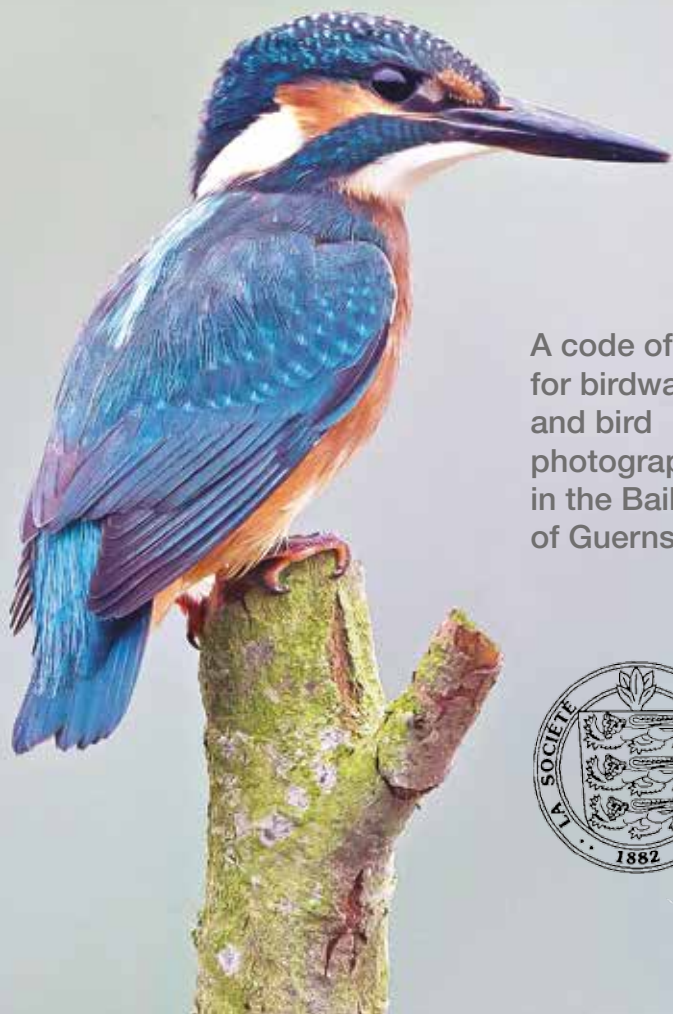


Strictly for the birds



A code of conduct
for birdwatchers
and bird
photographers
in the Bailiwick
of Guernsey





La Société Guernesiaise ornithological section



With grateful thanks to Barras Car Centre Limited for its generous sponsorship of this code of conduct.

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All photographs taken within the Bailiwick by Royston Carré and Mike Cunningham.

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Why do we need a code of conduct?

Twenty years ago it was possible for as many as six hundred dunlin to be seen in one flock at Vazon Bay during the winter months. Today a flock of a hundred birds would be regarded as exceptional. Whilst the decline of this particular species is extreme, there has been a substantial drop in the numbers of all wading birds that visit our shores. Sadly, this trend is not just limited to wading birds. Many other

species are also threatened. When did you last enjoy the song of a skylark? When did you last hear a cuckoo?

There are many reasons for this. The relentless commercialisation of Guernsey and the never-ending demand for more houses has inevitably reduced the habitat available for our wildlife. An increasing population with more leisure time than in previous decades



is also making demands upon habitats previously enjoyed by our wildlife – dog-walkers, hikers, birdwatchers, horse-riders, cyclists, motorcyclists, paragliders, shooters, golfers, cliff-climbers, coasters, boaters, kayakers, bathers and others. In fact, all of us. It is hardly surprising that you rarely see a beach where our waders can be left to feed and rest undisturbed.

We cannot hope to address these issues in this little booklet but we can do our best to ensure that those of us who love observing birds or photographing them do nothing to make their conditions even more difficult than they already are and that wherever possible we protect their habitat and breeding sites. If we all follow the

birdwatchers' code, it should enable us to enjoy seeing and photographing birds without harming them or their habitat.

The purpose of the code is first and foremost to promote the welfare of our birds but it also asks us to show respect for other people, even if they do not share our interest in birds. The code applies not just when you are at one of the Société's reserves or hides, but wherever you are watching birds in the Bailiwick or elsewhere. It has been compiled with reference to good practice as advocated by leading bird organisations, magazines and websites. The code will be most effective if we birdwatchers lead by example and sensitively challenge the minority who behave inappropriately.





Important points to remember

1

Avoid disturbing birds and their habitats and always put the birds' interests first

Birds respond to people in many ways depending on the species, location and time of year. Any disturbance can keep birds from their nests, leaving chicks hungry or enabling predators to take eggs or young.

During cold weather or when migrants have just completed a long flight, scaring birds off, known as flushing, can mean they use up vital energy needed for breeding or further migration. This is particularly important for our waders which have to share the shoreline with swimmers, surfers and dog-walkers amongst others. Every time migrating birds are chased out to sea by dogs or others, their long-term survival chances are diminished. Intentional or reckless disturbance of any species at or near the nest is, of course, illegal in the Bailiwick of Guernsey.

Whether your particular interest is photography, ringing, sound-recording or watching, remember

that the interests of the bird must always come first.

Avoid going too close to birds or disturbing their habitats. If a bird flies away or makes repeated alarm calls, you are too close and if it flies off, you have lost your opportunity. If a bird appears distressed or agitated, then move away.

Stay on roads and paths where they exist and avoid disturbing habitat used by birds. Our cliff paths, although enjoyed by many of us, are often close to the nesting and roosting sites of a variety of birds. Don't be tempted to climb down cliffs for that special view or photograph. It could be seriously harmful to your own wellbeing as well as that of the bird.

Think about your fieldcraft. Disturbance is not just about going too close to birds. Dress appropriately, avoid bright colours and try to merge with the scenery. Avoid

sudden movements and arm waving. If possible, sit or lie down and wait for the bird to come to you. If sharing a hide or a viewing point with others, be mindful not to disturb their enjoyment and remember silence is golden! The ideal situation is when the bird you are watching does not know you are there.

Repeatedly playing a recording of birdsong or calls to encourage a bird to respond can be very harmful to breeding birds. It could divert a territorial bird from other important tasks, such as feeding or protecting its young. Never use playback to attract a bird during its breeding season. Unfortunately this practice is becoming more common with the use of mobile phone apps. If you witness it, try sensitively to explain to the user what harm he or she may be causing.

If birdwatching from a boat, do not drift into areas where seabirds are feeding. This is very important during the breeding season and remember that some birds like the puffin are in our waters only at that time.

In England it is a criminal offence to disturb, intentionally or recklessly, at or near the nest, a species listed in Schedule 1 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Disturbance could include playback of songs and calls. English courts can impose fines of up to £5,000 and/or a prison sentence of up to six months for each offence. The current version of this schedule can be found on page 13. Similar legislation applies to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland but please note that because of devolution there are now some significant differences in the law between the constituent countries of the UK.

The UK act does not apply to the Bailiwick of Guernsey which has its own legislation in the form of The Protection of Wild Birds Ordinance 1949. Whilst not so specific, this ordinance protects all wild birds whereby wilful disturbance of breeding birds or their nests is a criminal offence. However, most harm is not caused by malevolent people but rather by well-meaning, unknowledgeable people.



2

Abide by the law and the rules for visiting open countryside and farmland

Respect the wishes of local residents and landowners and do not enter private property unless it is open for public access. Never enter fields containing crops, or those occupied by horses or other animals, without the specific consent of the farmer or owner. Even if you are on public land make sure

your behaviour does not agitate any animals in nearby fields. Irresponsible behaviour may cause a landowner or farmer to deny access to all responsible watchers and photographers. It may also disturb the birds or give birdwatching and bird photography bad coverage in the media.



3

Consider the needs of rare birds

Think about the interests of wildlife and local people before passing on news of a rare bird you may have spotted, especially during the breeding season. Mobile phones, the Guernsey Birds grapevine and the internet mean you can now share your sightings instantly. If you discover a rare bird, please bear the following in mind.

Consider the potential impact of spreading the news and make an effort to inform the landowner first (or, on a nature reserve, a Société official). Think about whether the site can cope with the likely number of visitors and whether sensitive species might be at risk, such as rare breeding birds, flocks of wading birds or even rare plants.



On private land, always talk to the owner first. With a little planning, access can often be arranged. Rare breeding birds are at risk from egg collectors and some birds of prey are often subject to persecution. If you discover a rare breeding species that you think might be vulnerable, contact La Société Guernesiaise, which has considerable experience in protecting rare breeding birds. On private land, also consider telling the owner – this may help ensure that the nest is not disturbed accidentally.

If you have the opportunity to see a rare bird, enjoy it, but don't let your enthusiasm override common sense. If you travel, park sensibly and follow instructions if the area is already under supervision. Don't get too close whilst trying to take a photograph – you'll earn the wrath of everyone else if you flush the bird out of sight. Birds should never be flushed in important wildlife habitats or where there are other nesting or roosting birds nearby. Be patient. If the viewing is limited, talk quietly and give others a chance to see the bird too.



4

Be an ambassador for birdwatching

Think about your fieldcraft and behaviour, not just so that you can enjoy your birdwatching, but so others can too. Respond positively to questions from interested passers-by. They may not be birdwatchers yet, but a good view of a bird or a helpful answer may light a spark of interest. Your enthusiasm could start a lifetime's interest in birds and a greater appreciation of wildlife and its conservation.



Bird hides



There are many purpose-built hides around the Bailiwick, so wherever possible always try to take advantage of them. The hides will often give you the opportunity to see some lovely birds at close quarters without disturbing them. Never intrude into the areas in front of the hides. Apart from

disturbing the birds, you will not please anyone else wanting to use the hide.

Two hides are situated on the Société's reserve at Rue des Bergers, two at La Claire Mare and one each at the Colin Best Reserve and the Vale Pond. Other hides can be found at the Chouet headland and at Le Grand Pré.

You can find out more about the Société's reserves by logging on to its website (see page 23). Please always try to leave a hide in the condition in which you would like to find it. If some careless person has left litter in the hide, why not take it away yourself rather than leaving it for someone else to clean up?



Protection of endangered birds in the Bailiwick

As referred to earlier in this code, the UK Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protects certain species of birds, their young, their eggs and their nest sites. The protected birds are listed in Schedule 1 of the act and that list can be found on the page opposite. Most of the listed birds are not known to nest in the Bailiwick but many do pass through during their spring and

autumn migrations. It is therefore important for us to be aware of the species of birds which are considered to be in need of protection and do all we can to ensure their safe passage through the islands. Many birds arriving on our shores will be exhausted and in need of food so be mindful of this and do nothing that will make feeding and resting more difficult for them.



The UK Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 1 species

Avocet
Bee-eater
Bittern
Bittern, Little
Bluethroat
Brambling
Bunting, Cirl
Bunting, Lapland
Bunting, Snow
Buzzard, Honey
Chough
Corncrake
Crake, Spotted
Crossbills (all species)
Curlew, Stone
Divers (all species)
Dotterel
Duck, Long-tailed
Eagle, Golden
Eagle, White-tailed
Falcon, Gyr
Fieldfare
Firecrest
Garganey
Godwit, Black-tailed
Goshawk
Grebe, Black-necked

Grebe, Slavonian
Greenshank
Gull, Little
Gull, Mediterranean
Harriers (all species)
Heron, Purple
Hobby
Hoopoe
Kingfisher
Kite, Red
Merlin
Oriole, Golden
Osprey
Owl, Barn
Owl, Snowy
Peregrine
Petrel, Leach's
Phalarope, Red-necked
Plover, Kentish
Plover, Little Ringed
Quail, Common
Redstart, Black
Redwing
Rosefinch, Scarlet
Ruff
Sandpiper, Green
Sandpiper, Purple

Sandpiper, Wood
Scaup
Scoter, Common
Scoter, Velvet
Serin
Shorelark
Shrike, Red-backed
Spoonbill
Stilt, Black-winged
Stint, Temminck's
Swan, Bewick's
Swan, Whooper
Tern, Black
Tern, Little
Tern, Roseate
Tit, Bearded
Tit, Crested
Trecreeper, Short-toed
Warbler, Cetti's
Warbler, Dartford
Warbler, Marsh
Warbler, Savi's
Whimbrel
Woodlark
Wryneck

Please also note that this schedule is subject to variation from time to time as the status of certain species changes.



Protection of nesting birds in the Bailiwick

The breeding season is obviously a critical time for birds when in addition to their usual tasks of finding food and shelter they have to find mates and build nests. Then, if breeding is successful, they also have to feed and protect their young. Factors such as climate change and human encroachment on their habitats can, for some species, make each successive breeding season more difficult than the previous one.

Whilst most of the birds listed in the UK's Schedule 1 do not nest in the Bailiwick, if we are really fortunate, there are a few which may attempt to do so. In addition there are several non-listed birds for which nesting here

is a rare but welcome occurrence. The list below includes most of the birds that are likely to fall into the two categories referred to above but from time to time there may be others.

If you come across any of these species breeding in the Bailiwick, it is vital that you do not disturb them in any way, either by approaching the nest or by staying too long in the area in the hope of a better sighting or photograph. If you are fortunate enough to find yourself in this situation, please contact the Société's Bird Section or the RSPB, the experts of which will be very pleased to advise you on what action if any is appropriate to protect the birds.

Barn owl
Black redstart
Cetti's warbler
Common buzzard
Dartford warbler
Firecrest
Goldcrest
Great spotted woodpecker
Grey wagtail
Kingfisher

Little egret
Little grebe
Long-eared owl
Marsh harrier
Northern wheatear
Peregrine falcon
Raven
Ringed plover
Sand martin
Sparrowhawk

It is now common practice in the UK for bird magazines and bird websites not to publish photographs of endangered species during the period 1 March to 30 June each year. Those four months broadly cover the main breeding season. A similar policy has now been adopted by La Société Guernesaise so that photographs of the birds listed

on the opposite page taken during the local restricted period will not ordinarily be published on the Guernsey Birds website. As breeding activity can occur earlier in the Bailiwick than in the UK the local restricted period begins on 1 February and ends on 30 June. Very exceptionally these restrictions may also be applied at other times.



Birds in your garden

As continued development shrinks the remaining wildlife habitats in Guernsey, our gardens are becoming an increasingly important resource for many species of birds, some of which have suffered severe declines in recent years. There are a few simple things we can do in our gardens to help.

Food

A wide range of feeders and bird food is available from garden centres and this supplementary feeding is especially important in the winter months and early spring. Breadcrumbs are not a good food source as they do not contain enough fat and nutrients to help sustain the birds during cold weather.

You can increase the amount of naturally-occurring food by growing berry-producing plants and by leaving wild patches in the garden. Avoid insecticides or slug pellets as the latter also kill snails – one reason why the number of song thrushes in the UK has dropped by 59 per cent since 1979. Song thrushes like moist and shady areas with plenty of leaf litter in which to forage for worms and snails. We can help by mulching our flower beds and by not sweeping up leaves as soon as they fall. The number of bullfinches has also fallen. If you have space in your garden, bullfinches do like a nettle bed. As well as the seeds, they enjoy areas of thick undergrowth.



Water

Just like human beings, birds need a constant supply of fresh water to survive. As well as drinking, birds need to bathe regularly throughout the year in order to keep their feathers in good condition. An adequate bird bath can be made from something as simple as an upturned dustbin lid, but our garden centres have a wide range of ornamental bird baths sufficient to meet all budgets. If you have space available, why not build a pond? You may be surprised at the amount of wildlife a small one can attract. But beware any visiting grey herons – they are rather partial to fish should you plan to introduce any to your pond.



Shelter and nest spaces

Trees, hedges and shrubs, as well as providing nest sites for many birds, also provide shelter from wind, rain and predators. A carefully sited nest box will encourage birds to raise a family in your garden. A wide variety of nest boxes is now sold in most garden centres. Most popular are the boxes for robins, blue tits, great tits, starlings and house sparrows. Nest boxes specially designed for swallows and house martins are also available.

The number of house sparrows in the UK has dropped by 63 per cent since 1979. House sparrows enjoy gardens full of insects and seeds. They like areas of long grass as insects will thrive there and also the long grass

produces more seed. House sparrows also need holes in which to nest. They used to find these under the eaves of old houses, but as the housing stock has been renovated or renewed these nest sites have reduced substantially in number. Fixing nest boxes to the underside of your eaves is one way in which you can help house sparrows.

Starlings have suffered an even more dramatic decline in the UK with their number falling 82 per cent since 1979. A lack of insects and fewer available nest sites are believed to be the main reasons for this decline. Whilst they are often dismissed without a glance when in large flocks, starlings, with their iridescent plumage, make very attractive garden birds.



Here in the Bailiwick, several people have had the privilege of seeing a great spotted woodpecker on their feeders. This delightful bird likes fat balls and peanuts so make sure your garden is well stocked.

For more information on how you can help endangered garden birds, please visit the RSPB website (see page 23) which will also provide advice on which bird food is best for which species.



A few
more birds
you may see
in your
garden...



Blue tit



Goldfinch



Sparrowhawk



Starling



Short-toed treecreeper



Long-tailed tit

The environment and declining species

Guernsey is already overcrowded and in future the population is likely to continue to grow. This will require further developments in housing and infrastructure, mostly at the expense of the environment and our diminishing wildlife.

If you are not already a member of La Société Guernesaise Bird Section or the RSPB, why not join and help us in our efforts to protect what remains of the Bailiwick's wonderful wildlife? Both societies have a junior section and bird lovers of all ages are most welcome.



Website addresses



For more information about the Bailiwick's wonderful birds, please visit the Société's Guernsey Birds website at

www.guernseybirds.org.gg

or the RSPB Guernsey Group website at

www.rspbguernsey.co.uk

or La Société Guernesiaise website at

www.societe.org.gg

If you would like to join us or to learn more about the Société's Bird Section, please telephone the Société's office at Candie Gardens on 725093.





Sedge warbler

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