

## Where to watch birds from the Avocet Line

### RSPB Exe Estuary nature reserves

There are two separate areas of coastal grazing marsh on opposite sides of the estuary: Exminster and Powderham Marshes on the west and Bowling Green Marsh on the east. They are important high tide refuges for thousands of birds in the colder winter months. In summer, they provide safe nesting sites for lapwings and redshanks – scarce breeding birds in Devon. Both sites have public access. The summer foot ferry links the reserves six days a week.



Bowling Green Marsh

### The RSPB Shop, Darts Farm

Situated above Cotswold Outdoor in the Darts Shopping Village, just over the Clyst Bridge, near Topsham – 20 minute walk from Topsham Station. Good range of bird food, optics, books and gifts. It is also close to RSPB's Bowling Green Marsh nature reserve.

### RSPB Bowling Green Marsh nature reserve

Comfortable hide 15 minute walk from Topsham station. From the Exeter bound platform at Topsham Station turn into Holman Way - see RSPB signs to Bowling Green Road after 250 metres. Best visit in winter is at high tide when hundreds of waders are roosting. Many ducks and other birds can be seen from the public hide at any time. Further along the lane a gate leads to the RSPB viewing platform over the Clyst and Exe - best at times other than high tide for feeding waders and wildfowl on the exposed mudflats.



Clyst viewing point

### Topsham - a circular tour

Continue along Bowling Green Road on foot to the river, where avocets may be seen on the far side in winter. Turn right along the Goatwalk to head into Topsham. Good selection of cafés, public houses etc. At the end of the High Street turn right into Station Road to return to the station.

### Exe Estuary Trail

Part of Sustrans National Cycle Route 2, the Exe Estuary Trail (fully open from 2011) is a 26 mile cycle/walkway along both sides of the estuary. Suitable for wheelchair users and pushchairs, it will be accessible from Topsham, Exton, Lympstone Village and Exmouth stations:

Exmouth - Lympstone	March 2008
Lympstone - Exton	March 2009
Exton - Topsham	2011

### Exton to Lympstone Village

From 2010 this section of the Exe Trail (1.5 miles) will be open, with vantage points over the estuary. An access ramp will be provided a few yards to the right of Lympstone village station entrance.

### Lympstone Village to Exmouth

To reach Exmouth on the Exe Estuary Trail (two mile section), turn right at the bottom of Lympstone Village station approach, follow the road through the village, over a small hill, to where it rejoins the estuary at Sowden End. Go inland a few yards and under the railway, Exe Trail sign on right. Alternatively, a footpath starts just before the bridge and follows the line on its seaward side.

### Exton

The single platform of Exton station is a great vantage point for watching waders, especially before and after high tide. Be careful as you get on and off the train – the platform is very low. Not all trains stop at Exton – and those that do are by request. Tell the conductor that you want to get off, and when rejoining the train give a clear hand signal to the driver. Puffing Billy restaurant close to the station, for lunch.



Exton platform

### Lympstone Village

This attractive village, with café, pubs and narrow lanes down to the river, is a good access point for the Exe Trail. Vantage points over the estuary to see waders, ducks and geese.



Lympstone

### Exmouth - Mudbank Lane

The car park between Exmouth station and the estuary leads north to a footpath with viewing points to see waders and wildfowl, including brent geese and good numbers of wigeon in winter. Follow the East Devon Way markers to Mudbank Lane, where a stream flows from a cut into the estuary - a good place for birds when the tide is not high.



Mudbank Lane

### Exmouth Local Nature Reserve

East Devon District Council's Local Nature Reserve on the Exe Estuary provides one of the most important areas for over-wintering brent geese. They flock here in their thousands to feed on one of the largest intertidal eelgrass beds in the country. In the early autumn, before the eelgrass is exhausted, the sight is quite incredible. Oystercatchers feed on the mussel beds of Little Bull Hill in summer. A short walk across the sand reveals hundreds of lugworm casts indicating the wealth of life lying hidden beneath.

### Further information

For RSPB Avocet Cruises, 01392 432691  
www.rspb.org.uk/brilliant/sites/avocet

For RSPB nature reserve or bird information:  
www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/e/exeestuary/index.asp

The RSPB shop, Darts Farm, 01392 879438  
www.dartsfarm.co.uk/rspb/rspb.html

For train timetables:  
www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk

Exe Estuary Management Partnership, 01392 382236  
www.exe-estuary.org

For up-to-date information about the Exe Estuary Trail:  
www.devon.gov.uk/exeestuarytrail

Exmouth Tourist Information Centre, 01395 222299  
www.exmouth-guide.co.uk

Stuart Line Cruises, 01395 222144  
www.stuartlinecruises.co.uk

Exmouth to Starcross Ferry  
www.exe2sea.co.uk/ferry.shtml

Sea Dream Topsham to Turf Locks Ferry, 07778 370582  
www.topshamtoturferry.co.uk

Topsham Ferry, 07801 203338

Turf Hotel, 01392 833128  
www.turfpub.net

Avocet Line Rail Users Group  
www.avocetlinrailusers.wikispaces.com

### River Exe cruises and ferries



### RSPB Avocet Cruises

These winter cruises allow people to get close to the estuary's most famous visitors, the avocets. Friendly guides help everyone from beginner to expert make the most of this unique wildlife encounter. Mini cruises on the *Sea Dream* last approximately 1½ hours and depart from Topsham. Full cruises on the *My Queen* last approximately 3-4 hours and depart from Starcross or Exmouth (advance booking essential).

### Sea Dream Topsham to Turf Locks ferry

61 seater launch taxis several times daily to and from Turf and departs from Trout's Boatyard next to the Quay at Topsham. Weekends and Bank Holidays from April and then daily from mid May until mid September.



Sea Dream

### Exmouth to Starcross Ferry

The ferry runs from early April to the end of October, seven days a week. Hourly departures leave Exmouth between 10.30 am and late afternoon. At low tide the ferry passes close to roosting birds on exposed sandbanks.

### Topsham Ferry

Small boat running between Topsham (departure point close to Passage House Inn) and Topsham Lock. Weekends and most Bank Holidays throughout the year and daily except Tuesdays from 1 April to 30 September, from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm (except at vey low tide).

### Stuart Line

From spring to autumn a Round Robin trip is available between Exmouth and Topsham, by river in one direction and rail in the other on an inclusive ticket. From November to March, Stuart Line run guided birdwatching cruises from Exmouth (booking essential).



View of the Exe near Exmouth Station

### Exmouth - seashore bird watching

To reach Exmouth's Esplanade from Exmouth Station, follow the shore line for most of the way via a recreation field and, after a deep water inlet, Shelley Beach. The mile long Esplanade, the start of the "Jurassic Coast", gives way to the South West Coast Path, which climbs up to cliffs at Orcombe Point.

	Avocet Line		Exe Estuary Trail
	Avocet Line railway station		Foot trail
	Key viewpoint		Nature reserve

Design: www.freeline-gfx.co.uk Map courtesy of Exe Estuary Partnership



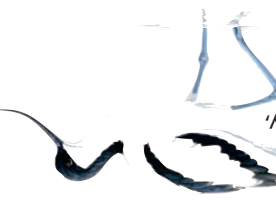
**Peregrine**  
(all Avocet Line stations)  
The peregrine, with its keen eyesight and impressive high speed stoops, finds rich pickings in winter and regularly hunts small widgeon and waders.



**Black-tailed godwit**  
(closest station, Topsham)  
With their very long, almost straight bill and distinctive eyestripe, these are most commonly seen in flocks on the upper parts of the estuary, especially on Greenland Bank and, at high tide, on RSPB Bowling Green Marsh nature reserve. In mid winter, the flock can number over 1,000 individuals. The birds that use the Exe breed in Iceland.



**Black-headed gull**  
(closest station, Topsham)  
Thousands feed and roost in the estuary but are most commonly seen in winter, when they have just a dark smudge of feathers behind the eye rather than the dark chocolate brown head of the breeding bird. They nest further north and west and on the continent.



**Avocet**  
(closest station, Topsham)  
From October to March, approximately 450 of these elegant birds (the symbol of the RSPB) congregate in flocks on the upper parts of the estuary, near Topsham. The Exe is nationally important as a wintering site for avocets that breed in eastern England and in the Low Countries.

**A guide to estuary birds**  
All the birds described below are mobile and therefore may be found elsewhere in the estuary as well as near the stations mentioned.

Traveling by rail along the Avocet Line to key sites on the internationally important Exe Estuary is one of the easiest ways to enjoy good sightings of birds all year round. In winter, up to 15,000 widgeon and waders flock to the estuary. They are attracted by our mild climate and abundant food in the estuary silt - what might look like lifeless mud and sand is in fact teeming with billions of tiny creatures; rich pickings for hungry birds. In summer the estuary and surrounds are home to a wide range of breeding wetland birds including herons, little egrets, redshanks and occasionally oystercatchers. This spectacle attracts thousands of people every year as the estuary offers unrivalled viewing of beautiful birds.

**Introduction**

Your guide to.....

**Wild birds by train**

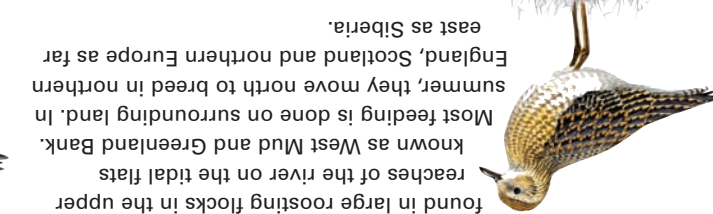
The Avocet Line - Exeter to Exmouth



"From Topsham onwards, the estuary views are almost uninterrupted."



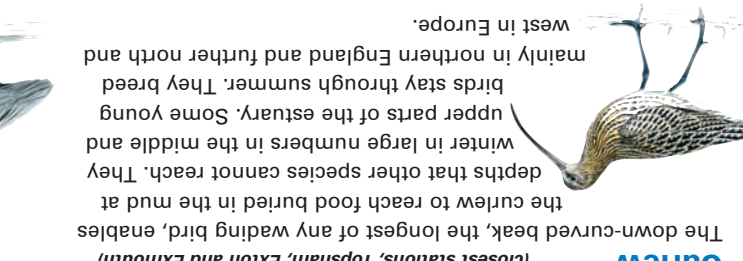
a million voices for nature



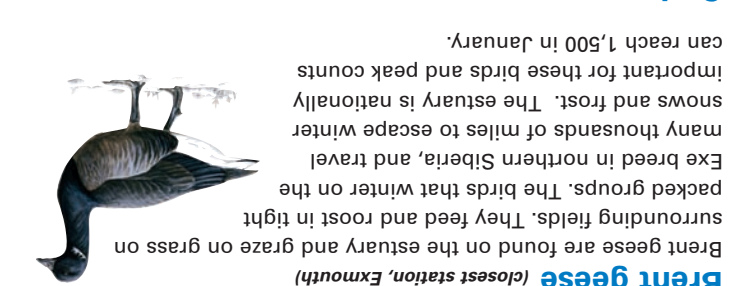
**Golden plover**  
(closest stations, Topsham and Exton)  
With their golden speckled breast and white belly, they are often found in large roosting flocks in the upper reaches of the river on the tidal flats known as West Mud and Greenland Bank. Most feeding is done on surrounding land. In summer, they move north to breed in northern England, Scotland and northern Europe as far east as Siberia.



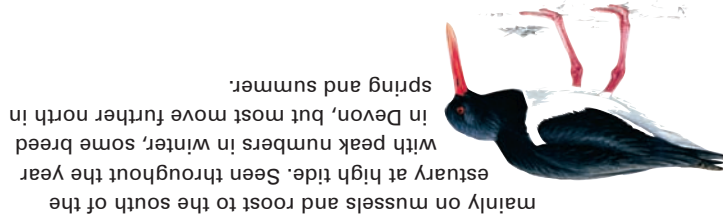
**Dunlin**  
(closest stations, Exton and Exmouth)  
In winter there may be 5,000 dunlins using the middle and upper parts of the estuary, feeding on small invertebrates such as molluscs and worms. When feeding they keep their heads down and probe rapidly into the mud. At high tide, they roost to the south of the estuary. They breed in northern England, Scotland and in northern Europe.



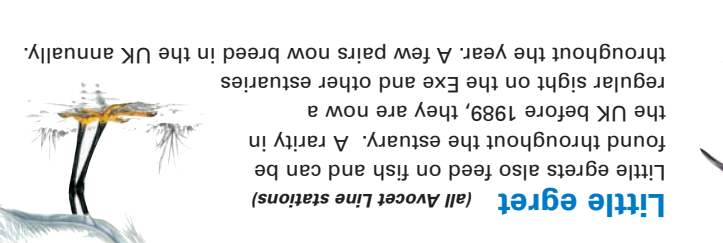
**Curlew**  
(closest stations, Topsham, Exton and Exmouth)  
The down-curved beak, the longest of any wading bird, enables the curlew to reach food buried in the mud at depths that other species cannot reach. They winter in large numbers in the middle and upper parts of the estuary. Some young birds stay through summer. They breed mainly in northern England and further north and west in Europe.



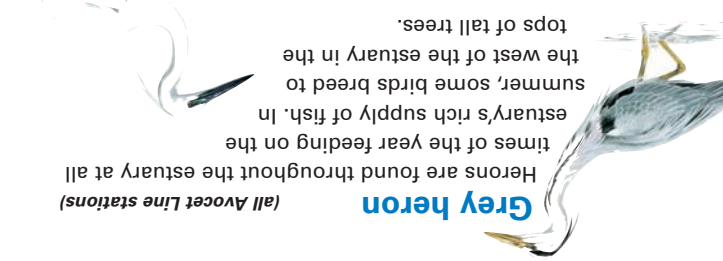
**Brent geese**  
(closest station, Exmouth)  
Brent geese are found on the estuary and graze on grass on surrounding fields. They feed and roost in tight packed groups. The birds that winter on the Exe breed in northern Siberia, and travel many thousands of miles to escape winter snows and frost. The estuary is nationally important for these birds and peak counts can reach 1,500 in January.



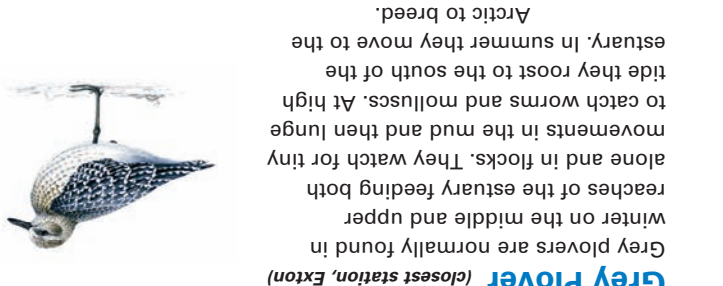
**Oystercatcher**  
(all Avocet Line stations)  
Unmistakable with a heavy orange bill and red eyes, they feed mainly on mussels and roost to the south of the estuary at high tide. Seen throughout the year with peak numbers in winter, some breed in Devon, but most move further north in spring and summer.



**Little egret**  
(all Avocet Line stations)  
Little egrets also feed on fish and can be found throughout the estuary. A rarity in the UK before 1989, they are now a regular sight on the Exe and other estuaries throughout the year. A few pairs now breed in the UK annually.



**Grey heron**  
(all Avocet Line stations)  
Hérons are found throughout the estuary at all times of the year feeding on the estuary's rich supply of fish. In summer, some birds breed to the west of the estuary in the tops of tall trees.

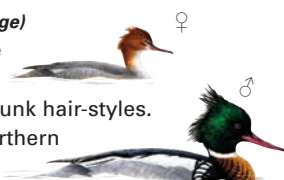


**Grey Plover**  
(closest station, Exton)  
Grey plovers are normally found in winter on the middle and upper reaches of the estuary feeding both alone and in flocks. They watch for tiny movements in the mud and then lunge to catch worms and molluscs. At high tide they roost to the south of the estuary. In summer they move to the Arctic to breed.

**Red-breasted merganser**

(closest stations, Exton and Lympstone Village)

Up to 135 red-breasted mergansers use the estuary in winter, forming loose flocks and hunting fish. Look for their punk hair-styles. In spring and summer they move to northern England and Scotland to breed.



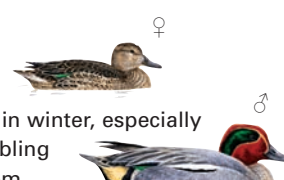
**Redshank** (closest stations, Topsham, Exton and Exmouth)

These solitary feeders are found in good numbers in winter and in smaller numbers in summer with a handful of pairs staying to breed on Exminster Marshes. They often defend feeding territories on mud at low tide. They have a distinctive 'teu-teu' call.



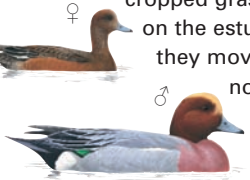
**Teal** (closest station, Topsham)

Our smallest wintering and breeding duck - up to 1,000 occur on the estuary in winter, especially in creeks and on marshland. These dabbling ducks take small plants and animals from near the water's surface. They breed in northern England, Scotland and northern Europe.



**Wigeon** (closest stations, Topsham and Exmouth)

Forming large flocks to feed on the estuary's surrounding closely cropped grassland and saltmarsh, up to 2-3,000 are on the estuary in winter. In spring and summer they move to northern England, Scotland and northern Europe to breed.



**Protecting wildlife on the Exe Estuary**

The national and international importance of the Exe Estuary for wildlife, especially for its wintering bird population, is reflected in its many protective designations. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Ramsar site - a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar convention of 1971. It is also a Special Protection Area under the EC Wild Birds Directive of 1979.

If you want to help protect birds and other wildlife of the Exe Estuary, please join the RSPB. Contact the RSPB South West England Regional Office on 01392 432691 for further information or visit [www.rspb.org.uk/join](http://www.rspb.org.uk/join)

**Rail information for the Avocet Line**

- Exeter St Davids to Exmouth service (with almost uninterrupted estuary views from Topsham onwards).
- Journey time - half hour (Exeter to Exmouth).
- All trains stop at Exeter Central, Topsham, Lympstone Village and Exmouth.
- Exton is a request stop available on most journeys.
- Weekday services from 6 am until midnight.
- Regular half hourly pattern during the day - hourly in the evening.
- Sundays - hourly service from late morning (earlier trains in the summer months).
- Visit [www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk](http://www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk) for a timetable or pick up a leaflet from staffed stations.

Off Peak Return Tickets allow a return journey on the date shown on the ticket and can be used after 08.40 Monday to Friday, or any time at weekends.

Single, Anytime Return and Off Peak Return tickets allow journeys to be broken at intermediate stations in either or both directions of travel, so long as the journey is then continued in the same direction.

Group Save fares allow up to four passengers to travel together for the price of two adult Off Peak Returns and up to four accompanying children for £1 each return. Valid after 08.40 Monday to Friday, or any time at weekends.

Up to two bicycles can be carried on all services (space permitting) on a first come first served basis. Folding cycles can be carried as hand luggage without restriction. Cycle racks are available at Topsham, Lympstone Village and Exmouth stations.

The Avocet Line Rail Users Group (ALRUG) represents users of the Exmouth to Exeter line, presses for action to improve rail services on the line and is a forum for local rail users.

Membership £5/year - visit

[www.avocetlinrailusers.wikispaces.com](http://www.avocetlinrailusers.wikispaces.com)

See ALRUG's notice boards in the shelters at Topsham, Lympstone Village and Exmouth stations for information about the Group and local rail services.



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