

Responsible Beach Cleaning on the Severn Estuary



Our Spectacular Severn

The Severn Estuary supports nationally and internationally important habitats and species, and is a key migratory route for salmon and internationally rare fish species. The extensive mudflats, saltmarshes and coastal grazing marshes make it one of the most important estuaries in the UK for its numbers of wildfowl and wading birds, with over 80,000 birds visiting every winter. It is a key refuelling stop for important spring and autumn passage birds and home to reefs of *Sabellaria alveolata*, a species of small worm which constructs honeycomb-like tubes using sand particles!

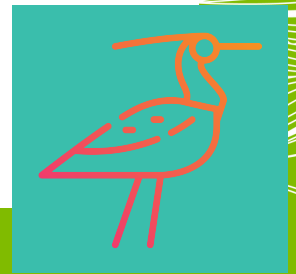
Litter picking is a fantastic way to support your local habitats and species, but it is important to consider how your actions can impact wildlife.

Disturbance is any activity or noise that could change behaviours of an animal (feeding, resting or breeding) or habitat structure. For example, repeated disturbance can threaten the survival of our estuary's birds. It may lead to birds stopping using an area to feed or roost, use up vital energy stores by putting them to flight and cause delays to arrival at breeding grounds. If they cannot feed enough to complete their migration, they may not survive the winter.



ORGANISING A BEACH CLEAN?

Before your event:



Check if the beach you are cleaning is protected due to special wildlife features or habitats. You can check through Defra, Natural England or Natural Resources Wales. Be sure to follow designation guidelines.



When you seek permission for your beach clean from the council or land owner, ask if there are any known sensitive habitats or species.



Try to organise your clean 2 hours after high tide. Always avoid 2 hours either side of high tide.



Incorporate tips into existing risk assessment documents and briefing notes.



Remind participants that if they bring a dog, they must keep it alongside them, under control, on a short lead if necessary.



Keep wildlife rescue numbers on hand, just in case.



Prepare a briefing for participants ahead of time and bring it with you to the event.

ORGANISING A BEACH CLEAN?

Before your event - Pre-event site visit:



Complete a pre-event check for wildlife habitats. Your pre-event visit should take place at the same level of tide as your planned clean-up time and within a week of your planned clean.



Plan the route your group will take when they arrive at the clean site. Make sure they'll be able to follow requests on signs and won't need to walk on sensitive habitats such as vegetated shingle, sabellaria reef or saltmarsh.



Identify the potentially sensitive wildlife on your site using the guide below (binoculars are helpful here!):

Resting birds



Shingle beaches, spits and islands, as well as manmade structures like jetties are used by resting birds. They may be camouflaged.

Feeding birds



Mudflats and saltmarsh habitats are essential feeding grounds. Birds will mostly be found near the water line.

Nesting birds (April to September)



You might find areas of beach are roped off or marked with signs where birds are nesting on the ground. Avoid cleaning in their vicinity.

Vulnerable marine or coastal plants



Take care of marine plants on beaches and in more sheltered locations which support highly specialised plants.

If you find your site is very sensitive, limit the number of beach cleaner volunteers if possible to reduce the chance of disturbing wildlife.

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Wildlife Briefing for Participants



Remind participants that if they bring a dog, they must keep it alongside them, under control, on a short lead if necessary.



Remind participants that larger bits of rubbish and debris may have become wildlife habitats.

They should check very carefully before removing or moving, keeping in mind that tiny animals may be hidden in crevices.



Ask them to leave natural items on site.

Items such as shells, feathers, cuttlefish bones and plants enrich a habitat.



Advise them to tread carefully.

Watch where they place their feet to avoid damaging vegetation.



Ask them to follow directions on signs.

Stick to paths where they exist.



Only remove visible litter.



Avoid turning things over and digging for litter.



Remind them to check with you if unsure.

For example they should check with you before removing material that has anything growing on it.



Walk beside rather than on strandline material.



Leave seaweed and other natural items in place and undisturbed.

Strandlines (high water marks) are important habitats for many small creatures and a vital feeding ground for birds.