



Birdwatching

in the Solway Coast
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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Introduction

This book is not about the birds of the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) it is about where, when and how to see them. The best vantage points and the best wildlife sites are all covered as well as the best stage of the tide and what to expect when you get to your chosen location.

Birdwatching in the Solway Coast AONB can be extremely rewarding both for the novice and the experienced. Estuaries are driven by the twice daily force of the tide and this alone creates a dynamic backdrop where birds are moved from their feeding grounds onto their roosting areas. The wintering birds are generally arctic breeders that winter in the milder

conditions of the Solway although some move further south, even as far as the African continent. These passage migrants use the Solway Coast as a staging point where they take the opportunity to feed before moving to higher latitudes in spring and lower latitudes in the autumn. Summer breeding birds on the Solway are also noteworthy.

The range of bird species that visit the Solway is dominated by the thousands of migratory waders and wildfowl that overwinter. The total population of the Svalbard breeding barnacle goose winter on the saltmarshes surrounding the estuary. Pink footed geese, whooper swans and various dabbling ducks such

as pintail, wigeon, shoveller and teal can be found throughout the inner estuary in large numbers. Wading birds like dunlin, oystercatcher, golden and grey plover, turnstone and curlew add to the spectacle.

Birds of prey are common and outside of the breeding season include peregrine, merlin, short eared owl and hen harrier.

Breeding birds like shelduck, snipe, lapwing, redshank and many others provide a constant backdrop of birdlife throughout the spring and summer. Behind the coastal areas lies the agricultural land and the lowland raised mires where many birds breed.

The Solway Coast
AONB has something
to offer the birdwatcher
all year round and
through using this book
we hope that your
excursions will be
enhanced and made
all the more enjoyable.



Facts and Further Information

The Solway Firth Estuary and the landscape surrounding it have a range of nature conservation designations. They are:

Solway Firth candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC)

Solway Firth Special Protected Area (SPA) (under the Birds Directive)

Solway Firth European Marine Site (EMS) (designated to encompass the cSAC and SPA within the marine area)

Solway Firth RAMSAR Site (Internationally important wetland site for the conservation of birds under the International Ramsar convention)

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are designated at Drumburgh Moss, Glasson Moss and Bowness Common.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are designated for: Solway Flats and Marshes, Drumburgh Moss, Glasson Moss, Bowness Common, Salta Moss and Silloth and Mawbray Dunes.

Other sites of high nature conservation value are: Campfield Marsh Nature Reserve (RSPB), Bowness Gravel Pits (CWT) and Crosscanonby Nature reserve (Solway Coast AONB).

Publications

If you would like to find out more about the birds of the Solway please see the following publications:

The Breeding Birds of Cumbria (2002) Stott, M *et al*, Cumbria Bird Club

Annual Cumbria County Bird and Natural History Reports, Carlisle Natural History Society



Mawbray



The Banks & Allonby Bay



Site: The Banks and Allonby Bay

Maps: OS Lanranger sheet 85 and 89 and OS Explorer Sheet 314

Tourist Information: Solway Coast Discovery Centre and Maryport Maritime Museum

Landscape and habitat: This part of the coast is dominated by sand dunes and shingle beaches. This provides a varied habitat for birds with newly formed dunes, older dunes and the 'dune slacks' or hollows behind them. The vegetation cover also varies from alkaline loving plants growing on the calcium rich sands to the heathers growing on the acid areas on top of remnants of boulder clay. This creates a patchwork of micro habitats that is moderately rich in bird life.

The best time to visit: From February to late May birds are moving through on migration. In autumn the reverse happens with both wading birds and passerines passing through in large numbers and this attracts the typical avian predators.

Birds: During migration wading birds dominate the scene; knot, dunlin, sanderling and turnstone all pass through in large numbers with scattered whimbrel occurring in May. Smaller birds like wheatear, whinchat, reed bunting and many finch and warbler species pass through the area. Breeding birds on the dunes include Shelduck, stonechat, reed bunting, skylark, meadow pipit, sedge warbler and lesser whitethroat. Along the shingle ridge ringed plover, oystercatcher, terns and gulls breed.

Local Services: The town of Silloth and Maryport have all services and the village of Allonby has hotels, pubs, café's and shops.

Local Knowledge: Early morning is the best time on the dunes; this is when raptors such as short eared owls are usually seen. High tides provide a spectacle from the large flocks of wading birds with large roosts centred on Dubmill Point, Beckfoot and Crosscanonby road end.

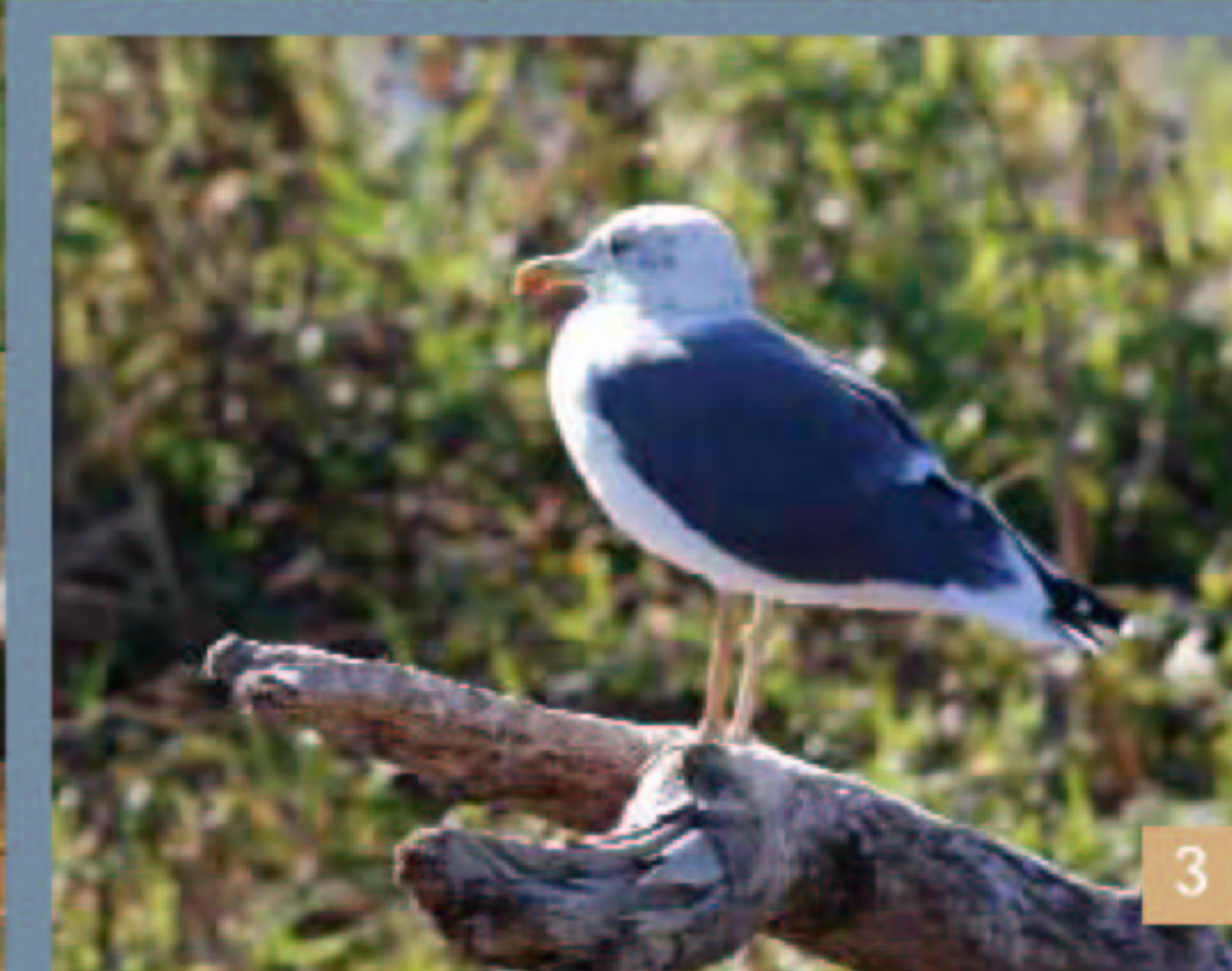
Silloth & Grune Point



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- 1 Oystercatcher
- 2 Red Shanks
- 3 Black Backed Gull
- 4 Turnstone
- 5 Arctic Tern
- 6 Silloth
- 7 Black Headed Gull
- 8 Red Shank
- 9 Black Backed Gull



Site: Silloth and Grune Point

Maps: OS Lanranger sheet 85 and OS Explorer Sheet 314

Tourist Information: Solway Coast Discovery Centre

Landscape and habitat: Grune Point is a shingle and sand ridge which protects Moricambe Bay from the storms of the open Solway. It has been improved for agriculture and is fringed on the northern flank by gorse and dune grassland. At the tip of the spit the ground is accreting but along its front erosion is taking parts of the spit away. On the front at the town of Silloth the coastline is man made with large areas of groynes encompassing shingle and sand beaches and concrete revetments. And at the southern end are the docks which form the port of Silloth.

The best time to visit: There is birdwatching interest in Silloth all year round, no one season being any better than another.

Birds: Gulls dominate the sea front of Silloth from black headed to great black backed. Waders fill the intertidal zone and move around with the tides, oystercatcher, turnstone, dunlin and redshank are around in good numbers as are cormorant and in winter divers and grebes are common. On Grune a range of wildfowl including scaup can be seen and in spring little tern and ringed plover can be seen. In the dune areas stonechats and linnets are common. Falls of migrating warblers can be brilliant given the correct conditions of a westerly or north westerly gale.

Local Services: Hotels, pubs, Café's, chippies and bakers and sandwich are available in Silloth along with a host of other services you expect in a market town.

Local Knowledge: Early morning walks along Grune can produce a good list of passerine migrants in late April and early May. A high tide watch during November can produce some good sea birds such as pomarine skua and petrels. A scan in the docks usually reveals either sheltering grebes or divers in late winter and early spring.

Moricambe Bay



- 1 Cormorant
- 2 Barnacle Geese
- 3 Wigeon
- 4 Golden Plover
- 5 Mallard
- 6 Barnacle Geese



Site: Moricambe Bay

Maps: OS Lanranger sheet 85 and OS Explorer Sheet 314

Tourist Information: Solway Coast Discovery Centre

Landscape and habitat: The dominating feature is the bay itself which forms the confluence of two rivers, the Wampool and the Waver. This area of mudbanks and sand is bordered by saltmarshes and forms one of the largest continuous areas of saltmarsh in England. The surrounding farmland is typically pasture with some arable such as root crops and cereal.

The best time to visit: This area has interest all year round with breeding birds and wintering migrants. The best time is between late February and mid April when waders and wildfowl are at their most numerous

Birds: Early spring sees a build up of geese around the bay and they can number up to 20,000. At this time waders begin to concentrate within the bay with dunlin and golden plover reaching their highest numbers. Once wildfowling has ended in February the marshes are used by large numbers of duck especially wigeon and pintail. Within the settlements of Brownrigg, Salta and Saltcoates village ponds support many species of breeding birds. Shelduck can be seen in fields where they breed in rabbit burrows. Cormorants have a large nesting colony on some piles that were used as training targets during WWII. They lie just off Skinburness Marsh and can be seen from almost anywhere within the bay.

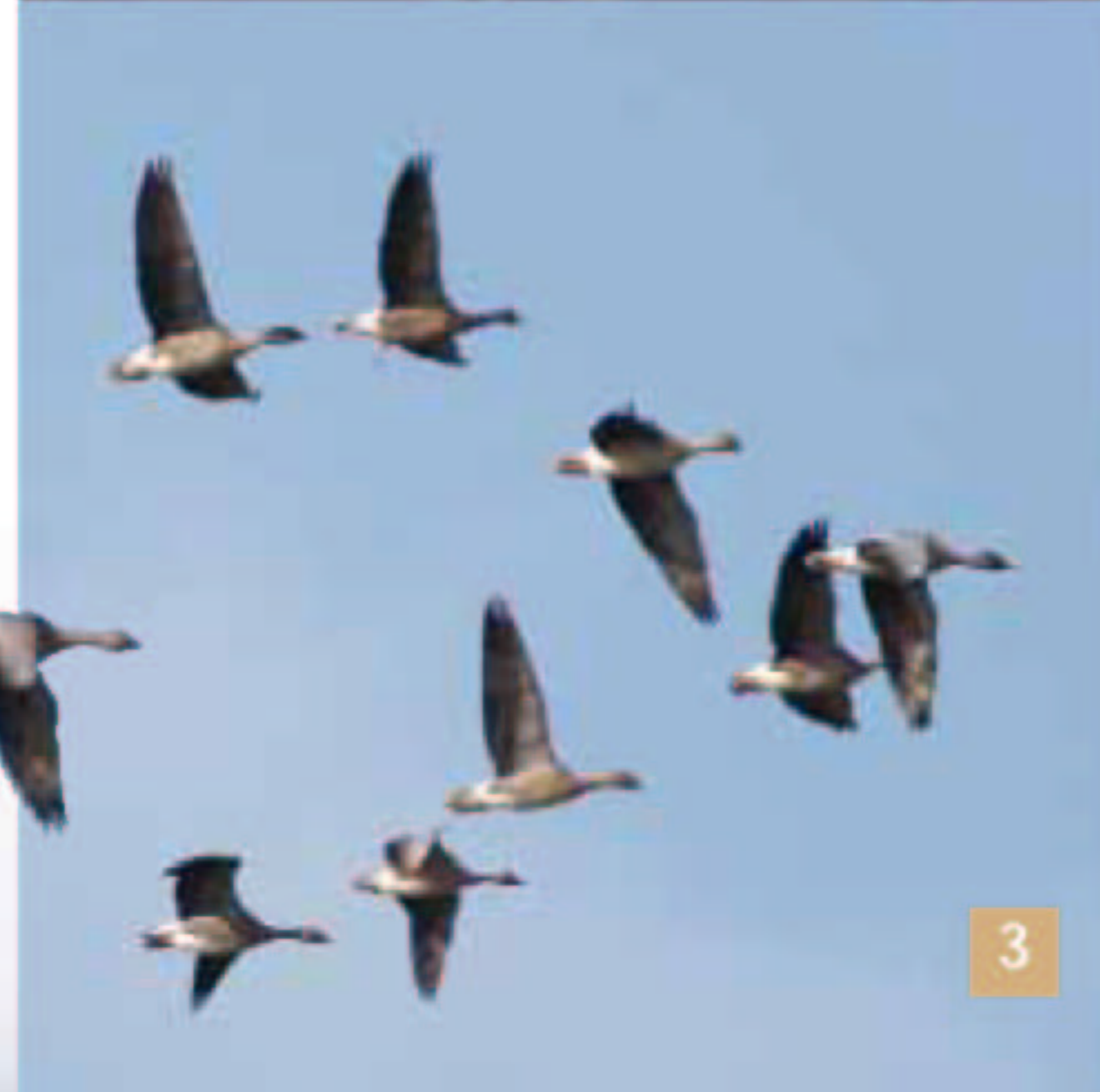
Local Services: Pubs and shops can be found in Kirkbride, Abbeytown and Newton Arlosh.

Local Knowledge: The road that runs around the edge of Skinburness marsh is a good area for birds during tidal events but be careful that the tide does not strand you as the road is liable to flooding. The area between Raby Farm and Saltcoates is good for watching geese, look for occasional merlin and barn owl in this area. The fields between the river Wampool and Kirkbride are excellent for whooper swans and pink footed geese.

Cardurnock Peninsula



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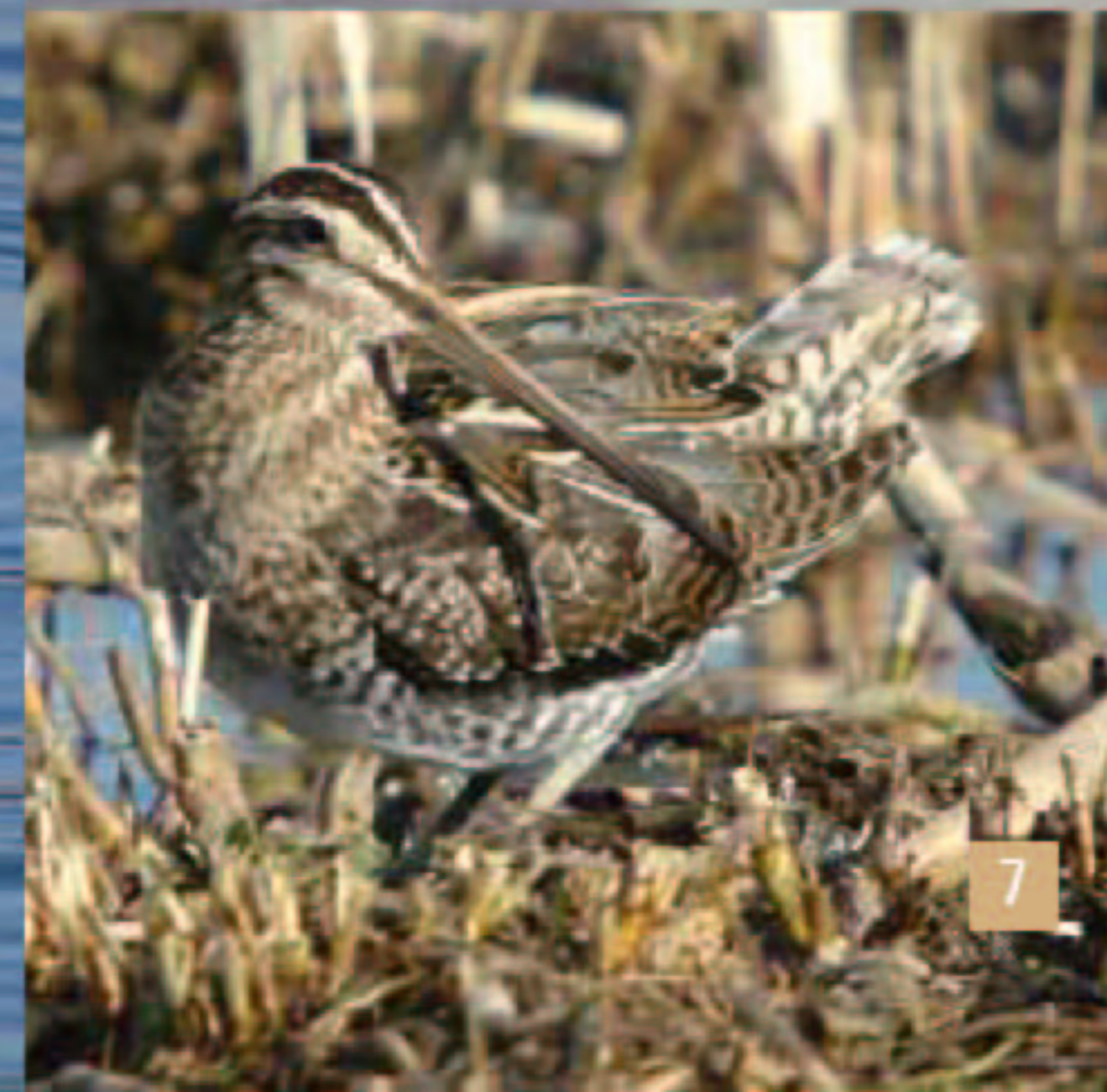
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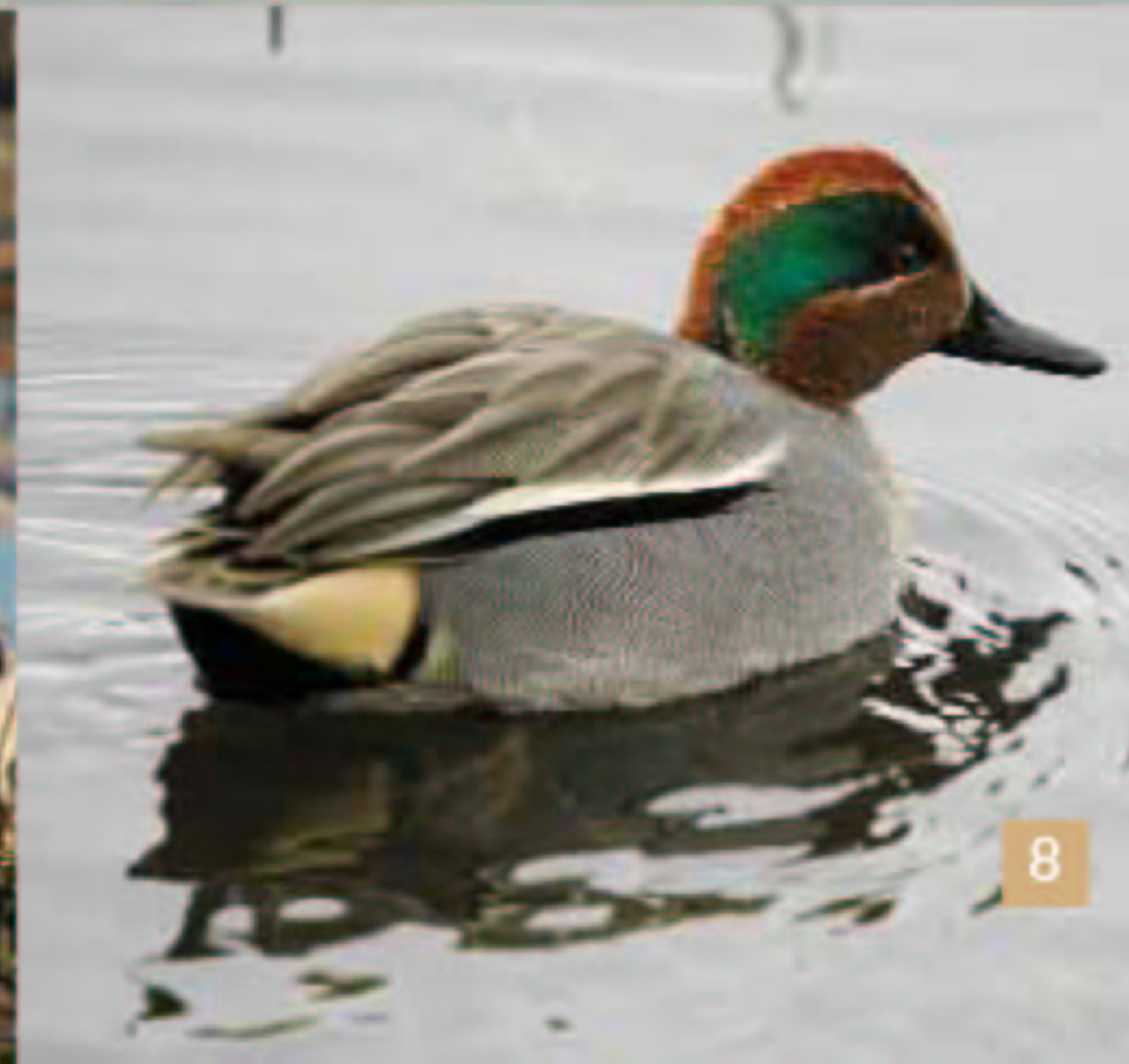
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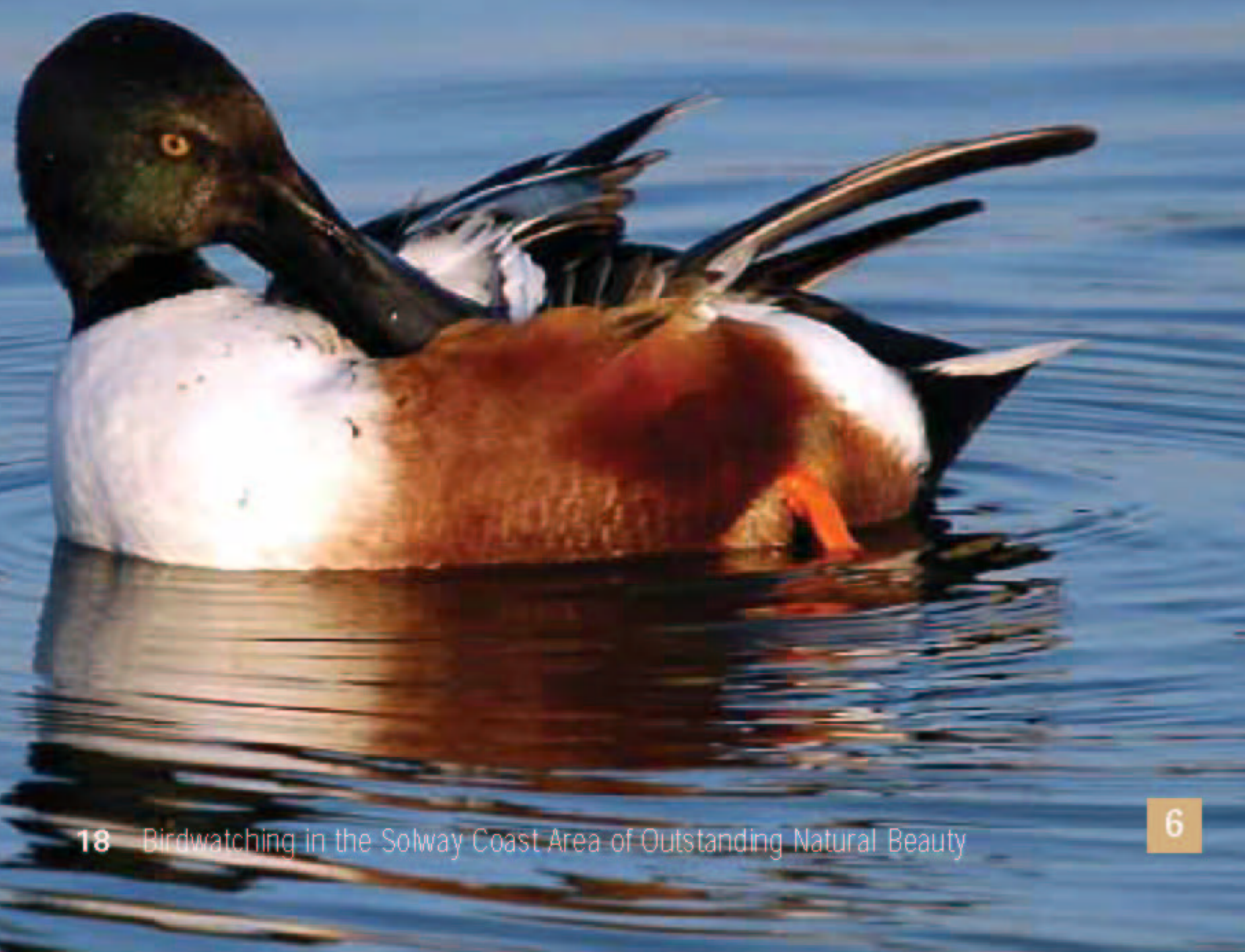


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- 1 Whooper Swans
- 2 Lapwing
- 3 Pink footed Geese
- 4 Shorteared Owl
- 5 Barnacle Geese
- 6 Shoveller
- 7 Snipe
- 8 Teal



2



6

Site: Cardurnock Peninsula

Maps: OS Landranger sheet 85 and OS Explorer Sheet 314

Tourist Information: Carlisle Town Hall and Solway Coast Discovery Centre

Landscape and habitat: At the heart of the Cardurnock Peninsula is the raised mire of Bowness Common this is a large peat body that is currently under restoration for its wildlife interests. There are a number of footpaths which take you into the area with the best being on the land within the RSPB reserve between North plain Farm and Rogersceugh Farm. The latter is also the best location to see the full extent of the peninsula and the raised mire. To the seaward side run two belts of habitat the improved or reclaimed semi-improved pasture used for grazing and the salt marshes.

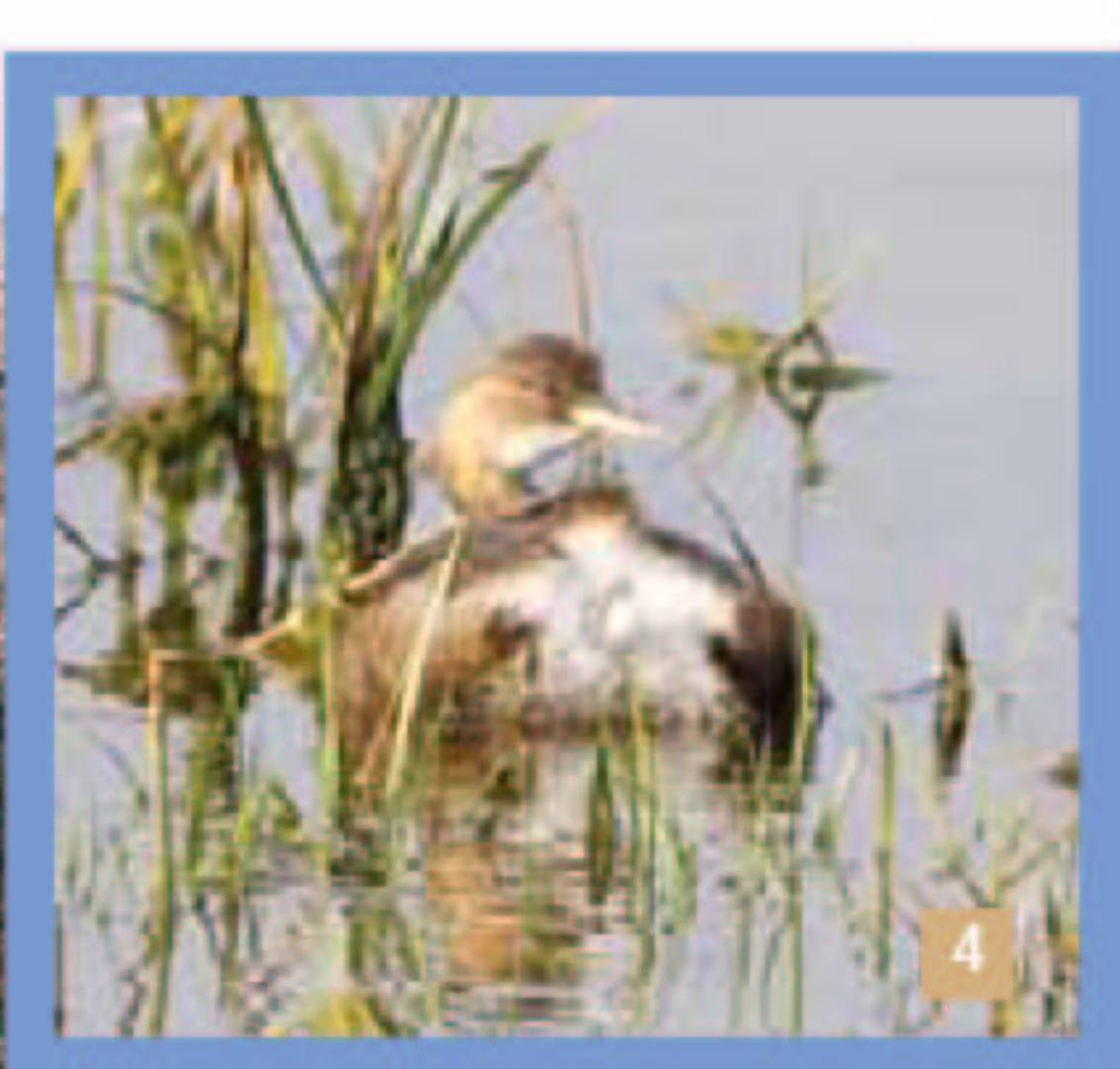
The best time to visit: This area has interest all year round with breeding birds and wintering migrants. The RSPB provides the best bird habitat and as such attracts thousands of wintering wildfowl and waders. In recent years increases in breeding birds associated with wet meadows is greater than the national average.

Birds: In winter on the marshes you can find wigeon, teal, pintail, shoveller, barnacle geese, pink footed geese, whooper swans and raptors such as peregrine, merlin, short eared owl, barn owl and hen harrier. There is also a large concentration of wintering golden plover in this area. In summer, breeding lapwing, redshank and curlew breed on the pastures with snipe, meadow pipit and teal dominating the raised mires.

Local Services: Pub food and Caf es can be found in Bowness on Solway and Kirkbride. A village shop is available in Bowness on Solway, Anthorn and Kirkbride.

Local Knowledge: The road around the disused airfield (masts) is good at high tide with birds coming very close to the road both roosting and feeding. Look out for lark, bunting and pipit on the airfield. The ponds and floods at North Plain are excellent for mixed flocks of waders and wildfowl. The marsh pond at Campfield has hosted many rarities such as spoonbill, little egret and cattle egret.

Inner Solway



- 1 Curlew
- 2 Dunlin
- 3 Barnacle Geese
- 4 Dab Chick
- 5 Golden Eye
- 6 Raised Mire

Site: Inner Solway Estuary

Maps: OS: Landranger Sheet ***
and OS Explorer Sheet 314

Tourist Information: Carlisle (Town Hall),
Silloth (Solway Coast Discovery Centre)

Landscape and habitat: The inner estuary contains the most diverse and concentrated interest for birdwatchers. The channels of the rivers Eden and Esk converge to form a complex of sand and mud banks between the shores of Scotland and England. The estuary is fringed by saltmarshes of varying width. Laying behind the saltmarshes is a thin band of agricultural pasture land and behind lay some of the remnant raised mires of the Solway. The intertidal zone drives a twice daily movement of birds from their feeding to roosting grounds

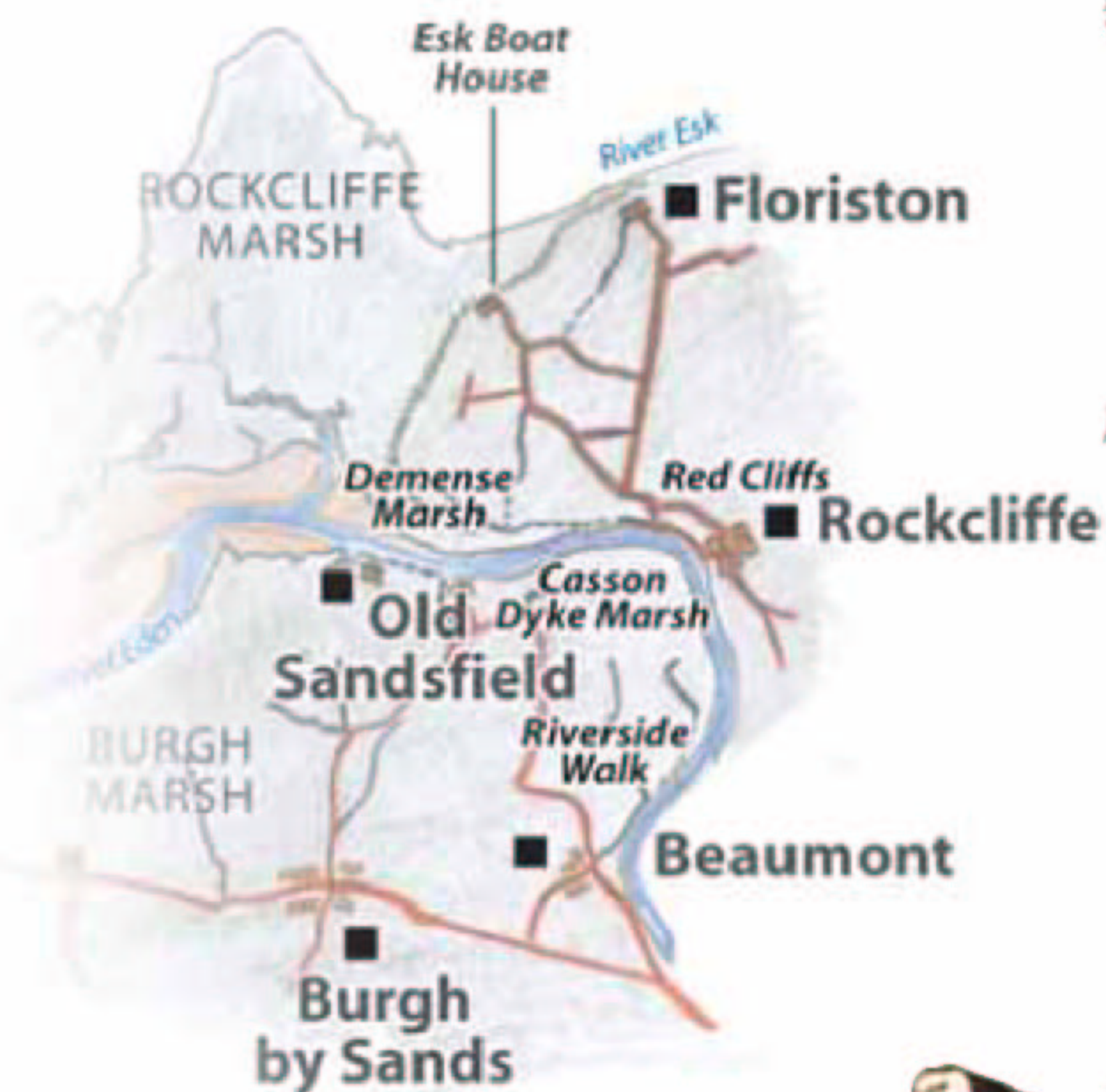
The best time to visit: Without doubt autumn spring are the best times to see migrants on passage and winter produces the greatest spectacle from the large flocks of wintering wildfowl and waders.

Birds: Tides, their height and their conditions produce a wide range of birds to this area. A mild form of 'seawatching' can be very productive when there have been storms in the Irish sea. Kittiwake, pomarine skua, storm petrel and great skua have all been recirded from this area. More commonly though the area is good as a flyway for waders and wildfowl using the saltmarshes to feed and the estuary for loafing and feeding. High tide roosts along this shoreline are extremely sensitive to disturbance especially by dogs so please be careful not approach too closely.

Local Services: Pub food is available in Burgh by Sands, Port Carlisle and Bowness on Solway. Village shops/post offices can be found in Burgh by Sands and Bowness on Solway.

Local knowledge: The Best places to watch birds along this area are Drumburgh, Port Carlisle harbour, the 'railings', 'The banks' in Bowness on Solway and the old railway viaduct (promontory) west of Bowness on Solway. The central part of the estuary can be good for migrating Skuas and other sea birds in spring and autumn crossing from the Irish Sea to the North Sea via the 'Tyne Gap'.

Eden Estuary



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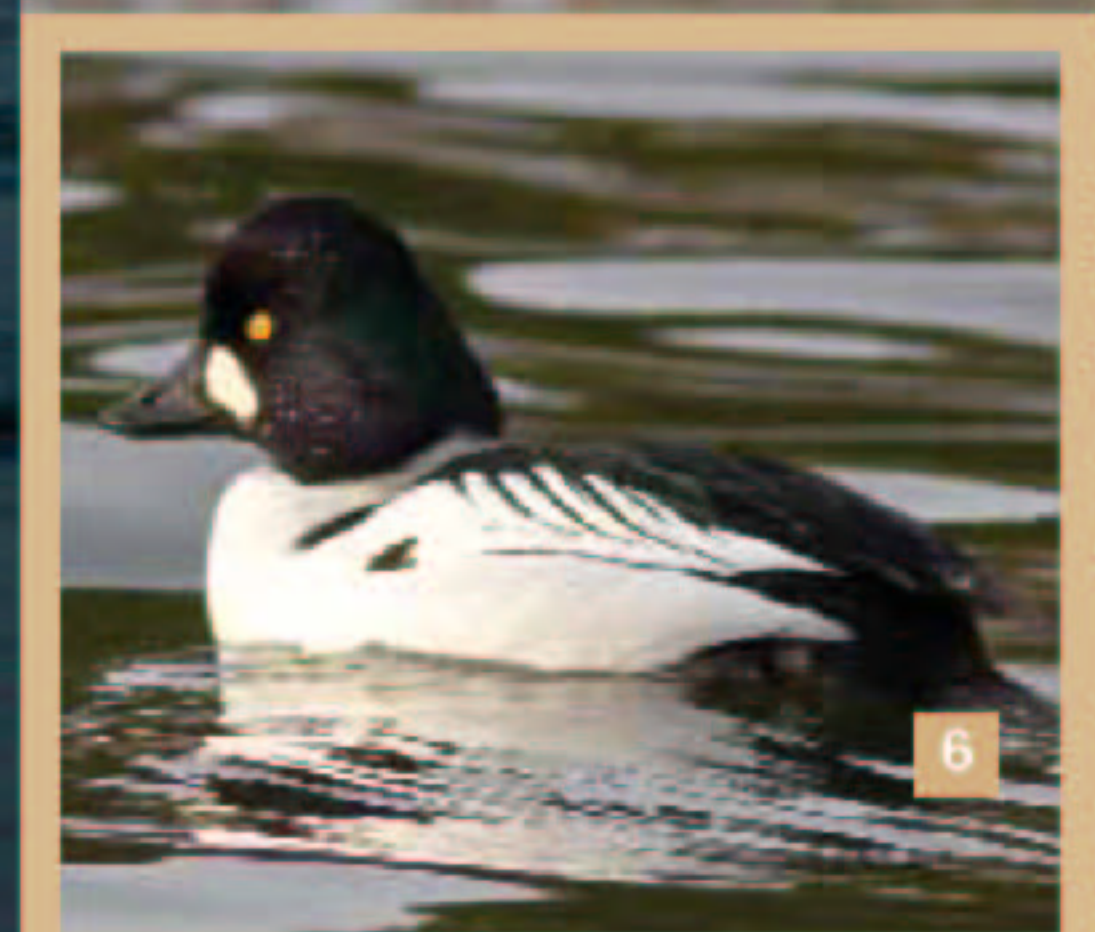
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- 1 Wigeon
- 2 Gooseander
- 3 Heron
- 4 Barnacle Geese
- 5 Whooper Swan
- 6 Goldeneye
- 7 Barnacle Geese



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Site: The Eden Estuary

Maps: OS Landranger 85 and OS Explorer 315

Tourist Information: Carlisle (Old Town hall)

Landscape and habitat: The Eden estuary covers an area from Beaumont village to Old Sandsfield on the southern bank of the river and Passes Rockcliffe on the northern bank. From Beaumont a public right of way takes you along the river edge and through a broadleaf woodland. At Old Sandsfield the river is channelised into sand and gravel banks. Between Floriston and Rockcliffe lies the largest single expanse of saltmarsh with Solway Coast AONB and is under private ownership.

The best time to visit: Spring and summer are good for woodland breeding birds but by far the best time is autumn and winter for wildfowl and waders using the river corridor for roosting, feeding and as a flight line. Grazing wildfowl use the marshes throughout autumn and winter.

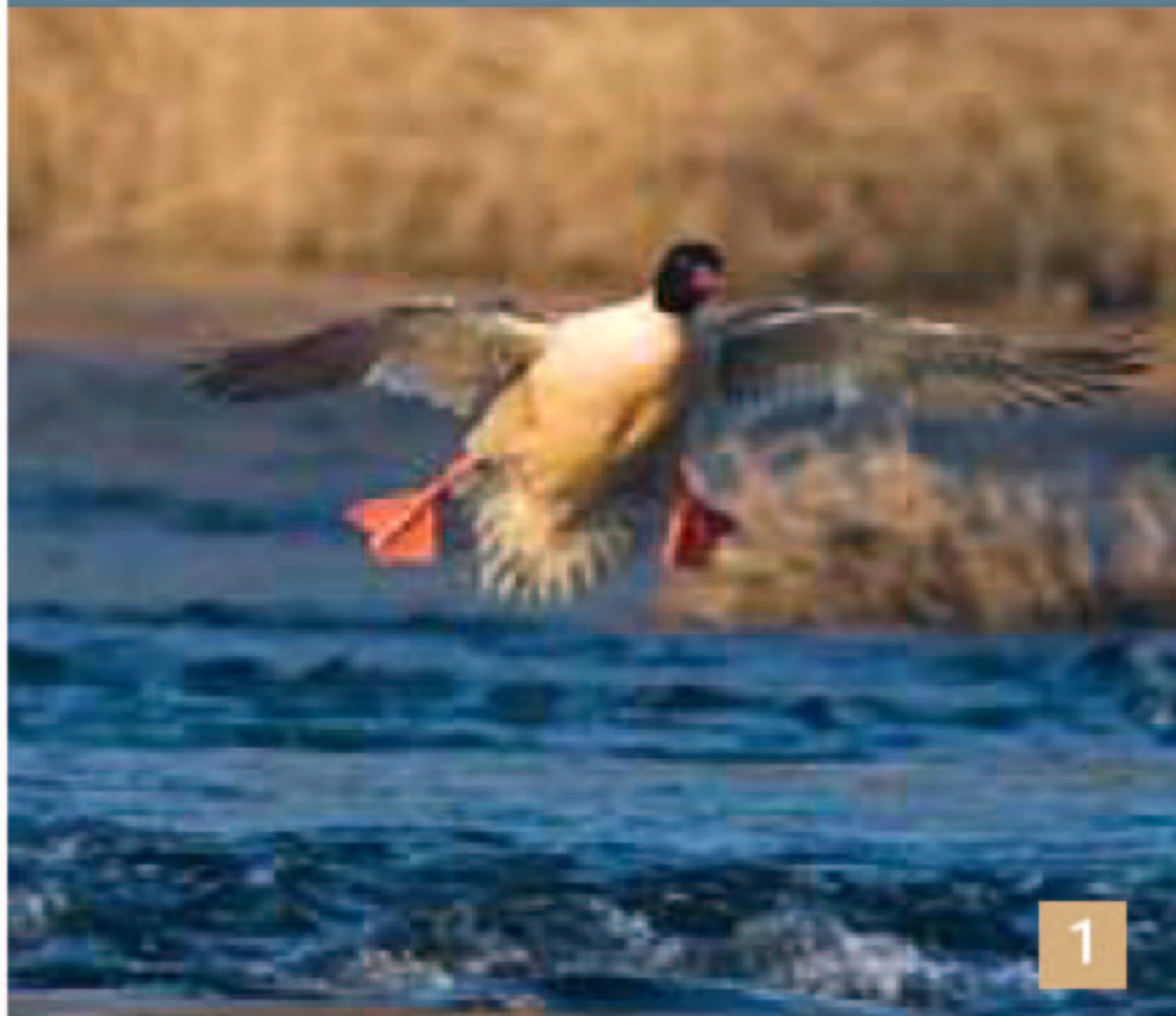
Birds: The highlights of this area are; whooper swan, barnacle goose, pink footed goose, goosander, red breasted merganser, goldeneye, wigeon, kingfisher, cormorant, grey heron, peregrine and merlin.

Local Services: Carlisle is close by but pub food can be found in Rockcliffe, Monkhill and Burgh by Sands. There are village shops/post offices in Burgh by Sands and Rockcliffe.

Local Transport: An hourly bus runs from Carlisle to Beaumont and Burgh by Sands. A half hourly bus runs from Carlisle to Rockcliffe

Local knowledge: Castletown estates own Rockcliffe marsh and it is used for wildfowling, the RSPB and Cumbria Wildlife Trust manage the marsh as a breeding area during spring and summer. Access to the main marsh area is limited.

Location Map



Cardurnock Peninsula



Eden Estuary

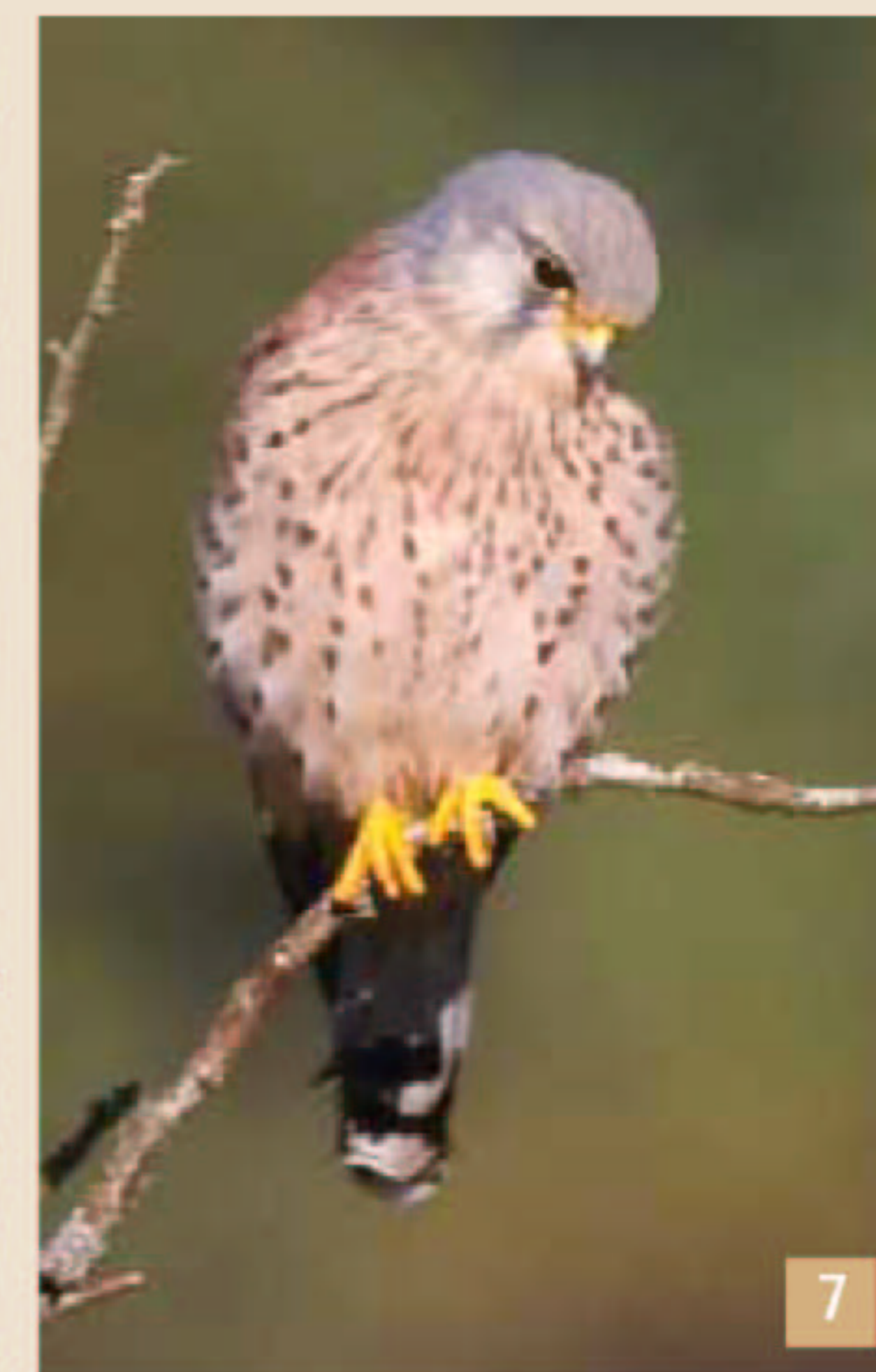
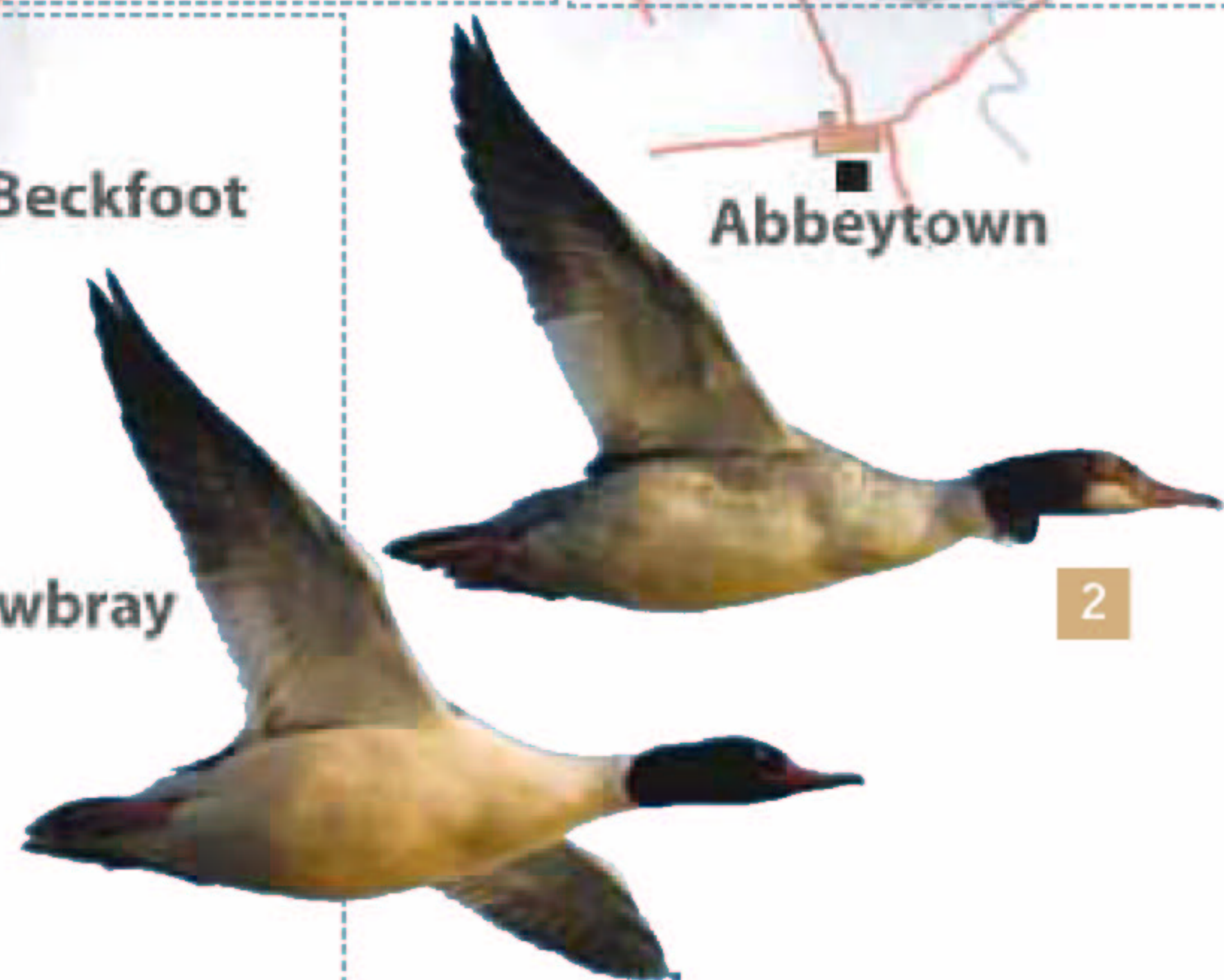
Silloth & Grune Point



Moricambe Bay



'The Banks' & Allonby Bay



- 1-3 Gooseander
- 4 Greylag Geese
- 5 Geese
- 6 Redwing
- 7 Kestrel
- 8 Reedbunting
- 9 Barn Owl





Respect the rights of landowners.

The wishes of landowners and occupiers of land must be respected. Do not enter land without permission. Comply with permit schemes. If you are leading a group, do give advance notice of the visit, even if a formal permit scheme is not in operation. Always obey the **Country Code**.

Respect the rights of other people.

Have proper consideration for other birdwatchers. Try not to disrupt their activities or scare the birds they are watching. There are many other people who also use the countryside. Do not interfere with their activities and, if it seems that what they are doing is causing unnecessary disturbance to birds, do try to take a balanced view. Flushing gulls when walking a dog on a beach may do little harm, while the same dog might be a serious disturbance at a tern colony. When pointing this out to a non-birdwatcher be courteous, but firm. The non-birdwatchers' goodwill towards birds must not be destroyed by the attitudes of birdwatchers.

Country Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Fasten all gates
- Keep your dogs under close control
- Keep to public paths across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
- Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Take special care on country roads
- Make no unnecessary noise

Birdwatchers' Code of Conduct

Welfare of birds must come first.

Whether your particular interest is photography, ringing, sound recording, scientific study or just birdwatching, remember that the welfare of the bird must always come first.

Habitat protection. Its habitat is vital to a bird and therefore we must ensure that our activities do not cause damage.

Keep disturbance to a minimum.

Birds' tolerance of disturbance varies between species and seasons. Therefore, it is safer to keep all disturbance to a minimum. No birds should be disturbed from the nest in case opportunities for predators to take eggs or young are increased. In very cold weather disturbance to birds may cause them to use vital energy at a time when food is difficult to find. Wildfowling already impose bans during cold weather; birdwatchers should exercise similar discretion.

Rare breeding birds. If you discover a rare bird breeding and feel that protection is necessary, inform the appropriate RSPB Regional Office, or the Species Protection Department at the Lodge.

Otherwise it is best in almost all circumstances to keep the record strictly secret in order to avoid disturbance by other birdwatchers and attacks by egg-collectors. Never visit known sites of rare breeding birds unless they are adequately protected. Even presence may give away the site to others and cause so many other visitors that the birds may fail to breed successfully. Disturbance at or near the nest of species listed on the **First Schedule of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981** is a criminal offence.

Rare migrants. Rare migrants or vagrants must not be harassed. If you discover one, consider the circumstances carefully before telling anyone. Will an influx of birdwatchers disturb the bird or others in the area? Will the habitat be damaged? Will problems be caused with the landowner?

The Law. The bird protection laws, as now embodied in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, are the result of hard campaigning by previous generations of birdwatchers. As birdwatchers we must abide by them at all times and not allow them to fall into disrepute.



Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Solway Coast was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1964. It came under full scale management in 1996. The area stretches from its easterly boundary at Floriston on the Border Esk to Maryport on the west Cumbrian coast. It area covers approximately 118 square kilometres.

The area is dominated by the estuary and its surrounding fringe of extensive inter-tidal salt marshes.

Further south are extensive sand dune and shingle beach areas.

Further inland but associated with the coast are lowland raised mires and agricultural land given over, in the main, to improved and semi-improved grassland for pasture. The fields are bounded by traditional hedges with distinctive 'kest's'.

Birdlife thrives within the area and much work is underway that restores bird habitats and their associated land-scapes. Environmental stewardship is creating new areas of wet pasture for breeding waders, it is creating traditional hedgerows that are havens for all wildlife. The RSPB, English Nature, Cumbria Wildlife Trust and the Solway Coast AONB are restoring and creating access and interpretation on the raised mires. The saltmarshes are currently all under environmental stewardship schemes to provide habitat for both wintering wildfowl and breeding waders.

The Solway Coast AONB is managed by a staff unit and is overseen by a wide partnership under the mechanism of a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC).



For more information regarding the area please log onto our website at www.solwaycoastaonb.org.uk where up to date information can be found including events and birdwatching walks.

You could even become one of our community volunteer wardens and take an active part in the conservation and restoration of one of the most beautiful places in Britain.

