

Bird Life



Kinish Harbour, Sherkin Island, Co. Cork.

Birds Feeding on the Mudflats

Kinish Harbour is a sheltered muddy shore in the centre of Sherkin Island, Co. Cork. With each tide, the sea flows in and out of the shallow harbour through a narrow channel. At high tide the harbour is full of water but at low tide it becomes a huge mudflat, with only a narrow channel of water flowing at the mouth of the harbour. Mudflats will be familiar to many people around the coast, particularly those who live near river estuaries (the place where the river meets the sea).



Redshank

Redshank (see its orange-red legs) with a lug worm in its beak.



Black-headed Gull

The colour of birds' feathers often varies from season to season and between young and adult birds. Here a Black-headed Gull in winter plumage, doesn't seem black-headed at all!

Food, Glorious Food!

It is tempting to think of a mudflat as dirty and boring because it is full of mud but actually the mud makes it really interesting, particularly for birds. We see mud but they see food! The mud itself is full of life, such as clams, razorshells, shrimp and worms, while the water has fish such as flounder and mullet. The birds know this and are quick to swoop in to feed when the tide goes out. Sometimes they can just pick off the food from the surface, such as crabs scurrying along the top of the mud, or a worm buried deep beneath. Different birds have adapted their feeding behaviour to maximise the amount of food they catch. Here are some of the birds feeding seen in Kinish Harbour.



Oystercatcher

Oystercatchers like to eat cockles and mussels.



Little Egret

Greenshank

Image © Robbie Murphy

The Greenshank's green legs and slightly upturned beak, tells it apart from other waders. The Little Egret is a large bird and a cousin of the Grey Heron.



Curlew

The Curlew is Europe's largest wading bird, its long downcurved beak helps identify it. Can you see the worm it has caught?



Hooded Crow

It's not just waders that visit the shore. This Hooded Crow is feasting on a crab.