

Oystercatcher

Haematopus ostralegus

Bird · Resident · here all year



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One of the most conspicuous birds of the Solway: boldly pied, with pink legs, a red eye and a long, heavy orange bill. Oystercatchers winter on the estuary in large flocks and move inland in spring to breed, nesting on shingle, riverbank gravel and increasingly on farmland and flat gravelled roofs well away from the sea. They are noisy in every season.

BEHAVIOUR

The bill is a specialist shellfish tool, and individuals learn one of two techniques from their parents — either hammering a mussel shell open or stabbing between the valves to cut the muscle — with the bill shape wearing differently to match. Groups perform noisy 'piping' displays, running together with bills pointed down and calling shrilly. They are long-lived, often over twenty years.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Oystercatchers (Haematopodidae)
SIZE	40–45 cm
UK STATUS	Amber-listed

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