

# Eider Identification



Eiders are a large, heavily built duck with a characteristic wedge-shaped beak and a long, sloping forehead.



**Male eiders** have:

- White and black colouring
- A black cap
- Greenish neck markings
- A distinctive cooing call



**Female eiders** have:

- A reddish-brown colour
- Distinctive black barring on their feathers

# Where to see Eiders



*Ideal locations for observing eider ducks*



## Ducklings

From mid-May, ducklings leave their nest sites as tiny balls of fluff and make the dangerous crossing to the sheltered bays, estuaries and harbours of the mainland.

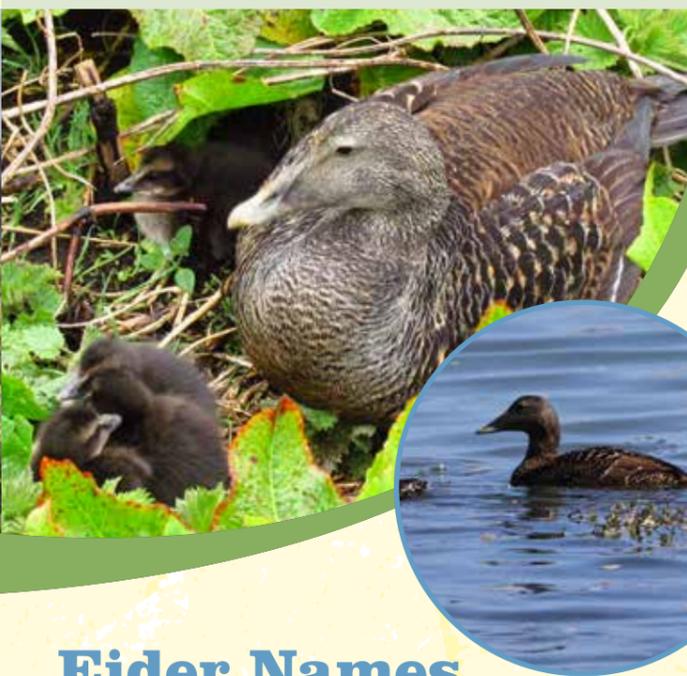
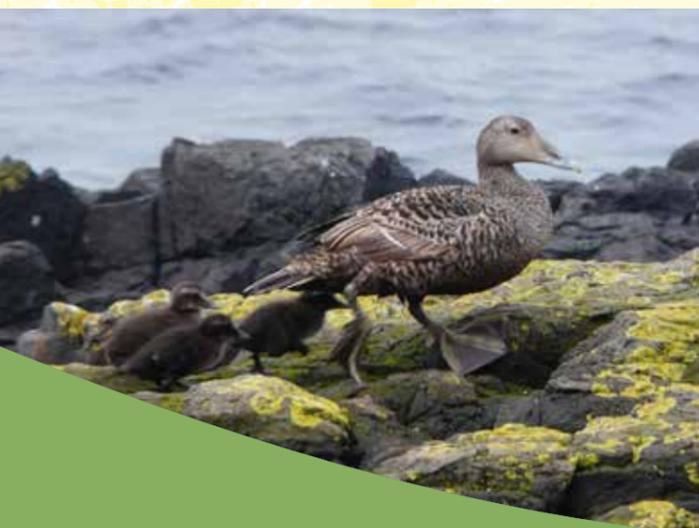
At this time, creches of ducklings can be seen with adult female birds at locations including the Coquet Estuary, Alnmouth and Budle Bay.

## Courtship Display

The amazing spectacle of male eiders displaying to the females can be seen from late winter through to early spring. The best places to watch this display at close quarters are in Amble or Seahouses harbours.

## Nesting Females

The main nesting sites for Northumberland's eider are on the Farne Islands National Nature Reserve and on Coquet Island. Boat trips to the Farne Islands can be taken from Seahouses Harbour where nesting eiders can be seen on Inner Farne.



# EiderAware North East



# Northumberland's Eider Ducks

Thousands of eiders make their home on the Northumberland coast making it a nationally important location for this much-loved seaduck.

St Cuthbert is reputed to have offered sanctuary to eiders on the Farne Islands back in the 7th century. Today, Northumberland's eiders are given protection by the Berwick to St Mary's Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) which extends from Berwick-upon-Tweed down to St Mary's Island.

# Eider Names

The association between eider ducks and St Cuthbert is reflected in their traditional local names of "Cuthbert duck" and "Cuddy duck".

The 12th century monks of Durham called eider "Aves Beati Cutherti" (birds of the blessed Cuthbert).

In the Western Isles "Colk" (gaelic for feather bed).

In Orkney and Shetland "Dunter" (from its bobbing up and down action whilst at sea).

In France - "Eider á Duvet".



# EiderAware North East

Eider Aware North East celebrates the nationally important eider populations of the Northumberland coast. Funding from the project has come from Northumbrian Water and the Northumberland Coast AONB

This leaflet is kindly sponsored by



A guide to Eider ducks on the Northumberland coast



## Eider Facts

Eiders are seaducks. They spend their entire lives on the coast or at sea.

- Nest building and chick rearing are all left to the female. Nests are made on the ground and lined with down feathers
- A month passes before the chicks hatch. The female doesn't feed while on the nest and may lose 30% of her body weight in this time
- Eider is the UK's largest duck and capable of flying at speeds of up to 50 mph

Ducklings take to the water within 48 hours of hatching and group together in creches supervised by mother ducks. Other females (called aunties) join the creches to protect ducklings against predators.

Eiders feed on shellfish – particularly mussels – which are swallowed whole and crushed in the bird's gizzard. Eiders can dive or swim to a depth of 10 metres for food.



## What to do if you find an injured Eider

If you see an injured or entangled bird then please consult [www.helpwildlife.co.uk/](http://www.helpwildlife.co.uk/) to find the details of your nearest local wildlife rescue centre or contact the RSPCA on 0300 1234 999.

Do not attempt to capture an injured or entangled bird yourself unless you are entirely confident that you are not causing it additional distress and that you are not risking your own safety. Remember that the coast contains a number of potential hazards including slippery rocks, strong tides and deep water.



## Be Eider Aware

Eider are under pressure. Human disturbance, predation of chicks, pollution, lack of suitable food and adverse weather conditions can all contribute to falling bird numbers.

The good news is that there are a few simple actions you can take to help reduce the pressure on Northumberland's eider and on other coastal birds:

**Don't feed the ducks:** Items such as chips and bread offer little nourishment to a bird adapted to feed on seafood. Help eider to eat the food that's best for them rather than human food.

**Avoid disturbance:** Disturbance from people increases the predation risk for eider chicks and reduces the time which eiders have to feed.

- Look out for any groups of eider and take care not to disturb them
- If birds appear to become alert or distressed then move further away
- Keep dogs away from coastal birds, putting your dog on a lead if necessary

Creches are particularly prone to disturbance and react to a perceived threat by swimming or walking away or by clustering together in a tight group.

### Take care when fishing:

Eider can be tempted by fishing bait. Please reel in your line if eiders are nearby and avoid casting towards groups of feeding eider.

Birds can become tangled in discarded fishing lines. Keep them safe by discarding line safely or make use of the Anglers National Line Recycling Scheme - ([www.anglers-nlrs.co.uk/recycling-locations](http://www.anglers-nlrs.co.uk/recycling-locations)).

**Reduce plastic pollution:** Plastic is a threat to all sea-life. Please dispose of rubbish safely. The domestic sewage system is a big source of plastics in our seas. Only ever flush the three Ps (pee, poo, paper) down the toilet.

### Tell us what you see:

You can tell us about your eider sightings at: [www.bit.ly/Eiders](http://www.bit.ly/Eiders).

The information you provide will contribute to ongoing efforts to conserve Northumberland's eiders.

