

# THE GREAT WHITE EGRET

## Avalon Marshes Nesting and Colour Ringing Report 2025

Alison Morgan



### SUMMARY

2025 was the 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive breeding year for the Great White Egret here on the Avalon Marshes, and a 10 year milestone for the ringing programme. Every year is different, and this year was no exception. Egret AAF set a new national longevity record and Egret ABM and partner helped create the first ever breeding record in Wales. Here in Somerset the birds battled with a year of erratic and inclement weather, established a new breeding site on Ham Wall and lost an entire colony in a single week to predation on Shapwick Heath. We received 94 resighting reports from across the country, many with fantastic photographs, including an unprecedented number of winter sightings of our birds feeding in the shallow waters of our depleted local reservoirs. We have continued to rely on our team of ringers, drone operators, helpers and surveyors, and on the support and encouragement provided by the reserve managers and staff. Each additional year of data brings new insights, and we are grateful to everyone for the contributions they have made.

### METHODOLOGY

The nests were monitored by Alan Ashman and Andrew Kirby using a drone, and by field observations from the ground. Most nests are not visible from ground level, so field observations are limited to recording early territorial behaviour and nest building, feeding flights and the presence of recently fledged chicks. Data gathered by drone were recorded on a spreadsheet which was updated weekly throughout the breeding season. As in previous years, the figures given for 2025 are the most accurate we can achieve, but are based sometimes on assumptions. In particular, it is assumed that birds which have reached fledging age and are absent from the nest have in fact fledged. The high proportion of subsequent resightings of colour ringed juveniles confirms that this is likely to be the case.

### OVERVIEW OF THE 2025 BREEDING SEASON

The breeding season got off to the usual early start, with nest building beginning in February and the first chicks hatching from the middle of March. But 10 days of low temperatures in the second half of February, followed by a few days of strong winds and heavy rain, meant that fewer nests were built than in recent years.<sup>1</sup> By the beginning of April there were just 45 occupied nests, compared with 69 at the same stage in 2024. In previous years building has continued into May, but this year no new nests were built after mid April. The number of occupied nests peaked at 58, compared with 72 in 2023 and 97 in 2024.

As the season progressed the weather continued to be atypical – but this time in a way which favoured the birds. April 2024 had been the 6<sup>th</sup> wettest on record for England, with an equally wet May bringing double the amount of rainfall across the South West compared to the previous year. This had led to a high level of mortality in the nest among chicks which were old enough to be left by foraging parents but not old enough to maintain a constant body temperature in inclement weather. In 2025, by contrast, April and May proved to be unusually warm and dry, with double the amount of sunshine and less than a third of the rainfall for the Somerset Levels compared with 2024.<sup>2</sup> The result was that although fewer nests were built in 2025 compared to the previous two years, the productivity of those nests was much higher, with 75% of chicks successfully fledging compared to 56% in 2024. Unfortunately this was not enough to compensate for the earlier challenges, and 2025 was the first year not to result in an increased number of pairs, nests and fledged young.

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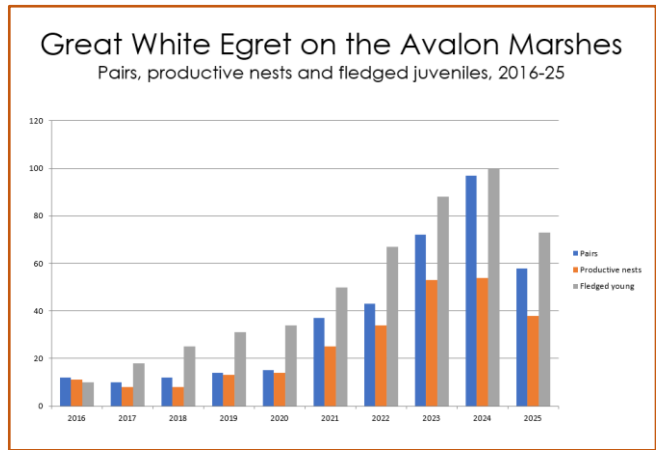
<sup>1</sup> The monthly average air temperature for SW England in February 2025 was 5.5°C, compared with a record-breaking 7.8°C in 2024. [https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/pub/data/weather/uk/climate/datasets/Tmean/date/England\\_SW\\_and\\_S\\_Wales.txt](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/pub/data/weather/uk/climate/datasets/Tmean/date/England_SW_and_S_Wales.txt)

<sup>2</sup> Yeovilton Weather Station recorded a rainfall for April 2025 of 16mm compared with 50mm in 2024, and hours of sunshine as 213 compared with 110 in 2024. May saw 18mm of rain and 240 hours of sunshine, compared with 136mm of rain and 144 hours of sunshine in 2024. <https://uk-historic-weather.co.uk/yeovilton-weather-data>. See also <https://www.bbc.co.uk/weather>, which reports 2025 as the sunniest year on record.

**The end of season totals were as follows:**

- 58 pairs
- 38 productive nests
- 98 chicks hatched
- 73 young fledged

This is the third highest total of young fledged, after 2024 and 2023, but nonetheless represents a break in the hitherto uninterrupted sequence of expansion.



**Figure 1: Pairs, productive nests & fledged juveniles 2016-25**

**NEST LOCATIONS AND OUTCOMES**

The 58 nests were situated in the following 10 locations:

Location of colony	No of nests	Successful nests	Young fledged
Phase One, Ham Wall	16	14	27
Godwins Island, Ham Wall	2	1	2
Long Drove, Ham Wall	1	1	3
Canada Farm Lake, Shapwick Heath	7	7	12
Decoy Lake, Shapwick Heath	5	2	4
First Lagoon, Shapwick Heath	3	2	4
70 Acres, Shapwick Heath	10	0	0
Westhay Tower Hide	6	5	9
Westhay Viridor	5	4	9
Westhay Lake Hide	3	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>73</b>

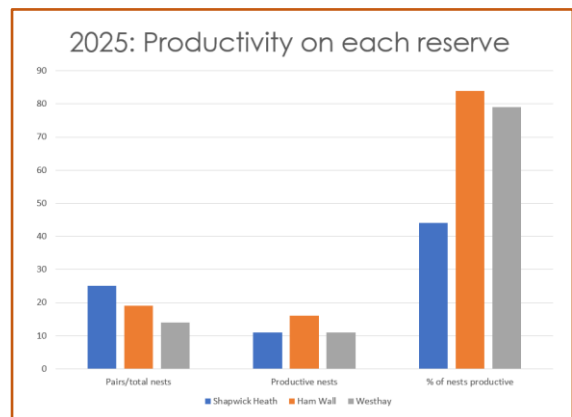
**Table 1: Colonies, nests & fledged young**

Although the three reserves are all part of the Avalon Marshes and offer similar habitat, there are inevitably differences in water levels, reed density, feeding opportunities and predation patterns. This may result in different breeding patterns and outcomes, and this was particularly marked this year.

**Westhay:** The number of sites and nests on Westhay has continued to increase, with a record 11 successful nests fledging 21 young. Although the smallest of the three reserves, Westhay’s population of Great White Egrets is now steadily growing.

**Ham Wall:** Ham Wall has seen fluctuating fortunes over the years, with some sites being abandoned and others newly colonised each year. This year Phase One was used for the first time and hosted the largest colony anywhere on the Marshes, with 14 successful nests and 27 young fledged; this meant that for the first time Ham Wall held the most nests and fledged the most chicks.

**Shapwick Heath:** The first UK Great White Egret breeding record came from Shapwick Heath, which has remained the species’ stronghold. But this now appears to be changing, with steadily declining productivity over the last three years. Small-scale predation had been a regular feature of previous breeding seasons, but is becoming an increasing problem on Shapwick Heath in particular, and this year an entire sitting colony of 10 nests at 70 Acres was abandoned over the course of a single week. Only one colony, on Canada Farm Lake, had good productivity, with 7 nests fledging 12 young. Undamaged, empty nests and observer reports suggest that the culprits were mink, and it seems likely that without a determined eradication programme this may become increasingly problematic.



**Figure 2: Proportion of Productive nests by reserve**

## Infertile eggs

A small number of nests proved to have infertile eggs:

- Westhay Lake Hide N3: the adult sat for between 48 and 66 days
- Westhay Viridor N3 had a bird sitting for between 36 and 71 days
- Westhay Tower Hide N6 hatched only 1 of its 3 eggs
- Shapwick Heath First Lagoon N3 incubated for at least 72 days

The normal incubation period is about 26 days.



Adult on infertile eggs, First Lagoon

## Brood reduction

Each year some nests fail completely due to adverse weather and/or predation. The typical clutch size on the Avalon Marshes is 3 eggs, but most pairs are not able to provide enough food to fledge 3 chicks. The shortfall is referred to as brood reduction, and the literature reports that for Great White Egrets this normally runs at 30%.<sup>3</sup>

In 2024 brood reduction occurred on 72% of productive nests, leading to an overall loss of 44% of hatched chicks, the highest loss seen in the five years for which we have reliable data. In 2025 brood reduction was seen on just 50% of productive nests, leading to a much lower loss of 25% - the lowest for five years.<sup>4</sup> This high success rate can be attributed to the warm and settled weather in April, May and June.

Very few chicks were lost to other causes this year. On Ham Wall predation was a probable cause of death on just one nest in the new colony on Phase One, which lost 2 young chicks in mid April. On Westhay there were no losses to predation, but the 2 younger chicks on Nest 3 at Tower Hide were found to be dead on the nest a week after the first chick had fledged; the cause is not clear.

## Productivity

Overall, although significantly fewer pairs attempted breeding and fewer chicks hatched in 2025 compared to 2024, a greater proportion of nests were successful and a higher proportion of the hatched chicks fledged, leading to a slightly increased level of productivity per nest compared to 2024 (1.92 compared to 1.85). Average long-term productivity per nest remains stable at 1.9.

This raises an interesting question. An American study suggested that with an expected mortality rate of 76% at the end of the first year and 26% each year thereafter, and with birds beginning to breed at 2 years of age, each pair would need to fledge 2.92 young each year in order to maintain a stable population.<sup>5</sup> The average annual productivity on the Avalon Marshes is just 1.9 – and yet the breeding population has been growing year on year.

A partial explanation for this is that the 1<sup>st</sup> year mortality rate for the Somerset birds appears to be considerably lower than that in the American study. Of the 64 colour ringed birds fledged between 2016-2024, 28 have been resighted a year or more after ringing, demonstrating a relatively low mortality rate of 56%. So a productivity of about 2 rather than about 3 may be sufficient to sustain, if not to grow, the colonies here.

Given the continued expansion of the breeding colonies it therefore seems likely that the breeding colonies on the Avalon Marshes have continued to be supplemented by incoming adults from continental Europe. We know that the first birds to nest here in 2012 were from France. We also know that most of our juveniles leave the Avalon Marshes after fledging (usually travelling north), and as far as we can tell they mostly do not return here to breed. Absence of proof is of course not proof of absence, and it is particularly difficult to see red rings on the seasonally red legs of birds in breeding colours. But of the 28 birds resighted at one or more years of age, only 3 are thought to have bred here; 6 others have returned after dispersing to other regions but are assumed to have either not bred or to have bred elsewhere, and the rest have not been resighted in Somerset after fledging. The 9 birds resighted in Somerset are as follows:

- **AAC & AAF** (2016) remained in Somerset and bred here for several consecutive years
- **AAM** (2018) left Somerset after fledging but returned a few weeks later, and is likely to have bred here

<sup>3</sup> Voisin, Claire: *The Herons of Europe*, Poyser 2010, ch 18.

<sup>4</sup> Average annual brood reduction from 2021 to 2025 was 33%.

<sup>5</sup> Kennard, J.H: 'Longevity records of North American Birds', in *Bird-Banding*, 46 (1975): 55-73, cited in Voisin ch 18.

- **AAT & AAU** (2021) left Somerset, returned a year later but then left again; both have been regularly seen in the Tees Valley and in Yorkshire since then
- **ABF** (2022) was seen at Blagdon Lake in March of its third and fourth year, but elsewhere in between
- **ABN** (2022) is suspected to have attempted nesting on the Isle of Wight, returning to winter at Chew Valley Lake
- **ABU** (2022) was seen in breeding colours on Shapwick Heath in its third year, but then headed north to Yorkshire before returning to winter at Chew Valley Lake and then leaving for Lincolnshire, where it was again seen in breeding colours
- **ACV** (2023) was seen in breeding colours at Chew Valley Lake at the precocious age of 11 months, but then left for Yorkshire; by June 2025 it was back at CVL, and was seen regularly there during October and November – along with 4 of the 2025 birds.

Of the remaining 17 birds resighted in or after their second year, 10 have been seen in breeding colours in their new locations, and 3 are known to have bred there (see below).

It therefore seems that whereas the 1<sup>st</sup> year survival rate for Somerset birds is higher than expected, the continued growth of the colonies here is likely to be due at least in part to a continued influx of birds from continental Europe.

## RINGING

The birds are ringed in the nest between 15 and 20 days old; the ideal is 17 or 18 days. The nest is accessed by kayak after careful calculation of the age of the chicks based on first sitting dates and drone images – the chicks fortunately show few signs of concern at a non-parental flying object hovering discreetly above them. Not all suitable nests can be accessed; many are built deep into the reedbeds and cannot be reached; many colonies are themselves inaccessible (they didn't build prehistoric trackways across the marshes here for nothing!); and once a nest has chicks which are 3 weeks old, those closest to it also become inaccessible for fear of provoking premature dispersal.



AHA, AHC and younger sibling, Westhay 28.4.25 - photo Alison Morgan

This year the ringing team (Alison Morgan, Bob Medland & Alexia Michaelides) visited 7 nests: 3 on Ham Wall, 2 on Shapwick Heath, and 2 on Westhay. 14 birds were given colour rings; DNA testing from feather samples revealed that 6 were male and 5 female, with 3 nil results. All fledged successfully, and by the end of the year 12 of the 14 had been resighted, some of them several times in different locations (see below).

Reserve	Young fledged	Young c-ringed
Ham Wall	27	AJV, AJW, AHF, AHH, AHJ
Shapwick Heath	12	AJL, AJN, AJP, AJX, AJT, AJU
Westhay	9	AHA, AHC, AJR
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>14</b>

Table 2: Young colour ringed

Since breeding first began in 2012, 513 juveniles have fledged from 271 successful nests; 78 (15%) of these fledged birds have been colour-ringed. Of these, 63 (80%) have been subsequently resighted. This is a pleasingly high proportion, and testimony to the national network of dedicated observers and photographers on whom we rely for reports.

## NEW RECORDS IN 2025

### A new breeding record

Great White Egrets breed from 2 or 3 years old. Overall, 13 of the ringed birds have been seen in breeding colours. 3 are known or thought to have bred on the Avalon Marshes (**AAC, AAF, AAM**) and a further 2 have been seen here in breeding colours but are not thought to have bred (**ABU, ACV**).

At least 3 others have bred outside Somerset with an unringed partner, pioneering new breeding locations for this

species in the UK. In 2024 **AAR** and partner nested at Cotswold Lakes, and **ABT** and partner set a new breeding record for Nottinghamshire at Besthorpe NR; ABT is assumed to be the colour-ringed bird which bred again in 2025.

2025 brought another first: **ABM** and partner were one of two pairs to set a new breeding record for Anglesey at the RSPB's Cors Ddyga reserve, where they fledged two young. This was not only the first time Great White Egrets have bred in Anglesey, but also in Wales as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

A further 10 ringed birds have been seen in breeding colours outside the county, but without confirmation of breeding: in 2024 **ABF** at Slimbridge, **ABN** on the Isle of Wight, **ACA** at Pulborough in West Sussex and **ACV** locally at Chew Valley Lake; in 2025 **AAW** at Sculthorpe Moor in Norfolk, **ABP** at Minsmere, **ABU** in Lincolnshire, **ACM** at Idle Washlands in Nottinghamshire, **ACV** in the Derwent Valley, Yorkshire and **AD?** at Otmoor in Oxfordshire.<sup>7</sup> All were at least 2 years old.



ABM doing a little feather care at the end of the season at Cors Ddyga – photo by John Oates.

Despite the increasing national distribution of the Great White Egret, Somerset remains the UK breeding stronghold. In recent years additional colonies have been established in Norfolk, on the Dee Estuary, on the Gloucestershire/Wiltshire border, on the Ouse Washes, in Nottinghamshire, on the Loch of Strathbeg in Scotland and now on Anglesey. Ringed Somerset birds have been seen in all of these locations except the Loch of Strathbeg, and it seems likely that as only a representative sample of 15% of our fledged juveniles are ringed, many more Somerset birds are also involved in establishing these new colonies.

### A new longevity record

2025 also brought a new UK longevity record. We began ringing in 2016, with just 3 birds, AAA, AAC and AAF – all males. **AAA** was reported once in October 2016, but has not been seen since then, and presumably did not survive its first winter. **AAC** fledged 3 young on Shapwick Heath in 2018, and was seen nest building on Ham Wall in 2019 where it was also present in breeding colours in 2020 and 2021 – but has not been reported since. The third bird, **AAF**, wandered widely within Somerset and bred here in both 2018 and 2023 – but was not seen in 2024. We were therefore delighted to learn that AAF was present at Chew Valley Lake in August and September 2025 – setting a new UK longevity record for this species of 9 years. As the oldest known bird lived for 22 years, AAF may have many productive years ahead.<sup>8</sup>



AAF at a nesting colony on Shapwick Heath in 2023 – photo Andrew Kirby

Fledged	Resighted	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years
64	52	28	16	7	4	2	1	1	1	1

Table 3: Survival of birds ringed from 2016-2024

## DISPERSAL

### Sightings of 2025 birds

In 2025 we received 94 reports of ringed birds. 25 of these reports were of birds ringed in previous years, and 49 were of birds ringed in 2025. A small number of reports concerned birds for which the ring code could only be partially read, and for whom an individual identity could not be confirmed.

We have received reports for 12 of the 14 birds ringed in 2025. The two unreported birds are **AHA** and **AJN**, both of

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/what-e-gret-win-for-welsh-nature>.

<sup>7</sup> The ID of ACA was assumed from an earlier sighting in this location but not confirmed. ACV was present in breeding colours in April at CVL (although not yet of breeding age) but moved to Yorkshire in May. The third letter of AD? was not legible, but the bird must have been either ADA, ADC or ADH, all ringed in 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Kennard 1975, see above.

which fledged successfully. As usual most of the birds have dispersed across the country, with sightings received from various locations in the following counties:

- Bedfordshire
- Ceredigion
- East Sussex
- Essex
- Gloucestershire
- Greater Manchester
- Isle of Wight
- Lancashire
- Lincolnshire
- Northamptonshire
- Oxfordshire
- Shropshire
- Somerset
- Warwickshire
- West Midlands

Some of these represent new locations for the Somerset birds. **AJT**'s visit to Olton Mere Reservoir in Solihull was our first record for the West Midlands, **AFU**'s visit to a small lake at Bickershaw was the first for Greater Manchester, and **AJV**'s visit to Pannel Valley NR was the first for East Sussex.



L: AHH at Chipping Sodbury Golf Course, Gloucs 10.7.25 – photo Mark Coller

R: AJW at Daventry CP, Northants 1.8.25 – photo Gary Pullan

L: AJW at Hersey NR, Isle of Wight 17.11.25 – photo John Adams

R: ACM at Idle Washlands, Notts 29.5.25 – photo Ian Cowgill

An unusual feature of 2025 was that whereas in most years the juvenile birds leave Somerset soon after fledging, this year that was not the case. One bird, **AJX**, has been resighted only on Shapwick Heath. Four more, **AJL**, **AJP**, **AJR** & **AHH** spent most of October and November feeding in the unusually shallow waters afforded by Cheddar Reservoir and Chew Valley Lake. AJP was only reported from these two reservoirs, AJR had previously visited Sutton Bingham Reservoir in the county in September, whereas AJL had returned from Pitsford Reservoir in Northamptonshire and AHH from Chipping Sodbury Golf Course in order to join the many birds at these two locations. At Chew Valley Lake a record 65 Great White Egrets were counted on a single October day.

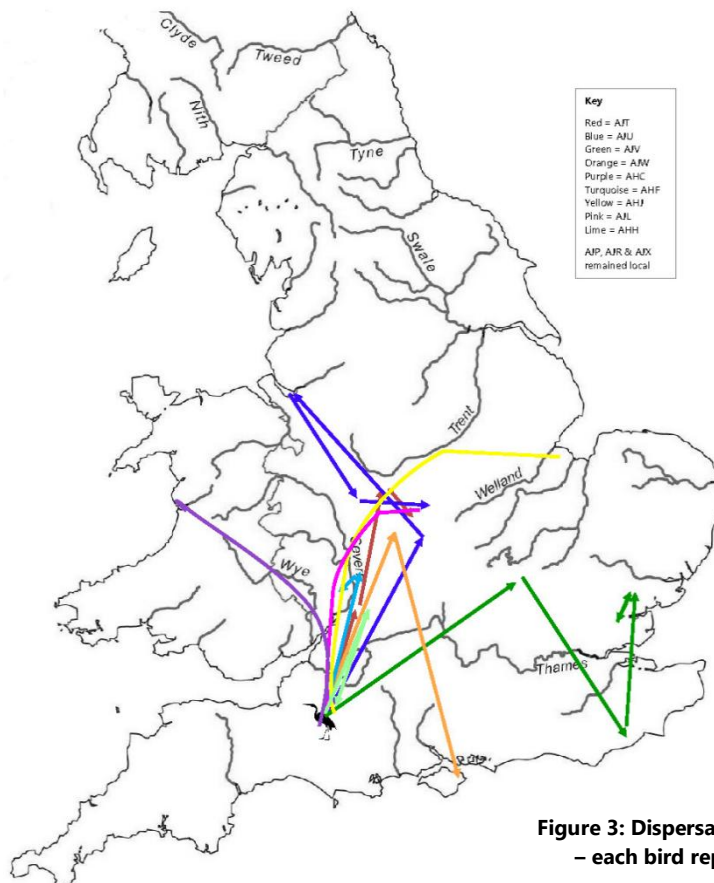


ACV and others feeding at Chew Valley Lake, 3.11.25 – photo Mike Moxon

As can be seen from the map in Figure 3 (below), some of this year's juveniles have already travelled widely, with birds from the same nest often heading in different directions:

- **AJT** was reported from Slimbridge, and then from reservoirs in Staffordshire and the West Midlands
- Nestmate **AJU** opted for marshes in Warwickshire and Shropshire, a nature reserve in Lancashire, and a reservoir in Northamptonshire
- **AJV** headed to a gravel pit in Bedfordshire before turning south to a river valley in East Sussex and then north-east to reservoirs in Essex
- Nestmate **AJW** spent some time in a country park in Northamptonshire before travelling to the Isle of Wight.
- Just one bird, **AHC**, went west, heading for Tregaron Bog in Ceredigion.

As in previous years, it seems that most birds begin their dispersal by heading up the River Severn, with others following the prevailing West wind and travelling east.



**Figure 3: Dispersal to date of the 2025 cohort – each bird represented by one colour**

### Sightings of birds ringed in previous years

In 2025 we received a further 25 sightings for birds ringed in previous years. These came from 5 birds ringed in 2024, 3 birds ringed in 2022, 1 bird ringed in 2021, and 1 bird ringed in 2016.

- **AAW** (2021) was seen at Sculthorpe Moor, Norfolk, on 6<sup>th</sup> June
- **ABF** (2022) was seen at Langorse Lake, Powys on 22<sup>nd</sup> February and Blagdon Lake, Somerset, on 7<sup>th</sup> March
- **ABM** (2022) bred on RSPB Cors Ddyga, Anglesey in July
- **ABP** (2022) was seen at Minsmere, Suffolk, on 7<sup>th</sup> April (previously reported there in September 2024)
- **ABT** (2022) bred at Besthorpe NR, Notts, and was seen at nearby Langfield Lowlands on 4<sup>th</sup> July & 4<sup>th</sup> November
- **ABU** (2022) was seen at Chew Valley lake on 14<sup>th</sup> January and Alkborough Flats, Lincs on 26<sup>th</sup> June
- **ACM** (2023) was present at Idle Washlands, Notts, for most of May



AAW at Sculthorpe Moor, Norfolk 6.6.25 – photo Graham Brownlow

- **ACV** (2023) was present at Chew Valley Lake in October & November
- **ADC** (2023) was seen at Marsworth Reservoir, Tring on 30<sup>th</sup> September
- **AFN** (2024) was seen at Messingham Sand Quarries, Lincs on 4<sup>th</sup> March and at Pilning Wetland, S Gloucs on 10<sup>th</sup> May
- **AFT** (2024) was seen at Farmoor Reservoir, Oxon on 27<sup>th</sup> Feb and 11<sup>th</sup> March
- **AFU** (2024) was seen at Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire on 24<sup>th</sup> April and Bickershaw, Greater Manchester on 2<sup>nd</sup> August
- **AFX** (2024) was seen at Neston on the Dee Estuary on 3<sup>rd</sup> April
- **AJH** (2024) was present at Oss Mere, Shropshire from September to December



ABF at Langorse Lake, Powys  
22.2.25 – photo Mark Waldron



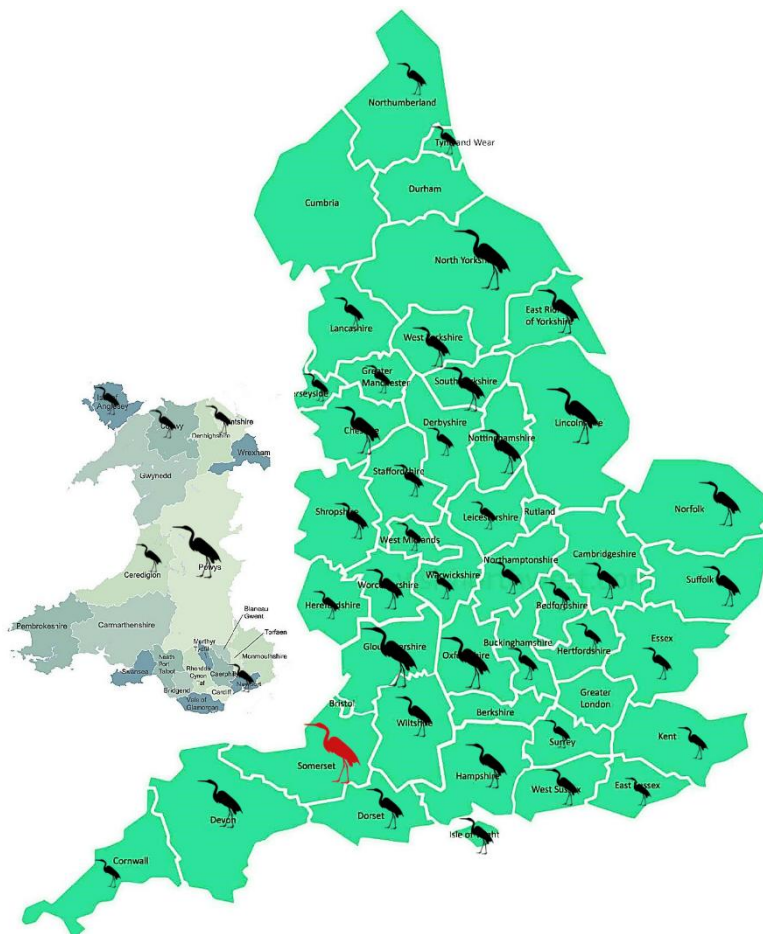
AFT at Farmoor Reservoir, Oxon  
27.2.25 – photo Gordon Stokes

All of these birds had been seen in other locations prior to the 2025 sighting, some of them many times. One thing that we have learned from this study is that Great White Egrets wander widely before they finally settle in a breeding location – which may be any or none of the places they had previously visited.

## DISTRIBUTION OF THE DISPERSED BIRDS 2016-25

Somerset birds have now been reported from 41 counties in England, 6 in Wales, 1 in Scotland, 1 in Northern Ireland and 1 in the Republic of Ireland.

Figure 4 shows the number of discrete locations at which Somerset egrets have been resighted within each English and Welsh county; the larger the bird, the more sites our birds have visited.



**Figure 4: Resighting locations in England & Wales by county. Bird size denotes the number of discrete sites.**

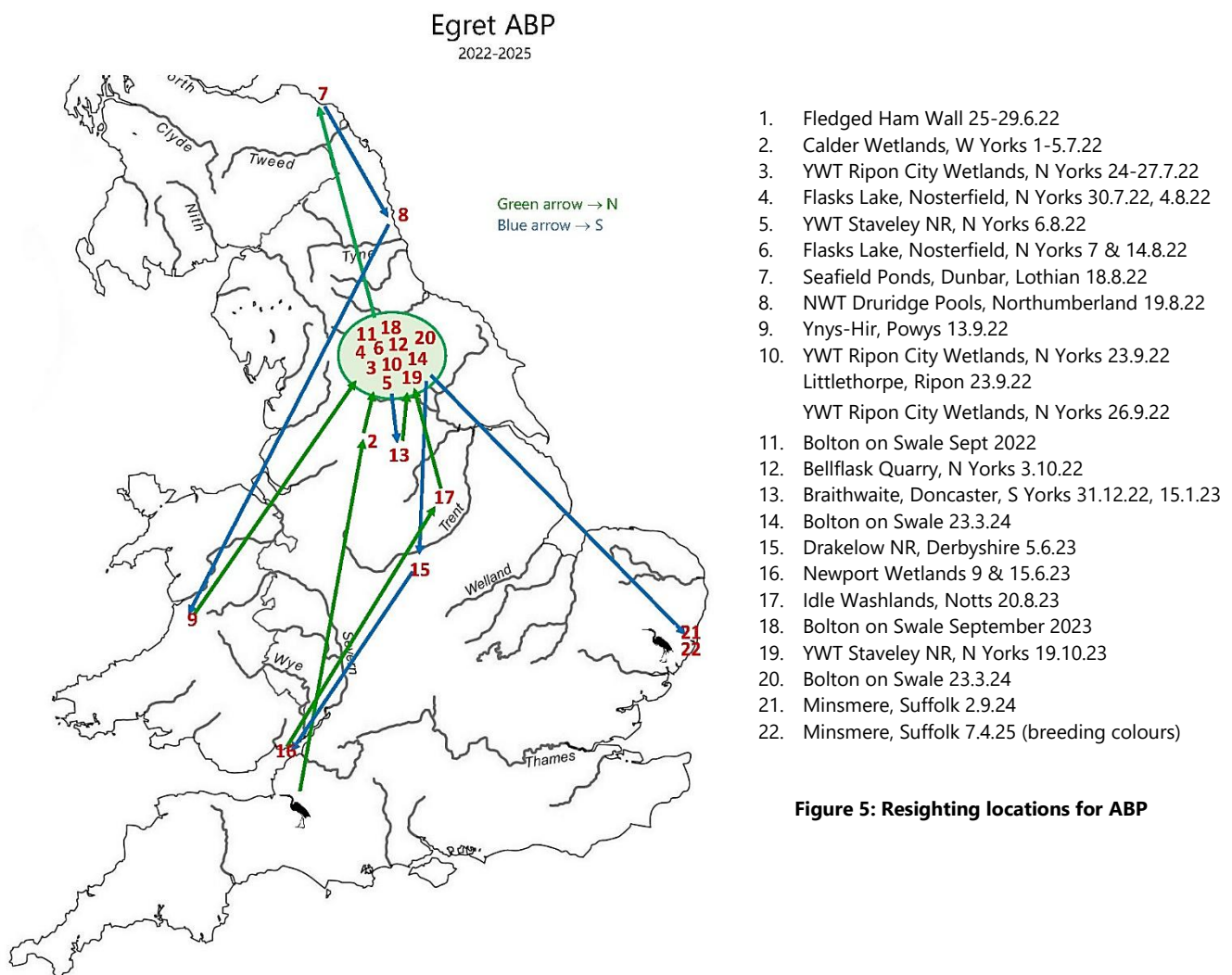
Each year we receive reports from more locations, and it is now apparent that Somerset egrets have travelled to every English county except Cumbria, Durham, Rutland, Berkshire and Greater London. Most have been reported from

nature reserves, possibly reflecting the greater observer presence in these locations – our birds have visited 70 of these. The next most popular destination is water bodies – birds have been reported from 40 different reservoirs and lakes. Then rivers, 21 of which have hosted Somerset birds. Other destinations include 6 coastal locations, 6 country parks, and 12 other venues including marshes, garden ponds and a golf course.

Some birds have been reported many times from a small number of locations, while others have shown a surprising inclination to wander from one part of the country to another. In all we have received reports from 158 different sites.

Over the years our most commonly reported bird has been **AAF**, the longest lived – but he has never left Somerset. The most widely travelled bird is undoubtedly **ABP**, a male ringed on Ham Wall in 2022. This bird has been reported 40 times from 20 different locations in England, Wales and Scotland. He may now have settled at Minsmere in Suffolk, where he was first seen in September 2024, and where he was present in breeding colours in April 2025. His journey is retraced in Figure 5:

Individual ID	Year ringed	Sightings
AAF	2016	41
AAU	2021	40
ABP	2022	26
ACV & ADC	2023	8
AFN	2024	10
AJV	2025	5



**Figure 5: Resighting locations for ABP**

## DISCUSSION

The ringing project was established in 2016 in order to identify, protect and monitor the breeding attempts of this colonising species in its initial breeding habitat. This has involved developing new methodologies and identifying good practice to support further colonisation both in Somerset and elsewhere.

We are encouraged by progress to date:

- We have built a team involving both reserve staff and volunteers, and together have established a reliable methodology for monitoring nests and evaluating progress throughout the breeding season
- We have acquired a growing understanding of nest site preferences and their influence on breeding success
- We have begun to see how our increasingly variable weather patterns impact breeding outcomes, and to assess the potential pressure from both avian and mammal predation
- We have been able to follow the fortunes of the ringed juveniles as they disperse, enabling us to map their progress and to gain a deeper understanding of their habitat requirements throughout the year
- We have seen Somerset birds begin to establish new breeding colonies in other parts of the country – in all cases following the careful creation and maintenance of suitable breeding habitat

Since they first bred on the Avalon Marshes in 2012, Great White Egrets have gone from strength to strength, and each year gives us a deeper understanding of the factors governing their success. One of our initial questions was whether Somerset birds would succeed in establishing colonies elsewhere, and with confirmed breeding records in Gloucestershire, Nottinghamshire and this year in Anglesey, and with Somerset ringed birds in breeding colours now reported from 10 other locations we are beginning to learn that this is indeed the case.

We look forward to continuing to follow their progress in the years to come.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Great White Egrets nest on three reserves within the Avalon Marshes: RSPB Ham Wall, Natural England Shapwick Heath and Somerset Wildlife Trust Westhay.

The drone and ringing teams are grateful for the support, encouragement and practical assistance provided by the wardens and staff on all three reserves. In particular we would like to acknowledge the contribution made by Ali Blaney, who moved on from her long-standing role as Warden of RSPB Ham Wall this year; without her oversight, support and encouragement this project would not have been possible. We would also like to express our thanks to those who have provided ground support for the ringing visits, and those who have provided observations both locally and nationally.

The colour ringing project is approved by the European Colour Ringing Birding group and listed on their website at <https://cr-birding.org/node/4022>, and operates under BTO project licence 5590. The ringing team (Alison Morgan, Bob Medland & Alexia Michaelides) and drone team (Alan Ashman & Andrew Kirby) hold the appropriate operational and disturbance licences. All ringing is carried out in accordance with current HPAI guidelines.

Alison Morgan, February 2026



AFU at Bickershaw, Leigh 2.8.25 – photo Jonathan Coombes.  
Ringed April 2024.