

Great White Egrets on the Avalon Marshes

2022 breeding season: Ringing and resightings
Alison Morgan

2022 has been another bumper breeding year for our expanding population of Great White Egrets, with 35 successful nests fledging an estimated 67 youngsters. The birds nested in 7 locations across the Avalon Marshes, with a single colony on Natural England's Shapwick Heath reserve packing in a whopping 24 nests. Smaller colonies were located on RSPB Ham Wall, Somerset Wildlife Trust's Westhay, and two other sites close to Ham Wall.

The colour ringing programme has continued this year, with 14 chicks ringed in 6 nests. 10 of these birds have subsequently been reported from locations across the country – often with youngsters from the same nest travelling in different directions. It's amazing that within just a few weeks a nestling in Somerset can turn into a fully fledged, confident bird in Yorkshire:



ABW in the nest on Ham Wall (photo Alison Morgan) and at RSPB Old Moor (photo Keith Pickering)

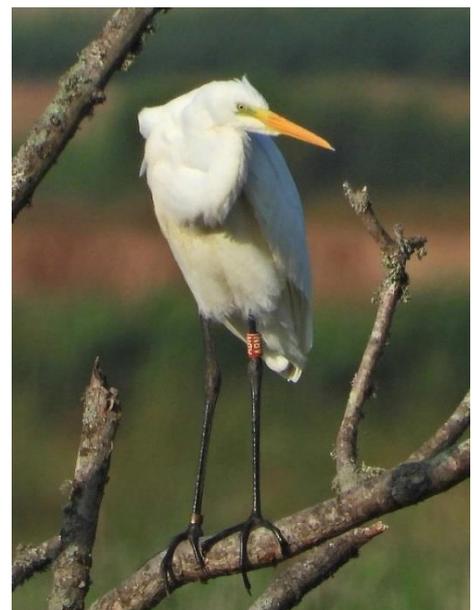
The list of sightings to date is impressive:

Siblings **ABC** and **ABJ** were ringed at Ham Wall on 26th April, and fledged during the first week of July. ABC was reported from Sandbach Flashes, Cheshire on 10th July. On the same day, ABJ was reported from Covehithe Broad, Suffolk.

Siblings **ABM** and **ABN** were ringed at Shapwick Heath on 29th April. They too fledged during the first week of July. ABM headed north and was reported from Bempton, E Yorks on 4th July, from RSPB Blacktoft Sands, E Yorks on 12th, and from nearby Alkborough Flats, Lincs, on 17th. ABN headed south, and was reported from the Isle of Wight on 11th July.

ABP and **ABT** were ringed at Ham Wall on 29th April. They fledged during the last week of June. ABT was reported from another part of the reserve on 24th June. ABP was reported from Ripon City Wetlands on 24th July.

ABU was ringed at Westhay on 7th May, fledged during the last week of June, and was reported from N Somercotes, Lincs on 17th July.



ABN at St Helens Bridge IOW
(Keith Ballard)

ABW and **ACA** were ringed at Ham Wall on 7th May; they fledged during the last week in June. ACA was reported from Brixham Harbour, Devon on 10th July. ABW was reported from RSPB Old Moor, Yorkshire on 20th July.

ACF was ringed on Ham Wall on 12th May and fledged during the last week in June. It was reported from Flamborough Head, Yorkshire, on 4th July.

What about birds ringed in previous years?

First winter mortality is high for this species, with one study finding that up to 76% of birds do not make it through to their second year. We have therefore been heartened to see AAF, ringed in 2016 and resolutely loyal to Somerset. He was photographed again at Ham Wall in June and is likely to have bred here this year.

Reports have continued to come in from the 2021 birds too. AAP was reported from Llangorse Lake in Powys in April and AAR was seen at Coombe Hill in Gloucestershire in May and June. AAT has been regularly seen at RSPB Saltholme in the Tees Valley, where she still is at the time of writing. Finally, her sibling AAU has continued his wanderings, checking back in at Ham Wall at Easter before setting off north to RSPB Saltholme with AAT, and then resuming his tour of the north with stops in Staffordshire and Yorkshire. He's currently at RSPB Fairburn Ings.

We are tremendously grateful everyone who is helping to make this study possible – locally, our reserve staff, the drone and ringing teams and our network of local volunteers, and more widely to everyone who has sent us sightings and photographs of the birds in recent months. We are learning a huge amount about the behaviour of this species as it continues its colonisation of England and Wales. Please do keep your reports coming!



Alison Morgan
Avalon Marshes New Colonists
Coordinator
alison.morgan@rspb.org.uk

July 2022

ABU at North Somercotes, Lincs 17.7.22
(Annamarie Hillam)



ABM at Blacktoft Sands, 12.7.22
(Andy Hunt)



ABJ at Covehithe, 10.7.22 (Tim Oakes)



ACA at Brixham Harbour 10.7.22 (Paul Bray)



AAR at Coombe Hill 23.5.22 (Roy Shilham)

