



WADER GURU



‘Which sites around the world do you think have the best shorebird spectacles?’

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An Inspiration of Waders in flight at Snettisham, Norfolk, England - Elis Simpson

Wow! That is some question and it required some research from our correspondents around the world, and clearly this will not be an exhaustive list but a selection from those who offered us their thoughts and here they are;

UK:

- West Kirby, Wirral. 53.372503, -3.189544
- Hoylake, Wirral. 53.396936, -3.180758
- Hilbre Island, Wirral. 53.381342, -3.225869
- Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire. 53.086149, 0.332642
- Ribble Estuary, Lancashire. 53.725894, -2.944123
- Morecambe Bay, Lancashire. 54.173051, -2.876146

Netherlands:

- Zeedijk. 53°16'22.8"N 5°33'18.0"E
- Texel. 53.132 N, 4.901 E
- Schiermonnikoog. 53.515 N, 6.383 E

Germany:

- Vorland Rickelsbullaer Koog. 54.898 N, 8.625 E
- Grothusenkoog / Wilhelminenkoog. 54.300 N, 8.743 E

Denmark:

- Ballum Sluse. 55.130 N, 8.689 E

France:

- La baie de l'Aiguillon Vendée et la Charente-Maritime
- Baie de Bourgneuf-en-Retz, Loire-Atlantique et Vendée

USA:

- Delaware Bay. 38.932 N, 74.965 W
- Copper River Delta, Cordova, AK . 60.373193, -144.938552
- Kachemak Bay Homer AK. 59.600726, -151.407611

- Elkhorn Slough, Moss Landing, California. 36.805270, -121.788924

Canada:

- Mackenzie Delta, Northwest Territories. 68.835462, -136.405569

Argentina:

- San Antonio oeste, Rio Negro. -40.732615, -64.915947

Brazil:

- Curupu Point North, São Luís, Maranhão. -2.404456, -44.063658
- Estuário do rio Sergipe, Sergipe. -10.955373, -37.028034

New Zealand:

- Pukorokoro Miranda, Waikato, -37.182477, 175.324149
- Karaka on the Manukau Harbour, Auckland. -37.068427, 174.835560
- Big Sand or Manakapua Island on the Kaipara Harbour, Auckland. -36.383558, 174.243823

Australia:

- Lee Point, Northern Territory -12.326753, 130.895869
- Shoalhaven Heads, New South Wales. -34.859049, 150.747533
- Observation Point, Victoria. -38.453268, 145.300300
- Point Smythe, Victoria. -38.651184, 145.746628
- The Western Treatment Plant, Victoria. -38.040693, 144.523295
- Pt Cook Coastal Park, Victoria. -37.923421, 144.798258
- Avalon Saltworks, Victoria. -38.079016, 144.444114
- Adelaide International Bird Sanctuary, South Australia. -34.572190, 138.363064
- Thompson Beach, South Australia. -34.488583, 138.280900
- Clinton Conservation Park, South Australia. -34.148016, 138.106602
- Eighty Mile Beach, Western Australia. -34.148016, 138.106602
- Broome Bird Observatory, Western Australia. -17.975714, 122.344111

North Korea:

- Sindo, North Korea 39.911116, 124.313132

China:

- Bohai Bay. 38.376897, 117.736127
- Yalu Jiang. 39.881112, 123.639544

Mozambique:

- San Sebastian Peninsula. -22.099476, 35.479267

Namibia:

- Walvis Bay. -22.963751, 14.425683

South Africa:

- West Coast National Park. -33.129034, 18.065128

Mauritania:

- Banc d'Arguin. 19.717653, -16.402762

Naturally, these sites are not always buzzing with waders, timing both in terms of the season and also the height and state of

the tide will largely determine whether or not birds will be gathering in huge numbers and be flying in these spectacular aggregations.

Footnote:

Did you know that the collective noun for these wader spectacles is not, as is often misquoted, 'a murmuration'. That particular noun is applicable to European Starlings and probably refers to the noise they make rather than anything to do with the flights that occur at winter roosts at dusk.

As a shameless plug on behalf of Wader Quest, they have suggested that the collective noun for an unidentified or mixed flock of waders is, or should be at least, An Inspiration. The argument for this is laid out in a Book of that name *An Inspiration of Waders*, which sets out the reasons behind this idea. Available from the [Wader Quest shop here](#).

Here is the final chapter of the book where the argument comes together.

An Inspiration of Waders

'A cloud of birds bursts from a seemingly deserted mudflat. With uncanny synchrony, several thousand shorebirds swirl about, twisting and turning as one entity – truly one of nature's awe-inspiring spectacles'.

The Shorebird Guide (2006) – Michael O'Brien, Richard Crossley and Kevin Karlson



What would you call a mixed or unidentified aggregation of wader species swirling in flight over your favourite estuary? What collective noun could do justice to these spectacular formations of birds tied together by invisible threads wheeling, swishing and pirouetting over an estuary when they rise up with a thunderclap of simultaneous wing beats like dry leaves lifted from a forest floor by a sudden gust of wind.

Once up they take shape immediately and dash headlong, low over the water as one. As you watch a wave action may then begin like a ribbon fluttering in the wind and myriad white dots merge into one living being, thousands upon thousands of birds and twice as many beating wings. Suddenly the squadron leader banks and a millisecond later the next follows suit, and the next, then the next as a ripple rolls down the hoard. The hitherto white birds, now dull, grey-brown, all but disappear against the low cloud on the horizon then, as if by magic, they just as suddenly reappear. They spiral upwards like laughter in an empty room in one homogeneous block. As they shoot skywards they form a towering biomass of life which suddenly collapses like a burst balloon full of water and they flow out across the surface of the sea forming a living stream. Next they turn through one hundred and eighty degrees and speed back towards the beach having taken on a tubular form; they perform a victory barrel roll like half of the double helix in the DNA belonging to some unimaginably immense being. They circle once, then again, gaining height in a blizzard of thrashing wings, flickering from dark to light like a fancy illuminated bill board in Time Square. The form morphs from globular mass to undulating string recalling a massive caterpillar traversing the estuary. They

then ride up to form a dancing cobra whose head breathtakingly disappears down its own throat to form a darting arrow as though they have been shot from Cupid's bow towards the very heart of the estuary. At last the frantic thrashings segue seamlessly into a more tempered urgency. Quelling their fervour, like a child that has lost interest in a new toy, the birds become more relaxed and form a gliding cloud over their chosen roost spot. Then, as with an unexpected April shower, it starts to rain waders as they tumble and wiffle out of the sky. Plunging vertically downward they pull up at the last moment to cruise in level flight over the heads of their fellow acrobats that had alighted moments before them. Finding a space they swell the front of the congregation as they land and settle slowly into a sizzling pancake of excited birds like the head of a living, breathing lava flow. Slowly they cool and become still and quiet once more, it is as though this miracle of natural finesse has never happened at all.

The tide now drops and the birds begin to leave and spread across the expanding mud as the sea inhales, sucking its lapping edge back towards its inner core. Suddenly, with the roar like a jet engine not ten feet above your head another phalanx of waders flies from their roost site to join the joyous celebration of life, to be lived for another day, out over the estuary.

Even if you have experienced this many times before, each time it is different, an infinite number of shapes and forms painted like a living fresco in the vaulted ceiling of the cathedral skies above you. Just sitting there, in awe of this exuberant demonstration of the power and beauty bestowed upon the natural realm around us, it becomes clear that a world that did not contain such events would be an impoverished one indeed. Each of those birds will soon be risking everything to return to their breeding grounds to try, against the odds, to replace themselves before they die, simply to maintain their species.

So I ask again, what do you call this inspiring phenomenon? The most likely answer I would expect to hear would be a 'flock of waders' since there is, as yet, no specific collective noun for these mixed or unidentified massed ranks of waders. Given all that has been written in the foregoing chapters of this book I put it to you that when you come across a multitude of them dashing as one, living being over the estuary, describing impossible turns and manoeuvres, flashing from dark to light as they go, that, referring to them as a flock is inadequate. That collective noun may be suitable for a bunch of random sheep on a hillside or an unruly gang of pigeons in a town square, but surely not noble or expressive enough for our majestic waders.

What about those who call it a murmuration, usurping the collective noun for European Starlings? That is overtly wrong and it would be no less wrong to usurp one that is used for a specific wader species that have inspired us to select, invent or adopt collective nouns for them (see Appendix I). Some are blindingly obvious, such as a pack of knots, some are rather insulting like a deceit of lapwings, others are entirely mystifying, witness an omniscience of godwits. We have collective nouns for many things, but somehow, one of the most striking and spectacular of life's experiences with waders has hitherto gone unrecognised in this way.

Is this because we cannot be sure exactly what we are watching? What species make up these swirling gyrations? Often they may be just one species, maybe they are all Knots, in which case we could call it a pack, but can we be sure when watching so many birds at once that they are all the same? It might be that those Knots are actually Dunlins, or Knots and Dunlins, in the thousands of beating wings some may actually be attached to godwits and plovers be they Common Ringed or Grey. Perhaps, unnoticed a few Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstones are scooped up in the throng around the periphery or lost in the middle of the heaving mass of birds; now they defy our attempts to give them a name, and so it seems we have never tried.

But surely this is a phenomenon that deserves better? It is one of nature's most engaging and breath-taking experiences to sit beside an estuary and witness this *tableau* in motion.

This little book is an entreaty to the world at large to give this amazing spectacle a name. What you have read within its pages is not designed nor intended to be a full coverage of how waders have inspired us over the years, they are just examples to emphasise the point. Together these snippets have, I hope, encouraged you to give greater recognition to this most wonderful group of eclectic birds and their flights of fantasy one of the natural world's greatest phenomena.

So what are we to call this mixed or unidentified group of waders speeding above the ebbing and flowing estuary waters? May I be so bold as to humbly submit that such magical gatherings of the birds that have been inspiring us since we came down from the trees, should be respectfully and reverently referred to as..... *An Inspiration of Waders*; I rest my case.

[Back to the Wader Guru.](#)



Waders need love too!

