

BBC

Wildlife

PHOTOGRAPHY MASTERCLASS

with Mark Carwardine

#2 Wildlife Photography Hotspots: Snettisham, north Norfolk

Equipment to use (and camera settings)

I recommend taking a long lens (the longer the better – I used a 600mm with a 1.4x extender) for tight shots of the swirling flocks and the birds packed together on the ground from the RSPB hide. It's also worth taking a shorter zoom, such as a 70-200mm, and a wider lens to photograph the shapes of the swirling flocks. Take a tripod, if you have one, to steady the long lens and to have it ready at all times. When photographing the flocks, I used a relatively small aperture of around f9 to get a good depth of field, a shutter speed of 1/1250 sec or higher, and an ISO of 1600.

What else to take

It's worth taking some rain protection for your camera kit, just in case, and plenty of lens cloths to keep the lens spotless (not least, to remove raindrops). Wellies are a good idea as it can get pretty muddy. Remember to wrap up warm – it can get very cold on the exposed beach where you stand. And take a torch for the walk in the dark from the car park to the viewing point.

Extra tips

Take binoculars and keep an eye open for peregrines, which often flush the waders into the air. Other birds you might see in the winter include huge numbers of pink-footed goose, as well as occasional hen harriers and short-eared owls.

WHY GO?

The unforgettable 'Snettisham Spectacular' is open to everyone and well worth the effort. The tide goes out a long way at The Wash, and thousands upon thousands of waders – knot, oystercatchers, dunlin – feed on the exposed mudflats and roost there at night, too. Returning quite rapidly, the tide pushes the birds closer to everyone standing on shore and, every so often, up into the air where they swirl upwards to create enormous shape-shifting clouds. They then land en masse further up the mud flat, only for it to happen all over again until it's high tide and the birds have nowhere else to settle except on dry land. This presents yet another fantastic spectacle: the sheer number crammed onto the bank opposite the RSPB hide is mind-boggling.



BEST TIME TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

The numbers of waders fluctuate during the year but the peak is generally from mid-autumn to mid-winter. To get the best view, you need to do a little forward planning and shouldn't risk just turning up – it's vital to plan your trip around the [best days](#) with the highest tides. The higher the tide, the better. For the best experience, make sure you arrive at the RSPB Snettisham Reserve car park a good hour and a half before high tide, and ideally plan around a spring tide. The walk to the best viewing point (see map) is about 1.5 miles (2.5km), along a clearly marked, often muddy path. Address: RSPB Snettisham, Beach Road, Snettisham, King's Lynn PE31 7RA. Car park is £2 and free to RSPB members. Click [here](#) for directions.



For inspirational e-books, workshops, tours, free fact sheets and more on wildlife photography, please go to www.markcarwardine.com