

## The Spoonbill

A Spoonbill has been residing around the Gann salt-marshes and river for the last week or so. Spoonbills are quite dramatic birds – they are large and white with long thick black legs, a floppy crest and a bill which is well-described by its name - it has a spatulate area on the end which the bird uses for catching small fish and crustaceans using a side to side sweeping motion. It is much bigger than a Little Egret and is a bird often reported by non-birdwatchers as it is so striking. Spoonbill visitors in the past have often dropped in for just a few hours but this bird seems to be a “long-stayer”.



It is not immediately obvious why we should see Spoonbills here - the main breeding population of Spoonbills is in eastern Europe, and they are not doing too well. They need large areas of reed swamp to feed in and undisturbed sites to nest. However, recently a breeding colony has developed in Norfolk at Holkham. Spoonbills first bred there in 2010 and they have successfully bred ever since, with the colony gradually increasing in size. It is therefore likely that it is wandering members of this colony which we see increasingly in wetlands all over the UK, including Pembrokeshire.

So a Spoonbill at the Gann nowadays does not generate quite so much excitement as it used to. It is always a good bird to see though.

*Rosemary Royle*

*Have you heard about the Greater Spotted Cuckoo at Penally on the golf course?? I think it has even reached the national BBC news! This is another dramatic bird, and much rarer than the Spoonbill - regrettably we have not yet had time to go and look at it. I just hope it is finding enough to eat - it would usually be feasting on large caterpillars and big grasshoppers in its usual home around the Mediterranean. These are in short supply in the UK in March!*

