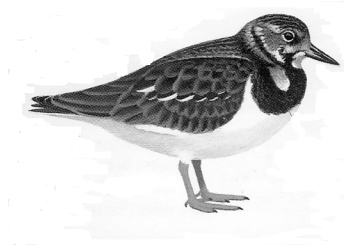


Turnstones

This dapper little bird is well named – it does indeed turn stones and seaweed to find food and it will eat virtually anything. Turnstones breed on rocky coasts in far northern latitudes - Scandinavia, Russia and North America. They spend the winter much further south - they can be seen in South Africa, Australia, India, South America and the Caribbean.



A few thousand birds choose to spend the winter in the UK, which is by far the most northerly of all the wintering locations. Yes, it presumably is a bit colder, but it's not so far to fly. A small group can often be found at the Gann and sometimes on Dale beach. They can be hard to spot – despite the bright orange legs, white belly and black and brown patterned upperparts they do a good impression of a rock, especially when roosting. When feeding they look like moving rocks – when a flock of Turnstones is working along a beach it almost looks as though the beach itself is moving.

Turnstones have two very endearing features. Firstly they are very tame. You can get very close and even dogs walking close by will not make them fly. Many people walk by them without knowing they are there. In the tropics they scavenge under restaurant tables – I guess a barbecued prawn would be Turnstone gastronomic heaven!. The second endearing feature is the clattering noise they make whilst feeding. Turning over rocks is a noisy business and more than once it has been the continuous clicking and clattering which has drawn our attention to them.

Although the arrival of the Turnstones in mid-September signals the end of the summer, I am always pleased to see them. Somehow a drab winter morning always seems better after sharing it with a flock of Turnstones.

Rosemary Royle