Being on the west coast of the UK, South Wales enjoys a very much milder winter climate than most of Europe and very many birds can remain resident throughout the year. They are also joined by winter migrant birds that seek out this region from all points of the compass, northwest through to east.

South Wales is particularly diverse geologically and this has led to a very large range of habitats, in close proximity to each other, when compared to many other regions of the UK. Naturally this diversity of habitats provides for a wide diversity of bird species and we shall also discover how each is associated with preferred habitats.

The tidal range here is very large – up to 10 metres at Swansea. Possible habitats we can visit include: Cliffs and cliff-top grasslands, rocky shore, estuaries, boulder strewn storm beaches, muddy and sandy shores as well as sand dunes and nearby lakes / reservoirs. We shall definitely visit Blackpill, an internationally known tidal flat locality for Gulls and Waders, where a freshwater stream flows over the beach – a spot much sought after by birds for washing.

South Wales provides the northern shoreline of the Bristol Channel. This course will be visiting locations along part of this area; the expansive Swansea Bay, between the Glamorgan Heritage Coast (SE of Porthcawl) and the Gower Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (West of Swansea).
Course Description

The course is for anyone who has an enthusiasm for learning within a friendly group where sharing knowledge and experiences is positively encouraged. You will probably need to have done at least some bird-watching before, but experience of coastal birds or waders and gulls in particular is not needed. You need to be able to manage strolls over uneven or undulating ground and spend time standing or sitting waiting for tides to bring birds into observation range.

This course will introduce you to the birds to be found on the coast of South Wales. The days will be spent visiting a variety of habitats, seeking out the range of different bird species to be found at each and learning more about their life strategies and any aids to their identification. Evening lectures/discussions will reinforce knowledge of how to identify Waders and Gulls. Distances walked will be kept to a minimum as we will be mainly driving between sites and most localities have adjacent car parks and public toilets/comfort stops nearby.

Each evening, we shall look at the ways of identifying waders and gulls.

After breakfast and checking the morning’s weather forecast, there will be a briefing on the proposed site visits, the type of terrain we will be passing over, availability of toilets etc. The likely birds we can hope for may also be mentioned, if that is not too much like tempting fate! The idea is to pick our spots at varied shoreline locations and with minimal walking observe what birds are present. Then move on to the next site to increase our chances of seeing as many different species as possible. Help and guidance will be given with all bird species identification, including getting to grips with identifying those ‘difficult’ waders and gulls where they occur.

About the Tutor

Ian Smith is an experienced all round naturalist and interpreter. He started leading bird watching walks in his student days and soon after took on roles with the British Trust for Ornithology, local bird clubs, Wildlife Trusts and varied wildlife conservation organisations.

Currently working as a Wildlife Surveyor / Ecologist and Inclusive Access Consultant, Ian also enjoys his time spent in the challenging role of a tutor with universities, colleges and the Field Studies Council.

Brought up in South Wales on the coast, Ian has travelled extensively and sought out birds from the Arctic to the Gambia and Atlantic Islands to the Middle East.

His interest in Waders started early whilst walking the shore in front of his home and he admits to an obsession with Gulls extending back well over 30 years, but promises not to take students to landfill sites on this course!
Arrival / Departure Times

This course officially starts at 6.00pm on the Friday with dinner and registration. Please aim to arrive between 4:00-5:00, there will be coffee and cake available from 4pm onwards.
Breakfast will be at 8am; Lunch will be a packed lunch.
The course will end on Sunday at 4:00pm.

What to Bring

- Warm clothes – plenty of layers to ensure you can keep warm and comfortable
- Waterproof top, waterproof trousers (Can be hired from the Centre)
- Hat and gloves – in case of strong winds and chill factor
- Water bottle and lunch box
- Binoculars (essential) and Telescope and sturdy tripod (if you have one – the tutor will have one if not)
- Camera (if you have one)
- Field guides: A recent (non-photo) field guide is essential. Collins Bird Guide by Mullarney, Svensson, Zetterstrom and Grant is excellent – either 1st or 2nd edition. The RSPB Handbook of British Birds (second edition) is another good book.
- Seating: A lightweight stick seat or foam seating mat can make watching more comfortable, whilst waiting for the incoming tide or new birds to appear at roosts.
- A notebook, pencil and pens
- Strong (preferably waterproof) footwear (e.g. walking boots)
- Sun hat and sun block
- A rucksack or shoulder bag

How to Book

Provisional bookings can be made by telephoning the centre on 01639 895636, by e-mail at enquiries.mp@field-studies-council.org or by completing the online form on the FSC website: www.field-studies-council.org. You will then be asked to complete a booking form, located within the relevant brochure or available to print off from the FSC website.