

### UPDATE 28th April 2025



**Curlews** have set up their territories and the females are incubating their eggs while the males stand guard looking out for danger. If a threat is detected he gives a warning call before trying to chase off any predators.

Our first **little terns** arrived from their wintering grounds on the north-west coast of Africa on the 18th April, slightly earlier than usual. The flock of roosting **sandwich tern** at Rue Point has grown over the past couple of weeks and the maximum count so far is 30. Sandwich tern can be seen showing courting behaviour but they don't nest on the Isle of Man. Ringing has shown that some of these sandwich terns hatched on the islands in Strandford Loch. A few passage **whimbrel** have been recorded on the NNR. We are still waiting for the main passage of small waders including **ringed plover**, **sanderling** and **dunlin** and their numbers should increase over the next few weeks.



Little tern and sandwich tern

Numbers of **golden plover** and **red-throated diver** are slowly reducing as they depart the Ayres and West Coast MNR for their breeding grounds further north.



West Coast Marine  
Nature Reserve

Between March and September Britain is home to nearly 70% of the world's breeding **gannet** population. A satellite tagging study of gannets by Wakefield and colleagues in 2013 showed that gannets feeding around the Isle of Man are coming from Ailsa Craig, a small granite island approximately 100km/62 miles to the north in the outer Firth of Clyde where an estimated 40,000 gannets nest. There is also a small ganetry on the Big Scare rock in Luce Bay 40km/24 miles to the north. Gannets



Peter Hadfield

plunge dive for fish and can enter the water at 60mph; they have an extensive network of air-sacs and thickened skull to protect them from injuries. If shoals of fish are present then feeding frenzies can take place with a hundred or more gannets diving together. The **Manx Wildlife Trust viewing tower** at Ballaghennie is a great place to watch this wildlife spectacle.



There have been several strandings of **squid eggs** on the Ayres beach recently. This also happened in 2023 and coincided with big feeding frenzies of gannet, gull and kittiwake off Point West (between the Point of Ayre and Ballaghennie); this may have been fuelled by fish feeding on the squid eggs and squid larva.



Early purple orchid

**Early purple orchids** are currently flowering by the lime kiln and approximately 400m east of the MWT Ayres Nature Discovery Centre (at a location marked by a concrete post). The Ayres NNR is the main location for this orchid on the Isle of Man.

**Raven** chicks have already fledged from their large stick nest in the plantation.

Our first **common lizards** for the year were recorded on the wooden stobs at the roadside. These cold blooded reptiles bask on the warm stobs in the sun to warm themselves up before they search for their invertebrate prey. These obliging creatures are great for showing children and for taking photographs of, but watch your shadow doesn't fall across them or they will take cover in the safety of the grasses.



Common lizard

The emergence of **St Mark's flies** has been slow so far this year. Their name is derived from St Mark's day on the 25th April when they usually emerge en-masse. Their emergence also times with an increase in swallow numbers and these large, black flies with daggling legs are an excellent food source for these summer visitors.

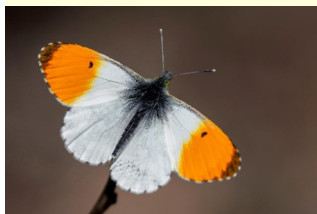


Dog violet (dune grassland)



Moonwort

**Dog violets** are currently flowering on the landward-side of the dunes. The leaves of this plant are an important food source for the caterpillars of the **dark green fritillary** butterfly. **Moonwort** is starting to emerge at one of its former locations; this is a very rare fern found only at a few locations, in low numbers, on the Isle of Man.



Male orange-tip butterfly

**Orange-tip** butterflies are on the wing and a particularly good place to see butterflies is the sheltered **Manx National Heritage** Ballakesh carpark (Ballaghennie entrance). Female orange-tip butterflies lack the orange-tip to their wing and can be confused with other white butterfly species. They lay their eggs on the leaves of cuckoo flower and bittercress.

**Stonechats** are carrying around beaks full of food indicating their first brood of chicks has hatched. Only low numbers of passage **wheatears**, stopping on the NNR to feed up, have been recorded so far.

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