

Rob interviewing Antony, warden at St Brieuc Nature Reserve

Antony: ...and migrating birds are arriving in the bay to make a pause in their migration or to stop for the winter

Rob: and how many are we talking about?

Antony: In the winter, we have maybe in December and January we are talking about 30,000 birds - 35,000 birds

Rob: All at the same time?

Antony: yes, all at the same time, different kinds of birds are present, like ducks and geese and waders like Oyster catcher or sand dunlins and there is a third class of bird or a group, gulls

Rob: seagulls, Where do these birds all come from?

Antony: These birds mainly come from the Eastern, nor(th) eastern Europe. They go over there to breed and when winter is coming they return in place for winter. It can be the little areas in France or Sauterne in African for example

Rob: some of the birds are going to stay in the Bay of St Brieuc all winter?

Antony: Yer all winter. We can observe that, with some birds which are ringed and we observe them all of the winter so we can say that that individual stay all the winter in the bay. But for all birds we count a group of birds and we can assure that all birds count in December are present in January for example. So we have a great stability in the number of birds in winter, but maybe there is some movement, some individual movement between sites (sites) and we can't underline it with simple counting our birds .

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Rob: How do you manage to count so many birds? It's an enormous number. I mean how do you do it?

Anthony: First of all we need some standardised protocols to be able to compare data over time and one of the more important conditions to make a count is the tidal level. So we need to count at high tide, in similar conditions and in these conditions birds are close and it's easier for us to count them; and we use different techniques to count groups. But when it's possible we'd count birds one for one

Rob: That's quite a task.

Anthony: Yes

Rob: Why do they come to the Bay of St Brieuc? What's so special about this enormous bay?

Anthony: It's a bay dominated by soft sediments and there is a lot of food in sediments, and birds come in the bay to keep quiet and the nature reserve allows them to stay quiet in the winter with no disturbance. So that's why the bay is attractive for these birds.

Rob: A wonderful sight to see so many birds. Where would you recommend for people to come, where they can observe these birds without disturbing them?

Anthony: If you are interested in looking at birds you can go, at high tide preferably, or maybe 2 hours before high tide and you come in the Yffiniac cove for example, at some sites called Bourienne, Pison, or Falaise de la cage and you can observe resting birds because at high tide there is no areas available for eating and the birds have a rest at this moment, high tide, during about one or two hours.

Rob: so it's good to know when the high tide and the low tides are in the Bay, because it's a very large bay with a very great difference in tide levels.



Anthony: Effectively the tide range is up to 30 metres at high tide in Spring conditions. It's quite amazing.

Rob: Migrating birds are extraordinarily capable of going long distances. Some of the birds I understand, that feed in the Bay of St Brieuc go further afterwards.

Anthony: Yer,yer, that's right. So one bird can make a stop at the Bay of St. Brieuc to refuel. It has a rest and a feed and when metrological conditions are ok for migration it can go further on the South.

Rob: Where can people get information about the different birds that they are going to observe?

Anthony: The website of the Naturel Reserve, there is some information about trends of populations also and about what spot to look at birds in the Bay of St Brieuc.

Rob: That's great. I am hoping that by the time we broadcast this interview that we will be free to come and visit the bay and see the birds. But it is important, isn't it, to keep a distance.

Anthony: Yes, from a distance and there are also other rules, so you must keep your dog attached in the reserve. The best advice we can give to observe is just observe the magic of nature, and if birds don't want to fly, don't try to make them flying just because you think it's beautiful. Respect natural conditions and respect birds reasons.

Rob: That's a lovely piece of advice to finish with. Thank you very much Anthony Steilbois, Mission Head at the nature reserve of the Bay of St Brieuc. Thank you.