

Little Egret

Egretta garzetta

Bird · Resident · range-expanding



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The little egret is a small, slender heron in pure white plumage, with a slim black bill, black legs and bright yellow feet that flash as it stalks through shallow water. A once-rare visitor to Britain, it colonised southern England from the 1990s and has since pushed steadily north and west; it's now an increasingly familiar, if still notable, sight on the Nith estuary and other Solway wetlands. Breeding birds grow fine plumes on the head, chest and back, historically prized by the millinery trade and part of the reason the species was hunted to scarcity across much of Europe. In Dumfries and Galloway it's recorded in every month but remains most reliable in autumn and winter, when estuary mudflats and salt marsh hold the richest feeding, and numbers here can include birds that have dispersed from breeding colonies further south.

BEHAVIOUR

Feeds actively rather than standing and waiting like a grey heron, wading through shallows with quick, darting steps and sudden lunges, sometimes stirring the mud with a yellow foot to flush prey. Takes small fish, shrimps and aquatic insects. Often feeds alongside other waders, and flies with slow, heavy wingbeats, neck folded back.

WHEN TO SEE IT

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Heron (Ardeidae)
SIZE	Length 55–65cm, wingspan 88–106cm
UK STATUS	Green list

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