

# Avalon Marshes Great White Egrets

## Class of 2024 – Where are they now?

Despite the wettest April on record Somerset's Great White Egrets managed another bumper year. 97 pairs attempted nesting on the Avalon Marshes, with 179 eggs hatching on 63 of those nests. Successive bands of cold, wet weather led to a higher than average brood reduction, but by the end of the season we were delighted to see no fewer than 100 chicks successfully fledging from 54 of the nests.

31 chicks from 15 nests were given colour rings – following the same scheme as before, a metal ring on one leg and a red plastic ring bearing three white letters on the other. 22 of these birds fledged, of which 14 have already been reported from elsewhere.



AFV, ringed on Shapwick Heath on 1.5.24, photo Alison Morgan

So where are they now? All over the country, is the short answer. Often within 10-12 weeks of hatching and in some cases only a few days after fledging, the 2024 Somerset juveniles have been reported from Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Dorset, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kent, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Powys, Somerset, Worcestershire and Yorkshire. Sometimes they are seen alone, sometimes with one or more other egrets – but rarely with their nestmates, which tend to fledge on a different date and often head in a different direction altogether.

This year the distance award goes to **AFN**, ringed on Ham Wall in April. This bird is a female, fledged in June, and reported from various locations in Yorkshire, Northumberland and Lincolnshire. Heading north, south, west and east, she has so far covered a minimum of 837 km. This bird also holds the record for the most sites visited this year – 8 in all: 2 in North Yorkshire, 2 in Lincolnshire, 1 in Northumberland, and 1 in each of South, West and East Yorkshire.



AFN at Far Ings NNR, Lincolnshire, 7.10.24, photo Paul Phillips



Map showing the stopping points of AFN

In second place on distance comes Westhay's **AFL**, another female who was reported from the Wirral within a few days of fledging – a journey of 454 km. This is all the more remarkable in that this bird was the smallest of a brood of three, and therefore not expected to survive. It was last seen in August near Warrington, still in Cheshire.

Finally, the get-up-and-go record goes to **ADM**, a female from Shapwick Heath, who left the nest at 8 weeks old and was reported from Abbotsbury Swannery, still only 9 weeks old. It then relocated to the possibly more suitable RSPB reserve at Lodmoor near Weymouth. These three birds are all females, yes – more of the juveniles ringed this year were female. But males have been reported from Cheshire (**AFU**), the Ouse Washes (**ADV**), the River Severn (**AFC**) and Worcestershire (**ADW**) too.



ADM in dispute at RSPB Lodmoor, 29.8.24, photo Mark Wright

It has been fascinating, as ever, to follow the progress of these young birds. Each year new dispersal sites are reported, and each year we get a clearer idea of the movements to and between them. As always, the birds are typically seen on nature reserves, rivers, wetlands, reservoirs and gravel pits – but of course that is probably also the distribution map of digiscope-wielding birders.



AFU at Tatton Park, Cheshire, 8.10.24, photo Stuart Benson