

The importance of food?

Video transcript for Autumnwatch clip from 2010 presented by Chris Packham and Kate Humble

Look at that! That is a beautiful, beautiful sight. There is an avocet over there.

Look at that. A bit of a combo going on: Curlew, Red Shank, a living Peter Scott. It is; it really is!

It may seem utterly mad idea to get on a boat and go bird- watching at this time of year but believe you me; if you can find a boat on an Estuary like this one it is a fantastic way to really enjoy birds at this time of year.

You see vast numbers of them and huge numbers of species.

Why is it, Chris, that birds congregate in Estuaries like this, because on the face of it they look pretty bleak and featureless.

Desolate. I think a lot of people think this can't be a productive place; surely it's our woodland in spring.

But I have to tell you that these are incredibly productive. This type of habitat is second only to tropical rainforests and coral reefs.

In one square metre here, we can have 50,000 amphipods, that may mean little to you, but if you are a red shank they're the treat to survive the winter on.

One square metre of mud, Kate, you know, produces during the course of the year 200,000 kcals of energy, do you know what that equates to? 77 of these chocolate bars.

Each square metre of the mud out here is giving rise to 77 chocolate bars. That's why three million birds come to our Estuaries.

What you are saying. . . not the chocolate, they don't eat that.

They eat all the inverts; they eat the blood worms; the amphipods, crustaceans everything that's out there.

What you are saying is what we see as mud, to these wintering waders, it is basically one vast buffet? It is, it's a buffet but it's a buffet that has different patches.

Different species are after different things in different types of mud at different times of the tide, sometimes different times of the day.

Then you have different species, everything from the tiny Dunlin through to the large Curlew.

All with different shaped bills for probing and different shaped leg of course. Some can cope with the deep mud and some can't.

When you start looking closely that's when you see the distant areas over there at absolutely filled with birds. Kate, look at all these Godwit over here.

That's lovely, I am a bit of a fan of the Godwit, I've got to say.

I have to say. They're quite delicate. There's nothing delicate about the way a Curlew feeds is there?

It goes right in with a good dig around, it's after lugworms, they feel around for them and they're able to open the beak in the mud and pull them out.

Sometimes they pull the worm out, shake off as much soil as possible before they swallow it.

Look, that one just did it. It really is a great resource for a fantastic range of species.