

RSPB PAGHAM HARBOUR LNR

Annual Report for April 2014 – March 2015 for WSCC

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This report outlines the RSPB's management activity at Pagham Harbour Local Nature Reserve during 2014/15, reporting on key activities and the progress against the Management Plan and Service Level Agreement with West Sussex County Council,

0. Headlines

- The most successful breeding season for Little Terns, the reserve's most important breeding species, for over 30 years.
- Number of volunteers up to 152
- The appointment of a People Engagement Officer allowed engagement with many more schoolchildren and local community groups.

1. Ecology

Key species:

Dark-bellied Brent Goose: The maximum count recorded during WeBS counts during winter 2014/15 was 2102 (the 5-year average is 2346).

Northern Pintail: The peak count was slightly up on last year with a maximum of 283 (the 5-year average is 320).

Black-tailed Godwit. Maximum count 277 (the 5-year average is 556).

Although all these counts are under the 5-year average, none give immediate cause for concern, although the continuing low counts of Pintail are potentially due to 'short-stopping' in which birds don't travel as far for the winter, staying at sites further north in the UK.

Little Tern:

- For our most important breeding species, a combination of plenty of small fish nearby to feed growing chicks and low predation of either eggs or chicks resulted in the most successful breeding season on the reserve for over 30 years.
- 12 pairs attempted to breed in spring 2014, with 11 pairs on the Church Norton Spit and one pair on Tern Island. Ten chicks fledged off the spit and two fledged from Tern Island. The colony at the reserve becomes increasingly important and now represents almost 40% of the Sussex population.
- Temporary electric fencing to reduce the risk of Foxes preying on eggs and chicks, was erected around the main colony for the duration of the breeding season. A seasonal Little Tern People Engagement Officer worked closely with the reserve team and the local community from June to October.
- Nationally whilst some Little Tern sites had their most productive year in decades, others struggled. Storms in July wiped out many of the Norfolk colonies and high tides washed out a number of sites around the UK, demonstrating just how vulnerable these birds are.

Other seabirds:

- 12 pairs of Common Tern nested (about 10% of the Sussex population) along with 44 pairs of Black-headed Gull, one pair of Sandwich Tern and one pair of Mediterranean Gull.
- There was a single incident of Fox predation, when one managed to get through the electric fence on Tern Island. Whilst, unfortunately, a large number of young Black-headed Gull chicks were predated, the

terns were largely missed as most were later nesting and only had eggs or small chicks and were missed. The fence was quickly repaired and there were no further incidents.

- 2 Black-headed Gull, 7 Common Tern and 3 Sandwich Tern chicks fledged

Shingle wading birds: 15 pairs of Ringed Plovers (about 20% of the Sussex population), fledged at least 13 chicks, a welcome increase on the last few years. Breeding pairs of Oystercatchers continued their encouraging upward trend with 18 pairs fledging at least three chicks.

Whilst disturbance of nesting areas continues to be a problem, improved signage and appreciation of the presence and vulnerability of these shingle-nesting birds by beach users may be contributing to better breeding success.

Breeding waders of wet grassland: Ferry Pool again supported at least seven nesting pairs of Lapwing. Only two chicks fledged, but at least this is better than last year when no chicks fledged. Monitoring of nests indicated that there may be a problem with Fox predating eggs. We will continue to monitor a selection of Lapwing nest next year with cameras and 'data loggers' to understand better why so few of our pairs appear to hatch and rear young. Redshank on Ferry Pool, however, had a much more successful breeding season with four pairs fledging three chicks.

Little Egret: Nine pairs bred in Owl Copse, a drop on last year (16 pairs and c.12 young in 2013), but not unexpected with the stormy winter and cold spring. All indications are that they had a successful breeding season with lots of activity in late July and fledged youngsters seen around the harbour.

Grey Heron: Ten pairs bred at the two heronries (cf. six pairs in 2013).

General bird breeding results:

The encouraging increases in the breeding population of several important species seen in 2013 continued. Reed Buntings reached 19 pairs (13 pairs in 2013) and the fall in breeding Skylark numbers was clearly reversed with at least seven pairs present.

Other important breeding species included: Treecreeper 1pair, Cetti's Warbler 26 singing males and Song Thrush 11prs. Linnets also continued to do well.

Turtle Doves: The project to try and help Turtle Doves which have recently declined to become only a sporadic breeding bird in Sussex continued in the winter of 2014/15. The project aims to increase the area of scrub in key areas of the reserve and to provide an early seed source for breeding birds by planting a special seed mix for Turtle Doves. In autumn 2014, a seed mix for Turtle Doves was planted in Slipe Field and tree planting work was carried out in winter 2014-15 around Church Norton. No Turtle Doves were recorded using the area, but the area is not publically accessible and it would have been easy to miss any occasional birds using Slipe Field. Over the winter a flock of 11 Yellowhammer and by March 200+ linnets and 20 reed bunting were using the field.

Reedbed/ fen/ freshwater rifles/ pools: Although the reeds in Mill Pond Marsh were not badly affected by the surge tide in December 2013, those in Long Pool were and there was much less growth through the season 2014–15. There was an improvement in growth rate in spring 2015. Once again the winter of 2014–15 was particularly wet and no cutting was possible either in Mill Pond Marsh or Long Pool, due to the high water levels. Over the year a new management and an HLS agreement was signed for the reedbed at The Severals. We aim to commence a management programme in winter 2015–16, dependant on suitable weather and water levels.

Water Voles: Populations continued to be monitored in partnership with Manhood Wildlife & Heritage Group (MWHG). RSPB also continued to fund the Mink Monitoring programme on the peninsula and is working with MWHG to develop a revised protocol and seek new funding for this programme.

Moths: The moth trap run at the visitor centre recorded a slight improvement on numbers seen in the previous two years but generally not to the level of 4-5 years ago possibly due to cold springs.

2. Archaeology: A new grazier was found in early 2014 and sheep grazing was reinstated in Glebe meadow in May 2014 and on the mound in winter 2014/15. Fencing was also replaced

3. Visitors and local communities

3.1 Visits: The precise number of visits to the whole site was not measured, given that this is an open access site with many entrance points. 15,206 visits were made to the Visitor Centre up by almost a third on the 11,364 visits in 2013/14.

3.2. Field teaching visits and outreach:

- 280 students and 35 teachers visited from seven schools enjoying the varied habitats of Pagham Harbour through curriculum based activities. School visits were led by the Visitor Experience Officer and the little tern People Engagement Officer (PEO), supported by a well established team of volunteer field teachers. Feedback was very positive and those schools have made contact for subsequent visits. There were also three visits by U3A groups and one college visit.
- 906 children and 142 adults participated in Little Tern and nature-related activities as part of the schools and youth group Outreach programme included in the Little Tern project.

The appointment of a Little Tern PEO in June 2014 has therefore allowed an increase in the reserve's engagement with schools and local youth groups raising awareness in the local community of the importance of little terns and Pagham Harbour.

3.3. Public events:

22 events were held on the reserve and the number of people engaged was over 500 (cf. 567 in 2013/14). Highlight of the year was The 50th Anniversary Picnic Party, which provided a wonderful opportunity for the team of staff, volunteers and Friends of Pagham Harbour to put on a family orientated day of activities.

The Little Tern PEO also allowed the reserve team to attend a greater variety of nearby events, engaging directly with over 650 people at local events and over 2,500 people on the reserve. Displays put up at various events and venues, eg libraries, were seen by over 10,500 people. A particular success has been the relationship with the guiding movement in Pagham and Aldwick.

3.4 Headlines from visitor questionnaires

Quality of visit: Data from summer 2014 (% of visitors who rate overall quality of experience as good or excellent) 90%

Meet and Greet (% of visitors who rate the friendliness and welcome of staff as 'excellent') 94%

3.5 Volunteers:

- Total volunteers 152 (cf 122 in 2013/14)
- Total hours of volunteering 6405 (cf. 5905 in 2013/14)

3.6 Pagham Harbour Local Communities Forum: The Forum met on 2 July 2014 and 8 Dec 2014 chaired by Cllr Bernard Smith. The forum allows local representatives of different organisations and the general public to gather to hear about progress on the reserve and put forward their views and questions.

3.7 E-updates: Interested members of the local community were kept up to speed with key issues through occasional e-updates.

3.8 Infrastructure projects: Issues regarding liability for the content of the 1960s/70s uncapped landfill (where the Visitor Centre is based) continued to inhibit progress in 2014/15; most of the infrastructure works (eg new toilets, path upgrades to make suitable for all-users) are due to take place here. The issues were investigated extensively, and are likely to require sizable insurance premiums to resolve as well as complex planning applications and partnership working with WSCC and the Environment Agency.

3.9 Pagham Harbour and Coastal Issues Group: RSPB continued to be an active participant in the group led by Arun District Council and the Environment Agency, seeking to resolve the serious and worrying erosion issue affecting Pagham Beach residents.

3.10 Wildlife Explorers: The Wildlife Explorer group for children based at the reserve continued to hold monthly meetings on the reserve. There was a change in group leader at the end of 2014 (we are grateful for everything Lesley did to help establish the group), The new leader is supported by a dedicated team of volunteers who are keen to expand numbers

The group meets in the classroom at the visitor centre and whilst independent of the reserve, we look to share resources when possible.

3.11 Staffing: The RSPB underwent a national review of its staffing on its 220 nature reserves in 2014/15, and as a result proposed some changes to bring consistency across the reserve network. The consequent restructure of the Pagham Harbour team merges it with the Medmerry team to form the following structure:

- Pagham Harbour & Medmerry Site Manager (full time)
- 2 x Pagham Harbour & Medmerry Warden (full time)
- Visitor Experience Officer (full time)
- People Engagement Officer (short-term contract)

[shared roles with RSPB Pulborough Brooks]

- Visitor Experience Manager (full time)
- Learning Officer (full time)
- 3 x Learning Assistants.

This structure will provide the continuity and sustainability of service that Pagham Harbour needs.

4. Statutory condition assessments and consents

No changes noted from last year

5. Agreements With Landowners

Good dialogue and discussions have been ongoing with landowners within the LNR ready for WSCC to proceed towards redeclaration of the boundary in 2015/16. A number of landowners have decided that they want extra land included in the LNR, a number decided not to renew the LNR agreements, and a small area of land was proven to be in unknown ownership and cannot therefore be a part of the LNR; the overall result will be a small net increase in the size of the LNR. An open session to help the public understand the changes was held on 24 February.

6. Finances

Income (k)	£ ('000s)	Expenditure	£ ('000s)
Net income	+217.8	Net expenditure	- 204.5
		Net summary	+13.2

Financial summary:

- RSPB had a surplus of £13.2K on the budget in 2014/15 when the proposed budget had predicted £36.2K deficit. This variance of nearly £50K was due largely to the need to defer a significant number of the uplift infrastructure projects as a result of uncertainties over the exact nature of and start date of the Environment Agency's Inner Harbour flood defence works and acquiring the necessary consents and planning details for a wide range of projects. The WSCC contribution towards the uplift project has been carried over into 2015/16.

- It is important to note that the expenditure figures do not account for all the spend (estimated at several tens of thousands of pounds) on in-house RSPB support from Land Agency, Project Management, Special Projects, Finances, HR, IT and Ecology. All this support came out of core RSPB charitable reserves.
- Payments on buildings, repairs and maintenance and the visitor centre overheads totalled £25.6K and a further £15K was spent on uplifts to buildings and infrastructure.
- Funding towards larger programmes of investment work not completed in 2014/15 have been carried over and will take place in the forthcoming years.

Proposed budget for 2015/16

Income (k)	£ ('000s)	Expenditure	£ ('000s)
Net income	+198.9	Net expenditure	-274.6
		Net summary	-75.6

7. SLA obligations:

- Planning permissions - none sought from WSCC in 2014/15
- Flood defence - Attendance at:
 - Pagham Harbour and Coastal Issues Group
 - Pagham Rife Management Group
- No work undertaken to compromise flood defences
- Public access - no access closed
- Car parking - two car parks open throughout; no charging introduced
- Visitor centre opening - Visitor Centre open 7 days a week throughout the year, bar very occasional closure due to flooding of the car park or other emergency circumstances. Estimated opening: 99% of promoted opening times.