

## RSPB PAGHAM HARBOUR LNR

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### Annual Report for April 2015 – March 2016 for WSCC

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*This report outlines the RSPB's management activity at Pagham Harbour Local Nature Reserve during 2015/16, reporting on key activities and the progress against the Management Plan and Service Level Agreement with West Sussex County Council.*

#### 0. Headlines

- A second back to back successful breeding season for Little Terns, the reserve's most important breeding species (16 chicks fledged, the highest number in over 30 years).
- The best breeding season for shoreline birds in over 30 years
- Development of the Visitor Experience and Learning Team (staff and volunteers) resulted in:-
  - 20% increase in visitors to the reserve using the Visitor Centre
  - 40% increase in students visiting the reserve and the Little Tern and Harbour Outreach programme again at capacity (958 children)
  - Almost double the number of events held in 2014/15 (941 people attending over 50 reserve events)
  - An increase in visitors recording the quality of their overall visit as 'excellent'

#### 1. Ecology

##### Key species:

**Dark-bellied Brent Goose:** The maximum count recorded during WeBS (Wetland Bird Surveys) counts during winter 2015/16 was 3701 (the 5-year average is 2708).

**Northern Pintail:** The peak count was a maximum of 221 (the 5-year average is 254).

**Black-tailed Godwit.** Maximum count 291 (the 5-year average is 478).

- Despite a very mild winter the numbers of Brent Geese reached exceptional levels with around 4000 birds (highest seen in the last 15-20yrs) present by late January 2016.
- There were very few juveniles amongst the flock, which indicated a poor breeding season in 2015.
- The sudden increase in numbers in January may have been due to mild weather conditions resulting in the earlier movement of birds from further west.
- Northern Pintail wintering in the harbour continue to be present in lower numbers than the five year average, but this reflects a reduction in the numbers wintering in the UK possible due to the milder serious of winters.

- Black-tailed Godwit numbers once again were lower than expected but numbers locally, in particular in the Arun valley, were exceptional. This appears to correspond to movement of Black-tailed Godwits from intertidal areas to feed and roost on inland flooded valley grasslands during periods of exceptional wet weather.

#### **Little Tern:**

Summer 2015: 18prs fledged 16 young

The colony has benefited over the past 2 years from the installation of an electric fence around the main colony on Church Norton Spit. This work has resulted in a significant reduction in disturbance from the public entering the main colony area and in a reduction in predation, particularly from Fox. In 2015, no Foxes were recorded on cameras deployed within the fenced areas on the Spit.

#### **Other seabirds:**

- Common Tern - 14prs fledged 7 young
- Black-headed Gull - 20prs
- Despite increased electric fencing on Tern Island, there has been a continuing issue of Fox predation there. Monitoring with trail cameras in 2015 indicated Fox(es) targeting the island after the chicks start to hatch and after storms.

#### **Shingle wading birds:**

- Ringed Plover - 18prs fledged 20young
- In line with other breeding shorebirds, the Ringed Plover breeding population has increased over the last two years. Pairs reared chicks on both Pagham and Church Norton spits. The increased isolation due to lengthening of Church Norton spit and the fencing for the terns have contributed to this productivity.
- Oystercatcher - 20prs

#### **Breeding waders of wet grassland:**

- Lapwing 11prs (2 fledged). The number of pairs has increased over the previous two years but productivity is still too low. Data loggers indicate the main loss of nests is due to mammalian predation. In 2015 there was increased evidence of avian predation (egg fragments of both Lapwing and Redshank found near Crow nests). For the first time, breeding was proven in Halsey's Field although the nest was predated by a Crow.
- Redshank 6prs (3 fledged). Numbers of breeding Redshank have increased in Ferry Field over the last couple of years and a single pair bred down the west side of the Harbour in 2015. Poor productivity also appears to be an issue with high levels of predation noted.

**Little Egret:** 17prs

**Grey Heron:** 14prs

**General bird breeding results:** The first breeding and successful fledging of 3 Nightingales for the nature reserve, in the scrub behind the Visitor Centre.

#### **Reedbed/ fen/ freshwater rifles/ pools:**

- The winter of 2015–16 was a little drier than the previous two winters and some cutting was possible in Mill Pond Marsh.
- The new Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement signed in 2013 required some amendments to be agreed with Natural England, which took 10 months; we therefore aim to commence a management programme for Severals reedbed in winter 2016–17, dependent on suitable water levels.
- Good numbers of Cetti's and Reed Warblers and Whitethroat and a good year for Cuckoo (possibly linked to the numbers of Reed Warbler)

### **Turtle Doves:**

- Actions on the reserve and at Medmerry in support of 'Project Turtle Dove' (a national project to reverse the dramatic decline in breeding Turtle Doves) were reviewed in the light of new research information and the continued absence of breeding Turtle Doves in the area. 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.
- A seed mix for Turtle Doves will continue to be sown in Slipe Field
- Additional tree planting work was carried out in winter 2015-16 around Church Norton.
- Slipe Field and the 'Wildbird Seed' planting again proved very popular with mixed flocks of several hundred Reed Buntings, Yellowhammer and Linnets using the field during the winter of 2015/16

**Rarities:** 2015/16 was a good year with Hudsonian Whimbrel, Terek Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Grey Phalarope and a good autumn passage including Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike and numerous Dartford Warblers

Spring 2016 was relatively quiet with Kentish Plover and Cattle Egret being the highlights.

**Water Voles:** The monitoring of the water vole population on the Manhood is carried out by the MWHG and Brighton University at Medmerry.

**Moths:** 420 spp recorded at the visitor centre in 2015 with the highlights being Convolvulus Hawk-moth, Brussels Lace, Round Winged Muslin, Scarce Bordered Straw and Bordered Straw.

## **2. Archaeology**

- Sheep grazing continued in Glebe Meadow and on the Mound, with notable reductions in scrub cover and rough grassland that had previously affected the condition of the Mound.
- Further fencing and a new screening scrub belt was planted as part of the HLS Agreement

## **3. Visitors and local communities**

### **3.1 Visits:**

- The reserve is an open access site with many entrance points and the exact number of visits to the whole site has only ever been estimated.
- There are a number of automatic data loggers on key access points around the reserve and data from these five counters has been used to give an indication of the level of use by people of these points.
- A rationalisation of these recording points since 2012/13 and an attempt to 'calibrate' the counters indicate that the overall number of 'visits' to the reserve has remained relatively consistent over the last 3 years.
- Of particular note is that 18,031 visits were made to the Visitor Centre, up by 19% on the year 2014/2015 (15,206). This, we believe, is due to us improving the visitor welcome within the centre, encouraging a greater proportion of visitors to come through the door, rather than an increase in the number of people to the reserve as a whole, in line with our aims.

### **3.2. Field teaching visits and outreach:**

Headlines from April to December 2015

- 386 students (281 in 2014/15) from seven schools and one university with visits primarily led by the Learning team from Pulborough, supported by reserve learning volunteers (100 volunteer hours) and the Little Tern People Engagement Officer (PEO).
- The 'outreach' programme led by the Little Tern PEO was at capacity during the summer with 958 children from various youth groups and schools engaged with (906 in 2014/15) and some great contacts and future relationships fostered

Headlines for January to July 2016: (note that this extends beyond the time period for this report, due to the different reporting schedule within the RSPB)

- To date we have hosted 358 students including a French school, which we hope will lead to more interest and opportunities for 'hands across the channel' (building on the recent PANACHE project that RSPB Langstone Harbour was involved in). School bookings are still being taken for this year
- A revised 'Little Tern and harbour Outreach' programme had a greater emphasis on activities on the beach
  - 'Birds on the Beach' or engagement around reserve – 286
  - Outreach with youth groups/schools – 345 (including 41 adults)

### **3.3. Public events:**

53 events engaged with 941 people (563 adults & 378 children; note that adults attended their children's events but will not be included in the figures). This is an increase from 22 events in 2014/15 with circa 500 engagements.

### **3.4 Headlines from visitor questionnaires**

294 questionnaires were returned (132 in 2014/15).

**Quality of visit:** An increase of 12% from 'good' and below to 'excellent' responses.

**Meet and Greet** An increase of 7% from 'good' and below to 'excellent' responses

### **3.5 Volunteers:**

- Total volunteers – 156 roles (we have previously reported on the number of volunteer 'roles' as opposed to the number of people who volunteer).
- As of March 2016, the total number of active volunteers (including the reserve Wildlife Explorer Group leaders and our Learning team volunteers) stood at 100, a significant number (approx 50%) of whom volunteer in more than one role.
- Total hours of volunteering - 5940 hours (6405 hours in 2014/15)  
This drop in volunteer hours is accounted for by the fact that the Black-winged Stilt nest protection scheme generated 620 volunteer hours in 2014/15 and the stilts did not return to breed in 2015. The 2015/16 figures are still up on those reported in 2013/14.
- We have a dedicated and enthusiastic team of volunteers, but we are very keen to attract more, especially 'Welcome team' volunteers

**3.6 Pagham Harbour Local Communities Forum:** The Forum met on 20 July 2015 and 25 November 2015 chaired by Cllr Tony Sutcliffe. 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:**

- Visitor welcome 'Uplift Project'. This is the major project that will replace the toilet block
  - improve disabled access
  - repair the car park
  - add staff and volunteer welfare facilities
  - improve the Discovery Area for families, schools and other visitors, including creation of an education shelter (to augment the existing classroom) and a large new dipping-pond.
- The complexities of the project in terms of working on an uncapped landfill (and the liabilities that this presents), the extensive consents required, and the need to conform to Construction Risk Management rules, meant that work this year focused on rigorous planning to ensure all preparations were in place.
- This meant that, while only limited work was undertaken on the ground, everything was ready to submit plans and a work programme for consents to WSCC, the Environment Agency and Natural

England at the start of the 2016/17 financial year and, subject to some minor tweaks and the outcomes of some further site investigations into the landfill, a planning application to Chichester DC and a work programme to WSCC at the end of June 2016.

- Pre-tender on-site meetings with contractors and consultants have been completed
- The classroom has been externally re-decorated and new doors (with half glass panes)
- Improvements were made to the disabled toilet (redecorated and floor replaced) before wholesale replacement in 2016/17.
- New reserve signage and reserve leaflets were designed.
- **Ferry Pool** –The bank between Ferry Pool and Broad Rife breached, thought to be due to natural factors, allowing much of the water in Ferry Pool to drain away. Clearly this needs to be resolved. Investigations of the breach and the bank have shown the bank is significantly at risk of further breaches. We have had several meetings with appropriate contractors and specialists and are now considering suitable options before discussing further with Sussex Wildlife Trust and Natural England. This will be a major wetland creation project to repair and protect the bank, reducing the risk of any further breaches and creating a new and complementary wetland features.
- **Church Norton car park:** This was resurfaced, considerably improving the experience for visitors (including those to St Wilfrid's Chapel).

### **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. The RSPB submitted a supportive response to the planning application to breach Church Norton Spit.
- The reserve team also worked with the consultants ABPmer, acting for the local community, providing bird counts and other data to support the community's applications.

### **3.10 Wildlife Explorers:**

- The Wildlife Explorer group for children based at the reserve meets monthly in the classroom at the visitor centre and carries out various activities on the reserve. The group leader (George Carney) is supported by a dedicated team of volunteers and the group continues to attract new members.

### **3.11 Staffing:**

- **Tim Callaway** - acting Site Manager, and Area Manager for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.
- **Ivan Lang** - Site Warden
- **Pete Hughes** - Site Warden
- **Roy Newnham** - Visitor Experience Officer
- **Jan Atkinson** - Little Tern Visitor Experience/Communities Officer).
- **Lucy Tozer** - Learning Officer and the Learning Team based at Pulborough
- **Roger Johnson** - Pagham Harbour and Medmerry Volunteer Coordinator (volunteer role).
- Plus support from a wide range of specialists, especially Sarah Cooper (Project Management), Neil Kellythorn (Estates), Adrian Thomas (Project Management), Emma Allen (Fundraising), Viv Booth (Ecology) and Peter Wilderspin (Land Agency).

**RSPB Area Reserve Managers** – RSPB South East Region now has appointed the full complement of Area Managers. It has been agreed that the Pagham Harbour and Medmerry team will be managed within the Hampshire and Isle of Wight team managed by Tim Callaway. The links to Pulborough Brooks regarding Visitor experience and Learning will stay in place

## **4. Statutory condition assessments and consents**

No changes noted from last year

## **5. Agreements With Landowners**

Liaison continues between reserve staff and landowners over management works and opportunities.

## **6. Finances**

<b>Income (k)</b>	<b>£ ('000s)</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>£ ('000s)</b>
<b>Net income</b>	<b>196.8</b>	<b>Net expenditure</b>	<b>199.5</b>
		<b>Net summary</b>	<b>-2.7</b>

### **Financial summary:**

- RSPB had a net summary deficit of £2.7K on the budget in 2015/16 when the proposed budget had predicted £75.7K deficit. This variance of £73K reflects the shift in commencement of the groundworks for the Uplift projects to 2016/17.
- 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.
- Spend on repairs and maintenance and visitor centre overheads were up by £10K on 2014/15, reflecting the need to do some temporary works prior to the start of the major uplift project.
- Funding towards larger programmes of investment work have been carried over, with WSCC agreement.

Proposed budget for 2016/17

<b>Income (k)</b>	<b>£ ('000s)</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>£ ('000s)</b>
<b>Net income</b>	<b>198.4</b>	<b>Net expenditure</b>	<b>350.3</b>
		<b>Net summary</b>	<b>-151.8</b>

## **7. SLA obligations**

- Planning permissions – Agreement sought from WSCC and EA in 2015/16 for the Uplift project to improve the Welcome for visitors at Sidlesham Ferry
- Consent obtained from Natural England for SSSI work
- 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 - open 7 days a week throughout the year. Estimated opening: 100% of promoted opening times.