

# RSPB PAGHAM HARBOUR LNR

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## Annual Report for April 2013-March 2014 for WSCC

**Name of authors: I Lang, K Hampson, T Callaway, A Thomas,**

This report summarises the RSPB's management activity at Pagham Harbour Local Nature Reserve during 2013/14, as presented verbally at the Contract Management Meeting between RSPB and WSCC in July 2014. It does not attempt to be comprehensive, but picks out key activities and highlights, and in particular the progress (or otherwise) against some of the targets in the Management Plan and Service Level Agreement with West Sussex County Council,

### **1. Ecology**

#### **Key species:**

**Dark-bellied Brent Goose:** The flock over the last five years seems to have stabilised at around 2200–2500 birds. The maximum count recorded during WeBS counts during winter 2013/14 was 2326 (2529 - 5 year average)

The number of **Northern Pintail** using the harbour has been declining for a number of years. Numbers this winter were again beneath the threshold for which they form part of the Special Protection Area designation; maximum count 244 (the 5 year average is 331). The reason for this is unknown; however, a recent national Wetland Bird Survey report indicates a national decline of 50% since 2005/06 and could be related to climate change. Numbers will continue to be monitored closely.

#### **Little Tern:**

- 11 pairs attempted to breed in spring 2014, with eight pairs on the Church Norton Spit and three pairs on Tern Island. Most pairs failed to successfully nest and no chicks were fledged.
- 600m of electric fencing was erected around the main colony for the duration of the breeding season.
- The terns arrived very late in the season and spent a long time deciding where to nest. Evidence elsewhere on the south coast suggested that birds were in poor condition and struggled to find food both to get into breeding condition and to rear any chicks
- The warm weather in the middle of the breeding season meant higher than usual levels of human disturbance on the spit, which may have also contributed to birds failing to nest.

#### **Common Tern:**

- 14 pairs of Common Tern nested (about 5% of the Sussex population) along with 18 pairs of Black-headed Gull, three pairs of Sandwich Tern and a pair of Mediterranean Gull.
- Improved fencing around Tern Island resulted in reduced Fox predation and, by the beginning of July, many of the pairs had hatched.
- At least eight Black-headed Gull chicks fledged and a least one Common Tern successfully fledged, the first in five years.

**Shingle waders:** The breeding populations of both Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher appear to have stabilised over the last five years. Typically 10-15pairs of Ringed Plovers breed on the shingle areas around the reserve (about 20% of the Sussex population); however, the number of reported fledged young was down slightly on the previous year. The main issue is the disturbance of nesting areas and, despite fencing and signage, people still regularly enter areas that are closed off.

Oystercatchers continue to slowly recover from a crash in the breeding population in the late 1990s. Twelve pairs bred (about 20% of the Sussex population) and, for the first time in four years, two pairs successfully fledged a total of four chicks from Tern Island. They primarily use the shingle spits; however, in recent years they have also bred in the surrounding agricultural land including Slipe Field, Halsey's Farm and Ferry Field.

**Breeding waders of wet grassland:** 9 -10prs of Lapwing set up territories on Ferry Pool, but only seven pairs nested. There were no other nesting attempts anywhere else on the reserve. One adult was found dead in the road killed by a car and a second body was found predated. No young were fledged despite several nesting attempts by each pair.

A project to monitor Lapwing nesting attempts and breeding productivity will commence in 2014 using data loggers and nest cameras to try and understand the reasons for low breeding productivity. Three pairs of Redshanks also nested on Ferry Field but no chicks were seen.

**Little Egret:** Little Egrets breeding on the reserve has been a success story. The first pair bred in 2003 and they peaked at 17 pairs in 2008. Successive severe winters in 2008/09 and 2009/10 drastically reduced the number of pairs. Since 2011 there has been a steady recovery with five pairs fledging nine young in 2011 and 16 pairs rearing at least a dozen young in 2013 (perhaps 25% of the Sussex population).

**Grey Heron:** The heronry held steady at six pairs in Owl Copse.

**General bird breeding results:** Despite a cold start to the spring, the generally drier and warmer late spring in 2013 saw the first increases in the breeding population of several important species for five years. Reed Buntings reached 13 pairs holding territories and the fall in breeding Skylark numbers was also reversed. Linnet also continued to do well with the population stabilising at around 24 pairs.

Turtle Dove have recently declined to become only a sporadic breeder; however a few individuals are regularly recorded during passage periods and there is the potential to re-gain a breeding population if further scrub areas are planted to increase suitable habitat. In February 2014 the initial stages of a project to increase scrub around Church Norton was started. An application to English Heritage was prepared for march 2014 for submission. The plan is to carry out planting work in winter 2014-15. In autumn 2013, a seed mix for Turtle Doves was planted in Slipe Field to provide an early seed source for breeding birds.

**Reedbed/ fen/ freshwater rifles/ pools:** A dry summer increased the opportunity for catching up with the management of the reedbeds in the winter of 2013-14; however, a tidal surge in December 2013 inundated the reed areas and prevented further cutting of those reedbeds which the RSPB has the authority to manage (note that there are several areas within the LNR which are the management responsibility of the landowner, not of the RSPB). After this, the wettest winter on record meant that all the reedbeds were flooded throughout the winter.

The new Management Plan includes plans to start reed management in other areas, in particularly Long Pool where a period of successful reed growth has rapidly spread across the saline lagoon.

**Water Voles:** Populations were monitored in partnership with Manhood Wildlife & Heritage Group. Winter flooding may have enabled populations to colonise new areas along with reduced mortality due to mild conditions.

**Moths:** A single trap was run to monitor the rare Flame Wainscot out in Mill Pond Marsh. This proved successful with 17 individuals recorded, the highest for a single trap. It seems that despite a cold and wet winter 2012/13, the moth was not affected

**Slipe Field:** Despite the weather, the majority of the spring/summer nectar crop germinated (90% germination). In August, a seedmix for Turtle Doves was sown along with another winter mix. Despite

waterlogging of the soil the subsequent winter causing low levels of germination, the area still proved popular for small finches and bunting; however the mild winter 2013/14 meant that over-wintering numbers were the lowest since the project started.

### Non-Native Invasive Plants

Is there a system for regularly checking for new alien plants on the reserve?		No
Priority Black Species *	Yes/No for each species occurring on the reserve	Are Elimination or Control measures in place? Mark E, C or No
Floating pennywort <i>Hydrocotyle ranunculoides</i>	YES	E, working in partnership with Environment Agency to remove from Pagham Rife
Rhododendron (Phytophthora) <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>	YES	Have been controlling in a small area of woodland up till 2012.
<b>Alert list**</b>		
Japanese knotweed <i>Fallopia japonica</i>	YES	Small areas adjacent to the woodland at Norton Priory have provided advice to Landowner to eradicate.
Sycamore <i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	YES	Have been controlling in a small area of woodland up till 2012.
<b>Other***</b>		
Red Valerian	YES	Has been spreading across both Pagham and Church Norton Vegetative Shingle Spits. At present investigating best control methods but little information on the subject available.

**2. Archaeology:** It was not possible to graze the mound at Church Norton in 2013 as the previous tenant was unable to provide suitable sheep. In order to ensure that scrub targets were achieved the mound was cut in September. Early in 2014 a potential new grazer was found and it is hoped that grazing can be reinstated in late 2014/15.

### 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. 11,364 visits were made to the Visitor Centre (cf 11,981 in 2012/13)

**3.2 Field teaching visits:** The Education Officer left to manage her own business in August 2013. 446 students visited from 14 schools (cf. 1094 students from 24 schools in 2012/13). Schools are increasingly unable to pay the necessary transport costs. The RSPB is committed to field teaching at Pagham Harbour but entered a phase of evaluation to best determine how to maintain the service.

**3.3 Public events:** 40 events were held (cf 44 in 2012/13), ranging from pond dipping to litter picking, adult education classes to guided walks. Number of people engaged: 567 (cf. 830 in 2012/13).

#### 3.4 Headlines from visitor questionnaires

**Quality of visit** (% of visitors who rate overall quality of experience as good or excellent) 95%  
**Meet and Greet** (% of visitors who rate the friendliness and welcome of staff as 'excellent') 72%  
**Quality Assurance overall score** (external independent assessment by VAQAS): 67%

#### 3.5 Volunteers:

- Total volunteers 122
- Total hours of volunteering 5905 (cf. 6101 in 2012/13)

**3.6 Pagham Harbour Local Communities Forum:** The Forum met on 15 June 2013 and 27 November 2013, chaired by Cllr Margaret Evans. 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 eupdates.

**3.8 Infrastructure projects:** Issues regarding liability for the content of the 1960s/70s uncapped landfill (where the visitor centre is based) inhibited progress in 2013/14; most of the infrastructure works (eg new toilets, path upgrades) 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 Club for children:** The RSPB established a Wildlife Explorers club for 8-12 year olds, with five volunteer leaders. The group will meet once a month to do activities such as pond dipping and bug hunting. The Friends of Pagham Harbour donated £1000 to help the group's establishment.

#### 4. Statutory condition assessments and consents

SSSI/ASSI name	Unit or feature	Name of area	Principle management authority	Assessment	Date	Reason	Remedy
Pagham Harbour	1	Pagham Lagoon Little Lagoon	RSPB RSPB	Unfavorable Recovering	26/10/10	An unidentified pollution incident affected the populations of lagoon invertebrates; recent investigations have shown signs of recovery.	Continued monitoring, if further incidents do occur, try to establish the cause
	3	Ferry Field	RSPB	Favorable	01/10/08	N/A	N/A
	5	Yeomans & Mill Pond Marsh	RSPB	Favorable	28/01/10	N/A	N/A
	6	Church Commissioners South	C Spiby	Favorable	01/10/08	N/A	N/A
	7	Church Commissioners North	C Spiby	Favorable	01/10/08	N/A	N/A
	8	North Fields	C Spiby	Favorable	01/10/08	N/A	N/A
	9	Halsey's Farm	RSPB	Favorable	28/01/10	N/A	N/A
	10	Church Norton wood	Mr Black	Unfavorable Recovering	29/04/09	There was very little regeneration of the native trees, with the lower storey being dominated by Sycamore and Rhododendron and dense Bracken. Under Woodlands Grant Scheme much of the Sycamore and Rhododendron has been removed and the Bracken is under successful control.	[Control of Sycamore and Bracken, removal Rhododendron, and ensure the regeneration of native trees (by planting if necessary). Bramble has become an issue.
	11	Horse Fields	Mr Black	Favorable	28/01/10	N/A	N/A
	12	The Harbour:	Bourne	Favorable	28/01/10	N/A	N/A

		East	Leisure, RSPB, Bells				
	14	Tern Island and Church Norton Spit	RSPB	Favorable	12/09/08	N/A	N/A
	15	Pagham Beach Foreshore	RSPB	Favorable	10/06/10	N/A	N/A
	16	Church Norton Spit to The Severals	RSPB & Nelson-Smiths	Favorable	10/06/10	N/A	N/A
	17	Torrence spur	George Torrence	Favorable	01/10/08	N/A	N/A
	18	Sidlesham landfill	RSPB	Favorable	01/10/08	N/A	N/A
	19	West Side Copse	RSPB	Favorable	01/10/08	N/A	N/A
	20	The Harbour (North)	RSPB & Mike Bond/EA	Favorable	01/10/08	N/A	N/A
	21	The Harbour next to Pagham Spit	RSPB	Favorable	01/10/08	N/A	N/A
	24	Pagham Spit	RSPB	Favorable	10/06/10	N/A	N/A
	4	The Severals	Nelson Smiths	Unfavorable Recovering	12/04/05	Reeding over of open water and encroachment of willow scrub. Under an agreement between NE and the landowner, remedial work was carried out in autumn 2005. However, no work on the area since.	Re-establish the open water; carry out regular management of the reedbed and removal of some of the scrub.
	22	Breach Pool and The Scrape	RSPB on behalf of Ashmarden, but not the Rife itself	Unfavorable Recovering	27/10/08	This area was part of the mitigation for the River Lavant relief scheme. A series of new water control devices were placed in the unit that had not achieved the desire effect and so habitat had not developed as planned.	Discussions ongoing with NE to ensure best management of this area.
	23 (outside LNR)	Pagham Beach (part of SSSI)	PBHL	Unfavorable (no change)	10/06/10	Vegetative shingle dominated with escaped garden plants	

## 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.

## 6. Finances

Income (k)	£ ('000s)	Expenditure	£ ('000s)
Net income	+230	Net expenditure	-211
		Net summary	+19

**Financial summary:**

- RSPB had a surplus of £19.48K on the budget in 2013/14. This was in part due to an increase in the HLS income and the deferring into 2014/15 of some of the uplift infrastructure projects. The WSCC contribution towards this has been carried over into 2014/15.
- 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 £24K and a further £14K was spent on uplifts to buildings and infrastructure.
- Funding towards larger programmes of investment work not completed in 2013/14 have been carried over and will take place in the forthcoming years.

Proposed budget for 2014/15

Income (k)	£ ('000s)	Expenditure	£ ('000s)
Net income	+237	Net expenditure	-273
		Net summary	-36

However the uncertainties about when RSPB will be able to start work on the landfill, due to indemnities and insurance - factors not wholly in RSPB control - may stretch funding into 2015/16.

#### 7. SLA obligations:

- Planning permissions - none sought from WSCC in 2013/14
- Flood defence - Attendance at Pagham Harbour and Coastal Issues 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.