

Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy Environment Agency - SPRING NEWSLETTER

The Strategy area is split into nine management units between Hurst Spit and Lymington. The four units at the western end of the strategy area are the ones that I shall comment upon. The remaining 5 eastern units all come within Pete Durnell's HCC area (i.e. the area inside the sea walls) whilst the marshes, outside the walls and embankments are leased and managed by the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

We invite the Environment Agency to decide how this report interfaces with the HS2L Strategy. The four units in our area are; Hurst Spit, Keyhaven, Avon Water and Keyhaven and Fishtail.

UNIT (1) - Hurst Spit: Bird monitoring of this area has been undertaken since 2004, primarily by Peter Hobby and Marc Moody and covers the consecutive breeding years from 2004 to 2022. The full breeding record list covers sixteen species of terns, gulls, waders, ducks and swan. We shall highlight a few of these as below. These records show the highest numbers of breeding pairs over the 18 preceding years, compared against last year's numbers:

Ringed Plover	Down from max of 10 pairs (2009) to 4 pairs (2022)
Oystercatcher	Down from max of 14 pairs (2015) to 4 pairs (2022)
Redshank	Down from max of 6 pairs (2015) to 5 pairs (2022)
Common Tern	Down from max of 19 pairs (2009) to zero (2022)
Little Tern	Down from max of 19 pairs (2009) to zero (2022)
Sandwich Tern	Down from max of 9 pairs (2014) to zero (2022)
Black-headed Gull	Down from max of 902 pairs (2008) to just 10 pairs (2022)

Suggested Mitigation Measure - Hurst Spit 'Seabird Sanctuary':

In order to reverse this downturn in breeding terns, gulls and waders, we propose that part of Hurst Spit becomes a seabird sanctuary during spring and summer. Landings (of any description) and access by walkers to this area would become out of bounds during spring and summer.

The Sanctuary would require funding and spring/summer wardening e.g. Solent Bird Aware/HWT/HOS/RSPB/Natural England etc and/or trained volunteers working alongside a paid summer warden.

UNIT (2): Referred to as Keyhaven but includes Sturt Pond, Saltgrass Lane/New Lane/Mount Lake, Saltgrass Marsh and New Lane farmland fields

The area is a haven for wintering geese, ducks and waders, especially Mount Lake (at low-tide) when the adjacent farmland fields (all either Core or Primary Support Areas in the Solent Brent Geese & Wader Strategy – see map below) are used at high-tide as feeding and loafing areas. Adjacent land to the west of the Keyhaven unit includes Sturt Pond (which is highly designated + a Local Nature Reserve) and I believe is somewhat overlooked. Unfortunately, Sturt Pond and the farmland either side of New Lane is currently excluded from the National Park boundary. If the boundary is ever reviewed, consideration should be given to include these important areas.

Classification

- Core Area
- Primary Support Area
- Secondary Support Area
- Low Use Site
- Candidate Site
- SPA Site



NF204 = Sturt Pond
 NF2A = Solent Grange Recreation Ground & Rally Field (aka the 'Goose Field')
 NF34 = Belport farmland
 NF03 = Belport farmland
 NF35 = Dunfords Pond
 Mount Lake sits south of Saltgrass Lane

Sturt Pond (LNR): MCV survey records for Sturt Pond began in February 2009 so we have comprehensive records for the site. It has become a refuse for Brent Geese to bathe, rest, feed and loaf, especially during the double high-tides, when wind-surfers and water-sports dominate the nearby Mount Lake.

Since our records began, Sturt Pond has recorded **159** different species. A mix of waterfowl, reedbed birds and scrub warblers is evident. Two bird ringing surveys have been carried out. The first in 2002/03 and a second in 2019/20. A short third session will be carried out this summer. In the first session September 2003 to September 2003, some **592** birds were ringed covering **31** different species. Of particular significance were 192 swallows, 13 common snipe, 88 meadow pipit, 8 grasshopper warbler, 59 sedge warbler, 19 reed warbler, 3 bearded reedling and 65 reed bunting.

The 2019/20 report showed that, **215** birds of **24** different species were ringed. The significant bird numbers being; 44 meadow pipit, 6 cetti's warbler, 25 sedge warbler and 27 reed warbler. Records from this survey were hampered by government restrictions during the Covid pandemic so a like with like analysis, is not possible. One comparison that can be made was that in the 2002/03 survey, **112** bird species were recorded of which **18** bred on site. In the 2019/20 survey, **113** bird species were recorded of which **26** different species bred. There was a noticeable drop in common snipe using the marsh in winter with a peak count of 30+ (14 caught and ringed). The more recent survey was 20 birds of which only 1 was ringed.

Pressing Requirements that could Enhance Sturt Pond:

- Ability to be able to control general water levels – Weir boards under the crabbing-bridge have been used in the past. An option to re-introduce the boards could be considered?
- As sea-levels continue to rise, the Solent Way footpath is more regularly under flood water. A raised boardwalk could be installed. Its construction and ongoing maintenance would be costly and would need to be 18 inches or more higher than the present footpath to would allow continued access for say the next 50 to 100 years. Once the existing path is no longer accessible, Sturt Pond could only be viewed from the Bird Hide/Solent end of the Pond and from a short section of the adjacent permissive footpath, owned by Royale Life/Solent

Grange, providing they continue to allow access to their land. Discussions should take place between the landowners to allow continued access to the Solent Way.

- Lack of any reedbed management by the owners; New Forest District Council
- Sturt Pond and adjacent New Lane farmland fields should be brought into the New Forest National Park Authority area should a boundary review be undertaken

UNIT (3): - Avon Water includes Keyhaven (Harbour) & The Pans Wetlands:

Bird monitoring of Avon Water and The Pans commenced in November 2017 when the then landowner J & D Edgar gave us permission to access the site. Since about 2020 the new landowners Belport Ltd extended this access permission. Our record keeping here is made daily, primarily by MCV volunteer – Chris Barrass. His record keeping is meticulous. The daily diary records indicate that numbers of wintering birds using Avon Water and at The Pans has increased over the six-year recording period. Ringing records have also been maintained on an ad hoc basis by BTO & Natural England licenced ringer; Graham Giddens. The resulting records are too numerous to include here, but copies of the annual diary and ringing records have been supplied to the HS2L Strategy Project Team and submitted to HOS annually.

Diary Highlights of Peak (max) Numbers using The Pans & Avon Water in 2022 include:

Little Grebe	41	January	Little Egret	47	August
Mallard	243	September	Coot	92	December
Gadwall	162	December	Shoveler	39	February
Shelduck	13	June	Teal	c.400	December
Tufted Duck	14	March	Pintail	56	December
Wigeon	c.350	September	Dark-bellied Brent Goose	800	January
Egyptian Goose	15	September	Greylag Goose	33	November
Black-tailed Godwit	243	August	Lapwing	200	January
Redshank	102	September	Curlew	17	February
Golden Plover	200	January	Ringed Plover	11	July
Common Snipe	23	January	Dunlin	30	September
Black-headed Gull	204	August			

The former arable farmland site continues to impress as an extendable wetland habitat. There are daily reports of marsh harrier and cetti's warbler, monthly reports of water rail and kingfisher. Summer and autumn records of bearded reedling, April to June records of Avocet and with the following unexpected visitors like; glossy ibis, great white egret, scaup, garganey, bar-tailed godwit, ruff and sandpipers, and occasional fly-over's by raven, red kite, peregrine and white-tailed (sea) eagle. Since monitoring began in November 2017, **141** different species have been recorded using *The Pans & Avon Water Wetlands*, the latest being a fleeting visit by a passing male pied flycatcher.

Pressing Requirements that could Enhance the site:

- To be able to control water levels in The Pans., i.e. to have low summer water levels to encourage waders such as black-tailed godwit, redshank, greenshank, curlew, avocet and lapwing.
- Higher water-levels during winter months when ducks and geese numbers increase
- North western grassland edges of The Pans could be better managed to encourage breeding ground-nesting birds like lapwing and possibly common snipe

- Provision of a mid-water positioned and protected (electric-fenced) island to encourage Avocet to breed and possibly little or common terns
- Artificial nesting bank to encourage sand martin breeding
- Management of reedbeds which are currently being killed by water levels being too high
- Webcam to be able to see waterfowl using the northern end of the site

UNIT (4): - Keyhaven to Fishtail – includes Iley Point, Small Balancing Pond & Copse:

Records for this area have been provided primarily by Marcus Ward (licenced bird ringer) who has maintained records of his captures and sightings, primarily covering what is known as Iley Point (private land). Records from here are impressive, but ringing and surveys are only currently being carried out on a few days each year. Nonetheless, the following four-year autumn **warbler records** for 2016 to 2019 are of particular interest:

Grasshopper Warbler	32 ringed	Sedge Warbler	90 ringed
Reed Warbler	74 ringed	Dartford Warbler	10 ringed
Lesser Whitethroat	26 ringed	Whitethroat	219 ringed
Garden Warbler	24 ringed	Blackcap	647 ringed
Chiffchaff	482 ringed	Willow Warbler	82 ringed
Yellow-browed Warbler	1 ringed		

Other Species Ringed:

<i>Nightjar</i>	6 ringed	Swallow	159 ringed
Robin	110 ringed	Goldcrest	98 ringed
Firecrest	6 ringed	Linnet	411 ringed
Bullfinch	46 ringed	Reed Bunting	87 ringed

A total of **2,247** birds were ringed at Iley Point by Marcus and his team over the period.

Of these records, the ringing of 6 different *nightjar* over just a two- year period (2018 & 2019) is significant. Nightjar is typically a bird of the New Forest. Out here on the coast they have only relatively recently come to our notice. Quiet during the daytime, their ‘churring’ calls of a night time seem to have been overlooked (not seen or heard) until 2018. Proof of breeding at Iley seemed to be confirmed when in July 2018 an adult bird was ringed, followed in early September by two juveniles at Iley Point.

Pressing Requirements that could Enhance the site:

- Concerns for the Iley Point gorse/scrub area favoured by nightjar and Dartford warbler if ‘managed realignment’ is the selected option. Maybe this privately-owned area could be included in any ‘flood protection bunding’ of the properties?
- Raised viewing platform and screen overlooking the small Balancing Pond – something that we believe was an aspiration/condition in the planning approval for this man-made site

Fishtail Lagoon:

An under recorded area. The western end of the Fishtail unit is for the most part too dry and overgrown.

Pressing Requirements that could Enhance the site:

- The site needs to be better recorded
- The site probably needs a definitive habitat management plan written for it

- It would also be enhanced if it was re-wetted (controlled re-wetting) with similar gates, weir-boards and mechanically hand-controlled sluices as appear to be at most other lagoons eastwards in Pete Durnell's Hampshire County Council managed area.
- The properties and the gorse habitat in which the nightjar and Dartford warbler thrive, needs to be specifically 'bunded' to protect homes and specialist habitat

SUMMARY

- To win community hearts and minds and to help gain traction to win support 'strategies' need to be able to give something back in return for acceptance of change. e.g. amenity shelter/s with scenic views across the Solent and saltmarsh, interpretation displays (explaining to visitors what and why changes need to be made and maybe a seabird 'breeding' sanctuary on Hurst
- The birdlife in three of the four Units (1) Hurst Spit, (2) Keyhaven and (3) Avon Water) are significant in that a wide variety of habitats already exist and species recorded. However, each Unit could be further enhanced for wildlife and in particular bird species with a clear long-term management strategy for all units.
- Unit (2) – Keyhaven, (Mount Lake) specifically needs to consider water-sport users and whether their sport is compatible with trying to enhance birdlife? A personal view is that there could be some common ground between all parties involved by partnership working
- Unit (4) – The birdlife of Fishtail needs to be properly surveyed over a minimum of two seasons, longer if time permits. It would undoubtedly benefit from re-wetting e.g. managed realignment – i.e. working with nature, but the three properties and specialist habitat requirement of the present nightjar and Dartford warbler needs protecting

The demise of Hurst and associated saltmarsh, mudflats and shingle Spit as seabird and wader breeding site is a considerable worry. The serious consideration of creating a '*seabird sanctuary*' at Hurst must surely be a compelling argument to be made by those with clout! i.e. Natural England, RSPB, Hampshire Wildlife Trust, the National Park Authority, County and District Councils and the Environment Agency itself. Even if a sanctuary was only for the spring/summer months, this seems to be the most important issue facing our local birdlife.

These are my considered opinions. I do not hold MCV accountable for these views. I believe them to be appropriate observations for what is required that would enhance local birdlife and wildlife should mitigation measures need to be made for bird and/or farmland habitats and if enhancement opportunities arise from the HS2L Strategy.

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