



Friends of Langstone Harbour Newsletter

Autumn 2007

You have not heard from us for a while for which your editor offers due apology but he won't bore you with the usual lame excuses. What is new since our May Newsletter?

It really has been a miserable summer, unless you count the last few weeks as summer. For wildlife we have been in the autumn for a few weeks already with breeding virtually over and migrants returning. I gather that for most species the summer weather has led to very little breeding success and that is true for our harbour birds. On the RSPB islands Sandwich terns raised 11 young, little terns just one, common terns also just one, Mediterranean gulls 15 while the black-headed gulls managed nearly 1,000. Jason Crook's report on the oyster beds is on page 2.

Some plants have thrived though and there are still surprises as some of them are unusually throwing new flowers even now. Butterflies have had a bad year but again there have been some nice ones to see.

On the work front it has also been rather quiet. The harbour open day organised by the Wildlife Trust was a mixed blessing. The strong winds at the oyster beds made it very difficult but we did pick up new members and some donations.

Work was concentrated on preparations connected to the Brockhampton path diversion. The planning for that and the path at Eastney Lake are ongoing and still need some clarification.

Information on what is planned now the summer is over is on a later page of this newsletter.

Water Quality

Over the last few months the various committees interested in Langstone Harbour have been concerned with outfall pipes into the harbour. Weather conditions have caused a lot more storm water outflows than were forecast when sewage was diverted through the long pipe into the Solent. Our members are charting all the outfalls they can find and the Environment Agency are also assessing whether more pipes should be licensed and controlled.

Interestingly the data available on water

quality on the Havant side of the harbour shows that Coliforms and Streptococci in the water in 2006 was within the criteria for bathing waters. We do not have data on the Portsmouth side but will endeavour to get this. There is probably no reason to expect data for Portsmouth or for 2007 to be different in spite of the increased storm water surges following 2007 rainfall.

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The Oyster Beds in Early August

By Jason Crook

Another month has passed of this so-called “summer”! There is good news and bad news, so I will begin with the good.....

One pair of oystercatchers, possibly the most experienced pair on the reserve, have now fledged their two young but they remain very much a family. The youngsters will likely stay with their parents and be dependent upon them through the rest of the summer. They occasionally squabble between themselves as they fight for the attention (and food) from their parents. More usually though each juvenile shadows a different parent as they learn the basic skills of finding food. Distinguishing the juveniles from the adults is relatively easy as they still have slightly shorter and duller orange bills and, easier to see perhaps, dull pink-grey legs as opposed to the bright pink-red legs of the adults. Their plumage is of course all very fresh and their upperparts including wings, as well as being a browner-black compared to the jet black of the adults, have very neat but narrow paler edges to each feather. If you get that close to them you ought to be able to hear their incessant squeaky chattering as they make it perfectly clear to their parents that they are still around and (often) hungry!

The other pair of Oystercatchers which hatched two chicks a month ago has reared one of them to almost fledging and I will be watching this bird carefully during the next few days to see its first flights as only then will I count it as finally “fledged”. All the other Oystercatchers have failed but remain on territory around the reserve. This sounds like a poor season, and I would agree it is not the best and improvements can (and I hope will be) made, but consider the following. A typical Oystercatcher lives for at least twelve years and starts breeding at four years. So, an average pair may need to raise just two young during their eight years of breeding to “cover” their own mortality. Of course, productivity probably needs to be slightly higher than this as juvenile mortality is doubtless higher than adult mortality, but even if it is double then each pair needs to raise four young during their lifetime. Or one juvenile every other year. For the ten pairs that are breeding at the Oysterbeds an average of five young need to be reared each summer. Well this year it should be three, and last year it was five (from nine pairs). So, on balance, they may already be almost successful enough to maintain the breeding population on the reserve.



Other good news is that from three pairs of Common Terns which re-nested after earlier failures two now have half-grown chicks on the south island.

Now the bad news. It has been a complete failure for the Little Terns this summer. Up to fifteen or so birds visited the Oysterbeds during July and there was a little interest in nesting with some nest scraping and courtship activity but only one pair settled and laid eggs. It soon became apparent that the female bird incubating was not being attended by a male and I watched her on several occasions flying off into the harbour to feed and so leaving her eggs to the mercy of the elements. She eventually gave up. I am already looking to improve conditions for this species for next year but there are no quick fixes or easy solutions.

Ringed Plovers have also done poorly and have, for the second year in succession, failed to fledge any young. The brood of three at the beginning of July didn't last and, by the third week of the month, all the adults had lost interest in breeding and had begun to flock up with other returning birds from elsewhere.

The return migration for other species is gaining momentum and in the last few weeks of August numbers of waders have really started to build. Whimbrel and Common Sandpiper are typically early in their return passage and the Oysterbeds is undoubtedly the best place to see these two species around the shores of Langstone Harbour. Peak counts have been 33 Whimbrel (on 20th July) and 16 Common Sandpiper (on 28th).

Wildlife Trust Walks and Meetings

September 26th . Public Meeting - Global Warming

Andrew Powling will explore for us the science surrounding this controversial subject and its affect on us and our wildlife.

Warblington School Denvilles at 7.30. Admission £2.50

October Friday 12th Farlington Marshes autumn bird walk

1000 – 1300 Walk round the Farlington Marshes reserve to see the autumn birds. 2½ - 3 miles. You may want to bring a hot drink.

Meet at the reserve western gate SU 679044 via the entrance of the roundabout at the junction of the A27 and the A2030.

Leader : John Goodspeed 023 9222 1361



November 28th Public Meeting -Chichester Harbour

Judi Darley will tell the meeting about wildlife and conservation work in the Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural beauty.

Warblington School Denvilles at 7.30. Admission £2.50

November Friday 30th Linear walk from Emsworth to Bedhampton

1115 – 1500. Meet at Bedhampton station at 1120 or Emsworth Station at 1135 for a 6 mile walk mainly along the shore. Lunch break at Langstone (bring or buy) where you may join or leave the walk at about 1300. Phone leader to check trains times.

Park in lay bys at Bedhampton or public (pay and display) car-parks in Emsworth.

Leader: John Goodspeed 023 9222 1361



January Saturday 19th Explore Portcreek and Tipner Lake

0930 to midday

We will wander along Portcreek and down Tipner Lake hoping to find birds in the scrub and on the shore.

Meet and park carefully in Boughton Court Anchorage Park (Behind Morrison's and off the Eastern Road). SU673039

John Goodspeed 023 9222 1361

February Tuesday 7th High Tide at Sandy and Black Points.

Walk the shore with us to see what is on the sea at Chichester harbour entrance and the wader roost at Black Point Hayling Island.

Meet in the car-park off Southwood Road Hayling Island opposite Creek Road. SZ743981 1000 - 1230

Leader : John Goodspeed 023 9222 1361



Annual General Meeting

Tuesday October 2nd

At 7.30 p.m.

A short business session will be followed by an open forum for your comments and questions and after a break a presentation on the wildlife of the harbour in 2007. If you would like to bring a table display or short slide show let us know.

Nominations to join the committee will be welcomed by the Secretary.

Come and enjoy a relaxed evening with people interested in our harbour.

There will be a raffle and refreshments.

Working Parties.

Our work parties are one of our most rewarding activities and people who come enjoy it and get a real sense of contributing to the well being of the harbour. Recent and future events will embrace as they did last year preparatory work on the paths at Eastney and Brockhampton, some scrub control at Milton Locks and the oyster beds and regular clearance of our adopted beach. The beach clearance will take us back to Budds Farm as there are other groups clearing Stoke Bay. The future programme subject to review is as follows.



- October 6th: Beach Clean at Budds Farm
- October 27th: Fence removal at Eastney
- November 24th: Scrub control at the oyster beds
- December 5th: Beach clean
- January 27th: Scrub control Milton Locks
- February 23rd Fence removal at Eastney