

TWENTY YEARS OF HARBOUR WILDLIFE WATCHING

Anne de Potier looks back at changes and trends

As this is probably my last piece for the *Newsletter* I thought I'd try to pick out a few highlights and trends from the last 20 years or so. That's really not very long — some birds alive in 1987 are probably still with us. But then, people would have travelled a long way to see a Little Egret if one had turned up here, now they are a common and characteristic feature of our wetland habitats. We have been counting our wintering coastal birds since the 1970's, and can pick out trends. For example there are generally more Black-tailed Godwits and Red-breasted Mergansers than 20 years ago, but fewer Shelduck and Ringed Plover. Is any of this because of climate change?

Possibly. Twenty years ago we would not have been thinking of that as an explanation.

Are there fewer Ringed Plover due to climate change?



George Sprages

Surveys and maps show that we have lost some areas of saltmarsh and intertidal vegetation, but gained others. In 1980 when the first survey was done, it took ages to do and the maps were drawn onto paper. The latest one still took a while, but came ready to be loaded into the Geographic Information System, and it was (relatively) straightforward to calculate the changes. Other surveys are helped by Global Positioning Systems, and data are now quickly passed between people and organisations. Just think back to when all sums had to be done with a calculator (or by hand!), and the photocopier was the pinnacle of technology.

So, over the years, we have found out more about our harbour, and have used this information to care for its wildlife more effectively. But do more people care? That's what really matters. In 1987 the Friends were just getting started, now there are over 2,000 members. A massive amount of practical work has been done, and funds have been given for surveys and equipment. We can all be proud of that. Keep it up!

13,000 Trees Planted

Helped by the unusually mild winter, the Conservancy were able to plant over 13,000 trees this winter — 3,000 more than expected.

All trees planted in the AONB are native species, found locally in copses and hedgerows, such as Field Maple, Hawthorn and Holly. They are all sourced from a Sussex nursery.

Volunteers from the Friends and other organisations helped with this work, which included replanting the hedgerow at Bosham which was stolen last year - we will not be beaten!

AONB Officer Nicky Horter said 'this year's tree planting programme has been an amazing achievement. We simply could not have done it without the overwhelming support of the Friends and Chichester Conservation Volunteers.'

WW2 Artefacts Wanted

Do any Friends have any Second World War artefacts, or household objects from the period, that they would be prepared to donate to the Conservancy? A workshop session about the history of the harbour is currently being designed to take to local schools and artefacts that can be (safely) touched or handled by children will help to bring history alive. Contact the Education team on 01243 789173.

Be a Volunteer Driver!

The Education Centre would like to hear from you if you are interested in becoming an occasional volunteer driver for the Conservancy minibus. Full training will be given.

The idea is that with a dedicated driver for school visits and harbour events, the event leader can concentrate on the students or participants.

Please contact the Education Centre on 01243 789173.



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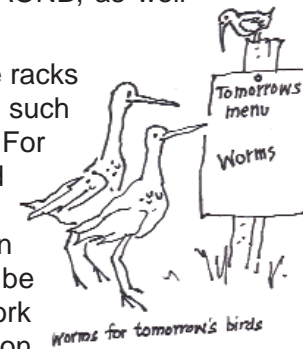


FROM WORMS TO WEATHER STATIONS - FRIENDS SUPPORT NEW PROJECTS

Heritage Lottery funding for improvements to the harbour has now ended, so it is even more important that the Friends carry on supporting projects - while accepting that our budgets are somewhat smaller than those of the mighty HLF!

The list of projects we plan to support in 2007 is designed to help human activities in the AONB, as well as the wildlife.

For cyclists, we will pay for cycle racks to be installed at up to five sites, such as the Bosham Ferry car park. For children, we have agreed to fund the £500 cost of a fixed weather station at Dell Quay Education Centre. Data generated will be used as part of the Centre's work with schools, and will appear on the education website pages for schools to access.



Worms for tomorrow's birds

An important project to help harbour bird life in the future, aptly christened 'Worms for Tomorrow's Birds', has also been agreed. A survey is being carried out to assess the food resources currently available for visiting wading birds. With sea levels rising, the amount of mudland exposed at low tide reduces, which could reduce the amount of food available in future.

The Harbour Creekies project is being re-launched this year. Despite the jolly name, it is not an event for children but an opportunity for local people to learn more about harbour wildlife. There will be four 4-hour sessions starting in the autumn, with refreshments and minibus transport included.

Finally, hedgerows and footpaths - very important that both are maintained and improved. The Friends contributed to the cost of improving the Snowhill path over the winter - it was becoming muddy and impassable when wet. Our members have been a great help in planting hedgerows at Bosham, the Apuldram Centre and Cobnor farm (this was a new copse), and we funded new hedges at West Chidham along the eastern boundary of the proposed managed realignment site.



More details of future projects in our next newsletter.

FOUR WALKS IN FOUR HARBOURS

One of the walks will start in Bosham



Adrian Rowe

Those ingenious people at the Conservancy have come up with a fresh approach to the annual harbour walks idea. This Spring, they are organising four walks, in four harbours, in four days. The Festival of Harbour walks will be held from 7-10 May, and will visit Chichester, Pagham, Langstone and Portsmouth harbours.

The Chichester walk will take in six of the harbourside villages, with a ferry trip across the Itchenor channel. At Pagham, walkers will circumnavigate the whole harbour, removing socks and shoes to wade across the entrance at low tide.

The Langstone explorer walk will take in the old oyster beds, and Farlington Marshes Nature Reserve.

The Portsmouth walk will include a boat trip and a visit to the top of the Spinnaker tower. Judi Darley, who is leading the Chichester walk, says: 'Although our harbours are all neighbours, each one is very individual. Taking in two or more will give you a chance to compare the rich variety on our doorstep'.

The walks vary in length from 4½ to 11 miles. Information and booking forms are available from the harbour offices at Chichester and Langstone, or on www.conservancy.co.uk.

Where to Find Some Lovely Shore Plants

Committee member *Peter Cameron* wrote a brilliantly illustrated guide to the coastal plants found growing wild in the harbour, in the Conservancy's recently published *Reference Guide*. We asked Peter to devise a short walk for Friends interested in seeing some of these lovely plants for themselves. He suggests a Spring stroll by the shore south of Bosham, where the ferry leaves for Itchenor.



A good place to start is beside the bait-digging notice on the Bosham side of the Itchenor ferry. Come across the ferry, or walk down from the car park at the west end of Smugglers Lane, Bosham. Face towards Itchenor, and in front of you is a patch of Saltmarsh Grass (*Puccinellia*).

Dark, short and fine-leaved, it is useful to know because it shelters flowering plants, in this case Sea Spurrey (*Spergularia*) with small, pinkish-white flowers in early summer and beady seed pods set on wide angled stems.

Sea Spurrey

Below this there is a humpy mix of Sea Purslane (*Atriplex*) — try tasting the leaves! and some more Saltmarsh Grass.

Beyond the mud and gravel band are swathes of Cordgrass (*Spartina*) going much of the way to the channel.

On your left is another area of mixed Sea Purslane and grasses. Walk across it to the little channel, and when you are level with posts 5 - 10 of the fence opposite, look for Scurvy Grass (*Cochlearia*) with bright



Sea Purslane



St John's Wort

Around the corner of the point, where the blackthorns are wind-bowed, look along the upper strand line for the low, dark green mats of Sea Milkwort (*Glaux*), with a flush of small pink flowers in June and July. Up on the bank from here on, notice the Wild Irises: the flowers are rather dull but give way to a good show of orange-red berries in autumn.



Look out for the Ice Age boulder

white flowers in April and May.

Now go to the end bench and in front of you is a Tree Mallow (*Lavatera*) and, to your right, a pretty example of Marsh Mallow (*Althaea*), both flowering in mid-summer.

Next, walk along the beach towards the granite boulder (and try to work out which Ice Age brought it here, and from where). Notice on the eroding bank the Teasels, St John's Wort (alongside Ragwort) and some delicate pink Centaury, all at their best in June and July.

This is a good winter walk, too, with distant views of the Isle of Wight through the harbour mouth, and wonderful sunset displays of cloud and colour.

Stinking Iris



Marsh Mallow

ANNE, THE FOUNDER OF THE FRIENDS, RETIRES

The person mainly responsible for the formation of the Friends exactly 20 years ago, *Anne de Potier*, retires this Spring from her post as the Conservancy's Conservation Officer

Anne was working as a librarian in Chichester, and doing voluntary work in the harbour in her spare time, when she realised that an umbrella organisation was needed to encourage helpers to carry out practical conservation work.

A year later, in 1988, she changed careers to become the Conservancy's Conservation Warden, and was able to encourage the growth of the fledgling Friends, which to start with had only 100 or so members, from her office in Itchenor. Today the Friends with 2000 members has a strong voice in harbour affairs as well as raising funds for conservation and providing practical help with projects.

Conservation is now one of the Conservancy's most important tasks, and Anne has played a large part in encouraging this. Nineteen years ago, she says, there was very little detailed knowledge of the harbour's wildlife and habitats. She has enjoyed working with a range of environmental experts to build on the basic database through practical and scientific research projects, so that today the Conservancy is seen as a role model because of its data gathering systems, and its bird records.

Anne de Potier retires after 19 years at the Conservancy

Anne played a part in starting the Conservancy's education work with schools and the public, when teachers were trained to lead field trips within the AONB. Now of course the Conservancy has a fully staffed education unit which reaches out to thousands of school children each year through lectures and visits.

For the future, Anne hopes that despite ever increasing legislation and the flurry and bustle of 21st century living, those responsible for the harbour's management can still focus on the importance of guarding the harbour's habitat and its wildlife. She recalls that Martin Beale, a fellow



founder member of the Friends, used to say that the harbour's best asset was its mud - it restricted tourist development and made for a peaceful environment.

In (early) retirement, Anne will continue to be a volunteer bird counter, and in particular will carry on working with the Greenshank research project, which she started. Greenshank, and waders in general, are her favourite birds, she says, and Cobnor, where she keeps her West Wight Scow, her favourite place.

She also belongs to the International Wader Study Group, and expects to be attending their conference in La Rochelle this year. She hopes to have more time, too, to expand her knowledge of harbour birds such as the Black-tailed Godwit by travelling to areas to which they migrate.

Anne's many friends in the Friends will be glad to hear she has no intention of leaving Emsworth, and we look forward to seeing her in and around the harbour for many years to come. *Ian McIntyre*

THE TRUST TAKES STOCK

The Chichester Harbour Trust has been taking stock of the sites now within its care, and making decisions on how best to look after them.

The summer drought last year may have taken its toll of new trees planted at the Dell, Chidham, but checks will be made this Spring and replacements planted if necessary.

At Ellanore Spit, the Conservancy's new interpretation board on the path overlooking the spit provides a welcome explanation to passers-by of the importance of the area for birds and fauna.

At the Trust's new Itchenor site, it has been decided to leave the meadowland very much as it is: mowing occasionally to prevent the wild flowers from being overgrown by larger species. A small interpretation board will be erected.

The Trust is grateful for help from the Friends in maintaining these sites, and the Trustees are in discussion over other possible sites needing long term protection in the harbour.

CYCLING FOR CHARITY

Friends with bikes, plus all of us interested in sponsoring good causes, should note that another sponsored bike ride is being organised on 13 May.

The ride will again be from Chichester, along the Salterns Way cycle track, to East Head. There is a prize of a £400 bicycle for the person who raises the most sponsorship. Application forms can be downloaded from the Conservancy website.

The event raises money for MacMillan Cancer Support and the St Wilfrid's Hospice, and the organisers are hoping to exceed last year's £7000.