

Confessions of an addicted harbour walker



Maurice Johnson, an FOCH Life Member, has donned his walking boots and enjoyed the annual harbour walks for each of the last 14 years, which must be a record. We asked Maurice to give readers his impressions of this year's walk in May, and to tell us why the annual ritual has become SO addictive!

For about twenty years it was known as the Chichester Harbour three day walk, but now that there are many long walks countrywide it was decided last year that it was time to distinguish this walk from the others and thus it acquired its present name - the Whimbrel Walk.

Whimbrels are migratory wading birds that can be seen in the harbour during the spring and autumn. In appearance they are akin to the curlew having the same basic plumage pattern and long turned down beak. Their principal difference is that they are smaller in size.

This is the fourteenth year in which I have undertaken the walk and to ensure that I have a place on both the spring and autumn walks I book my place in January! I have been charged with being addicted to the walks and in a sense that may be true, but it simply that the experience never ceases to delight me. Every walk differs in some way, different weather patterns, activity in the harbour, birds, flora, new planting, other work undertaken by conservationists, and a host of other features to interest one.

This year for example we saw the solar boat recently acquired by the Conservancy with the aid Lottery funding and which proved to be a source of great interest. Several years ago we had the joy of seeing the Little Egret for the first time. In truth there is always something new to see.

This year the walks start at East Head and finish at Langstone. Next year they will be reversed so for those who wish to be able to say that they have really seen the harbour it is necessary to undertake the walks in consecutive years otherwise only half will have been seen!

In addition to walking the shoreline we always have the pleasure of a boat trip for about 45 minutes when we reach Itchenor which, of course, happened on the first day this year and which serves to add another dimension to our view of the harbour. In the autumn we shall doubtless experience the pleasure of a ride on the solar boat.

On the second day of each walk lunch is taken at Bosham which by any standard is a delightful place to visit with its wonderfully cared for ancient church and its association with Canute. Also there is usually activity on the quay to interest one.

This year the third day lunch break was at the Yacht Club on Thorney Island. Adjacent to the clubhouse is the church which seems remarkably large for an island which appears to have been largely uninhabited. Usually the church is opened for our benefit and a visit to view the window dedicated to the Royal Air Force is worthwhile, as is the well cared for British and German War Graves cemetery.

Another point of interest in the churchyard are several headstones bearing carvings which suggest they denote graves of victims of the plague.

Lest any reader who has not had the pleasure of walking round the harbour wishes to consider doing so, a brief outline of a typical day out may be helpful. We meet at Chichester Railway Station and are transported by coach to the start of the day's walk which varies between 10 - 14 miles. We have a coffee break mid-morning during which the Leader gives a few minutes talk on features of interest which we are viewing. Later, as already mentioned, we break for lunch, enjoy another brief break mid-afternoon before returning to Chichester by 5-5.30.

Further information may be obtained from the Harbour Office, telephone 01243 512301



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Solar Heritage - Launched

A full complement of Friends enjoyed a social evening on the Conservancy's new solar powered boat in May, on one of its first public outings following its launch by Lady Pippa Blake.

The boat, a twin-hulled catamaran imported from Switzerland, will provide educational and public trips round the harbour for up to 50 passengers. Being battery-powered, it is almost silent and the twin hulls give it extra stability which will be welcomed by bird watchers and poor sailors!

The cost of the boat has been jointly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Friends of Chichester Harbour, the Crown Estates, the Countryside Agency and Peters plc.

Conservancy Hope to Keep East Head Rock Berm

By July, the Conservancy hope to submit their application to renew consent to keep the rock berm in place at East Head, to prevent a tidal channel forming through this narrow neck of sand. The submission will be made by the Conservancy with the agreement of English Nature, the Environment Agency, Chichester District Council and the National Trust.

'I am reasonably confident that agreement will be forthcoming', says John Davis, the Harbour Master, 'but approval will, again, be heavily conditional'.

The application has to be made now because the temporary planning consent for the original berm, put in place in 2000, expires in November this year.

The Conservancy issued a useful summary of the East Head berm story in May to organisations round the harbour, following a public meeting of the Conservancy in April. This explained that in 1997/8, erosion of the hinge at East Head was especially rapid, and the Conservancy were concerned that if the Hinge breached, a tidal channel would form through it. There was historic and empirical evidence, based on a previous breach at East Head in 1963/4, to indicate that if this happened, the sedimentation patterns in the Chichester Channel would be altered.

As happened in 1964, this might result in an inner bar forming in the vicinity of the junction of the Chichester and

Editorial

The response from members to the offer of a trip in the Conservancy's new solar-powered boat was very encouraging, writes David Rolph, our Chairman. In fact we were oversubscribed as the boat takes only 54 passengers. Happily, we have been able to arrange another trip on Friday September 10th at 5.30pm. Those who were disappointed first time round will be given priority; but please let our Secretary, Ann, know if you are interested.

In the last Newsletter we asked you to nominate projects round the harbour which might benefit from financial support from our funds. Some have been identified - mainly concerning footpath maintenance and improvement - and we will take them forward in consultation with the Conservancy. Please keep your ideas coming in as they help us to plan ahead.

The controversy over the proposed cycle and wheelchair path between Chichester and West Wittering has given rise to much recent correspondence in the Chichester Observer. To date there has been no agreement, but we will report progress (if any) in the next Newsletter.

Two other important issues continue to exercise the minds of members - East Head Erosion and Managed Realignment - so we have included up-to-date information in this issue. Let us hope to avoid the combination of extra high tides and south-westerly gales.

A word of thanks to Roger Smith who donated one of his paintings to be raffled for the Friends at his exhibition in May. It raised £320.

Our Changing Harbour Coastline

The Conservancy's Conservation Manager Philip Couchman explains how rising sea levels are affecting the harbour, and what is being done about it.

Managed Retreat? Controlled Regression? Set back? Managed Realignment?

These are just some of the expressions that have been used over the past 15 years when considering the implications of sea level rise and the loss of intertidal habitats.

However they all mean approximately the same thing - allowing the shoreline to move but in a controlled, managed way that avoids the potentially catastrophic impacts of a sudden loss of sea defences.

Why is it necessary? Where is it happening? How might it affect me?

These are the typical questions we get from visitors and residents alike who come across the concept of what we shall in future, for simplicity's sake, call Managed Realignment.

Not all areas are suitable for managed realignment - the first thing to know is it is not a low cost option - not simply a matter of doing nothing and allowing existing sea defences to decay. Mostly the areas selected are where there is low lying land, probably claimed from the sea in the past, with limited existing sea defences and with potential for the creation of saltmarsh, saline lagoons or intertidal mudland.

These are the precious conservation resources that make Chichester Harbour of international importance for nature conservation. They are also the habitats most threatened by the changes we are seeing now as sea levels rise. They are habitats that require a precise amount of immersion and drying. Where they are squeezed between rising sea levels and hard coastal defences they cease to exist.

Whilst most sea defences that protect life and property are essential and will almost certainly continue to be defended there are areas, particularly within Chichester Harbour, where it is simply not cost effective to defend on the existing line in the long term. By using the realignment approach the initial investment can provide longer, more cost effective defences as the newly created habitats themselves provide a defence for the land. So it is necessary if

East Head continued

Emsworth channels. Such a bar would be a hazard to navigation and would impact on the enjoyment of the harbour by many of the larger vessels based in it.

In order to prevent a breach occurring, the Conservancy sought to build a rock 'rip rap' wall on the western, seaward side of the Hinge to protect the sand dunes, that were being eroded from the west. This proposal was not accepted by English Nature or the owners of East Head, the National Trust, as it was assessed that it would be damaging to the SSSI status of the site; it is a geomorphologically important mobile sand dune feature. However, by placing a rock berm on the eastern side of the dunes, it was judged that natural processes could run their course for longer.

In recognition of the concerns of English Nature and the National Trust, the planning consent, from Chichester District Council, was a temporary one, for an initial five years, and was conditioned by a requirement to remove the berm if it proved environmentally damaging or unnecessary. The Conservancy were disappointed that the defences could not be placed on the western face of the Hinge, but were entirely satisfied that the rock berm on the eastern side would prevent a tidal channel forming through it, at least in the short to medium term.

The berm was duly built in the Spring of 2000, with money raised from public subscription.

The long term future of East Head is not in the Conservancy's hands. It rests with the relevant statutory authorities responsible for coastal and flood defence matters, namely Chichester District Council, and the Environment Agency with funding from central government through DEFRA. The future for this section of coastline is spelled out in the Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy. So far as East Head is concerned, the short term policy is to 'hold the line' until a further study is undertaken to determine what impact East Head has on navigation, amenity, and the environment of the harbour as a whole. This is a policy to be implemented by the district council and the Environment Agency.

The Pagham to East Head Coastal Defence Strategy should have been approved and adopted in 2000/01 and it was anticipated that the further study into the impact of East Head on the wider harbour would have been completed by now. It has not, and the Conservancy continues to wait to learn the way ahead from the district council and the Environment Agency.

In the meantime, the rock berm which was designed as a short term measure pending the implementation of the Coastal Defence Strategy should remain in place, subject to planning consent.



Why The Harbour Bird Count is So Important

Have you ever wondered just how many Brent geese or Little Egrets visit the harbour, writes Anne de Poitier? Every month volunteers make co-ordinated counts of all the wildfowl, waders and other waterbirds so that we can answer those questions, and show how important Chichester harbour is for birds.

They do the counts at high tide, which is when the waders, forced off the mudflats, gather together in roosts to rest and preen. Wildfowl can in theory be counted on the water - but try doing that in strong wind or heavy rain! Here is a selection of facts and figures derived from the recent counts.

The highest number of birds occur in midwinter, but there are often large quantities much earlier in the year, including during what we think of as summer. Last season, there was a record peak of 228 Little Egret in October. Brent Geese peaked at 8290, the highest since the winter of 1999/2000. This may have been because they had a better breeding season than recently. There was a peak of 1817 Wigeon and 1451 Teal. The diving ducks had mixed fortunes: fewer Goldeneye (peak 27) and more Red Breasted Merganser (191).

Turning to the waders, the story is again one of mixed fortunes. The peak number of Ringed Plover on autumn passage was 217 (August): this is low, and the trend is downward, as is that during the winter period. The autumn peak of Grey Plover was also low at 631. The winter peak (1515) and the average are down as well.

A maximum of only six Sanderling was recorded on the appointed count days during the autumn migration, though two counts of 150 or over were made during the period. The winter average shows a slight improvement but the overall trend is downward. Autumn Dunlin numbers were just half those of the previous season. The winter peak (12,552) was also low.

By contrast, the peak of 952 Black-Tailed Godwit in October was the best since 1985. Similarly, the winter peak of 1053 in November was the best since 1994. Peak numbers of Curlew (1680) in autumn occurred in July, as is often the case. Numbers of greenshank throughout were good but not record breaking. The winter peak of 2450 Redshank was up, and good, and the winter trend is upward.

Changes in numbers are difficult to interpret, and may not be anything to do with the harbour itself. But it is vital to keep counting, and to understand as much as possible. In addition, since all these birds travel to many different places throughout the year, maintaining each link of the chain is essential.

The Little Egret is now a common sight



News from the Harbour Office

Everywhere you turn, there is evidence of Lottery projects that have been started, and which are already making a big impact on the harbour.

Our flagship project, of course, is the Solar Heritage solar powered boat. She was successfully launched at an event, which was combined with the launch of our new management plan. It was attended by over 100 people who enjoyed a lunch of local produce, including slices of harbour beef on miniature Yorkshire puddings and parfait of Selsey crab.

Just in time for the launch, a new pontoon was put in alongside the quay at Dell Quay. It is very grand and gives one the feeling of boarding the QE2! Also at Itchenor, we have a new jetty, which is wider with a longer T-head. This was the venue for the Working Boats Day, a huge success attended by 5-600 people.

The weather was great and there were all sorts of interesting boats to climb aboard including the new Sussex Sea Fisheries vessel with its own on-board RIB, a very fancy Rodman motorboat as sold by Sea Sport marine (I am saving hard!) and a traditional Cornish Shrimper from Eclipse Sailing.

Our full patrol team are now in place, with all of last year's team returning, so I guess they must enjoy working here, along with a couple of new faces. Already they have attended over 40 call outs, including helping a person with fishing hooks stuck in their hand and plucking a little dog from the Bosham Channel.

Despite all the hard work going on we still found time for our annual rounders match against the village of Itchenor. For the first time since 1977 - we won (by ½ a rounder!), though the village insisted that the trophy stay on display in the Ship. *Ali Beckett*



Diary Dates

Here are the details of the forthcoming work parties. Please come and help if you can – it's sociable and no harder than active gardening. Just wear old clothes and bring tough gloves – plus food and drink for an elevenses break! If you are unsure of the meeting place or have any other questions please contact Anne de Potier or Alison Fowler at the Harbour Office.

Friday 3 September *Preparing information packs* (including Friends leaflets!) for the Harbour Conservancy stand at Emsworth Food Fair. Meet at Dell Quay Education Centre at 1000. Morning only.

Tuesday 14 September Chichester Marina: *Cutting reeds and other vegetation* in front of the bird observation hide. We need to do this to improve the habitat and the view. Meet at 1000 on the right hand side (coming from the A286) of the marina approach road, near a gateway by the second speed bump, and some large concrete blocks. You will need wellies - or waders if you have them, and waterproof gloves. Morning only.

Sunday 19 September *Cobnor foreshore: litter clearance*. As part of the Greater Solent litter clearance taking place this weekend. Meet at 1000 at the hard users car park at the far end of the private drive through Cobnor Estate: the turning is on the left just past the turning for the activities centres. Bring waterproof gloves and wellies. Morning only.

Wednesday 22 September Snowhill Marsh, West Wittering: *clearing rubbish* that has blown into this important conservation area. Meet at 1000 in the West Wittering Sailing Club car park, which is at the far end of Coastguard Lane (go as though you are going to the sea, but turn right as you pass the church). Waterproof gloves needed, and wellies advised. Morning only.

Tuesday 28 September *Management of the recently planted woodland on Thorney Island*: removing dead trees in preparation for replanting. Meet at 1000 at the junction of Thorney Road and Thornham Lane, where we will combine into as few cars as possible to go onto Thorney. Morning only. We need to provide a list in advance of the name, car make, colour and registration of those attending. If you think you might come, please provide this information to Anne de Potier, Alison Fowler or Nicky Horter at the Harbour Office 7 days in advance. If you cannot make it on the day, do not worry.

Thursday 7 October *Coppicing* bushes adjacent to the footpath in the southeast of Thorney Island. Meeting point and arrangements as for 28 Sept.

Wednesday 13 October *Coppicing* bushes adjacent to the footpath at Rookwood. Drive as though you are going to West Wittering from Birdham, but as the road turns sharp left just as you enter West Wittering, turn right instead into the private road to Rookwood. Follow the road, round the left hand bend, then turn right, and a bit further on turn right again at a T junction. Park in the garden of the house called Sandhead. Meet at 1000. Morning only.

Wednesday 20 October *Stream management at Fishbourne* (the annual paddle). Clearing some of the plants ready for increased winter flow. Meet at 1000 at Fishbourne millpond; park in Mill Close if necessary. Bring wellies and gloves; waders if you have them. Morning only.

Thursday 28 October *Coppicing and dead hedging at Salterns Copse*. Continuing traditional management to maintain wildlife interest. Meet at 1000 at the public car park, Chichester Marina. We then drive together through the security gate to the wood. If you arrive late go to the Marina Office by the lock gates and ask for the code number. If you know you will be late contact Nicky Horter at the Harbour Office the day before. Stout boots and gloves needed. Morning only.

Monday 1 November *Coppicing* bushes adjacent to the shoreline footpath at Salterns Copse Arrangements as for 28 October.

Wednesday 10 November Another meeting to continue *coppicing* bushes adjacent to the footpath in the southeast part of Thorney Island. Meeting point and arrangements as for 28 Sept.

Tuesday 16 November *Coppicing* bushes adjacent to the footpath at Dell Quay. Meet at 1000 outside the pub at Dell Quay. Morning only.

Thursday 25 November '*Pot luck!*' Contact Anne or Alison at the Harbour Office before 0915 to find out what is happening. Morning only.

Tuesday 30 November General *fallback* morning for unfinished or unpredicted jobs. Contact Anne or Alison at the Harbour Office before 0915 to find out what is happening.