



Natural Environment Group (NEG)

26th April 2023 via MS Teams

Meeting Notes

Welcome

Jess Taylor (JT) from Natural England the NEG chair welcomed everyone to the Teams meeting. There were two new attendees, Fay Pisani from the RSPB and Kirstyn May from the MMO. Round robin introductions were held.

Anna Parry (AP) from Bird Aware Solent asked to speak on paper 2.

Please see Appendix 1 for attendees and apologies.

Actions Arising from the Last Meeting (02/11/22)

Karen McHugh (KM) updated the group on action arising from the last meeting.

The Clean Solent Shores and Seas pages on plastics and microplastics have been updated and Kate Ansell (KA) prepared a paper on [GRP Boat Disposal.pdf \(solentems.org.uk\)](#). There were actions for Sussex IFCA and Natural England. JT had an action to forward a report on plastics and microplastics on designated sites. This is not yet complete.

Action: Jake Wilson (Sussex IFCA) to report to KM on IFCA work on shellfisheries and microplastics, and JT to forward report when complete

Update on NEG actions from SEMS (paper 1)

KM presented Paper 1 that reviews the actions for NEG arising from the SEMS Annual Management Report. She noted:

The Bird Aware five-year review is now complete and is discussed separately in Paper 2.

There is a need to survey members on the Clean Solent Shores and Seas hub (CSSS) to see if the content is helpful.

Mooring and anchoring issues are being addressed by the LIFE ReMEDIES project.

There is a generic action for bird sensitivity mapping in relation to recreational activity, the Solent Seascapes project is now taking this on and ABPmer is subcontracted for the work. The Solent Forum contributed £30k and is chairing the working group for this workstream. This £30k includes the £1k that Natural England gave for mudflat disturbance work.

Peter Hughes (PH) from Chichester Harbour Conservancy has been undertaking monitoring of paddle sports use in the harbour and will present later in the meeting.

Julie Sims (JS) from Bird Aware has sent a request on drone use to their data officer but information is still being compiled from last winter. Initial observations are that there is no change in drone use from previous years.

Action: KM to survey usefulness of CSSS.

Action: Julie Sims to report on Bird Aware drone disturbance data.

Action KM to report on progress of Bird Sensitivity mapping at a future meeting.

Solent Marine Invasives and Biosecurity Planning

KM updated the group on the biosecurity work that the Solent Forum are undertaking with Natural England. Three in person workshops were held in March and a further three online ones will be held in June. The resources will be available by Autumn 2023.

JT noted that everyone needs to buy into this and encouraged everyone to attend the June workshops.

Action: All to attend one of the [June biosecurity workshops](#).

Action: Solent Forum to report on completed resources at the next NEG meeting.

Presentation: Assessing the potential impact of the non-native Asian date mussel in the UK using inter-species comparisons of feeding rate– Kate Dey, University of Portsmouth

Kate Dey (KD) gave a [presentation](#) on her research on the Asian Date Mussel. She received a Solent Forum Mike Clark Bursary Award to assist with her research.

This invasive species is now found in many places with low density currently. Specimens have been found in Farlington Marshes and sub tidally in Southampton Water. She asked that people report sightings on iRecord. Currently habitat suitability is medium as the Solent is on the northern limits of range, but with warmer waters the habitat suitability will increase. The species can be found in both the intertidal and subtidal on both sandy and muddy locations and on hard structures. It has been found in grab samples in Southampton Water.

Peter Hughes (PH) asked how far down in the subtidal do they go. KD replied that the literature records show that they can survive up to about 20 metres deep in the subtidal.

Megan Roberts (MR) asked how long it takes for high density colonies to build, KD said it was difficult to say but the literature shows approx. a few years.

JT asked if we can we do DNA monitoring in grab samples? KD sent some samples to Cefas for them to look at, she is unsure of where that got to, but agreed it is probably the right way forward to monitor them in the future.

JT added that we have confidence that the species is in the Solent, but how far has monitoring happened along the coast? KD replied this is limited as this species is hard to spot, she would guess it is outside of the Solent as it has a long pelagic stage (6-8 weeks) and can travel long distances. Transport levels around the Solent could lead to spread along the south coast. JT added we need to raise awareness outside of the Solent.

NEG Funded Projects

KM had sent an update on NEG Funded Projects with the agenda, as follows, and the AQUASS pre-recorded presentation was shown.

Previous years' projects (2022/3)

- Salt marsh passive regrowth promotion – Lands End, Old Bursledon, AQUASS – Presentation [Passive saltmarsh restoration trial, Bursledon \(You Tube video\)](#) 26/4/23
- Fathom Ecology, Intertidal Seagrass Restoration in the Solent - Appendix 2
- HCC Recoding Snipe on coastal site using one thermal imager
- HCC equipment to capture Snipe at Lymington/Keyhaven - Appendix 2

Projects for 2023/24

- It's the water quality stupid! Id risks to support successful restoration in the Solent, University of Portsmouth

Paper 2: Bird Aware Solent Five Year Review

KM noted that NEG has been tasked with providing an update on the Bird Aware review for the SEMS Management Scheme, Paper 2 was prepared to fulfil this action.

AP clarified that the recently published document is an internal 5-year review of evidence, including all visitor studies, to assess what's changing and happening on the coast in terms of users, birds and the impact that the Bird Aware campaign is having across the Solent. It will be used to support five year forward planning which will have wider consultation and stakeholder involvement.

Action: NEG to support Bird Aware Solent future forward planning exercise.

Watersports with Wildlife: Reducing Disturbance to Coastal Birds, Julie Sims Bird Aware Solent

Julie Sims (JS) presented on the work she has done on preparing an interactive map showing areas in the Solent that are at high risk of disturbing birds. [Watersports with Wildlife: Reducing Disturbance to Coastal Birds.](#)

The map currently covers Hurst Spit to Southampton Water and she is now hoping to work with a wider group of stakeholders to expand into the rest of the Solent. She is also working on information distribution and has a list of businesses and stakeholders that she wants to contact to inform them of this work.

Action: All to support Bird Aware with the expansion of this map into the wider Solent and help to publicise it to local business and stakeholders.

JS added that she has seen a particular problem with kitesurfing disturbing birds around the Calshot area and asked if anyone knows of any mechanisms to minimise this disturbance.

KA noted that you can use [Operation Wave Breaker](#) to record and report low level anti-social behaviour. JT recommended speaking to the MMO Marine Non-Licensable activity team as they are responsible for managing coastal recreational activity. She added that these concerns can also be fed into Solent Seascapes work. Lucy Sheffield (LS) noted that where appropriate this work could link to other ongoing work like the biosecurity work that the Solent Forum are doing that includes recreational boating. Peter Hughes and Megan Roberts noted that Chichester and Langstone Harbours have byelaws against kite surfing for safety reasons.

Presentation: Chichester Harbour Paddlers Survey, Peter Hughes, Chichester Harbour Conservancy

Peter Hughes presented on the work he has been doing to [monitor the use of paddlesports in Chichester Harbour](#). The aim was to gather baseline data about how many kayakers and paddleboarders were using the harbour and look for incidence of bird disturbance.

KA asked if there is the ability to collect any participation information from water sports businesses. PH replied they did consider this, but they have no powers to ask for this information, they could see if one or two paddle board hire companies would volunteer their information.

The group discussed bird habituation to this activity. PH commented that they know birds do get habituated for certain things in certain ways, but after the first site disturbance incident there will be no birds to disturb thereafter so it is difficult to judge.

Finance – Paper 3, Karen McHugh, Solent Forum

KM presented Paper 3 on finance. She noted that the project money for 2023/4 has been allocated. A final end of year account will be available for the next meeting.

Any Other Business

All Relevant Authorities were reminded to complete their SEMS survey return.

Adam Cave reported that the Environment Agency are launching a Sustainability and Innovation fund that focuses on reducing greenhouse gases and carbon and improving biodiversity. He will send KM details to share, but they are particularly keen to talk to anyone who's working on initiatives like innovative mechanical use for seagrass planting and flood defence.

Action: Adam Cave to send KM details of the Sustainability and Innovation fund to share.

Alison Fowler noted that they have had the BBC filming the creation of the Hamble oyster reef. All thought this was great news.

Date of Next Meeting

The group will next meet on **1st November 2023** via MS Teams.

Appendix 1 – Attending and Apologies

Attendees

Jess Taylor – Natural England, NEG Chair
Karen McHugh – Solent Forum, NEG Secretary
Kate Ansell – Solent Forum, SEMS Secretary
Alison Fowler – River Hamble Harbour Authority
Megan Roberts – LHB
Lucy Sheffield – Coastal Partners
Tom Day – Chichester DC
Julie Sims – Bird Aware
Anna Parry – Bird Aware
Peter Hughes – Chichester HC
Grace Booth – IOW Council
Fay Pisani – RSPB
Zoe Keeble – West Sussex CC
Kirstyn May - MMO
Mary Andrew – Natural England
Tim Ferrero – Hants and Wight Wildlife Trust
Jackie Mellan – Environment Agency
Kate Dey – University of Portsmouth
Adam Cave – Environment Agency

Apologies

Winchester CC
Portsmouth University
Kings Harbour Master
Isle of Wight Estuaries
Southampton University
Havant Borough Council
Sussex IFCA
New Forest National Park Authority
NFDC

Appendix 2 – Bursary Award Updates

Fathom Ecology, Intertidal Seagrass Restoration in the Solent

The sites that will be used have now been identified within Chichester Harbour and we have permissions from the conservancy for use for the project. I now have to get out on site and measure redox potential (I have ordered the redox sensor with money from the project and this is due to arrive later this week), slope and take 12 sediment samples for PSA and organic carbon. All being well this work should be completed by this coming weekend.

For the actual seagrass work, I have made to make some small changes to the project so as to comply with what Natural England will license within a SSSI. The original plan had hoped to trail the use of plugs and rhizomes but this has not proved possible and so I have submitted alternative techniques which have proved successful in the Baltic and Wadden seas. These are:

1. Replanting of zostera collected from strandline by attaching plants to an iron nail using corrodable wire. This technique has proved extremely successful in the Baltic and I am hoping will have similar results here.

The other technique proposed involves using modified sealant guns to inject seeds to a depth of 1-4 cm in the mudflat. Two planting densities will be trailed:

2. Planting of seeds at a concentration of 50 seeds per litre sediment
3. Planting seeds at a concentration of 100 seeds per litre sediment.

HCC Snipe – PDF Report from Andrew Colenutt sent separately prior to meeting (text below)

Surveying Snipe and Jack Snipe at Lymington/Keyhaven marshes Following the positive support and funding approval from Solent Forum in April 2022, the New Forest Ringing Group (NFRG) identified the survey equipment to assist their efforts to target the ringing and monitoring of Snipe and Jack Snipe on the Lymington and Keyhaven marshes. The equipment comprising a high-powered torch and a landing net with extendable pole, were sourced and delivered in June. Using the combination of a thermal imaging camera, the torch and landing net, we aimed to explore numbers and map the location of Snipe and Jack Snipe using the site for feeding and roosting, as well as site fidelity. Jack Snipe From discussions with other groups, the approach adopted was to attempt to catch birds at night during the chillier evenings and nights over autumn and winter, when the thermal contrast was greatest, and if possible, nights with full cloud cover, a strong breeze and drizzle. These conditions would mask our approach and in theory, increase our chance of making successful captures. The method involves carrying the landing net and torch whilst using the thermal camera to identify birds sat on the ground and approach without flushing the target. When approximately 5-10m from the bird, the high-powered torch is switched on and focused on the target bird – a term called ‘lamping’. The bird may remain static on the ground in the spotlight and allow one to approach, position the landing net on the fully extended pole, and carefully but quickly drop the net over the bird. The bird is then delicately retrieved from the net, placed in a cloth bag and carried safely and calmly to the ringing station. During the summer months, a number of familiarity sessions were held at Keyhaven marshes to determine the optimal settings on the thermal imager as these were different for each individual, and also trial various techniques for carrying and deploying the equipment. From October onwards further field work visits were made. The welfare of the birds is always paramount and following BTO advice, and liaising with Hampshire County Council, it was not possible to undertake as much fieldwork as intended due to the increased confirmed presence and spread of avian flu, and prolonged periods of freezing or below freezing conditions. In addition, lengthy periods of extremely flooded marshes scuppered a stealthy approach, as well as making it far more difficult for the surveyor to navigate safely. When conditions and availability permitted during autumn/winter 2022/23, further site visits were undertaken at both Lymington and Keyhaven marshes. We have not yet been successful in catching the target species, but we are learning valuable lessons. For example: • Switching between different settings and modes on the thermal imaging torch, • identifying where the birds are favouring although this varies depending on wind strength and direction, rain, brightness and amount of moonlight and how flooded the ground is underfoot • how to approach settled birds (mostly snipe, jack snipe, but other species have been observed such as lapwing, teal, skylark), • the effect light pollution has on our ability to approach targets undetected • how best to carry and operate the pole/net when close enough to catch. We have had many near misses, which is part of the learning curve. We are planning on continuing our attempts during March and then will focus on the autumn, to avoid the breeding season on the marshes. Further fieldwork will of course be dependent on weather, levels of flooding, avian flu etc. Acknowledgments The New Forest Ringing Group

team comprises Marcus Ward, Andrew Colenutt, Helen Schneider, Jamie Ward, Tara & Amy Squire, Saul Alfonso, Rob Farnworth, and Georgie Digby. We are grateful for funding and support received from Solent Forum, Hampshire County Council, BTO, and Hampshire Ornithological Society. Andrew Colenutt February 2022.