

## Conservation Review

Colin Young

As the Conservation Liaison Officer, during the past year I have tried to respond to the various conservation issues raised that are affecting birding in Hampshire. Some of them could be considered of national importance whilst some are still important, but at the local level. My role has covered:

- ? advising on conservation issues and policy that may affect the Society and influence our directions and activities
- ? responding to enquiries from agencies regarding what HOS might be doing or could do on particular issues or in specific areas
- ? acting as the HOS point of contact for conservation-related information and input from the various agencies
- ? communicating to the HOS membership how we are making a difference to bird conservation in Hampshire

My position within HOS has been to act as a focal point for conservation-related activities rather than as someone more proactive in front-line conservation on HOS's behalf. Public interest in the many related aspects of wildlife conservation is steadily increasing, and to continue responding to this movement I am pleased to welcome Peter Thompson as my successor.

Some of the issues that HOS participated in during 2008 are outlined below.

### *New Forest Plan*

During October 2008 I prepared a HOS submission to the consultation draft National Park Plan and Recreation Management Strategy. After talking with Hampshire Wildlife Trust on the best approach I made the following suggestions:

- ? The protection given to the existing SSSIs, SINCs, Ramsar sites, etc should be more greatly enforced – this will protect the areas where increased human recreation is likely to disturb bird populations
- ? HOS support for designated dog-walking car parks so that dog walkers can take their animals clearly away from ground-breeding bird habitats

These areas of concern were probably submitted with differing emphasis by other organisations that had greater resources to respond to such a lengthy and technical planning document. However, our Management Committee's view is that it is important that HOS did make its own response to the National Park Authority to make them aware of our concerns on the likely impact on bird habitat by the proposed changes. Although we were not invited to participate in the further working groups and workshops our views will be represented by the larger bird organisations and conservation bodies.

## ***HMS Daedulus***

HOS was invited to attend a stakeholder meeting to discuss the ecological issues and how these may have an impact upon the proposed development that is planned for Lee-on-the Solent at the former Royal Navy base at HMS Daedulus.

I was asked to provide some specific advice regarding dark-bellied brent geese and the potential for them to use parts of the site as a feeding resource (an area of open, improved grassland). A habitat survey that locates the protected species has been prepared and identifies any impacts and opportunities that the proposed development may have on these species. The site, excluding the airfield, will occupy 82.4 ha/204 acres and the development will take a number of years before it is complete.

## ***Military aircraft activity***

There can be nothing more frustrating to a keen bird observer who is quietly watching a rare bird when suddenly a low flying helicopter appears on the scene. This has happened several times to our members during the past year.

In response to this I contacted Defence Estates, the agency responsible for managing Ministry of Defence property and who are able to intercede on our behalf with the military authorities on air movements. South of the A31 is within the Southampton Avoidance Area and there should be no military helicopters operating below 500 feet over open countryside without the commanding officer's express approval. North of the A31 falls into Low Flying Area 1 and will routinely see helicopter traffic.

Defence Estates would be happy to consider requests from HOS for temporary avoidance if we wished to submit an application. Some applications have been considered for specific areas for a limited time period in the breeding season. Each request is considered in the light of training requirements but currently there are no limitations in place around the Salisbury Plain area where there are significant colonies of rare breeding birds as well as winter hen harrier roosts.

## ***Local intervention***

Finally, amongst the larger conservation issues that are briefly mentioned above it is easy to overlook the valuable contributions that individuals can make in their area.

As a good example, one HOS member from Ringwood has been monitoring for several years the changes in natural habitat close to his home. His campaigning has addressed many concerns. These include: proposals to increase mineral extraction; rising water levels along the Avon valley; the steady encroachment of weeds in lakes that affect breeding waders; and coarse fishing interests. His accurate recording and photographs of the changes to his local patch have been sent to the local authorities and environment agencies. These have generated positive action resulting in improved maintenance of the local wildlife habitat.