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# Conservation Progress Report

[This contribution is the thirteenth in an annual series (beginning in 1989 - Newsletter No.42) reporting on aspects of conservation affecting Hampshire's birds].

## **Enhanced “conservation” activity and reporting policy**

The introduction to the first report of the present series (1989) included the following quotes: (1) from a recent Management Committee meeting “There is a belief that more people might join HOS if the Society’s position on conservation was more widely understood” and (2) from the third objective of the society... “to support and encourage the preservation and conservation of wild birds and places of ornithological interest in the county and protect these from injury, ill-treatment or destruction”. It was noted that until 1989 conservation issues had received only irregular attention. A further upgrading of activity and reporting on conservation matters has been pursued in the past 18 months. The Society has taken the lead in forming a partnership with the BTO, HCC, HWT and RSPB (SE England office) to help progress the Biodiversity Action Plan for birds in Hampshire, the first formal meeting taking place last June; we issued a HOS Surveys and Monitoring Future Strategy statement at the 2000 AGM (reproduced in the Spring 2000 Newsletter); all issues of the Newsletter in the last year have carried items related to the conservation of Hampshire’s birds; and the Chairman devoted a substantial part of this annual report for 2000 (presented at the 2001 AGM) to HOS’s activity in this area.

## **CRoW Act**

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act – to give it its proper title – thought by some to be a “right to roam” (it is nothing of the sort – the concept of “access land” is introduced) became law at the beginning of February. It is a fairly massive document, containing 5 Parts and 16 Schedules, with a number of significant improvements for wildlife conservation compared to the Wildlife Acts, which are replaced by Part III of the present Act with effect from 30 Jan 2001. For example, the Biodiversity Action Plan process will now have statutory under-pinning:

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for SSSIs existing consents can be revoked in some circumstances; powers of entry (by EN) have been extended considerably; there is no longer to be “deemed consent”; if an owner/occupier is found guilty of carrying out an operation causing damage to one of the features for which an SSSI has been notified, the o/o will be liable to a hefty fine and be required to undertake restoration of that feature. There is much more: briefing papers are available from DETR, see their website.

## **Dibden terminal Inquiry**

A recurring topic in these reports (eg NL Nos.74, 82)! A quick thumb-nail reminder of why it matters what happens at Dibden. The land on which it is proposed to build the container terminal itself is a SINC. The adjacent mudflats, which would be removed by dock construction to provide 2 km of berths, form part of the Solent and Southampton Water SPA and Ramsar Site. It also abuts the Solent Maritime cSAC. The development would inevitably also impact indirectly, negatively and seriously, on a much larger part of the designated international, national and local Sites – for instance as a result of proposed dredging disposal on the Hythe to Calshot salt marshes. All this “land” is important for waterfowl feeding, roosting, on migration and over-wintering, and for breeding shorebirds; not to mention its other wildlife interests.

Things are beginning to move on the planning front. Associated British Ports (ABP) submitted their long-awaited applications last October, all the many volumes of it. Fortunately there is also some literature which summarises their intentions. One is unconvinced by their arguments that there is an economic case “in the national interest”. The latter test has to be demonstrated in order to develop and potentially damage international wildlife sites.

The likely chronology of events is now: a pre-Inquiry meeting on 23 April, called by the Planning Inspector appointed to hear the public examination of the application, while the Inquiry itself is likely to commence in September 2001.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) received some 6000 comments, mostly against the proposals (including HOS), by the deadline. The Secretary of State – John Prescott – called in the application for an examination in public. That is the process which is

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unfolding. There are some 50 parties wishing to play major roles at the inquiry, including most of the relevant statutory and non-governmental organisations. The only “big” players in the “pro” lobby are: ABP, Southampton City Council and the Transport and General Workers Union; while the “anti” lobby includes: HCC, NFDC, Environment Agency, English Nature, Esso (Exxon-Mobil) and other Waterside industries, Council for National Parks/Countryside Agency, Ministry of Defence, RSPB, HWT, WWF(UK), etc.

Watch this space; those on *hoslist* may care to follow developments there.

## **New Forest National Park boundary**

The Countryside Agency has just completed a public consultation on its Draft proposals for a boundary to the New Forest National Park. HOS has joined others in suggesting the inclusion of further land meeting National Park criteria, on all sides of the Forest. The Draft proposal essentially followed the Heritage Area boundary with extensions along Southampton Water (including the Dibden reclaim), along the NW Solent coast and in the Avon Valley. The additions proposed in response to the consultation include all the marshes along the western shore of the Test estuary/ Southampton Water, the NW Solent to low water, and parts of the Dorset heaths (including part of Ringwood Forest) west of the Avon. The target is to declare the National Park, with appropriate administration, next year.

## **Thames Basin Heaths pSPA**

The proposal of the early 1990s had to be withdrawn because many of the sites included did not have SSSI status. A revised submission is about to go to Brussels with many of the sites, but not all, now with SSSI status, reinstated.

## **Avon Valley**

Although the Environment Agency has considerable powers with respect to river catchments, is responsible for producing Local Environment Action Plans (LEAPs), Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs) and can advise on many planning issues, it lacks statutory authority to stop some potentially damaging developments (such as building housing estates on

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flood plains!). The recent EU Water Framework Directive, due to be adopted into UK law by the end of 2003, is based around the concept of river basin planning, taking a holistic approach to water management. Its emphasis on ecological interests, as well as chemical quality, will mark a change in approach for the UK. The writer has for some time been advocating such an approach for the Hampshire Avon; it is difficult to see a viable alternative if the characteristic and internationally important ecological features of the Avon and its flood plain are to be retained and enhanced. Because the Avon acts as a geographical boundary for many purposes, the achievement of such a vision will require co-operation between a large number of parties. These include 3 County and many District Councils, 2 or 3 Regional Development Agencies, 3 EN teams, EA (Wessex), 2 RSPB regions, 3 County Wildlife Trusts, several water companies, aggregate enterprises, landfill concessions, landowners, fishing interests, the MoD and others. An umbrella structure like a National Park, or an EN Natural Area “with teeth”, is probably required.

## **Biodiversity Action Plans**

Species Action Plans for birds in Hampshire are due to appear in an addition to vol. 2 of the County BAP due in late September this year.

At the Jan 2001 meeting of the Joint Hampshire (BAP) Bird Monitoring Group, it was agreed to group species according to habitat requirements, resulting in 5 groups. With the likely species concerned, these are, in order of priority: 1) Farmland seed-eating birds (Grey Partridge, Skylark, Linnet, [Bullfinch], Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer); 2) Heathland birds (Hobby, Nightjar, Woodlark, Dartford Warbler); 3) Wet Meadows birds (Lapwing, Snipe, Redshank, Yellow Wagtail and possibly wintering Whitefronts and Bewick's); 4) Reed-bed birds (Bittern, Bearded Tit, Reed Warbler and possibly Aquatic Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler, Reed Bunting); and 5) Foreshore birds (Little Egret, Grey Plover, Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit). HOS has been invited to take responsibility for producing appropriate Action Plans for these groups. All the species listed are on the County priority list, or are likely to be there shortly (eg Yellowhammer). One or two species, including Dark-bellied Brent Goose, may merit a single species SAP.

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The role of the HOS Sites Register survey in relation to these action plans is currently under review.

All but 2 of the 77 species mentioned in “The state of the UK’s birds 2000”, produced by the RSPB, WWT and BTO, detailing population trends of widespread and common breeding birds, are regular breeders in Hants. This is one measure of sustainability used by HM Government.

## **Song Thrush**

This is one of the species being used as a measure of sustainability. If possible please continue with the survey started last year and/or promote it to primary schools, Watch groups and Wildlife gardeners (details in previous Newsletters or contact Hampshire Wildlife Trust)

## **Keyhaven**

Concern about the future of the Keyhaven marshes, as a result of extraction activities, is being pursued with HCC. It is interesting to note that Keyhaven featured in the very first of these reports!

## **Foot & Mouth**

The Foot & Mouth epidemic, a disaster for the many farmers and others directly affected, is also stopping almost all organised survey work for 2001. The BTO announced at the end of February that most breeding season surveys planned for 2001 had been postponed to 2002 and routine ongoing surveys (WFBS, BBS and WeBS) had been suspended until further notice.

As always, my thanks for help during the past year go to many people, but especially those in the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, in the RSPB’s South-East England Office; to Robin Saunders and Russell Wynn for keeping an eye on developments along the NW Solent shore; to John Clark and John Eyre for help with the Thames Basin Heaths pSPA and Thames LEAP; and to Jess Pain for input concerning the Avon Valley. Background information comes from a much wider range of sources, including the County Council ecologists, Environment Agency and English Nature staff. However, any resulting errors or confusion are mine.

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