

## Policy 8 Thriving Wildlife

The abundant wildlife and plants of Chichester Harbour will continue to be cherished, respected, allowed space to flourish, and will live in harmony with humans. Ongoing species research will continue to help inform management decisions.

Chichester Harbour is a birdwatcher's paradise because it is **internationally important for its birdlife**. The Special Protection Area, which was designated to protect the birdlife, was awarded in recognition of 15 species of non-breeding waders and waterfowl, three species of breeding tern and for its overall water bird assemblage. Peak counts of water birds in mid-winter regularly exceed 48,000, with **dark-bellied brent geese** and **dunlin** the two most abundant species. The Conservancy works closely with Bird Aware Solent to help manage levels of recreational disturbance in the Special Protection Area.

**Recreational disturbance** is the term used to describe the actions of humans directly causing wildlife to move, take flight or 'flush' for fear of predation. One of the most pertinent forms of disturbance comes from dogs that may instinctively charge towards birds as they are resting or feeding. Research undertaken by Bird Aware Solent found that on average 1 in 4 households have a dog in South East England, which results in a lot of dog walking



around Chichester Harbour, and potentially frequent disruptions to the wildlife as more houses are built. Threatened and endangered species are considered to be particularly vulnerable to this form of disturbance and specifically, during the overwintering period. To help address this, all new developments within 5.6 kilometres of the Special Protection Area are required to pay a levy to be used to raise awareness of recreational disturbance and thereby help to mitigate the problem. Aside from the overwintering birds, Chichester Harbour is also important for passage migrants such as **osprey**, which stop off to feed and rest on their way to and from their breeding grounds in northern England and Scotland.

Chichester and Langstone Harbours have **the largest colony of harbour seals and grey seals in the Solent**, with annual counts revealing that numbers are gradually increasing. Recent counts have shown there are around 40 harbour (common) seals and 10 grey seals in late summer. Previous monitoring of the movement of seals (Solent Seal Tagging Project, 2010) proved that they were foraging throughout the Solent and along the Sussex coast.

The Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) has carried out biennial small fish surveys in Chichester Harbour since 2010, in collaboration with Chichester Harbour Conservancy. So far, 48 species have been recorded, with **herring, common gobies, sand smelt, golden grey mullet, black bream and bass** forming the bulk of the samples. These surveys illustrate the importance of the Harbour as a designated Bass Nursery. Other sub-tidal species include **peacock worm** and **squat lobster**.

Historically, Chichester Harbour has also supported a large **oyster** fishery. It is open for a short period each autumn to licensed vessels and is regulated by Sussex IFCA.

The ditches, streams and ponds within Chichester Harbour also support populations of **water voles** which require sensitively managed waterside vegetation, and well-connected wetland areas. Many of the hedges, orchards and woodlands support populations of **bats** and **hedgehogs**.

A number of sites around the Harbour, such as some upper saltmarshes, shingle ridges and coastal grasslands are botanically rich. Fishbourne Meadows is notable for its population of **southern marsh orchids**, and Ellanore Spit for its community of shingle plants including **sea kale**. In late summer, many of the Harbour's saltmarshes bloom with extensive patches of **sea lavender**.

#### MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

- National decline in nature through decreasing wildlife and biodiversity.
- Recreational disturbance, particularly to wintering birds but also to other species such as seals and water voles.
- Chichester Harbour is a designated Bass Nursery Area and its fish stocks need to be protected.
- High levels of night time light pollution have detrimental impact on nocturnal animals.
- Storm surges may damage key habitats, like shingle banks and sand dunes.
- Uncertainty as to how climate change will impact on the variety of habitats and wildlife.
- Over collection of ragworm.
- Uncontrolled collection of clams.

#### PRINCIPAL PARTNERS

- Arun & Rother Rivers Trust
- Arun & Western Streams Catchment Partnership
- Bird Aware Solent
- British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)
- Chichester Harbour Conservancy
- Chichester Harbour Trust
- Eastern Solent Coastal Partnership
- Environment Agency
- Farmers
- Friends of Chichester Harbour
- Hampshire Ornithological Society
- Individual Residents
- Landowners
- Langstone Harbour Board
- Local Authorities
- Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group (MW&HG)
- National Trust
- Natural England
- Parish Councils
- Residents Associations
- The RSPB
- Sussex IFCA
- Sussex Ornithological Society
- Thorney Island Conservation Group
- Wildfowlers
- The Wildlife Trusts



### Actions to be taken by Chichester Harbour Conservancy:

- 8.1 In partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology, to deploy Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) volunteer counters to monitor Special Protection Area birds throughout the year, including breeding bird surveys.
- 8.2 To create a variety of secure, safe seabird breeding sites, which may include islands and use of fences to prevent access by foxes.
- 8.3 To install floating tern rafts at appropriate locations around the Harbour.
- 8.4 To develop new management agreements to secure important wintering and breeding bird sites.
- 8.5 To prepare and publish a new Priority Species Strategy for Chichester Harbour.
- 8.6 To raise awareness about the issue of recreational disturbance.
- 8.7 In partnership with Langstone Harbour Board, to monitor the seal population and investigate their diet and behaviour.
- 8.8 To undertake a new sub-tidal survey of Chichester Harbour.

### Actions to be taken by other stakeholders:

- 8.9 To improve habitats for pollinators and insects.
- 8.10 To implement the Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy.
- 8.11 To invest developer contributions through Bird Aware Solent to help look after the Special Protection Area.
- 8.12 To ensure known water vole sites are sensitively managed.
- 8.13 To only plant native species in Chichester Harbour whilst removing non-native plant species.
- 8.14 To ensure fish and shellfish stocks are carefully and sustainably managed for future generations (businesses, Sussex IFCA, etc.).
- 8.15 To develop and implement new small-scale conservation projects (Wildfowlers).
- 8.16 To promote and participate in relevant national campaigns, including the Garden Bird Survey, the Farmland Bird Survey and Big Butterfly Count.

