

Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project

Project Update - January 2010

Introduction

The Solent Forum's Nature Conservation Group is coordinating a project to investigate the impacts of recreational pressure on the nationally and internationally important populations of birds that shelter, feed and breed in the Solent. The project will assess the current and future potential effects of visitor pressure and recreational use on these sites, including that arising from proposed new housing development within reach of the Solent shores. It will establish whether avoidance or mitigation measures are necessary to ensure the future protection of the Solent's important birds.

The project is being supported by several organisations including Natural England, the Environment Agency, Hampshire County Council, Chichester Harbour Conservancy, Chichester District Council, the RSPB, the New Forest National Park Authority, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH).

Project Aims

1. Measuring the distribution and intensity of visitor activities and their effects on birds.
2. Determining the current impact of human disturbance on the bird populations of the Solent.
3. Predicting the potential future impact of additional human disturbance on the bird populations of the Solent resulting from proposed housing developments.
4. Recommending the scale, nature, location and extent of potential mitigation measures.



Photo courtesy of RSPB

Phase 1

Phase I of this project is complete and has been published. It has:

- Collated existing data on the distribution of housing and human activities around the Solent.
- Assessed stakeholder opinion of the importance of recreational disturbance on birds through a series of workshops and interviews.
- Collated data on bird distribution and abundance around the Solent.
- Outlined the range of mitigation measures that could potentially minimise the impacts of increased recreational disturbance caused by increased housing in the Solent area.



The report can be downloaded from the Forum's website at www.solentforum.org/forum/sub_groups/Nature_Conservation_Group/solent_disturbance/.

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Phase 2

Phase 2 will assess the current impact of visitor numbers and activities on the survival rates of wintering waterbirds throughout the Solent. The first part of this phase of the project, a trial survey of wintering bird disturbance, was carried out during the winter of 2008-09.

It recorded disturbance to:

- Birds feeding on the intertidal at low water.
- Birds roosting or feeding at high water on coastal habitats (saltmarsh, shingle, sea walls and other coastal structures).
- Birds on the water at high water.

The project is now carrying out further bird survey work to augment the data collected last winter, in addition to on-site visitor surveys, to help understand how people currently use the Solent for recreation and what features attract them to the area. Future aspects of the project will include household surveys, modelling work and strategic mitigation recommendations.



Photo courtesy of RSPB

Further Information

For more information on this and other Solent Forum projects you can visit our website at www.solentforum.org. You can also contact the Forum Office on 01962 846027 or email info@solentforum.org.

The work of the Solent Forum Nature Conservation Group can be viewed at www.solentforum.org/forum/sub_groups/Nature_Conservation_Group/.

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