
March 22 – March 23



Pagham Harbour and Medmerry Recreation Mitigation Strategy

Community Conservation Ranger Report



Ranger's Report

Summary

This report provides a summary of the work conducted by the two Community Conservation Rangers (1.5FTE) funded by the Pagham Harbour and Medmerry Recreation Mitigation Strategy. This report covers the dates from 31st March 2022 – 31st March 2023 and includes information around the range of activities conducted by the ranger team, including patrols, signage, events, and social media. A summary of breeding success at the RSPB Pagham Harbour and RSPB Medmerry nature reserves have also been included to provide some great context on the impact of the ranger team in helping to reduce recreational pressures to support the Special Protection Area feature species.

Recruitment

Our new full time Community Conservation Ranger, Gail Richens, commenced in post 21/3/22. A new part time Assistant Conservation Ranger, Georgia Warren, also began working in the team on 23/7/22. Georgia's part time post was advertised as primarily a weekend post to ensure that ranger cover is available at busy weekend times. Gail's full-time ranger role also includes some weekend working days; but having the part time ranger working on weekend days specifically has ensured ranger cover is available throughout the week.

There is a core group of volunteer rangers that also patrol the site, but this tends to be during the week which again shows the need for the weekend Assistant Conservation Ranger post. Currently, we have 20 volunteer rangers who are a great asset to the team. The combination of the ranger team resourced through staffing and volunteering is a fantastic example of a novel approach to mitigating recreational disturbance impacts on a coastal SPA.

Spring/Summer 2022

Patrols

Due to IT issues patrol reports from 21/3/22 to 28/4/22 have not been captured but were undertaken by the new ranger from around approximately 30/3/22 onwards. During the period 28/4/22 to 27/8/22 the conservation rangers recorded 32 patrols across the reserves with 181 interactions with visitors.

Please note: This period contained a significant amount of pre-booked annual leave used by the conservation ranger who was also undertaking induction and training as a new starter with the RSPB. The assistant conversation ranger did not commence employment until 23/7/22 by which time the main breeding season for shorebirds/seabirds had finished.

During the period 1/4/22 to 31/8/22 the volunteer rangers recorded 171 patrols across the reserves. The number of interactions has not been recorded due to ongoing IT issues, but they were out and about across the reserves talking to visitors about the birds and advising them on how to avoid disturbing the breeding shorebirds and seabirds. The conservation rangers and volunteer rangers carried with them a pack containing pictures of the relevant birds, a life sized model of a Little Tern and leaflets about disturbance and dog walking to help educate visitors about the breeding birds and how they can help them. The pack also contained some “spot the eggs” and “spot the chicks pictures” showing visitors just how hard it can be to see the eggs and chicks.

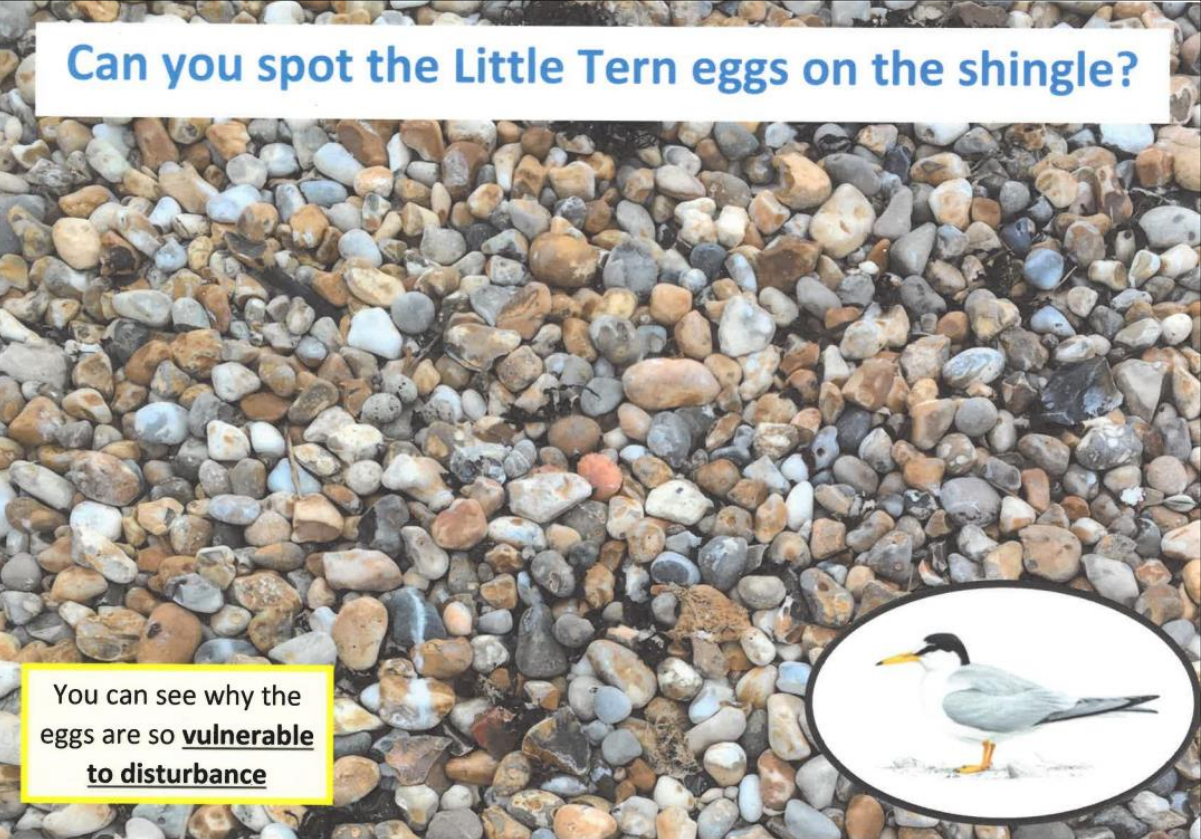


Can you spot the three chicks in this photo?

Many chicks are now venturing away from their nests. They are well camouflaged against shingle and vegetation. Please help us give them the best chance of survival and stay well away from the nesting areas.


Inspiring everyone to give nature a home
[rspb.org.uk/paghamharbour](https://www.rspb.org.uk/paghamharbour)
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Visitor pack including “spot the chicks” (above) and “spot the eggs” (below)



Can you spot the Little Tern eggs on the shingle?

You can see why the eggs are so **vulnerable to disturbance**



Summer breeding results

The patrols undertaken by both the conservation rangers and the volunteer rangers helped to produce some of the highest recorded fledge counts on record for both Little Terns and Mediterranean Gulls. Little Terns are one of Pagham Harbours SPA species so this result is brilliant news and evidence that all the work done by the ranger team has assisted with this result. The colony pair numbers and the fledge counts are listed below:



Little Tern



Common Tern



Sandwich Tern



Mediterranean Gull



Black-headed Gull

Species	Colony (pairs)	No. fledged	
Little Tern*	31	26	(highest on record)
Sandwich Tern	335	148	(3 rd highest on record)
Common Tern*	4	1	
Mediterranean Gull	282	269	(highest on record)
Black-headed Gull	1434	473	

**Pagham Harbour SPA feature species*

Fledge counts for breeding Ringed Plovers have not yet been fully confirmed but there were 8 pairs overall spread between Church Norton spit, Breach Island and Pagham spit. We saw at least 4 young birds with parents when out on patrols, so we know that at least 4 fledged from 8 nests. Predation was a factor with breeding Ringed Plovers in 2022 with a high number of Crows in attendance on Church Norton spit. We know we lost one nest on Church Norton spit but do not know the cause, but this was most likely predation from Crows.



Little Tern eggs taken under licence on Breach Island



Little Tern chick and egg taken under licence on Breach Island

Autumn/Winter 2022/23

Patrols

During the period 01/09/22 to 31/03/23 the conservation rangers undertook 57 patrols across the reserves and recorded 259 interactions with visitors. These figures include 6 pop up events held across the Pagham Harbour reserve which have been trialled as new ways to engage with visitors. A number of volunteer rangers have helped out with some of the pop-up events too which offers them a chance to engage in a slightly different way.

During the period 01/9/22 to 31/03/22 the volunteer rangers completed 175 patrols across the reserves. As noted previously, due to IT issues we do not have a count of the number of interactions the volunteer rangers had while out on patrol.

The first 3 pop-up events were held in conjunction with the Great Coastal Birdwatch – a cross partnership event with Bird Aware Solent who have run the birdwatch as the Great Solent Birdwatch in previous years. The pop-up events were run to encourage visitors to take part in the birdwatch which is similar to the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch but involved counting coastal birds for one hour instead of garden birds.

The conservation rangers and some of the volunteer rangers set up in locations where visitors were likely to be able to easily spot birds and were on hand with spotting scopes and binoculars to point the birds out. This was a great way to engage with all visitors and took place during October half term meaning that lots of families could be involved. We received lots of verbal feedback at the pop ups as to how educational they were and lots of visitors, particularly children were excited to look through the spotting scopes and see the birds close up. Through these pop ups we were able to talk to visitors about the overwintering birds and how everyone can reduce disturbance to overwintering birds. The Great Coastal Birdwatch was advertised on our Facebook and Twitter pages and via a poster in the visitor centre and a board outside.



Display board advertising the Great Coastal Birdwatch at the RSPB Pagham Harbour Visitor Centre



Advert for the Great Coastal Birdwatch, a cross partnership event hosted by Bird Aware Solent, Bird Wise North & East Kent, and now Pagham Harbour and Medmerry



RSPB Pagham Harbour

Published by Gail Richens · October 13, 2022 ·

The Great Coastal Birdwatch is coming to RSPB Pagham Harbour between 22nd-30th October 2022. 🐦🐦

We are teaming up with our friends and coastal partners [Bird Aware Solent](#) to get involved in this exciting citizen science project, raise awareness of the over wintering birds in the harbour and advise how everyone can help them by giving them the space they need to feed and rest.

Come along to one of our pop up events on the reserve, grab a form and count all the coastal birds you see in an hour. There will be friendly rangers on site to help with bird ID and collect your completed forms. Alternatively, if you can't get to a pop up event, collect a form from the Visitor Centre during the week and return it after your count. Remember to stick to the paths to avoid disturbing the birds and move further away if they become alert.

Please see below for pop up dates and locations (please check our social media on the day for any changes due to bad weather)

Wednesday 26th October 10am-12pm by the Ferry Channel

Friday 28th October 10.30am-12.30pm by the benches at Church Norton

Saturday 29th October 11.30am-1.30pm on the North Wall



RSPB Pagham Harbour

Published by Gail Richens · October 28, 2022 ·

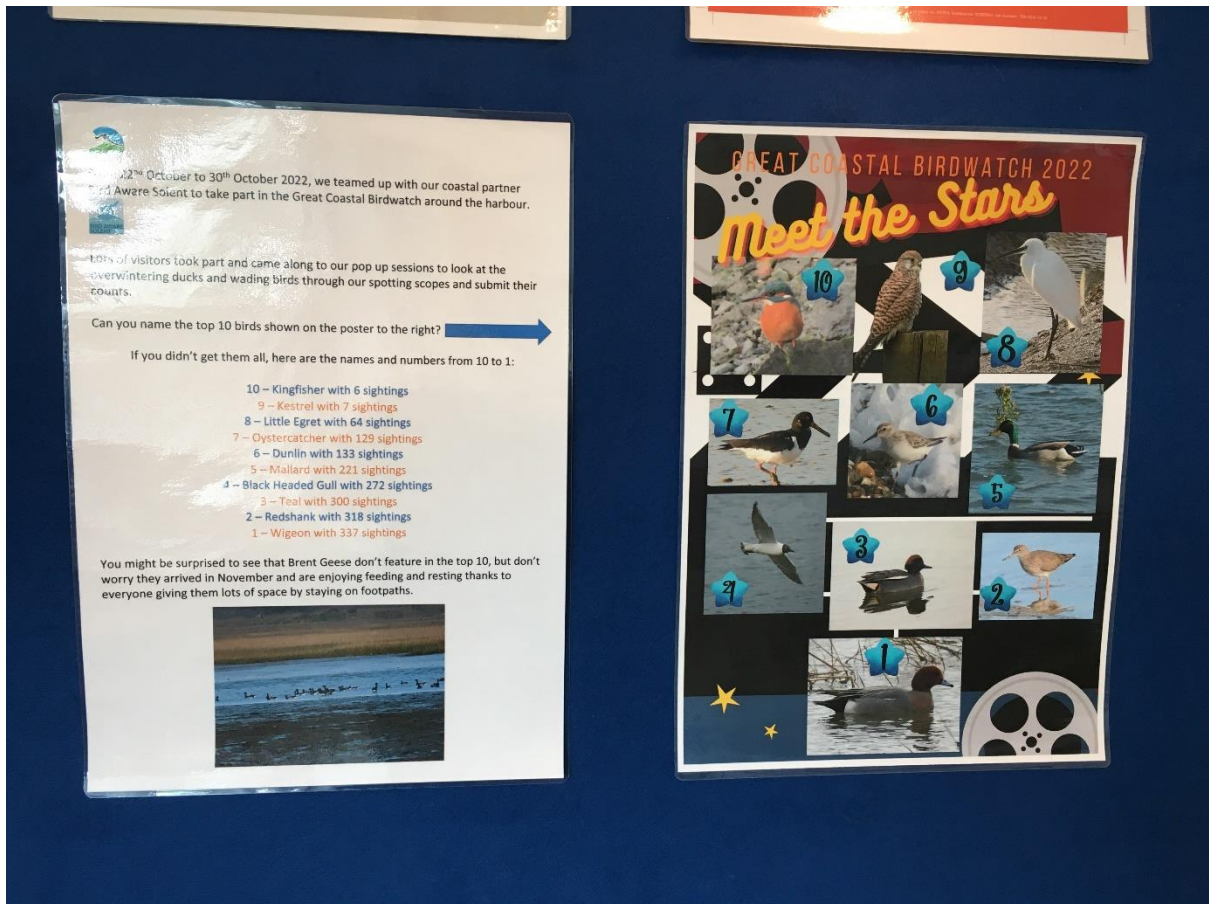
Thanks to everyone who has taken part in the Great Coastal Birdwatch so far this week at the reserve. You still have until Sunday to come down and take part. We will be on the North Wall (near Breach Pool) tomorrow (29/10/22) from 11.30am to 1.30pm so come down and see us. The turnstone in the photo below is just one of the many birds you might spot. The birds are busy feeding during low tides and then resting at high tides, so they really appreciate everyone sticking to the paths to avoid disturbing them. If birds become alert and stop feeding or resting, you can help them by moving a little further away. Remember to keep your furry friends close to you when you are on the reserve too and avoid them running onto the saltmarsh or mudflats as they could disturb the birds but also get stuck!

[Bird Aware Solent](#)



Social media was also updated during the week to encourage more visitors to take part and to promote the messages on how to avoid disturbing the birds and to keep dogs under close control on the reserves.

The Great Coastal Birdwatch week and pop ups were an excellent way of engaging with lots of visitors and encouraging good behaviour on the coast. We analysed all the data from the forms submitted and displayed the results in the Visitor Centre at Pagham Harbour.



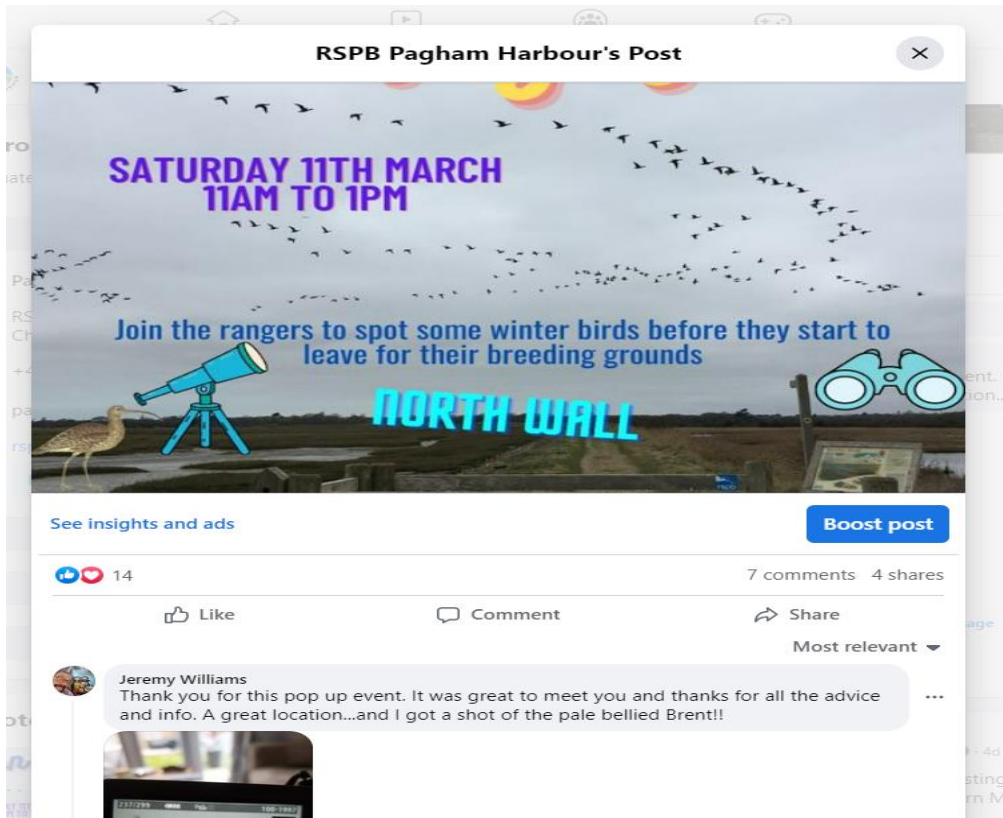
From the success of the Great Coastal Birdwatch pop ups we have continued to hold these free events that visitors can just turn up to without the need to book. These have been really popular community engagement events with lots of visitors coming along and seeing the birds through the spotting scopes and binoculars. We find that people are more likely to care about something if they can see it and these events have provided that opportunity. We have engaged with lots of different users of the reserves including dog walkers, birdwatchers, photographers, walkers, and lots of families. All the pop ups have been advertised on our Facebook and Twitter pages and the pop-up areas selected for the likelihood of seeing the birds easily.

We plan to hold more pop-up events throughout the breeding season in 2023 to promote good behaviour around the areas of the reserve where our ground nesting and

shore nesting birds are located. We hope to educate visitors about the breeding birds and how important it is that they are not disturbed from their nests.



Example social media posts and posters used to advertise the pop ups



Feedback from someone who had seen the pop up advertised on our Facebook page and came along to the reserve specifically for the event.



Photos from North Wall Bon Voyage to the winter birds pop up.

Social media

Both the conservation rangers have aimed to raise the Social Media profile of the reserve over the last few months. We have tried to make some of the posts interactive by asking questions or asking followers to name how many species they can spot in photos or let us know what they have seen on the reserve. We have taken the conscious decision not to add disturbance messaging to every post to avoid saturating followers with the same messages. We feel followers may switch off from our posts if we bombard them with the same type of message so have chosen key times or posts to add guidance on how to avoid disturbing the birds.








 **RSPB Pagham Harbour**
Published by Georgia Warren · March 5 at 3:20 PM · 🌐


This Water Rail has been showing well recently, and is best seen just down from our visitor centre at low tide. They're secretive individuals, particularly in the breeding season, and are usually heard before they're seen (their call is similar to a squealing pig 🐷). Thank you to all our visitors that stick to the paths and allow the birds, including the Water Rail, to feed in peace and gain as much energy as possible without needing to fly away 🙌🐦🐸



0:10 / 0:13



 **RSPB Pagham Harbour**
Published by Georgia Warren · February 18 · 🌐

This Spotted Redshank has made regular appearances in the Ferry Channel this month - it's almost like it knew it was Ferry February! It has been feeding very well, with their usual diet being insect larvae, worms, and small crustaceans and fish 🐛🐛🐛

Spotted Redshanks are a scarce winter visitor to the UK, making them an amber-listed bird. They are slightly larger than Redshanks with a longer bill, darker eye stripe and no white wing bars. More information can be found on our website: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/.../bird-a-z/spotted-redshank/>

#ferryfebruary See less

Edit

👍❤️ 46 5 💬 2 ➦



RSPB Pagham Harbour

Published by Gail Richens · December 6, 2022 ·



With chilly weather now arriving, remember our birds and wildlife can't put a hat and scarf on to keep warm. So please help them out by giving them lots of space to feed and rest when you see them.

Small actions like sticking to the footpaths to avoid disturbing them can really help to make a difference to our winter birds. They need to save lots of energy to keep warm and survive.

If you are walking dogs on the reserve, please remember to keep them under close control and don't let them venture off the footpaths.



RSPB Pagham Harbour

21

1 comment 5 shares

RSPB Pagham Harbour
Published by Georgia Warren · February 14 ·

This one is for all you pLOVERS out there...
If you've ever wondered about the love life of a plover (who hasn't right..?) then this post is for you:

🥰 We have 5 species from the plover family that visit the reserve, three of which breed in the area. These are:

- UK breeders: Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Golden Plover (North of England, Scotland, Wales)
- Winter visitor to UK: Grey Plover (breed in Alaska, Canada & Russia)

💕 Ringed Plovers and Little Ringed Plovers are monogamous... sort of! They will stick with the same mate for an entire breeding season, but they may change partners each year. This is the same for Lapwings, although some individuals are polygamous. Grey Plovers and Golden Plovers are monogamous for several years, and sometimes for a lifetime.

🥰 Golden Plovers and Little Ringed Plovers perform captivating aerial displays with butterfly-like movements as well as songs during the breeding season to impress the opposite sex. Male Lapwings also carry out impressive aerial displays with dives and rolls to excite the ladies and ward off any rival males.

💕 In all of these 5 plover species, the females lay around 4 eggs and both the males and females take turns incubating them on the nest, and both help to raise the chicks.

🥰 Plovers make great parents – nests are vulnerable to predators as they're on the ground, and several plover species have been observed pretending to have a broken wing to lead potential predators away from the nest and protect their chicks.

Now that you've learnt a bit about the plovers, why not visit our reserve today and see if you can spot any of them! 👁️

LAPWING – RED LISTED

Labels: Fun hairdo (crest), Black bill, Black on face, White front, Pink legs.

RINGED PLOVER – RED LISTED

Labels: Brown back and top of head, No ring around the eye, Orange bill with black tip, Distinctive black & white face and neck, White front, Orange legs.

GREY PLOVER – AMBER LISTED

Labels: Dark legs, White rum, Brown back.

WINTER PLUMAGE

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER – GREEN LISTED

Labels: Brown back and top of head, Yellow ring around the eye, Black bill, Distinctive black.

GOLDEN PLOVER – GREEN LISTED

Labels: Distinctive white stripe, Black gold and black back and head, Black front, Dark legs, Pale buff/white front, Paler colouration back and head.

SUMMER PLUMAGE **WINTER/JUVENILE PLUMAGE**

[See insights and ads](#) [Boost post](#)

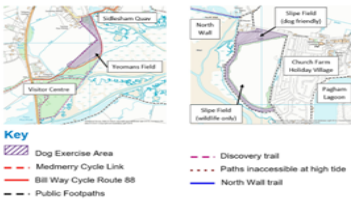
👍❤️ 34 3 comments 8 shares

We have also focussed on some educational social media posts regarding some of the birds that can be seen on the reserves along with having some fun with a play on words for a St Valentine's Day post.




Leaflets


From 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, 960 leaflets have been distributed in leaflet holders around the reserve. The Guide for Dog Walkers leaflets are placed in known dog walking areas to promote good behaviour for dog walkers.

<h3>Protecting birds</h3> <p>It is easy to accidentally get too close to birds and scare them. Dogs may bark at, chase or attack birds, as well as eat their eggs and young.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When disturbed, birds can easily abandon their nest or not return to feed their chicks regularly enough. • To survive the winter, birds must feed constantly and a lot of energy is lost from flying away. In cold weather it is difficult to replace this lost energy and so they can die. • Saltmarshes are a treasure trove of food. If disturbance makes birds leave here, there may be nowhere else for them to feed. <p>Please help us offer birds a stable home and keep them coming back.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep an eye out for feeding, resting and nesting birds. • Try not to disturb them and move further away if they become alert. • Ensure your dog keeps to the paths. • Always follow requests on signs. They are there for a reason, including your safety. 	<h3>Summary</h3> <p>Thank you for reading this leaflet. Here is a reminder of our guidelines. Please:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure your dog stays on the paths under close control or on a lead. • Show respect to others. • Clean up after your dog. • Look out for birds and livestock. • Remember that birds may not be where you expect, many nest on the ground! • Contact us if you see people or their dogs disturbing livestock/wildlife. • Visit the Kennel Club or Natural England's websites for more information about The Countryside Code.  <h3>Contact us</h3> <p>Telephone: 01243 641508 Email: pagham.harbour@rspb.org.uk Website: rspb.org.uk/paghamharbour Facebook: @RSPBPaghamHarbour Twitter: @RSPBPagham</p> <p><small>The RSPB is a registered charity in England & Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654</small></p>	 <h2>A Guide for Dog Walkers</h2>  <h3>Pagham Harbour & Medmerry Reserves</h3>
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<h3>Giving nature a home</h3> <p>We want our nature reserves to be accessible to everyone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your support and cooperation helps us protect these special places. • Often unintentional actions can negatively impact the wildlife these places are designed to protect. • The following guidelines are here to make your visit safe and enjoyable, while allowing other visitors the same experience. <h3>Keeping your dog safe</h3> <p>Dogs can easily become lost or injured. You can help prevent this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping them under 'close control' or on a lead if this is not possible. • Steering clear of hazardous machinery, livestock and electric fencing. • Staying alert for natural dangers like adders and ticks. • Worming your dog regularly. They love to investigate and can easily pick up parasites such as worms. 	<h3>Protecting grazing animals</h3> <p>Dog attacks have injured or killed sheep on the reserves many times in the past few years. Please help us prevent this from happening again.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep to the signposted Rights of Way and observe the 'wildlife only' areas. • Take advantage of the off-lead areas (map below). These may sometimes be grazed by livestock. • If your dog likes to chase animals, please keep them on a lead. Livestock worrying is illegal and dangerous for all parties involved. <div data-bbox="619 1570 971 1644" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>What is 'close control'? The dog responds to their owner's commands and is kept close at heel.</p> </div> 	<h3>Cleaning up</h3> <p>Dog waste can cause diseases which lead to stomach upsets, asthma and blindness! It can also contribute to the spread of worms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please bag it and bin it / take it home. • Please do not leave bagged waste on site. This is littering and can result in a fine from the council. • Become a 'Green Dog Walker'. Take a leaflet from our dispensers or visit: www.chichester.gov.uk/greendogwalkers. <h3>Keeping others safe</h3> <p>While you love your dog, some visitors may feel intimidated. Therefore please:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be respectful of other dogs, especially those on a lead. • Prevent your dog from approaching or jumping up at people. • Keep your dog away from horse riders and cyclists, as they may be tempted to bark or chase them! • Set a good example. If you are trespassing, others will think it is okay and follow suit.
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During autumn/winter a leaflet on how to avoid disturbing overwintering birds was placed in locations including by the shore at Church Norton where many winter birds gather to feed and rest, in the bird hide and in the visitor centre.

<p>About the reserves</p> <p>Both nature reserves are very special places for people and wildlife.</p> <p>Pagham Harbour is a historic area and first became a nature reserve in 1964. It is well known for its variety of wildlife and is a beloved walking and bird watching spot.</p> <p>Medmerry is truly unique. Completed as a flood defence in 2013, it is establishing itself wonderfully as a nature reserve and is a peaceful area for birds and visitors alike.</p> <p>There are many protections in place across the reserves, including:</p> <p>Local Nature Reserve (LNR) - a protected site of local significance.</p> <p>Special Protected Area (SPA) - for internationally important bird populations.</p> <p>Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) - to protect seagrass beds and two very rare invertebrates.</p> <p>Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - to allow the scientific study of the wildlife, habitats and geology.</p> <p>RAMSAR Site</p>	<p>How can you help?</p> <p>Please help us give nature a home by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping an eye out for feeding and resting birds. • Trying not to disturb them and moving further away if they become alert. • Always following requests on signs and sticking to the Rights of Way. • Not walking onto the saltmarsh. • Keeping your dog on a lead or under close control at all times. • Calling the police immediately on 999 or 101 if you see an attack on wildlife. Then informing the Visitor Centre.  <p>Contact us</p> <p>Telephone: 01243 641508 Email: pagham.harbour@rspb.org.uk Website: rspb.org.uk/paghamharbour Facebook: @RSPBPaghamHarbour Twitter: @RSPBPagham</p> <p><small>The RSPB is a registered charity in England & Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654</small></p>	 <p>Reducing Disturbance to Migratory and Wintering Birds</p>  <p>Pagham Harbour and Medmerry Reserves</p>
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<p>What is disturbance?</p> <p>'The interruption of a settled and peaceful condition'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For birds, this means an environmental change disrupting their normal behaviour. These could be natural, such as predation, or man-made. • Many human recreational activities can seem very scary to birds. • Disturbance can make them fly away or stop feeding to look for danger. <p>Disturbing a bird may not seem like a big deal. After all they usually come back, right?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But remember, someone else could do the same thing five minutes later, and someone else after that. The cycle could continue all day. • Constant, small-level disturbance reduces their time for feeding and prevents them from resting. • Saltmarshes and mudflats are a treasure trove of food, but are quickly disappearing from our coastline. If disturbance makes birds leave a wetland area, they may not be able to find another like it! 	<p>Overwintering birds</p> <p>Many birds spend their winters here after a long migration from the Arctic.</p> <p>These include up to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,000 Dark-bellied Brent Geese. • 2,000 Wigeon • 1,000 Black-tailed Godwit <p>The reserves are internationally important wintering grounds for Northern Pintail and Dark-bellied Brent Geese. They are also used by passing migrants, like Common Sandpiper, as refuel stations.</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migratory species are especially vulnerable to disturbance. They may not have seen many people where they come from and large amounts of human activity can come as a shock. • Resident birds living near busy areas like footpaths can get used to regular human activity: but only when people stick to those areas! • Not only is walking on the saltmarsh prohibited due to the amount of disturbance it causes, you would put you or your loved ones in significant danger! It is very easy to get stuck in the mud or caught by the tide. 	<p>Feeding challenges</p> <p>The major challenge at this time of year is building up enough fat reserves to survive the winter, and migration in spring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saltmarshes and mudflats are only accessible at low tide. This limits birds' feeding time, especially with the shorter daylight hours in winter. • The more time birds spend flying away and looking for danger, the less time they have to feed. <p>Birds need to rest and save energy when not feeding. They often shelter in areas where they cannot be seen.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This means people can easily get too close and scare them away, without realising there is anything to disturb. • Many species are well camouflaged, so are tricky to see on saltmarshes, mudflats or riverbanks. • At high tide they can move to higher ground, including nearby fields to rest or feed some more on winter crops. • Please be aware that birds may not be where you expect.
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For the spring/summer breeding season, a leaflet about nesting birds replaced the winter leaflet in the same locations.

<p>About the reserves Both nature reserves are very special and very different.</p> <p>Pagham Harbour is a historic area and first became a nature reserve in 1964. It is a well-known for its variety of wildlife and is a beloved walking and bird watching spot.</p> <p>Medmerry is truly unique. Completed as a flood defence in 2013, it is establishing itself wonderfully as a nature reserve and is a peaceful area for birds and visitors alike.</p> <p>There are many protections in place across the reserves, including:</p> <p>Local Nature Reserve (LNR) - a protected site of local significance.</p> <p>Special Protected Area (SPA) - for internationally important bird populations</p> <p>Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) - to protect seagrass beds and two very rare invertebrates.</p> <p>Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - to allow the scientific study of the wildlife, habitats and geology.</p> <p>RAMSAR Site - one of 2372 wetland sites worldwide protected by an international treaty.</p>	<p>How can we help?</p> <p>Please help us give nature a home by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping an eye out for feeding, resting and nesting birds. • Trying not to disturb them and moving further away if they become alert. • Always following requests on signs and sticking to the Rights of Way. • Not walking onto the saltmarsh. • Keeping your dog on a lead or under close control at all times. • Keeping your dog on a lead near areas fenced off for nesting. • Calling the police immediately on 999 if you see an attack on wildlife or the destruction/removal of active nests. Then inform the Visitor Centre.  <p>Contact us Telephone: 01243 641508 Email: pagham.harbour@rspb.org.uk Website: rspb.org.uk/paghamharbour Facebook: @RSPBPaghamHarbour Twitter: @RSPBPagham</p> <p><small>The RSPB is a registered charity in England & Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654</small></p>	 <p>Reducing Disturbance to Nesting Birds</p>  <p>Pagham Harbour and Medmerry Reserves</p>
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<p>What is disturbance?</p> <p>'The interruption of a settled and peaceful condition'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For birds, this means an environmental change disrupting their normal behaviour. • These changes could be natural, such as predation, or man-made. • Many human recreational activities can seem very scary to birds. • Disturbance can make them fly away or stop feeding to look for danger. <p>Disturbing a bird may not seem like a big deal. Once you leave they usually come back, right?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But remember, someone else could do the same thing five minutes later, and someone else after that. The cycle could continue all day. • This constant, small-level disturbance often greatly impacts birds' survival – possibly even more than major disturbance events! • The nesting season can coincide with nicer weather and more people spending time outside, leading to more unintentional disturbance. 	<p>Nesting birds</p> <p>Just because no birds are visible, this does not mean they are not there.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birds often nest in unexpected places: burrows, reedbeds, riverbanks or even shingle. So look around before you lay down your beach towel! • Eggs and chicks, like those of the little tern (pictured) are often well camouflaged. • Please remember that if your dog is not under close control, they can easily disturb nesting birds or even eat the eggs or chicks before you notice anything is there. • Attacks on wildlife and the destruction or removal of nests which are in use are all illegal. <p>Pictured: little tern egg and chick.</p> 	<p>What is the big deal?</p> <p>Birds can be especially sensitive when tending to young.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disturbance can lead to parent birds leaving their nests more frequently and for longer periods of time. • Eggs may be left cooling for longer than they usually would be, which can reduce the growth of the embryo. • Chicks may not be fed regularly enough, reducing their chances of survival. • The longer eggs and chicks are left alone, the greater chance they could fall victim to predators like foxes. • If the threat is great enough, birds can abandon their nest altogether. • In the summer we fence off some otherwise accessible areas for SPA species (see 'about the reserves') like little and common terns, which are trying to nest. • Please keep your dog on a lead near these fenced off areas • This is one of the only areas on the South coast that allows seabirds the opportunity to raise their young free of disturbance. Please help us give these birds the best chance of survival.
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Signage

New sign design to aimed at dog walkers aiming to encourage good behaviour on the reserve. This sign has been placed on the gate by the entrance to the North Wall. A leaflet holder with Guide to Dog Walking leaflets is also in the same location.

CALLING ALL DOG WALKERS!

All visitors are welcomed onto our reserves, including your furry four-legged friends! To ensure you, your dog(s), and all other visitors enjoy their day please:



Keep them under close control



Stick to the paths



Clean up after them


Why is it important to keep dogs under close control and stick to the paths?



1. In the summer there will be nesting birds in the shrubs and on the shoreline, and in the winter many birds will rest and feed on the mudflats – if they are disturbed energy will be wasted flying away from perceived danger that could have been used for feeding chicks in the summer or themselves in the winter
2. In warmer weather there are adders out on the reserve in places you cannot see from the paths
3. The salt marsh and mud can be a dangerous habitat


Happy Walking!






Shhh... we're sleeping...

You might not be able to see us, but we rest up on the shore during high tides to save energy for finding food later, and we are easily disturbed




Thank you to all humans **and dogs** for sticking to the paths and protecting our overwintering birds



High tide rest area ahead

Thank you for giving us space to rest on this spit at high tide by choosing to stay on the path



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Examples of winter disturbance signage placed at Church Norton particularly focussed on the spit/beach area for high tide roosts.

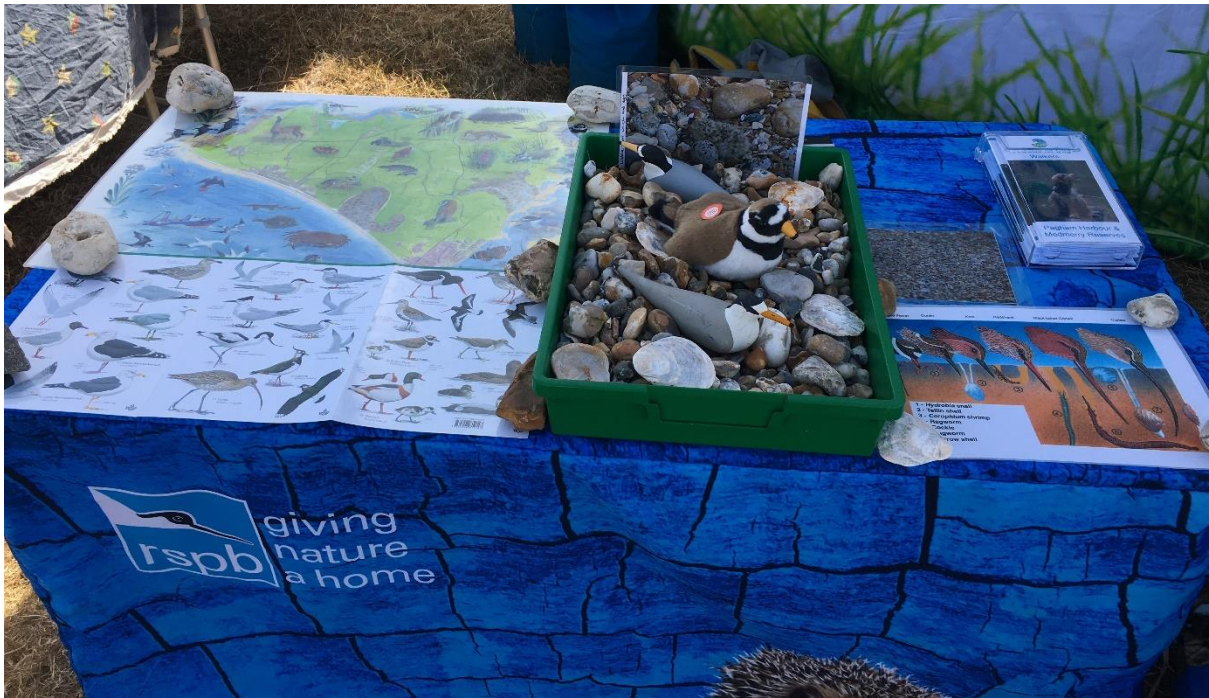


New sign designed and installed at Medmerry.

We do not have photos of 2022 breeding season signage unfortunately.

Events

The conservation rangers have attended 3 community events in the last year. In August 2022 the conservation rangers attended the Selsey RNL Day with a small display stand alongside an RSPB fundraiser. This provided the opportunity to engage with locals and tourists to promote the reserve and talk to people about the breeding birds at Pagham and Medmerry.



Display stand at RNL Day (above); advertising chalkboard for display stand (below)



In November 2022 the conservation rangers were invited to give a talk about the Pagham and Medmerry reserves to Pagham Chestnuts who are a group of over 55's that meet once a month for activities and social events. We designed a powerpoint presentation to showcase the reserves throughout the year which included details on the breeding shorebirds and the overwintering birds. We also included other wildlife that can be seen along with birds generally seen on migration. We invited questions from the audience and received really positive feedback from the group on the day and again when we met the leader of the group out on the reserve several months later. We really enjoyed giving the presentation and it was nice to meet some of the local residents (no photos available from this talk).

We were invited to attend the Selsey Town Council meeting in March 2023 to have a small stand to engage with the local community about the reserve. We interacted with a good amount of the attendees during the networking time and then stayed on for the meeting to show support for the local community and discover more about our neighbours. We were able to promote volunteering opportunities at the reserve as the theme of the meeting was volunteering and hope that we encouraged a few people to take part. We also gained some good contacts from the meeting and will be looking to work together on some small projects in the future.



Brent Goose and Wader Surveys

Due to Covid 19 lockdowns, no surveys have been performed around the reserves since the winter of 2018-19. We were able to organise 2 surveys to be undertaken in February 2023 and 1 survey for March 2023 before the geese and waders started to leave for their breeding grounds. The conservation rangers reviewed previous areas the geese have been seen using and also knowledge of the areas they have been using this winter. We sent a message to all reserve volunteers asking for help with the surveys and were able to cover a large amount of both Pagham and Medmerry reserves due to the good uptake of surveyors. This was a chance for some of the volunteer rangers to get involved in something different to site patrols.

The data from the surveys has not yet been analysed due to preparation for the 2023 breeding season, but we know good numbers of Brent Geese have been using areas around the reserve for feeding and resting, along with other wildfowl and waders. This information could prove exceptionally useful when any planning applications are submitted that may impact these crucial areas. Both conservation rangers are new to arranging surveys on this large scale, but now feel confident that we can start these surveys much earlier for autumn/winter 2023 with the aim to commence when the Brent Geese arrive in numbers.

Analysis of the winter 22/23 survey will be completed once the busy breeding season has settled. Repeat survey efforts across multiple winters will provide a more robust and clearer picture of brent goose use of functionally linked land to Pagham Harbour SPA and Medmerry.



Dark-bellied Brent Geese flying over Pagham Harbour - Georgia Warren

Final thoughts

Having a uniformed RSPB presence on site has proved to be a positive for another year helping to ensure that visitors are complying with guidance on signage to help the birds. Unfortunately, out of hours antisocial behaviour continues to be reported and we are working with the Police regarding motorised vehicles on footpaths and hare coursing. We recently had to alert the Police to illegal wildfowling taking place within the reserve at Medmerry after a report from a member of the local birdwatching community. We were in constant contact over the phone with the Police to provide the What3Words location and photos of the wildfowler via email. They were able to locate and intercept the wildfowler who had unfortunately already killed a duck. We advised the Police that he did not have permission to be inside the reserve and shooting wildfowl. We are awaiting further information from the Police regarding the outcome and have asked to be kept informed. Our positive relationship with the local birdwatching community has been very valuable over the last year and we will look to build on this further going forward.

We have had some contact with Sussex IFCA regarding angling issues around the reserves, particularly during the 2022 breeding season at Church Norton. We obtained some leaflets regarding the Marine Conservation Zone and where fishing is prohibited from 1st April to 31st August and gave these out to anglers and other interested visitors. We had several issues with anglers ignoring the closure of spit for the breeding season and the no fishing zone between those dates in 2022 and have designed specific signage for the 2023 breeding season regarding this. We also hope to conduct some joint patrols with Sussex IFCA during the season to advise anglers of the byelaw.

We are currently trying to contact CDC Environmental Protection Team regarding concerns about certain professional dog walkers and their behaviour on the reserves recently. Dog fouling is also an issue we have noticed more of over the winter and will be aiming to address this further going forward.

Image credit

Front page: Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) – Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)



Stay connected

Keep up to date with the latest thinking, news, events, and information from the RSPB in your local community.



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Head Office

RSPB The Lodge
Potton Road
Sandy
Bedfordshire SG19 2DL