

Flamborough Head European Marine Site Management Scheme

**Annual Report
2016**





Compiled by Heather Davison
Flamborough Head European Marine Site Project Officer
January 2017

Introduction

This report forms part of the Flamborough Head European Marine Site (EMS) Management Scheme's annual review and details the progress of the Management Scheme throughout 2016. In July, Relevant Authorities approved the new 2016-2021 Management Plan which describes current management and any future actions expected over the next five years. In order to ensure that the new Management Plan remains as up-to-date and effective as possible, the first annual review of the document has been undertaken. The updates provided by the Relevant Authorities and Key Partners during this process have informed this report, alongside summaries of actions progressed by the Project Officer on behalf of the Management Scheme.

On 23 June 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union (EU). Although the protection afforded to the Flamborough Head EMS is based on a number of European directives and national legislation, it is not yet clear how the decision will affect this, and many other, marine protected areas. However until the UK officially leaves the EU, and legislation is altered or amended accordingly, all current directives, regulations and commitments remain in place. As such, the Defra family has advised the Management Scheme to continue with 'business as usual' until further guidance is available.

Condition Assessments and Conservation Advice

This work supports Aims 1 and 2 of the Management Scheme

No new condition assessments have been undertaken during this period, however the kittiwake feature of the Special Protection Area (SPA) has now been downgraded from 'favourable' to 'unfavourable' condition, due to significant declines in the kittiwake population. This reclassification ensures consistency with units of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which became 'unfavourable' in 2015 in order to reflect the reduction in kittiwake numbers. Data collected by the Seabird Monitoring Programme (undertaken by the RSPB on behalf of Natural England) indicates a 53% decline in the kittiwake population since SSSI designation in 1986.

It is important to note that, although the reasons for this decline are, as yet, not fully understood, the reduction in the kittiwake population is not believed to be linked to inappropriate site management. Nevertheless, all Relevant Authorities are aware that any additional pressures on the colony, such as recreational disturbance, must be reduced to ensure that the kittiwakes, and all other seabirds, are given the best chance of breeding successfully.

A revised Regulation 35 (formerly 33) Conservation Advice package is currently in preparation. This package offers site managers and other interested parties advice about what activities could negatively affect the conservation features of the protected area, along with general information about management. In early 2016, the EMS Project Officer completed a secondment with Natural England in order to assist in the development of the package and will continue to feed in to the process, where appropriate, until completion. A draft document is expected to be available to key stakeholders in spring 2017. All Authorities and stakeholders should note that, until the Regulation 35 advice is officially published, the Regulation 33 Conservation Advice should still be used to inform the decision-making process. This document can be viewed on Natural England's [website](#).



Kittiwake with Egg at Briel Nook

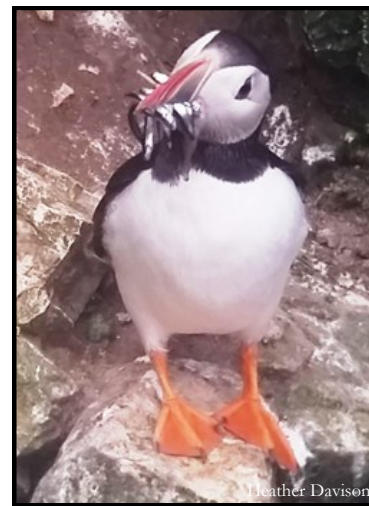
Relevant Authority Updates

This work supports Aims 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7 of the Management Scheme

The projects in this section are being undertaken by Relevant Authorities as individual organisations, rather than on behalf of the Management Scheme partnership.

As part of a national review of fisheries management within marine protected areas, North Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NEIFCA) have completed assessments for each commercial fishing activity within the EMS. As a result, new measures have been proposed which are intended to reduce the risk of negative impacts on the protected area. Once the new byelaws have been approved for use, a number of conditions will apply to all vessels within the NEIFCA district. This includes the requirement to have an onboard Automatic Identification System and submit monthly catch returns. There will also be an annual prohibition on the setting of nets within the Flamborough and Filey Coast pSPA, from 1st March to 30th September, to reduce the potential for seabird bycatch.

Bridlington Harbour Commissioners and East Riding of Yorkshire Council have appointed consultants to prepare an Environmental Statement as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment needed to accompany the potential re-development of Bridlington Harbour. The RSPB, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the Management Scheme have been invited to advise on the surveys accompanying this document in order to reduce any impact on the important local seabird population. The Management Scheme will maintain involvement in the project, as appropriate.



Puffin with Fish at Briel Nook

Seabird Monitoring Programme

This work supports Aims 1, 2 and 5 of the Management Scheme

A seabird monitoring report is prepared each year by the RSPB, covering the whole pSPA, on behalf of Natural England. This information is used to inform management and condition assessments.

A summary of the 2016 season is provided below.

- Although a relatively poor breeding season, potentially linked to adverse weather conditions in early spring, gannets and fulmars maintained productivity levels from previous years.
- Razorbill productivity fell to 0.50 (from 0.66 in 2015). Anecdotal evidence suggests that carrion crow predation may have affected some monitoring plots. Guillemots fared slightly better, though prospecting gannets have displaced some birds from their traditional breeding ledges.
- The productivity of kittiwakes at Bempton and Flamborough fell significantly to 0.52 (from 0.73) during the 2016 season. It is thought that many kittiwakes began to build nests but then failed to breed, possibly due to inclement weather restricting their ability to maintain breeding condition. Similarly, productivity at Filey fell to 0.23. The colony here was further hampered by a rock fall and the resident peregrine falcon.
- For the first time, a puffin count was undertaken whilst birds were 'staging' on the sea prior to coming ashore at the start of the breeding season. Approximately 2,300 puffins were counted which, although only an index of colony size, is close to the expected population.
- A kittiwake whole colony count for the pSPA was also carried out this year, with approximately 51,001 apparently occupied nests being recorded. It is hoped that subsequent whole colony counts will be completed over the next few years, subject to funding, to gain a better understanding of how this population is changing.

The RSPB, working alongside DONG Energy and Natural England, also carried out a pilot study to determine whether conducting colony counts by an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV or drone) would be feasible. This survey, commissioned by DONG Energy and carried out by NIRAS Consulting Ltd., indicated that the UAV performed well with no significant disturbance to the seabirds. The images produced were of sufficient quality to allow for the identification of species and of breeding and non-breeding birds. It should be noted that special permission was obtained from Natural England for this study and the use of drones or UAVs within a protected area is strictly regulated.



The UAV in use at Bempton Cliffs

Recreational Disturbance - Voluntary Agreement Developments

This work supports Aims 2 and 3 of the Management Scheme

In February, the Management Scheme held a workshop with personal watercraft (Jet Ski) users, Natural England, local authority representatives, the RSPB and the Personal Watercraft Partnership, in order to discuss the recent disturbance issues within the EMS caused by fast-moving personal watercraft (PWCs). The workshop provided the opportunity for site managers and PWC users to discuss the sensitivities of the site and work towards a voluntary code of conduct. These positive discussions resulted in new guidance for PWC users in the form of two ‘zones’:

- No-Wake Zone: Within 300m of the cliff face, users are asked to travel at a no-wake speed;
- Awareness Zone: Outside of 300m, users are asked to be aware that seabirds rest on the sea in groups. Users should slow down to a no-wake speed and go around any groups of birds.



New Sign at South Landing

To accompany this new guidance, leaflets were produced and placed at key locations along the coastline, supported by local media coverage. Later in the year a unique sign was installed at South Landing (Flamborough) to discourage unauthorised PWC launches. Additional signs for local launch sites will follow in 2017. A review meeting took place in November in which the voluntary code of conduct was reaffirmed and minor amendments to the code of conduct leaflet were agreed.

Due to the challenging landscape of the protected area, the Humberside Search and Rescue helicopter teams regularly conduct vital training exercises along this stretch of coast. Unfortunately, during the breeding season, low-flying exercises can result in significant disturbance to the seabird colony. Following one such event in the summer, the Project Officer worked with the Chief Pilot of the Humberside Search and Rescue team to agree voluntary low-flying ‘avoid’ areas around Flamborough Head and Filey Brigg. These ‘avoid’ areas only apply to low-flying training exercises conducted by the Search and Rescue helicopter between 15th March and 15th August. This voluntary agreement does not affect or hinder any emergency responses carried out by the helicopter crew.

The angling voluntary code of conduct, which is in place along the length of the RSPB Bempton Cliffs reserve, continues to successfully reduce conflict between anglers and seabirds. The Management Scheme will build on such successful partnerships to ensure the effectiveness of voluntary agreements, whilst also engaging with new user groups to further reduce any recreational impacts on site.

Recreational Disturbance - Monitoring Project

This work supports Aims 2 and 3 of the Management Scheme

Three volunteers were recruited this summer to undertake intensive recreational activity monitoring around the site. One volunteer was able to conduct monitoring from Easter to the end of September, with most reports concentrated around the school holiday season, including some monitoring trials at Filey Brigg. In total, over 22 days of monitoring, 388 activities were recorded with 94 of these deemed to cause at least some level of disturbance to the seabird colony. Table 1 below illustrates the level of disturbance recorded for each activity observed on site this year.

Table 1: 2016 Summer Survey Disturbance Reports

Activity	No. of Reports	High-Moderate Disturbance	Slight-No Disturbance	Disturbance Level Not Recorded
Personal Watercraft	14	93%	7%	0
Motorised Boats	31	65%	35%	0
Canoes & Kayaks	6	50%	50%	0
Low-Flying Aircraft	13	54%	38%	8%
Angling (Cliff or Shore)	1	0	100%	0
Dog Walking	13	46%	46%	8%
School/Walking Group	1	0	100%	0
Sub-Aqua Sports	2	0	100%	0
Other	21	24%	24%	52%

Walking with dogs was regularly observed to cause high disturbance, however it is thought that this activity interacts with wading or non-breeding birds near the shoreline rather than birds on the nest. A very high number of 'other' activities were recorded this year, yet 52% of these records did not offer any further information. Incomplete or inaccurate data recording is a major drawback of using volunteers for this monitoring, perhaps indicating that more stringent training should be provided in the future. Nevertheless, these records will add to the dataset and allow site managers to concentrate resources on those activities which have the most potential to create a disturbance event.

In addition to intensive summer surveys, the Project Officer received 58 ad-hoc recreational activity monitoring reports. This is a 28% reduction on reports submitted in 2015. Whilst variables such as the weather and a lack of reporting could be responsible for this reduction, it is positive to see a decline in reports immediately following work to engage with user groups. Table 2 below details the levels of disturbance recorded for each activity observed on site, using the ad-hoc reporting method.

Table 2: 2016 Recreational Activity Ad-Hoc Disturbance Reports

Activity	No. of Reports	High-Moderate Disturbance	Slight-No Disturbance	Disturbance Level Not Recorded
Personal Watercraft	12	58%	16%	25%
Motorised Boats	25	80%	12%	8%
Yachts	2	100%	0	0
Canoes & Kayaks	8	75%	25%	0
Low-Flying Aircraft	10	70%	20%	10%
Angling (Cliff or Shore)	1	100%	0	0

The majority of disturbance events recorded using this method were from motorised boats, which tallies with the intensive summer survey monitoring data. Personal watercraft users were also recorded as causing high levels of disturbance, however reports were significantly lower than in 2015. Despite this, a significant disturbance event concerning one personal watercraft user occurred in August and was forwarded to Natural England for investigation.

One of the Management Scheme's priorities for 2017 will be to develop a consistent approach to the development of voluntary agreements and codes of conduct. In the past, the Management Scheme has engaged with user groups reactively in order to deal with specific incidents. Whilst this has yielded some positive results, sufficient data now exists to pre-empt future problems with recreational disturbance. As such, the data collected over the last four years will be used to prioritise engagement with specific user groups and encourage partnership working to complete a suite of voluntary codes of conduct.

Shellfish Stock Assessments

This work supports Aim 4 of the Management Scheme



Lobster Caught in No Take Zone

Heather Davison

This summer, the Project Officer conducted six shellfish stock assessments, three each in the No Take Zone (NTZ) and the wider Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Logistical delays meant that the first surveys were conducted in June (rather than May) and, unfortunately, the weather hampered efforts to complete final surveys in September. Initial post-survey analysis has indicated that surveys conducted within the NTZ are yielding a greater proportion of larger lobsters than surveys outside the Zone. Further analysis is required to determine whether this is a statistically significant difference and how these results correlate with the two other NTZs in the UK.

Awareness-Raising

This work supports Aim 3 of the Management Scheme

Following publication of the 2016-2021 Management Plan, each Relevant Authority was asked to adopt or formally support the document as an independent organisation. Indicating support for the Management Plan in this way has helped to reaffirm each Authority's commitment to partnership working in order to appropriately manage the EMS. This process encouraged Authorities to discuss the work of the Management Scheme internally to achieve such support, thereby raising awareness of the internationally-important area within each organisation.

The Project Officer has provided talks to two school groups this year, based around the management of the site and engagement with stakeholders. Additionally, the Management Scheme was represented at Driffeld Show and had a presence at the Hornsea School and Language College careers event.



Black-browed Albatross Spotted at Bempton

Kevin Grocock

During late summer and early autumn, after most of the seabirds have dispersed, the headland becomes a hotspot for migratory birds on their journeys across the northern hemisphere. 2016 was no different, with an eastern-crowned warbler (only the fourth record in Britain) seen at Bempton in early October, followed swiftly by a black-browed albatross travelling south along the Yorkshire Coast. These, and other migrant birds, attracted more than 3,000 extra visitors to the protected area during October than the same period in 2015*.

* Data from RSPB Bempton Cliffs Seabird Centre Visitor Records.

Priorities for 2017

Work will continue throughout 2017 to record and monitor recreational activities around the EMS, including whether these activities cause disturbance to the conservation features of the site. This will also involve producing a consistent approach to voluntary agreement development, taking into account effective stakeholder engagement methods and a uniform approach to the design of any supporting materials such as information boards and leaflets. Where possible, the Management Scheme will look to involve national bodies or regulators of each activity to ensure a consistent message.

The Regulation 35 Conservation Advice package is expected to be drafted and finalised during 2017. The Project Officer will work closely with Natural England to assist in this process, where appropriate, which may include facilitation of stakeholder workshops. The Project Officer will act as a link between the Relevant Authorities' Group and the Conservation Advice team to ensure that any queries or issues are resolved prior to publication. Furthermore, the Project Officer will work with Natural England to produce a report into the data collected from 2008 - 2015 as part of the Filey Bay Bycatch Monitoring Project, particularly concentrating on environmental variations which may affect bycatch rates.

The Project Officer will continue to offer support and guidance to Authorities and will work closely with each organisation to identify any future funding opportunities. Similarly, the Project Officer will maintain involvement in active external funding bids for partnership projects with Key Partners, where appropriate, and will look to identify other potential areas of joint-working.



Flamborough Headland from Filey Bay

Aims of the Management Scheme

- Aim 1:** Ensure no management measures or unregulated activities adversely impact the conservation features, through regular condition assessments and implementation of Habitats Directive procedures.
- Aim 2:** Work to maintain and improve protection of the conservation features through the sharing of appropriate scientific research and site specific information.
- Aim 3:** In order to support the work of the Management Scheme, raise public awareness about the site's importance and support sustainable recreation and tourism practices.
- Aim 4:** Monitor both recreational and commercial fishing activities, ensure all relevant permits are observed and support sustainable practices, whilst engaging with the local fishing community to increase environmental awareness.
- Aim 5:** Ensure that any non-fishing commercial activity within or adjacent to the EMS does not negatively affect the conservation features, and work to reduce the risk of marine pollution to the site.
- Aim 6:** Appropriately manage the marine environment through the monitoring of consented discharges, achieving water quality standards and ensuring all coastal environmental incidents are dealt with effectively, whilst creating a safe environment for recreational and commercial users.
- Aim 7:** Ensure that activities of the Management Scheme promote the conservation of seascape and landscape character in a way which is compatible with safe maritime practices and the values of sustainable development.



For further information please contact the Flamborough Project Officer at:

sacofficer@flamboroughheadsac.org.uk

Additional details on the management of this internationally-important area can also be found in the 2016-2021 Flamborough Head European Marine Site Management Plan which can be downloaded at:

www.flamboroughheadsac.org.uk