



# Exe Press

Newsletter of the EXE Estuary Partnership

ISSUE 16 • SPRING 2009

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**2008 Crab Tile Survey Published**



For the latest estuary-wide information, news and events visit [www.exe-estuary.org](http://www.exe-estuary.org)

## NEW EXE WILDLIFE LEAFLET AND EXE EXPLORER 2009 NOW AVAILABLE

How many mars bars worth of calories are there in a cubic meter of estuary mud? Why are bacteria so important to life in the estuary? Which birds pair for life and keep in contact in massive flocks by constantly calling to each other?

A new leaflet about the wildlife of the Exe Estuary is now available to answer these and many more questions. The leaflet provides information on when and where to see a few of the wildlife highlights that the Exe has to offer as well as an insight into the complex relationships that make up this fascinating ecosystem.

The leaflet was designed by an Exe Action Group that first met at the Exe Estuary Autumn Forum. Thanks to everybody who has contributed to the development and design of Exe Wildlife.

### Exe Explorer 2009

The partnership has also been working hard to improve our most popular leaflet, the Exe Explorer. This informative guide provides information on all of the footpaths, cycleways, public transport and ferry routes on the estuary as well as local amenities such as toilets, cycle hire, and places to eat that you can use on your visit.

The newly updated 2009 leaflet also includes information on longer walking and cycling routes for you to enjoy starting from the Exe but exploring more of the glorious countryside that Devon has to offer. Featured routes include the East Devon Way, which starts at Exmouth, travels along the Exe Estuary Trail to Lymington and then journeys all the way to Lyme Regis. Or experience the full life of the Exe by travelling all the way to its source on Exmoor with the Exe Valley Way.

Exe Explorer, Exe Wildlife and Exe Activities, a guide to the recreational pursuits available in and around the Exe, are all available from Tourist Information Centres, the Exe Estuary website ([www.exe-estuary.org.uk](http://www.exe-estuary.org.uk)) or on request from the Estuary Officer 01392 382236.



## A SUNNY WINTER'S DAY AT TOPSHAM

### A Bird Watchers Joy!

**What could be better than a sunny cold brisk Sunday morning in January with the tide rising over the glistening mud on the estuary, driving the waders on to the green flood meadows that surround the Exe. For me there is no place better to be than Bowling Green RSPB Reserve.**

As you meander down Bowling Green Lane there is always a sense of expectation and the hope that this is the day when the marsh will be full of birds with their colours translucent in the bright sunlight. From the hide it is like being in a theatre with the floodlit stage laid out before you. Settle down quietly with binoculars or telescope and feast your eyes on the entertainment to come.

Avocets gather in pied black and white on the far waters edge. Some, with their upturned bills hidden under wings, sleep fitfully on one leg. Wigeon whistle continuously as they graze purposefully over the green sward. Occasionally a swoosh of air as others fly over the hide to land in the lake, water skiing for a few seconds until sinking down to float on the water. See the luminescent band of purple to green on the little teal dabbling in the mud at the lake edge and pintail upending with long spiky tails pointing to the sky. Shoveller ducks with brown disc marking their flanks sift the sediment through the fine filaments of their crazily shaped shovel bills.

As eyes become more accustomed to the mêlée of activity, Snipe appear with eye stripe aligned with the endless point of a dagger sharp bill probing through the grass for grubs and worms to keep up the energy levels and combat the chilling wind.

All this concentration of busy activity can change in an instant. If you are lucky then you will witness the high speed stoop of a Peregrine Falcon creating marsh mayhem. Everything lifts as one body into the air swooping and turning in overlapping patterns designed to confuse and distract the hungry predator. The safety in numbers play re-enacted thousands of times over for one reason only, the avoidance of death, a real possibility never far away.

If anyone wants to see this amazing show of the diversity of wildlife in so many forms evolved over millions of years (as understood by Darwin 200 years ago) you have to go no further than Bowling Green Reserve Topsham on a bright sunny morning in January.

*John Wokersien, Exmouth Town Clerk and Bird Watcher Enthusiast*



## EXE ESTUARY CLEAN UP

### A Real Success Story

**The autumn clean up was our 3rd event in eighteen months and proved to be our biggest and best so far.**

Around 80 volunteers spared the time to help clear litter from the Exmouth Local Nature Reserve area of the estuary while 25 scuba divers, led by Jurassic Coast Divers, cleared litter from the pier area of Exmouth finding many unusual objects such as parts of a boat engine and copper piping as well as the usual miles of fishing line, weights, lures, drinks cans, etc.

And the hard work didn't stop there! Over the other side of the estuary the Dawlish Warren Rangers were also leading a group of volunteers and on the Inner Warren Devon Wildlife Trust Officers were working with volunteers from the Devon Wildfowlers to clear the litter and debris that had collected there.

In all it was a fantastic event that made a massive impact on the amount of litter on the estuary. All of the sites found that they could see a real difference sensing that we are making a real impact with our regular efforts. There was a great atmosphere among the committed volunteers, many of whom have attended all three of our events so far. Other volunteers that came for the first time were surprised at the types of litter we were removing and the danger that they potentially caused if allowed to remain in the estuary, such as broken metal spikes, especially considering the importance of the estuary for wildlife and recreational activities such as kite surfing.

Once again we are extremely grateful to Exmouth Mussels who volunteered their services – not only attending the Exmouth LNR event with their families, but also collecting the litter with their boat at high tide saving the volunteers valuable time and effort.

The Exmouth LNR and dive volunteers were then treated to a free cruise courtesy of Stuart Line Cruises as a thank you for their hard work. The Dawlish Warren and Inner Warren volunteers also received free goodies.

We are making a real impact on the amount of litter on the estuary, especially as we are repeating our efforts regularly. Which is why we are asking for your help again this spring.

**On Saturday 25th April we will once again be tackling the litter on the estuary and are asking for even more volunteers to take part.**

Stuart Line Cruises have kindly offered to provide a free cruise for volunteers once again, as a thank you for their hard work. The cruise will depart at 4pm from Exmouth Marina and all volunteers who have helped at any of the events will be more than welcome to come along.



### Exmouth Local Nature Reserve

**Date:** Saturday 25th April 2009  
**Time:** 1.00 pm till 3.30 pm  
**Meeting Point:** Imperial Recreation Ground Slipway  
**Leader:** The Exe Estuary Officer  
**Booking:** Please call Jenny on 01392 382236 to book your place. Places are limited due to health and safety so please book early to avoid disappointment

**Travel:** Free parking vouchers available for volunteers; please state at the time of booking. The train and bus station are a couple of minutes stroll from the meeting point.  
**Cruise:** Please state if you are able to attend the cruise when booking your place.

### Dawlish Warren

**Date:** Saturday 25th April 2009  
**Time:** 10 am till 1.00 pm  
**Meeting Point:** Dawlish Warren Visitor Centre  
**Leaders:** The Dawlish Warren Rangers  
**Booking:** Please call the rangers on 01626 863980 or email: [phil.chambers@teignbridge.gov.uk](mailto:phil.chambers@teignbridge.gov.uk)  
**Cruise:** When booking your volunteer place please state whether you will be able to attend the cruise and the rangers will be able to provide details of free transport to and from Exmouth.

The Devon Wildlife Trust will be working with volunteers from the Devon Wildfowlers to clear litter and debris from the Reed Beds at the beginning of April while the reeds are less dense and the area can be accessed more easily.

### General Information

- Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult
- Gloves, litter pickers and bags will be provided
- Sensible waterproof footwear such as Wellington boots is essential
- Waterproof clothing is strongly recommended
- Some spades will be provided but if you are able to bring your own please do as they are very useful.

**We can all make a difference to the future of litter on the Estuary by opting for low packaging alternatives, reusing, recycling and when visiting the Estuary please remember to take your litter home with you or use bins where provided.**

Jenny Lockett, Exe Estuary Officer  
 Tel: 01392 382236  
 Email: [exeestua@devon.gov.uk](mailto:exeestua@devon.gov.uk)  
 Web: [www.exe-estuary.org.uk](http://www.exe-estuary.org.uk)

*Special thanks to the following organisations for making this event possible*



# DISTURBANCE STUDY FOR THE EXE

The Exe Estuary is a vibrant and busy place with many recreational pursuits and commercial activities taking place alongside a wide array of internationally protected wildlife.

Some activities, such as dog walking and kite surfing, take place in sensitive wildlife areas, where birds feed or roost. This often causes disturbance, which could range from the birds becoming cautious and raising their heads to the extreme of being forced to take flight. For example, the stunning front cover photo hides the concerning truth that the Brent Geese were forced to take flight by an uncontrolled dog.

By taking flight the birds are not only prevented from feeding or resting but they are unnecessarily wasting precious energy. Some of the species that visit the estuary need to gain as much energy as they can before their long migration, which could be as far as the Arctic. When leaving the estuary in early spring Brent Geese will fly as much as 6,000 miles to Scandinavia where they will spend the summer breeding. Individual incidences of disturbance may not have any long term effects on the bird's chances of survival but repeated disturbance is a much greater risk to the birds' fitness. The risks to survival become much greater in harsh winters, such as has been experienced this year, when the birds must expend more energy to keep warm. Often the effects of disturbance are unnoticeable with everything appearing normal until the bird's energy levels reach a critical threshold and within hours hundreds of birds, sometimes 90% of the site's population, will die.

The Exe Estuary Partnership are wholly supportive of the sustainable use of the estuary but believe there are some simple practices which could help all users to have a better experience and cause less impact to our feathered visitors. The Partnership is in the process of appointing a consultant to study the usage of the estuary in all of its forms, such as dog walking, bird watching, kite surfing and sailing. It is hoped that the study will help us to better understand which are the most sensitive areas, which activities have the greatest effect, how much of an impact disturbance has on survival and most importantly to advise management tools that can help to protect the users of the estuary as well as the wildlife. What's more the results of the study will be able to inform the management of other estuaries in the UK which deal with similar issues.

Some practices are already in place, such as zonation and voluntary codes of conduct and these have proved effective. However, an ever increasing population around the estuary (new housing developments have been approved in East Devon, Exeter and Teignbridge) will increase the number of people visiting and using this delicate site and mean that the Management Partnership must be prepared for the increased pressure on our precious wildlife.

You will be kept informed of the studies development in future issues of Exe-press, for more immediate information please check our WebPages at [www.exe-estuary.org](http://www.exe-estuary.org)



We can all do our bit to protect the estuary and limit our impact, please remember to:

- **Keep Your Distance**  
Wildlife is incredibly sensitive to disturbance. High tide is a critical rest time for birds.
- **Keep Your Dog Under Control**  
Dogs chasing birds are a major cause of disturbance and can impact greatly on bird survival. Please avoid using the estuary to exercise your dog during winter when the greatest numbers of birds are present and the seafront is available as an alternative. Please clean up after your dog.
- **Don't Damage the Estuary**  
Various activities can have long lasting impacts on the habitats of the estuary. Please remember it is an offence to knowingly damage the estuary and this includes driving on the foreshore.
- **Take nothing but photographs**  
Do not remove plants or animals or damage their habitat.
- **Prevent Litter**  
Litter is a major cause of seabird deaths. Bin litter or take it home.
- **Observe Estuary Bylaws and Warning Signs**
- **Respect Other Users**  
The Estuary is a busy place with many and varied activities taking place.

## Health Check for the Estuary

Last autumn the partnership, working closely with the Environment Agency and local users, gave the estuary a thorough health check from head to toe. This completes a piece of work started in 2002 by Natasha Barker (the Estuary Officer at the time). Groups of individuals representing relevant organisations and local communities walked the entire length of foreshore on both sides of the estuary checking for any signs of pollution or points of concern. A full report has now been completed and is available in local libraries and on the Estuary website ([www.exe-estuary.org.uk](http://www.exe-estuary.org.uk)).

Although some concerns have been raised and a series of actions have been agreed in order to tackle these, generally the estuary was found to be in very good condition. However this report is simply a

visual assessment and ongoing monitoring of water quality amongst other sampling is essential and is carried out as a matter of course by the Environment Agency.

If you ever need to report a pollution incidence, poaching, risks to wildlife, flytipping or fish in distress on the Exe or anywhere else please call the emergency hotline: 0800 807060



# BRENT GEESE ON THE EXE

The yearly record of bird numbers on the Estuary has been compiled once again by David Price, who co-ordinates the Wetland Birds Survey - or WeBS counts - on the Exe Estuary. This invaluable, volunteer-led survey uses a monthly count at locations throughout the estuary, to piece together a picture of bird populations through the year. It has been happening here on the Exe since the late seventies, so we have a really important historical data source of population trends over the last 30 years.

Once again 2008 would seem to have been a bad breeding year for the dark-bellied brent geese. With lemming numbers reportedly down in the Siberian arctic, predators turn to geese chicks as an alternative food source and this has been linked to lowered success of population recruitment. Moreover, it is adjudged that when the brent goose population fails to successfully fledge 15% of the adult population, then the overall population will decline. Apart from a particularly good year in 2005, when this breeding success reached 30% for the Exe Estuary birds, the percentage of first-year birds recorded has kept stubbornly below the magic 15% level since 1999.

This finding reflects the observed gradual decline of brent goose numbers on the Exe, from a population spike in the mid eighties

of over 3,500 birds, to its current level just below 1,500. The first winter period count of brent geese for 2008 peaked in February with 1,807 birds being recorded throughout the estuary. The estuary then falls silent of their grunting between April and August, with birds returning in the second winter period from the middle of August. These first returning birds tend to clamour to feed in the eelgrass beds at the southern end of the estuary, refuelling on this rich food source before feeding in the wider estuary as the winter continues.

The second winter period numbers peaked at 1,302 birds in November, somewhat down on the earlier records. Bearing in mind the cold spells we experienced in early 2009, it will be interesting to see if 2009 records manage to generate counts higher than recent years?

A massive vote of thanks must go to David and his volunteers who continue to provide such a valuable record of bird numbers on the Estuary.



## Volunteer Opportunities at Dawlish Warren

An impressive sand spit reaching across the mouth of the Exe Estuary Dawlish Warren is an internationally important site due to its sand dunes, meadows, woods, reed beds, ponds and salt marsh habitats. In autumn and winter, the Warren is an invaluable roosting site for huge numbers of wading birds and wildfowl.

This summer, there are estuarine events for everyone to get involved and help keep Dawlish Warren such an important area.

### Conservation Volunteers

Why not come on a workday? Everyone is welcome on these fun and friendly tasks for adults who want to help to look after the Warren's wildlife, get fit in the fresh air, and meet new people interested in the environment.

### Wednesday 13 May:

#### Practical help – Meadows

Enjoy a morning of meadow management with the Rangers. Hot drinks and biscuits provided

### Sunday 21 June:

#### Practical help – Grassland

Alien Invasion: Defence of the Warren. Stop plant invaders taking over the Warren's dune grasslands. Hot drinks and biscuits provided

### Wednesday 22 July:

#### Practical help – Grassland

Alien Invasion: Defence of the Warren. Stop plant invaders taking over the Warren's dune grasslands. Hot drinks and biscuits provided

### Junior Rangers

Junior Rangers enjoy a free programme of children's activities, experiencing the wonderful Warren wildlife at first hand. Junior Rangers get a membership pack, newsletter and fun sheet all about this fascinating national nature reserve.

### Tuesday 14 April:

#### Easter eggstravaganza

Dawlish Warren is famous for rabbits: Has the Easter Bunny been here too? Explore the Warren looking for clues! You may leave your children with us for this activity

### Family Events

Come on an inspirational event with us at the Warren this summer, there is sure to be one for you. Our events are relaxed and friendly, you do not have to be a wildlife expert to take part, and a Teignbridge Ranger leads each one.

### Sunday 5 April:

#### Miniature marvels

The Warren's spring flowers are miniature marvels. With luck, we will find the tiny Warren crocus in bloom; along with many other spring flowers, mostly miniscule

### Sunday 3 May:

#### Dawn chorus walk

Listen to bird song on this early morning walk. Yes, it is early, but it is also beautiful and tuneful. Convivial tea and toast provided

### Sunday 14 June:

#### Early summer wildlife

Enjoy seeing butterflies, bugs, flowers, and birds along the way on this walk to the hide

### Sunday 12 July:

#### A wander on the Warren

Wonder as you wander at the fabulous flowers, incredible insects, beautiful birds and weird wildlife of the Warren

### Thursday 30 July:

#### Family summer walk

Explore and discover the Warren on this walk for the whole family with loads of fun activities for children along the way

To find out more about any of these events and book your place call the rangers on 01626 863 980

### Warren Visitors

Please help us to look after the special wildlife at this National Nature Reserve: Avoid disturbing birds on the beach, never light fires, clean up after your dog, and leave the flowers for everyone to enjoy. There are guidelines about fishing, watercraft, and dogs; find out more at [www.teignbridge.gov.uk/countryside](http://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/countryside)

Phil Chambers, Head Ranger

Tel: 01626 863980

Email: [phil.chambers@teignbridge.gov.uk](mailto:phil.chambers@teignbridge.gov.uk)



# Estuary News

For the latest Estuary News and event dates at any time please visit [www.exe-estuary.org](http://www.exe-estuary.org)

## NATIONAL MARITIME NEWS

Brought to you by the Devon Maritime Forum

### The Marine Management Organisation a new Non Departmental Public Body

The long-awaited decision on the location for the new Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has been announced, and it has gone to . . . Newcastle. The North of England is a key strategic location, able to knit together issues across the devolved assemblies of Scotland and England. The location decision still comes as a disappointment for the South West, however, with Plymouth representing the most diverse and largest accumulation of marine science, research and professionals in the UK.

Regardless of the location of the MMO, local stakeholders will need to engage with the regional offices that will be established as the UK Government's strategic delivery body for the marine area. In recognition for this, DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) have produced a document that outlines what the MMO will do, how it will work with other bodies, and its organisational structure and governance. This document is called "Managing Marine Resources: The Marine Management Organisation" and a pdf of the document is now available at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/marine/pdf/legislation/mmo-brochure.pdf>

A limited number of hard copies of this publication are available by contacting Ruth Alban at [Ruth.Alban@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Ruth.Alban@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

### Draft River Basin Management Plan Consultation

The Environment Agency, as part of the European Water Framework Directive, has developed a number of regional Draft River Basin Management Plans. These plans require considerable stakeholder input and the consultation period runs until the 22nd June 2009.

Devon Maritime Forum will be holding a meeting to provide members of the Forum with an opportunity to feed directly in to this consultation process. Contact Jim Masters for more information. The Consultation documents can be downloaded from the Environment Agency website:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/33106.aspx>

For more Marine related news visit the DMF website at:

[www.devonmaritimeforum.org.uk](http://www.devonmaritimeforum.org.uk)

Jim Masters

Devon Maritime Forum Coordinator

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## What Does the Exe Estuary Need?

A new bird hide at Exmouth, better interpretation materials, education material for visiting school groups????



Dawlish Warren bird hide

Stuart Line Cruises approached the partnership in December offering to raise money for the estuary on their very popular bird watching cruises. As the partnership are 100% focused on the Exe Estuary they knew all of the money would be spent right here on the Exe, and that is what we are doing. Every penny of money donated on the cruises will be spent on new projects for the Estuary and as the Estuary Officer is funded through the partnership none of the money will need to be spent on officer time.

The bird watching trips were incredibly popular this winter, so much so that Stuart Line have already published the winter timetable for next winter. So far in just 2 months we have raised more than £300, by the end of the year this could mean almost £2,000 worth of funding to use on the Estuary. Although we are not sure exactly how much money we will be able to raise we would like to hear your ideas of how to spend it? So whether it's a new bird hide, a new bench or a new leaflet it's up to you!!!!

Send your ideas to the Exe Estuary Officer by 31st May, at the contact details below, and we will select a few of the most popular and most innovative to put forward for a public vote in our next newsletter in the summer.

Don't forget to look out for our collection pots on the Stuart Line Cruises!

Jenny Lockett

Exe Estuary Officer

Tel: 01392 382236

Email: [exeestua@devon.gov.uk](mailto:exeestua@devon.gov.uk)

Web: [www.exe-estuary.org](http://www.exe-estuary.org)

## VISITOR CENTRE SETBACK

Dreams of a world class visitor centre for Exmouth had seemed to be almost realised with the prospect of funding earmarked by the South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) paired with financial assistance from the private sector. However, recent months have seen the project suffer several set backs.

In a letter to East Devon District Council (EDDC), the area director of SWRDA says the agency has had to "re-evaluate its spending plans due to a progressive reduction in our budget as the Government meets other priorities".

In partnership with Devon County Council, which has pledged £500,000 in capital funding, EDDC had been working towards delivery of the centre by using its own land assets and attracting financial assistance from the private sector.

In a second blow to EDDC the preferred partner for the project, ASDA, have now pulled out of the project due to the recession.

Although many residents of Exmouth, who petitioned vigilantly against the ASDA development, will be overjoyed at this news it has still come as a blow to plans for a World Class Visitor Centre for the Exe Estuary.

Responding to news of the removal of this part of the funding, Councillor Ray Franklin, EDDC's Portfolio Holder Strategic Planning and Regeneration, said: "We understand completely the difficult position our partners at SWRDA face. We are living in an economic downturn and we cannot expect to be immune from pressures on funding that are happening not just in East Devon but frankly all over the world".

"But here in East Devon we have a challenge to deliver something really special for our special place and this setback will not diminish our enthusiasm for continuing with regeneration work in our towns. We will have to be even more creative with the funding options open to us from the private sector and other cash sources."

"One possible major source of funding is the 'Sea Change' programme of cultural investment in seaside resorts, administered by the Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment (CABE). We are already investigating this source".

Councillor Darryl Nicholas, EDDC's Champion for Exmouth, said: "We must continue to fight for a visitor centre to be part of the wider blueprint for upgrading our town. This news is clearly a disappointment, but I am hopeful that we can still deliver the kind of facilities that a modern seaside resort needs. With extra bookings confirmed at Sandy Bay and British holidays proving more popular, we need to be ready to offer tourists reasons to visit us and to keep coming back".

### A Message from the Exmouth Visitor Centre Trust

"Whilst recent events have set us back, no worthwhile project is without hurdles and obstacles to be overcome – and this has in no way affected our original aspirations or our determination to achieve a World Class Visitor Centre for Exmouth.

In terms of project progress, we are back where we were 18 months to 2 years ago and it will take proportionately longer to reach our eventual goal – however, the will to achieve it – by all the partners involved – is undiminished, indeed we are all even more determined to succeed.

This very special place will have the Centre of Learning and Discovery and the Visitor Experience it so richly deserves. **SO WATCH THIS SPACE!!**"

David Conway, Chair, Exmouth Visitor Centre Trust

## NAVIGATION NEWS

The public inquiry for the Harbour Revision Order was completed in September with both the City Council and opposition groups to the proposal given the opportunity to discuss their views and concerns. The inspector is expected to submit his report and recommendations to the secretary of state within 6 months with a final decision announced during 2009.

The new Exmouth approaches channel appears to be establishing itself well with a depth of 1 meter L80 with the new safe water mark XEXE a very useful landfall on approaching the Exe estuary. The harbour authority has just carried out the spring hydrographical survey which will be circulated and posted before Easter and also available on the Exe Estuary the website [www.exe-estuary.org](http://www.exe-estuary.org)

## EXMOUTH NEWS IN BRIEF

Exmouth Town Council launch new business-based website created in partnership with Exmouth Community college and Nigel Wilkinson at WNW design. [www.exmouthtownmanagement.co.uk](http://www.exmouthtownmanagement.co.uk)

There will be a public exhibition in Exmouth town centre in late April, concerning the enhancements proposed for the Strand area of the town. The work is part of the planned pedestrian link from the estuary to the seafront and will also respond to the needs of cyclists in the area. Final proposals for the enhancements will be on show, following an extensive consultation process on the scheme, which has been taking place in Exmouth since last summer 2008.

## DAWLISH NEWS IN BRIEF

### BBC Gardeners' World Presenter to open Local Produce Market in Dawlish

Toby Buckland, presenter on the ever-popular gardening programme, BBC Gardeners' World, will perform the opening ceremony of Dawlish Local Produce Market at 11.00a.m. on Friday 17th April 2009 at the piazza on the Lawn, Dawlish.

The produce market is a joint venture between Dawlish Town Council and Dawlish Chamber of Trade and Commerce, delivered jointly in an effort to help regenerate the town and the businesses of producers locally. The project is supported by Devon Renaissance.

The market is held on the third Friday of every month and the Grand Opening on the 17th April will also celebrate the completion of the new piazza/market place for the town where, it is hoped, a plethora of local events will take place throughout the year.

# CRAB TILE SURVEY 2008

Last autumn the partnership carried out a survey of the number of crab tiles in the estuary comparing it to the 2001 and 2004 surveys previously completed.

Crab tiling or potting is the collection of peeler crabs from the intertidal mudflats on the estuary for use as bait by fishermen and anglers. Like all crustaceans shore crabs moult their shell in order to grow meaning at various intervals in their life cycle they have soft shells and are vulnerable to predation. During these periods the crabs actively seek out hard surfaces to shelter under as a refuge from predators. The bait collectors exploit this behaviour by providing artificial structures for the crabs to use.

The bait collectors each have their own sets of crab tiles on the estuary, which are generally sections of drain pipe or roof tiles that the peeler crabs will shelter under. Crab tiling has taken place for many years and local crab tilers often recall their grandfathers crab tiling on the same site.

Crab Tiling is managed by Devon Sea Fisheries Committee Bylaw 24 which limits the area in which crab tiles can be laid in order to maintain sustainable quantities of shore crabs on the estuary, any tiles outside of this area may be removed. Starcorss Yacht club across to Exton are the upper limits of the area.

A voluntary crab tile code of conduct is also in force, which was created and agreed by the bait collectors and the Exe Estuary Management Partnership in 2003. The code states that no more tiles should be laid, the 2001 survey results are used as the benchmark of how many tiles are allowed.

Unlike the previous surveys the 2008 report was not instigated due to any perceived increase in activity but is part of the long term management and understanding of the situation and provides guidance as to the success

of the bylaw and voluntary code of conduct.

The results show a general decline in the number of tiles across the estuary, since the last survey was undertaken, with 26,488 tiles counted and a small decline when compared with the baseline data of 26,800 collected in 2001. The fluctuations are fairly small and appear stable to within a few thousand tiles.

The results are a positive sign that the voluntary code of conduct has been successful and has been abided by. This is not surprising as the number of tiles is directly related to the number of crabs caught per tile so it is in the bait collector's interest to abide by the voluntary code of conduct. Feedback from crab tillers indicates that the catch rate has decreased in recent years making it even more important that the code of conduct is adhered to in the future and no more tiles are added.

The survey is limited in its use as it does not provide any information as to the impact of tiles on the number of crabs or the estuary as a whole, such as disturbance to key feeding and roosting areas for birds. We hope to expand future studies to examine the wider impact of crab tiling on the Exe. The partnership will continue to monitor the situation and will work with Devon Sea Fisheries to ensure the necessary legislation is in place to protect the estuary.



## Crab Collector's Code



Through voluntary agreement of existing crab collectors it has been agreed that no more tiles should be placed on the Exe Estuary



Due to rapid expansion in recent years Devon Sea Fisheries Committee have introduced new legislation – Byelaw 24. Tiles outside the orange area on the map are now illegal.



Be aware that permission of the landowner should be given before accessing the foreshore or placing crab tiles.



Make sure you are aware of Devon Sea Fisheries, Local Council Byelaws and Harbour Authority Byelaws



To avoid causing difficulty or damage to other estuary users:

- Avoid placing crab tiles in awkward or dangerous positions (eg. near slipways)
- Place crab tiles at a low angle. Crab tiles should be no more than 20cm in height above the mudflat.
- Avoid placing crab tiles within 5m of commercial oyster and mussel beds and leave a 10m wide access route to each bed.



Never use (and phase out whenever possible) material such as asbestos or sharp metal which could have a detrimental effect on the environment or people.



Only take crabs that are fit for use as bait and return immature, berried (egg carrying) and non moulting crabs.



Whilst on the foreshore, keep dogs on a lead to avoid disturbance to birds.



Offer advice about your activity to other estuary users wherever possible.



Should you encounter non-native or unusual species eg. Chinese mitten crab please report these to MarLIN 01752 255026



If you are interested in contributing to the Exe-Press newsletter or would like information about any aspect of the Partnership's work, please contact the Exe Estuary Management Partnership c/o Luccombe House, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon EX2 4QW  
Tel 01392 382236 Mobile 07967 456376 Email [exeestua@devon.gov.uk](mailto:exeestua@devon.gov.uk)