

Are you on the Partnership's database?

Over 400 people have registered their contact details with the Exe Estuary Partnership. The Exe Estuary Officer maintains a database of over 400 people active in and around the Exe Estuary. Those listed, receive a free copy of the Exe-Press newsletter by post and notice of meetings convened by the Partnership. If you would like to be included on the Partnership's database please complete a Response Form and return it to the Estuary Officer. Copies of the form are available on the Partnership's website <http://www.exe-estuary.org/index2.htm> under 'Leaflets' and 'Our Publications', or contact the Estuary Officer directly (contact details below).

Summer Events...

Details of events on and around the Exe Estuary are regularly posted on the Partnership's website www.exe-estuary.org. Here are just a few events taking place this summer.

Dawlish Warren

Guided Events for Children

Scavenger Hunt

Tuesday 29th July @ 2pm

Dragons, Damsels & Other Beasts

Thursday 7th August @ 2pm

Guided Family Wildlife Walk

Wildlife on the Warren

Tuesday 5th August @ 10.30am

For a full programme of guided walks and other events at Dawlish Warren contact the wardens on 01626 863980

Powderham Castle

Various events March to November

Phone for the latest information or check the website.

Tel: 01626 890243

Email: castle@powderham.co.uk

Website: www.powderham.co.uk

Historic Exmouth

A free guided walk on the Blue Plaque Heritage Trail

Every Tuesday morning from 6th May - 30th September.



(No unaccompanied children or large groups. Guide dogs only). Walk lasts approx. 1 hour. Meet at Exmouth Pavillion Esplanade (seafront). Organised by Exmouth Town Management Partnership
Tel: 01395 263084
Email: simonekruger@supanet.com
www.exmouth-guide.co.uk

South West Marine Week

9-16th August

Look out for lots of fun activities all around the South West, celebrating the wonderful marine life of the coast. Coastal walks, seasearch dives, rock pooling, marine family fun days and lots more! Take part in a special 'Coastwatch' for marine wildlife on **16th August**. For further information contact Barbara Haddrill at Devon Wildlife Trust on Tel: 01271 879853.

A Date for your Diary

Saturday 8th
November 2003

Exe Estuary Forum

The annual informal meeting of the Exe Estuary Partnership.

For details contact the Exe Estuary Officer.



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 Officer, Natasha Barker.

Exe Estuary Management Partnership

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Exe-Press Editors: Natasha Barker, Exe Estuary Officer and David Atkins, Local Community Focus Group Chairman



New Harbour Authority Progress

Exeter City Council has now formally decided that a new Trust style harbour authority should be established for the management of harbour services on the Exe Estuary. The aim is that a new single harbour authority for the Exe will replace the two existing harbour authorities (Exeter City Council and Exmouth Docks Company).

So what will the new harbour authority do? The precise details are still to be worked out, but the most important role will be to maintain navigation and help ensure marine safety. Surveying and maintaining buoys to mark the navigable channel, and control of vessels through

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NEWS FLASH!

New European Funds for the Exe

The Exe Estuary Partnership have just been awarded new funds for the next 3 years as part of a project led by the Environment Agency called 'Cycleau'.

The funds have been allocated from the European Commission's Interreg IIIb programme.

More details will be provided in the next edition of *Exe-Press*.

BBC launch new webcam over the Exe!



After months of negotiation Starcross Fishing & Cruising Club are pleased to announce that the BBC have agreed to mount a webcam on the Brunel Tower.

The webcam gives a panoramic view of the Estuary - approximately 35 degrees either side of Starcross Pier. It can be accessed from the BBC Internet Web Site www.bbc.co.uk/devon/

The Exe webcam forms one of a series of natural history sites at which the BBC have installed webcams. They were attracted to the Exe by its natural beauty - confirming the significance of the Exe as one of Devon's most valuable areas.

byelaws etc. are some of the more noticeable functions, but other roles such as pilotage and management of waste will also be included in the harbour authority's responsibilities. A more dedicated harbour authority could also provide services such as the provision of information and promotion of the estuary - work which is currently done by the Exe Estuary Partnership.

The other District Councils neighbouring the estuary (East Devon and Teignbridge) and the Exmouth Docks Company have all informally declared support for the dissolution of the two existing harbour authorities and the establishment of a new harbour authority, set up as a Trust. Details of how the Trust will be financed will need to be worked out over the coming months.

The Exe Estuary Partnership has been invited to be a 'fundamental' partner on a working group being set up to look into the details needed so that the necessary legislation can be drafted. Ivan Wilkinson, Chairman of the Exe Estuary Partnership's Harbour Services Focus Group said 'Government policy states that users pay for the services and facilities that they use, therefore boat owners will be expected to pay for navigation services. However, additional means of raising finance to provide facilities which other estuary users enjoy needs to be explored.'

The Exe Estuary Partnership has encouraged the involvement of estuary users in the debate leading up to Exeter City Council's decision to form a new harbour Trust - and will continue to encourage consultation and raise awareness of the plans for a new harbour authority.

For further information please see **Exeter City Council's Information Bulletin** inside *Exe-Press*, or contact Ian Cowe of Exeter City Council (Tel: 01392 265336).

Crab Collection - New Code

Over the past few months the Exe Estuary Partnership has been making closer contact with some of the Exe's most interesting characters - crabs! The future of crab collection on the Exe is being discussed with the drafting of a new Code of Conduct.

For decades, local people - mainly anglers - have collected peeler/shore crabs from Devon's estuaries because they provide good quality bait. Extra shelters are placed in the mud for the crabs to use during their vulnerable moulting stage, providing more habitat for them and possibly increasing stocks. When the crabs are about to peel they are taken by fishermen and used for bait. As recreational angling has increased in popularity, so too has the demand for crabs. The activity of crab collection using tiles (sometimes known as pots) has been present on estuaries in the south-west for decades, but has increased significantly over the past decade.

It is estimated that there are approximately 30,000 crab tiles in the Exe Estuary. They can be seen on the western shore around Starcross and on the eastern shore between Lypstone and Exmouth. The 'tiles' are anything that provides shelter for the crabs - typically pieces of old roof tiles or drain pipe and are angled at 30-50° in the mud. Some people mistake the lines of shelters for rocks or archaeological features.

A first draft of a Code of Conduct has been sent to all known crab collectors. The aim is to establish a voluntary code which limits the risk of conflict with other estuary users e.g. boat users, mussel/oyster farming and feeding birds. Crab



Crab collection has taken place on the Estuary for decades, but has significantly increased over the past ten years.

collectors are welcoming the Code.

Whilst the Exe Estuary Partnership and the relevant authorities would prefer to pursue a voluntary approach to crab collection on the Exe, it was apparent from a meeting held with crab collectors in February that regulation of the activity may be required. In the meantime it is hoped that the interests of crab collectors will be better represented in future if co-operation on a voluntary basis can be demonstrated.

For further information please contact the Estuary Officer or Devon Sea Fisheries Committee (Tel: 01803 854648).

Focus on Farming

Most of the land surrounding the Exe Estuary was drained from salt marsh in the 17th and 18th centuries. The drainage was organised by the three large landowning estates surrounding the river: Bishops Court around Clyst St Mary/Topsham; Haldon Estate around Exminster; and Powderham Estate which stretches from Turf to the city boundary at Countess Wear.

After the land was drained it was allocated to the tenants' farms of the relevant estates and became an integral part of their farming system. The top soil is comprised of alluvial silts with clay below, on a gravel base. This type of soil provides highly fertile production especially in the dry summer months as most of the home farms on the Estates are on a sandstone base soil and are very prone to drying out in summer. The addition of the marsh land was therefore of tremendous benefit to grazing and fodder supplies.

Historically the marshes have been used for summer grazing of cattle and hay and silage making. Sheep are unsuitable as they are inclined to get into the dykes, where their fleeces would soak with water and become so heavy that the sheep would be unable to get out and usually drown.

With the introduction of artificial fertilizers in the early 1960's and the reseeded of the pastures, agricultural production boomed. The Government encouraged "food from our own resources" and the Exe marshes were intensively grazed by large numbers of cattle. Cattle prices were good and farmers thrived by producing top quality British beef.

In the early 1980's Government policy began to change with the emphasis on conservation becoming more important than intensive food production. There was a world glut of beef which could easily be imported at a cheap price and concern over dwindling wildlife numbers. The Exe Estuary is an extremely important bird reserve;



Farming is an integral part of the estuary landscape

with the combination of mud flats and marsh land it is ideal for winter migration and summer residents which is noted nationwide.

The sale of Bishops Court and Haldon Estate allowed the marshes to be bought by the local farmers and in the 1970's there were about 25-30 different owners. However, with the decline of British agriculture and with the new interest in conservation much of the land is now owned by the RSPB and about 10 farmers. Historically, because the land is so fertile it was sold for twice the price of ordinary land - this is no longer the case. To improve the wildlife habitat some fields have been flooded, such that agricultural production is at an all time low.

The supermarket shelves are now stocked with food from all around the world giving the housewife unlimited choice. The marshes of the Exe Estuary still remain a beautiful and peaceful place but to a large extent the "birds have replaced the bullocks".

R J Mortimer, Chairman of the Agriculture and Land Use Focus Group and local farmer.

Focus Group Chairmen - Election Results

Several years ago the Exe Estuary Partnership established Focus Groups to bring together groups of people in specific subject areas to discuss estuary related matters. Focus Group Chairmen were identified from volunteers who put themselves forward. Views from the Focus Groups are taken to the Exe Estuary Forum for wider discussion and are represented by Focus Group Chairmen on the Partnership's Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). The Focus Group Chairmen and Estuary Officer meet regularly to discuss problems and opportunities relating to the future use and management of the estuary.

In April 2003 elections were held to formalise the Focus Group Chairmen's positions. Four Focus Group Chairmen were uncontested: Robert Mortimer for Agriculture/Land Use; Malcolm Davies for Conservation; David Jarrad for Fisheries; and David Atkins for Local Community. Lyn Trout stood down for Commerce and nominated Guy Child who was uncontested. There were two new volunteers for Harbour Services and Recreation/Access with Jim Shapter and Alan Harwood interested in both positions. With the majority of Harbour Services Focus Group votes, Ivan Wilkinson will continue as Chairman. For the Chairman of Recreation/Access there was a tie between Philip Chesterfield and Jim Shapter who have decided to share the role. Eileen Wragg volunteered to be the first Chairman of the Water Quality and Pollution Focus Group.

For further information about the Focus Group Chairmen and other members of the JAC, please see the *Who's Who Leaflet* (provided inside this newsletter).



How many birds are there? Thirty years of bird counts on the Exe Estuary.

Bird flocks on the Exe in winter 2003 including black tailed godwit (foreground)

The Exe Estuary is of outstanding importance for water birds; designations of the Exe as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area and Ramsar Wetland Site reflect this importance at a UK and international level. Whether or not an area is designated sometimes depends upon the numbers of birds using a particular site. Just how do we know how many birds are using the Exe Estuary and whether their numbers are going up or down?

In common with most estuaries and wetlands in the UK, the Exe Estuary is regularly counted as part of the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). This scheme aims to monitor water birds in the UK, to provide the data on which the conservation of the species and their habitats can be based. Water birds include divers, grebes, herons, swans, geese, ducks and waders. WeBS data is used to assess the importance of individual sites and the trends in water bird populations and distributions.

Here on the Exe, up to a dozen experienced volunteers take part in a synchronised WeBS counts of water birds every month. Each counter has an area of the estuary allocated to them; including land at the margins that estuary birds are known to use. The counts are usually one or two hours before high tide, which means that many wading birds are forced off the intertidal mud, towards the margins of the estuary by the incoming tide.

The data from the Exe is sent to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge, who combine all the counts to produce reports giving the overall picture for the whole of the UK.

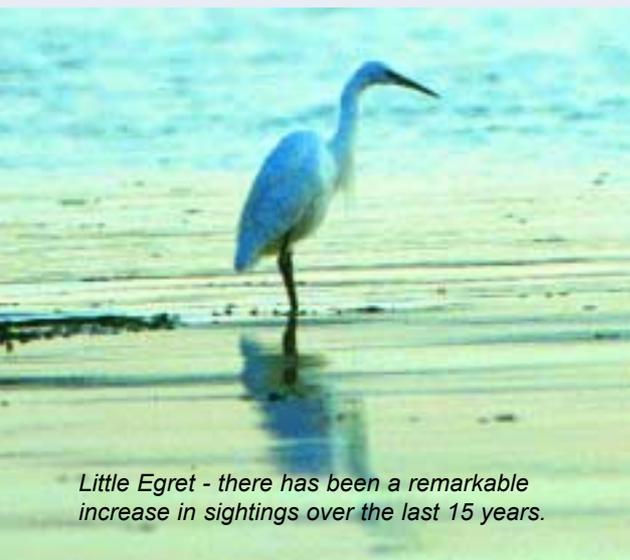
WeBS style counts were first carried out on the Exe in 1970, so there is now over 30 years worth of data available, particularly important when trying to assess significant long-term trends. The data is particularly valuable, because of the consistency of the methods used and the fact that individual counters cover the same areas - sometimes for more than 20 years!

What is happening to bird numbers on the Exe Estuary?

The most important time for birds on the Exe Estuary is during the winter, when a grand total of between 15 to 25,000 birds can be seen at one time, which makes the area internationally important for its birds. The highest numbers each year are usually recorded in December or January. Looking at these annual peak counts over the 30-year period, total numbers of birds have remained about the same.

However, within the combined totals are many differences between individual species. For example, peak winter counts for wigeon have declined over the whole period from around 6-7,000 in the 1970's to between 2-4,000 recently. Over the same period, peak winter counts of avocet have dramatically increased, from less than 50 to between 4-500 (although recently, the trend has stabilized). The numbers of little egrets visiting the estuary over the last 15 years has rocketed from occasional sightings of single birds to peak counts of over 100.

Currently the estuary is internationally important for the numbers of black tailed godwits recorded here during winter, and nationally important for several other wintering birds including avocet, brent goose and oystercatcher. The estuary also attracts nationally important numbers of



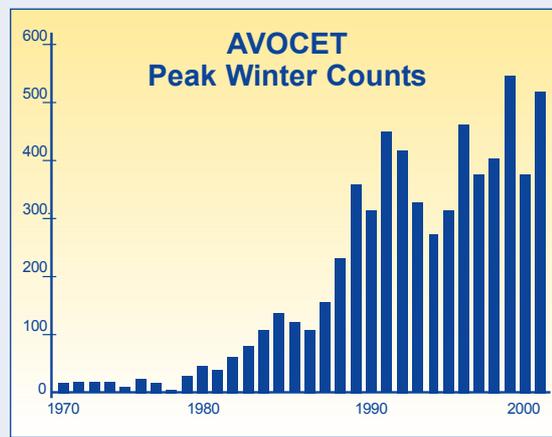
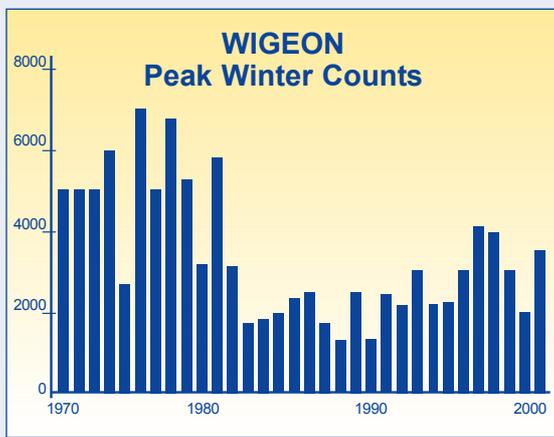
Little Egret - there has been a remarkable increase in sightings over the last 15 years.

The Partnership's Local Community Focus Group aims to promote the Exe Estuary Management Partnership, its roles and responsibilities through various means. In short - to publicise, promote, present and participate (the four P's!) - through as many ways as is practical within the available resources. Natasha the Exe Estuary Officer and I have embarked on a series of visits to Parish/Town Councils and other bodies to promote the Estuary Partnership, which is one way I'd hoped to make more people aware of the need to co-operate in the future management of the Exe and its associated well being.

We are now to embark on brief news items on the work of the Partnership in local news letters and press articles. It is our hope that more people will wish to become aware of the needs of the Estuary and the requirement for voluntary guidance and control of all aspects of 'life on the Exe' and its surrounding catchment area.

Our aim is to balance the needs of agriculture, recreation, fishing and boating in all forms - and co-operation is the password for success and commitment.

David Atkins, Chairman of the Local Community Focus Group



birds such as ringed plover, sandwich tern and whimbrel during spring and autumn migration periods.

The counts can reveal other changes; for example, the majority of the wintering duck are arriving in the estuary up to 2 months earlier than 30 years ago, and then leaving one to two months earlier. Is this one effect of global warming?

Numbers of some birds are easier to collect than others. For example, the monthly WeBS counts are likely to reflect the true numbers of birds such as wintering brent geese, whose population is largely resident over that period. Flocks of migrating birds are a different matter; large numbers of whimbrel pass through the estuary each spring and autumn. As the individual flocks often only stay in the estuary for a day or so, and the majority of the population passes through in less than a fortnight, recording a true passage peak as part of the WeBS count is a matter of chance.

If anyone is interested in participating in future WeBS counts on the Exe Estuary, please contact the local count coordinator: davidprice@eclipse.co.uk

Malcolm Davies, Conservation Focus Group Chairman.

Prosecution for Dog Walker



After a previous warning an Exeter man has pleaded guilty and been fined for walking his dog in the designated dog ban area (past groyne 9) at Dawlish Warren National Nature Reserve. The site has European designation for its wildlife and this places a special responsibility on Teignbridge District Council to protect the site.

The Council introduced new byelaws for dog walking in April 2002. Dogs can still be taken over a large part of the beach and over much of the Reserve on a lead, but not past groyne 9 towards Warren Point which is the most sensitive area for wildlife all year round.

Wardens at Dawlish Warren have been actively promoting and publicising the new byelaw and most dog walkers have followed the byelaws since their introduction. However, a small minority have not and now enforcement action is being taken where necessary.

For further information on where to walk your dog at the Warren please contact the Wardens on 01626 863980 or 01626 215754.



View of Exmouth Beach from the east at Orcombe Point

Exmouth Waterside and Visitor Centre

A Development Group commissioned Graham Manchester (watersports consultant) to draw up a business plan for a new Exmouth Waterside and Visitor Centre which has been submitted to East Devon District Council this summer. About 20 organisations are supporting the proposals with a view to being based within the centre. For further information, see www.onwater.net (under Project Portfolio) or Tel: (01395) 260452.

The New 'Avocet Line'

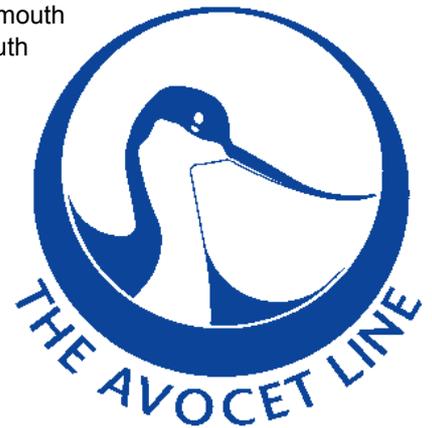
The Exe Estuary's famous avocet will soon be giving its name to the Exeter to Exmouth Rail Link. Exmouth Town Management Partnership is working with Wessex Trains and the RSPB to 'brand' the line with the bird's name.

Exmouth already has a sponsored train running throughout the South West, called the Exmouth Avocet which carries a montage of Exmouth scenes, which was officially named at Exmouth Station on 19th May this year.

The target date for the branding ceremony of the Avocet Line is in October when the avocet return to the Exe for the winter. Exeter Central is the 'gateway' station and interpretation boards and a mural of the estuary are under discussion. The Partnership will be providing information for posters at each station alongside the estuary between Exeter and Exmouth.

Exmouth Town Manager Robin Fletcher says 'We hope to stimulate interest in the many attractions and activities on offer in Exmouth, the Estuary and its hinterland'.

The Exmouth Town Manager is based at Exmouth Town Council Tel: 01395 263084.



Chief Executive Endorses Partnership

English Nature's newly appointed Chief Executive, Dr Andy Brown, recently visited the Exe Estuary. This was Dr Brown's first visit to the estuary with its internationally important wildlife and he spent the morning with members of English Nature's Devon team at the nature reserves in Topsham.

Dr Brown said, "It was encouraging to hear about the excellent work of the Exe Estuary Partnership in helping to deliver sustainable management of this internationally important site. We are committed to supporting the work of the Partnership and hope it continues to enable the public to experience and enjoy the rich wildlife of the estuary".

English Nature strongly believes that working in partnership is the most effective way of managing protected sites, particularly for complex sites with many organisations and people involved such as the Exe, and is delighted with the continued delivery of the Exe Estuary Partnership.



Dr Andy Brown (middle) with colleagues from the Devon team of English Nature

National Cycle Network Progress

Devon County Council and English Nature have recently been in discussion about proposals for the National Cycle Network which has been promoted by Sustrans for some years. The Council is preparing outline plans for the route between the major towns and villages around the Exe Estuary, with as many flat and off-road sections as possible. The cycle routes around the Canal basin and River Exe to Bridge Road section have been completed over the past year, illustrating the potential improvements that could be made for cyclists around the whole estuary.

Sections of the proposed route between Exmouth and Lympstone are progressing most quickly, with the aim of alleviating traffic problems - approximately 20,000 cars use the road between Exmouth and Exeter every day! Discussions for other sections of the estuary-side route have focused on how to cross the railway at Powderham and the River Clyst between Exton and Topsham. English Nature have advised Devon County Council



that an Appropriate Assessment will be required outlining potential impacts on birds and linked habitats designated under the European Habitats Directive. The Exe Estuary Forum and Recreation/Access and Conservation Focus Groups have received presentations from Devon County Council officers involved in the NCN development over the past year about the proposals. The Exe Estuary Partnership is calling for a strategic approach to assessing route options and alignments and full consideration of environmental impacts, whilst in principle supporting the new cycle network. Fuller public consultation is expected in due course.

For further information please contact Robin Bevis at Devon County Council
Tel: 01392 382000 Email: rbevis@devon.gov.uk

Kiteboarding Schools Open in Exmouth

Kiteboarding/Kitesurfing is becoming increasingly popular on the Exe Estuary. This year has seen new schools offering a variety of courses opening in Exmouth. Exe Kiteboarders, a group of local kiteboarders, are widely advocating the Voluntary Code of Conduct which gives guidance on setting up, launching & landing, local sites, equipment, general safety guidelines and rules for the local area. The Exe Kiteboarders are hoping to set up club membership to help publicise and implement the Code and encourage safe and responsible use of the water for kiteboarders. Schools which have set up in Exmouth are working together to ensure all boarders have adequate insurance cover and all schools and instructors are abiding by the Code.

For further information please contact: www.exe-kiteboarders.co.uk

- **Spinnakers Sailing Centre and Kite School** - Tel: 01395 222551
- **Waterfront Sports** - Tel: 01395 276599 / www.waterfront-sports.com
- **Tad Shop** - Tel: 01395 227007 / info@tadshop.com / www.tadshop.com

