

## Exe Estuary Forum 2011

### Disturbance Study Workshop Notes

#### Middle Estuary

- Activities restricted by railway which protects the middle Exe from more intensive access / usage
- Starcross YC – Access not often open and limited to members
- Other access points are public but not maintained thereby limiting access
- SYC's experience is that birds in this area are not often disturbed by sailing boats
- Major sailing activity takes place at high water therefore is in limited competition with the birds
- Issues concerning parking at Lympstone on the foreshore
- Can we create alternative parking at Lympstone to dissuade people parking on the foreshore
- Wildfowlers' dogs run around on the foreshore whilst the wildfowlers shoot from the shore
- Birds seem to be accustomed to disturbance by trains, shooting from marine camp and the marine band.
- It is not right to stop people accessing the foreshore
- Existing polite signs are ignored (e.g. those on Powderham estate asking people to keep dogs on leads)

#### Suggestions:

- All dog walkers should use a lead and alternative space should be provided where they can run free
- Education: Need to raise awareness of why restrictions are in place to increase probability of people adhering to them
- Cameras?
- Appropriate signage – keep it wild, not too much signage
- Cyclists should give way to pedestrians on cycle path and they should be reminded of that – code of conduct promoted? (is already on next Exe Explorer leaflet)
- Wardening – too expensive
  - confidential issues of enforcement (face to face)
- Speeding related issues – boats going too fast and very noisy – who can enforce speed limits?
- Police patrol? Waterskiing, jet skiing will probably increase in future
- Birds don't appear to be disturbed by existing use of cycle path at Starcross and Powderham. They will probably get used to increasing numbers of people using it should population and estuary use increase.
- Harbour Revision Order – will that resolve any of these issues?
- The water-ski area has now moved to the middle of the channel
- Does zonation work?
- Can we learn anything from what's being done at other sites? Why reinvent the wheel?
- On the middle Exe there are lots of very quiet, inaccessible spots – there is a reasonable balance here
- Sowden lane slipway seems to be the main problem area

## **Starcross – Dawlish**

- Could the Exe ever lose its SPA status?
- Walking not a problem at Starcross
- Wardening effective at Dawlish Warren
- How to reach people that don't know about the issues?
- Problem of encouraging people to use the countryside vs. disturbance
- People don't read signs
- General local offence at the Dawlish Warren restrictions for dog walking
- Need to specifically show the effects of disturbance on birds
  - More data needed
  - Data needs to be available and easy to understand – then people will realise that there is a problem.
  - Needs to be less softy softly, more abrupt – we might lose the birds!
  - Need to make use of historical data
  - Really clearly demonstrate the declines
- Ban crab tiling
- Engage Parish Councils further – more widespread publicity of the issues / restrictions.

## **Exmouth LNR / Duck Pond**

### Parking on Foreshore

#### **Motivation for parking on the foreshore?**

- Limited spaces in car park
- Free
- Encouraged by seeing other cars parked there
- For easier access to boat
- To avoid time limit on car park (max 3 hour stay)

#### **How can we prevent?**

- Awareness raising of disturbance being caused
- Is there a distinction between legitimate use (people accessing boats) and non-legitimate (people using instead of car park)
- Regular groups of people collecting shellfish all park on the foreshore (believed to be commercial)
- There is a need to improve signage so people know they shouldn't park there but this needs to be balanced with other signs / interpretation else there are too many and nobody takes any notice
- The driving behaviour of people on the foreshore is important

### Exercising dogs on the foreshore

- Could possibly be a bylaw paired with the summer beach exclusion so that dogs can use Exmouth seafront in the winter and the estuary in the summer.
- Would be difficult to enforce any bylaw / order preventing people walking their dog here.
- Need to educate people about disturbance and promote a responsible citizen approach
- Again, beware of too much signage
- Has there been a decrease in seal numbers? Is this related to these disturbance issues as well?

- Can we use a 'soft touch' and approach dog walkers politely and request that they no longer use the area in the winter?
- Other members of the group had experience of trying this approach and commented on the amount of abuse they and received.
- Needs multiple approach: education and enforcement / bylaw as well as alternative sites for people to use
- Green spaces where dogs are allowed to be exercised needs to be considered in development of new housing areas
- Could there be some way of identifying regular users
- Responsible dog owner's scheme.

#### Bait Digging / Crab Collecting

- Unlike other activities bait diggers can't go elsewhere to alternative sites nearby
- This is not just a hobby but a livelihood for some people so harder to restrict.
- Shellfish collecting is not well regulated and there are groups that come every day to collect shellfish from the estuary.
- Could bait collectors be made to register so that we have a list of who is collecting what and where? (this has been difficult in the past as many of them don't declare earnings so are reluctant to be formally registered)
- Seasonal Zonation? – could we prevent them collecting from key areas where bird disturbance would otherwise be minimal?
- Could we rotate areas that they are allowed to use? Would this benefit the ecology of the Exe?
- Seasonal restrictions / voluntary agreements to avoid high pressure areas
- There will always be a difficulty enforcing any restrictions – would need funding for wardens
- Easier group to work with as small in comparison to other user groups.

Education - seen as a way of managing many of these issues but what sources can we use to educate local communities?

- Spotlight and other local news programmes
- Local paper
- James Chubb's regular article in Exmouth Journal – very well read and respected
- Signage – although this has to be balanced to prevent too many
- Leaflet / flyer drop at people's homes
- Schools – Group strongly agreed that a key focus should be to work with the younger users through local schools
- Posters / information in local vets / kennels / pet shops etc
- We need to capitalise on news stories in the press to influence responsible dog ownership, such as recent dog attack on Exmoor
- Volunteer wardens – people are 'contained' on the sandbanks at Exmouth LNR so could be easily approached if somebody is in place to do so
- Indoor market in Exmouth is seen as very popular, opportunity to have messages on shopping bags particularly from local pet shops
- 'Dog control area' sign can be very effective in making people more aware of their behaviour without imposing lots of bylaws or signage – a method used in other countries.

## Upper Estuary

- Would like to know if increased activity during the housing growth is going to affect disturbance.
- Delegate states that they feel assured how little disturbance occurs from recreation. But the Disturbance Study indicates that there is disturbance from recreation. Disturbance can depend on how regular an activity is, birds can get used to it.
- Bowling Green – No activities take place there that didn't occur 30-40 years ago. Therefore is there much point in carrying out the study here?
- Watersports don't really take place at the top of the Estuary.
- Clyst – Boats don't go there very often.
- Exe Cycle Route – the increase in cyclists could result in a significant increase in disturbance.
- Topsham – Density of boats greater.
- Why do we need more intertidal habitat?
  - Strategy needs to conclude before any managed realignment takes place.
  - Exe has hard defences around it, so the resulting losses of intertidal habitat caused the need to create more habitat.

### Turf:

- Main activities include walking, canoeing and cycling.
- Pure volume of walking creates flight responses.
- Walking occurs all year round which could possibly be the reason for the high disturbance that this creates?
- Does it matter if a bird flies about 50m away?
  - The study will look at the effects of this.

### Which measures / restrictions would you rather see?

- Won't birds just move to quieter areas away from disturbance?
  - This is based on the assumption that there are quieter places available.
  - Birds may end up moving to a potentially worse site for feeding. Are there any studies on the mud in different areas? To show why birds feed in certain areas? Yes, but these studies are expensive.
- If restrictions are imposed in the management of the Exe, some people will continue to carry out their activities regardless.
- Is there an option to introduce zoned areas?
- One delegate mentioned that in their experience, dog walking off the lead did not disturb an Avocet, who carried on feeding.
- Boats and deeper water activities surely shouldn't create as much disturbance?
- In the past, Topsham was a busy port. Maybe there's a possibility that birds just adjust to disturbance?
- From experience, generally birds seem to have increased since the past. Not borne out by data.
- Country Parks unlikely to divert use.
- Increased management of access acceptable.
- Increase in education is key – e.g. signs, leaflets.

## Exmouth Seafont

- Seafont is so busy it's rarely used by birds. Pole Sand can sometimes hold waders, gulls and terns.

- Discussion focussed on the potential for the seafront to be used more by e.g. dog walkers (reducing use at the Duck Pond / LNR area) and also kite surfers and windsurfers launching from here but ending up at Dawlish Warren (where birds roost). The Maer and the seafront are key local sites for dog walkers.
- The firm, sandy intertidal areas are popular both with dog walkers and families (the latter in the summer). For dog walkers the attraction is the firm walking, safe areas for dogs to run off leads, no need to pick up.
- Education and signage was thought important – unlikely that dog walkers realised that dogs off leads on the intertidal habitats might be causing disturbance
- Use of local paper and better signage would be good
- Many dog walkers do use both the LNR area and the seafront. There's a limited range of other locations to go around Exmouth (Woodbury was mentioned as one alternative)
- Could access in the LNR area be focused on the sandy area around the sailing club and around the buildings/boats, rather than the wider (muddier areas) used by birds? This might require some kind of markers.
- Some reciprocal promotion, such that the seafront was used in the winter by dog walkers and the LNR area in the summer was suggested.
- The grassy area at LNR (the recreation ground) was suggested as a good area within Exmouth to promote for all year round dog walking (i.e. dogs on grass area not the foreshore)