

## Fleet Study Group 121st Meeting (24th November 2017)

### Attendees:

Ed Harland (Chairman), Jessica Mead, Mark, Alan Holiday, Jon Bass, Steve Groves, Charlie Wheeler, Angela Thomas, Jonathan Cox, Don Moxom, John Dadds, Adrian Bicker, Maxine Chavner, Sarah Bagwell, Adrian Brokenshire.

### Apologies:

Charlotte Bolton, Lin Baldock, Steve Feist, Angus Menzies, Matt Doggett & Kevin Donnelly

### Minutes of the 120th meeting

Accepted as a true record - following correction of two typos. **Ed Harland** apologised for the delay in circulation.

### Recent Meetings

Dorset Coast Forum: (attended by **Lin Baldock**) noted a presentation of specific FSG interest, an overview of Portland port activities including reference to measures required to accommodate large cruise ships

Plymouth SW Coastal Observatory: no FSG members in attendance, presentations included report on shoreline recovery following storm events. Presentations are not on-line yet.

Portland Harbour Consultative Committee: following limited consultation the draft application for a new shellfish culture area (Portland Oystermen Shellfish - Several Order) is undergoing changes. In summary, **Ed Harland** reported there was a discussion on potential adverse environmental impacts, with uncertainty both in terms of the final wording of the formal application and appropriate consent conditions to be imposed.

### Coastal Access route along the Fleet

Still no news of the outcome from the local Public Inquiry (Nov/Dec 2016). **Maxine Holder** (Natural England - NE) stated that a report is currently with NE.

### Reports

**Sarah Bagwell** (Bournemouth University) presented an update on her PhD study which includes analysing concentrations of metals and Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs), consequences for a species of polychaete worm and potential cascade impacts to other trophic levels. Sampling was from embayments along the length of the Fleet landward shore and included fine sediment/pore water/overlying water and the worm. Some contaminants indicate possible past industrial sources, for one or two metals the analytical results have prompted a verification exercise.

**Alex Green** (University College London) - no update currently available on her success with core sampling of deep fine sediment in the Fleet and associated carbon analysis.  
(Preliminary sediment samples under seagrass had indicated exceptionally high carbon concentrations in the Fleet.)

**Natural England Technical Advisory Group** - no activities to report

**Charlie Wheeler (Fleet Reserve Warden) assisted by Angela Thomas (Assistant Warden)**

- described their monitoring of bird reactions to a small (c.30cm) drone operated at 80m during systematic overflights to gather images of seagrass in the Fleet (see AOB - re separate slides prepared by **Matt Doggett/Lin Baldock**). The exercise will inform drone consent conditions being developed to minimise bird disturbance. {Ed Harland queried precision of drone altitude control - Q for **Matt Doggett**).
- in 2017 survey teams from SIFCA & EA surveyed small fish by seine-netting at 2-3 locations along the Fleet (as in 2016). An unexpected brill was recovered in a net haul near Ferry Bridge.
- assistance was provided with a bat netting operation at the Swannery using a harpnet trap with vegetation disguising the frame, also a separate 3-month acoustic investigation (see separate account by **Adrian Bicker**).
- organised a Beach Clean event at Abbotsbury which attracted 27 people and filled 12 bin-liners (plastic items filled 5 of the bags).
- helped **Steve Groves** ring Common Tern chicks and Black-headed Gull chicks on the pontoon moored in Swannery bay (see separate account for Little Terns by **John Dadds**). Moth trapping, also with **Steve Groves**, yielded some southern spp that had been absent when trapping took place c.30 years ago.
- Charlie described the new access permit system he has developed as operating successfully, including the advantage of a written permission document to present when challenged. Please contact Charlie in the first instance to arrange your visit.
- consulted on a new prohibition order for bottom towed fishing gear (this to cover tidal area of the Fleet, plus Portland Harbour and specific inshore areas along the Chesil Bank in Lyme Bay.)
- unusual autumn bird sightings in the Fleet reserve (incomplete list noted) - North American waders, Baird's Sandpiper and Spotted Sandpiper (following October storms), five Glossy Ibis, eight Grey Phalaropes, one Whooper Swan, two Cattle Egrets, Barred Warbler(?)
- recent mammals seen include Yellow-necked mouse and otters (Swannery area). Otter activity is now increasing, following rare sightings of spraints in 2008, a camera trap image in 2013, with recent day-sightings, footprints and camera-trap images (2017), including a

mother and cub adjacent to otter spraint depositing locations. Requested news of otter sightings which would appear on the reserve website [www.fleetandchesilreserve.org](http://www.fleetandchesilreserve.org)

**Adrian Bicker** described his acoustic monitoring of the *Nathusius Pipistrelle* which breeds in Europe and migrates over the UK. An area near Abbotsbury beach car park was chosen on the basis that known coastal movement might be focused here with the bats avoiding higher ground just inland during their autumn migration (Aug-Nov 2017). Adrian has developed a directional microphone shield to distinguish east/west movements of individual bats, he showed differences in echo location calls between *Nathusius Pipistrelle* and other bat spp, also social versus location echo call patterns. The equipment was displayed and fitted neatly into a small rucksack.

**John Dadds** provided an update on the 2017 Little Tern nesting/fledging success. Improvements in recent years were maintained, associated with nest insulation, predator deterrence and vigilance from 50 seasonal volunteers. 38 pairs nested with 1.9 chicks fledged per pair. Seven nests were predated by crows with no chicks lost to Kestrel. A new bird-scaring device using a focused light source was tested successfully. The Little Tern is now recognised as a 'Feature' of the Fleet 'Special Protection Area'. However, long-term funding support to organise volunteers and manage protection of the Little Tern colony remains an annual concern. [Related: in AOB **Maxine Holder** confirmed NE planned to fund retention of two remote cameras adjacent to the Fleet.]

**Jessica Mead** (Community Seagrass Initiative) has conducted a project which used teams of volunteer divers to monitor seagrass beds in the Weymouth area. The 3-year funding for the project has now come to an end. Assessment of Fleet seagrass beds revealed particularly dynamic coverage patterns of this protected habitat in the Fleet, stimulated the recent drone overflight surveys, validation exercises using underwater Go-Pro cameras and deployment of loggers (provided by NE) to record water temperature, light intensity and water depth. As a spin-off the project outcomes and data will assist interpretation of infrequently monitored Fleet seagrass status.

**FSG** - a planned Wadeway visit is proposed during a suitable tidal period in late March 2018. Purpose: to conduct a preliminary levels survey establishing wadeway sub-tidal shape and extent, in readiness for a FSG summer visit to record fauna/flora/geology in the area and additional ground surveys of the Wadeway.

#### **AOB**

**Jon Bass** presented drone overflight maps of the Fleet displaying composite survey images from 2016 & 2017 (provided by **Matt Doggett** and **Lin Baldock**). The 2016 data confirmed the reported loss of seagrass area within the Fleet and the 2017 data indicate signs of seagrass area recovery. Matt and Lin are currently analysing the image data. This will be

compared with information from **Jessica Mead** (contemporary Community Seagrass Initiative project).

**Marc Kativu-Smith** (Dorset Wildlife Trust Fleet Centre) outlined the bid under development to promote interception of angling litter at source, he reported there was support from local tackle shops and angling clubs, possibly to include timed litter collection periods at the end of competitions on Chesil Beach. Marc also described the new 'wader viewing platform' beside the Fleet Centre. This area is intended to provide focused 'spotting' activity at a convenient and comfortable position to reduce bird disturbance from people that currently encroach onto the foreshore and adjacent mudflats.

**Alan Holiday** drew attention to an article in Bridport News suggesting there was documentary evidence of a large Tsunami which came ashore in the Chesil area in 1014. **Ed Harland** invited comments and **Adrian Brokenshire** drew attention to the anomalous 'recent' deposit of mollusc shells present high on the sandy cliff along the Fleet shore between Pirates Cove and the Bridging Camp, which could be related to a Tsunami event . Other comments are invited.

#### **Dates of forthcoming FSG meetings in 2018**

16th March and 13th July - venues to be confirmed