

## Minutes of the 122<sup>nd</sup> Fleet Study Group Meeting 16<sup>th</sup> March 2018 at Littlebredy Walled Gardens

**Present:** Ed Harland, Lin Baldock, Jon Bass, Maxine Chavner, Jonathan Cox, John Dadds, Kevin Donnelley, Steve Groves, Alan Holiday, Don Moxom, Rachel Waldock, Charlie Wheeler.

**Apologies:** Richard Acornley, Charlotte Bolton, Matt Doggett, Marc Kativa-Smith, Simon Pengelly, Emma Rance.

**Introduction to the venue:** Liz Eaton. A one acre walled garden with the Walled Garden Workshop being a not-for-profit Community Interest company run by volunteers offering gardening placements for suitable people interested in acquiring hands-on experience in gardening and horticulture. Volunteers are currently restoring the gardens and walks. Teas served Wednesday and Sunday afternoons in season. <http://www.littlebredy.com/> and <http://wgw.org.uk/>

**Minutes of the 121<sup>st</sup> meeting:** approved with the correction of Maxine Chavner's name.

### Reports from representatives – summarised by Ed Harland

- **Portland Harbour Consultative Committee:** meetings now held twice a year. No progress with the Portland Harbour Oyster Farm Several Order. Application for the proposed dredging activity by the Outer Coaling Pier is now with the MMO.
- **Dorset Coast Forum:** nothing to report. Dorset Wildlife Trust centre at Kimmeridge has been refurbished and renamed the Fine Foundation Wild Seas Centre. <https://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/kimmeridge.html>

**Coastal Access:** no further developments.

### On-going and Planned Research

- Lin Baldock and other volunteers will be monitoring seagrass density at Langton Hive and Gore Cove twice a year continuing the work undertaken at these locations for the last three years by the Community Seagrass Initiative.
- Charlie Wheeler will continue studies on the impact of Drone flights on birds.
- Steve Groves has continued bird ringing on the reserve.
- Steve Groves has been running moth traps at Ferrybridge, Gore Cove, Clouds Hill and the Swannery. Plans are afoot to run a trap on the Portland Breakwater where a very rare moth has been reported whose caterpillars feed on Sea Lavender.
- Small fish surveys will continue to be undertaken twice-yearly by the Southern IFCA and the Environment Agency.
- Bats will continue to be monitored using acoustic methods and possibly mist netting.
- Funding has been secured for continued Little Tern protection and monitoring.
- Natural England will look for evidence for wild settlement of Pacific Oysters in the Fleet by a walk over and snorkel survey.
- Natural England (Maxine Chavner) is preparing the revised condition assessment documents for the Chesil and the Fleet SAC and the Chesil Beach and the Fleet SPA. Drafts to be sent out to stake holders imminently.

### Chesil Bank and the Fleet Nature Reserve Activities (Charlie Wheeler)

- Took part in the **Great Dorset Beach Clean** at Abbotsbury with 27 volunteers participating, collected 16 bags for landfill, 2 bags glass, 5 bags plastic, 4 bags tin cans.
- **Wild fowlers** assisted with clearing un-claimed boats from the reserve.
- **A Gate** has been installed at Langton Herring to try and reduce access by the public to the shore at Langton Hive.

- **Bird 'flu** (H5N6 strain) appeared in the swan herd in the winter, Abbotsbury being the first site in England to record an outbreak this winter (2017/2018). The outbreak appeared to be less severe than the 2016/17 one (H5N8 strain) with some adult birds showing immunity this winter. However, there was a 25% loss of the 2017 cohort of cygnets. In 2016/17 2-6 year old birds were lost, in 2017/18 losses in this group were much reduced indicating building immunity to the virus within the herd. Sarah Hill at Oxford University is undertaking a PhD "*Ecology and Epidemiology of Avian Influenza*" which is already providing a better understanding of the development and investigating possible inheritance of immunity within this unique group of birds. As part of this study blood samples from 64 live caught swans were analysed: of these six were positive for the virus two of these died and four survived.
- **Had discussions with HeliOperations** based at Portland to ensure flight paths avoid the Little Tern colony. This organisation provides training for SAR pilots and will ensure that their pilots are aware of the flight restrictions. They are obviously unable to influence other helicopter movements in the area.
- **Extra signage** has been put up on Herbury Island to discourage walkers from straying from the inland public right of way to follow the route along the shore. There has been some resistance to this.

### **Aerial Survey of the Fleet**

A summary of the aerial survey of the Fleet undertaken in September 2017 was to have been presented by Matt Doggett. Unfortunately, a vehicle breakdown prevented him attending the meeting. The full report of the survey will be available once Natural England has reviewed and approved the document. Hopefully Matt will be able to make a presentation at another time to the FSG.

### **Wade Way Survey – Ed Harland**

Suggested activities for 2018

- Establish reference points at each end of the wade way
- Characterise the shoreline – vegetation/geology/archaeology
- Map the exposure and establish its profile
- Snorkel survey
- Drone overflight
- Weather permitting a preliminary visit was proposed for 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

**Litter survey** – Moonfleet – visit proposed for August after the bird nesting season is over.

### **Little Terns – John Dadds**

Video of the Little Terns shown on Hugh's Wild West (BBC 2), played for the benefit of those who had not seen it before. The consensus of those present was that the clip was well presented and, most importantly, factually accurate.

The Chesil colony of Little Terns had its best season in recent years in 2017 with each pair fledging 1.92 chicks. This places the colony in the top five Little Tern colonies in the UK and Ireland for fledging success. The tern monitoring will continue in 2018 supported by funding from Court Leet and Natural England. It is hoped to provide 24hr cover, but at present there is insufficient funding.

Ed Harland is investigating ways of providing a more effective electric fence around the colony to reduce predation by foxes in particular. Washing the fence with water or washing and treating with PTFE spray did not improve the effectiveness of a short test fence

### **Any Other Business**

Several FSG members had indicated that Friday afternoon was not a good time to hold the meeting. In response to this the next meeting will be held on

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at 11am**  
**West Yard Barn Offices Abbotsbury**