

Breeding Waders of Poole Harbour

Oystercatcher · Redshank · Lapwing · Curlew · Little Ringed Plover

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Nick Hopper

Introduction

This report covers the species Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew and Little Ringed Plover. Avocet and Ringed Plover were also surveyed for, but no potential breeding activity was recorded. It was hoped this survey would also include Common Snipe and Woodcock but these two species will now form a separate survey next year.

Oystercatcher

Historical introduction

Poole Harbour is the most important breeding area in the region for Oystercatcher. Nesting is largely confined to the safer shores of the islands, with Brownsea being the most important.

Blathwayt (1933) described it as "a common resident that bred somewhat sparingly in the Poole Harbour area" and this has pretty much been the narrative ever since.

Prendergast and Boys (1983) considered that the Harbour breeding population was "probably under 20 in most years".

In 1994 a survey covering the Harbour's main islands was conducted (McClure and Payne) recording 25-33 pairs.

Writing in Important birds of Poole Harbour, Pickess & Day (2002) considered the description given by Blathwayt to be "as true today as it was some 70 years ago". They estimated the breeding population at 25 pairs.

Apart from the 1994 survey, all Poole Harbour population estimates have been based upon counts at Brownsea. In the 1990's, the ten-year average of breeding pairs here was 17. This increased to an average of 25 pairs in the ten years from 2000-2010, suggesting perhaps around 35 pairs for the harbour based on previous metrics.

It is not clear whether the 9 pairs recorded in 2011 was the result of a bad year or an incomplete count, however 1-5 pairs in the following years to 2019 were the result of under-recording.

Method

Oystercatcher nest on beaches, dunes, saltmarshes, rocky shores, vegetated tops of islands, cliff-foot scree, lake shores, inland river valleys, gravel pit islands, arable fields and more recently roof top locations.

All these habitats within the Poole Harbour recording area were identified and surveyed using a variety of methods ranging from walking beaches to scanning rooftops. Saltmarshes were also covered to within at least 100m of all areas as part of the Redshank survey.

Results

A total of 80 pairs of Oystercatcher were located. The highest numbers were on Brownsea with 31 pairs (20 along the shoreline and 11 on the Lagoon). Furzey and Green Islands were the next most important sites, each with 10 pairs. The top 8 sites were all island locations.

Table 1. Oystercatcher pairs by site

Brownsea (shoreline)	20
Brownsea Lagoon	11
Furzey Island	10
Green Island	10
Long Island	6
Holton Heath Islands	5
Fitzworth Islands	3
Round Island	3
Holes Bay south	2
Shag Looe Head	2
Arne Clay Pit	1
Brand's Bay	1
Holes Bay north	1
Poole Breakwater	1
Poole Park	1
Poole Port	1
Parkstone Yacht Club	1
Purbeck School	1

Most nests were on or adjacent to beaches on islands. Where the beach was bordered by a bluff, birds tended to either nest at the base or some feet up, where the area had perhaps subsided to provide a variety of hollows and entangled tree roots. Even old tree stumps were used.

Shingle areas bordered by saltmarsh were also commonly used where they occurred on islands. Away from islands, all beach areas were ignored apart from Shag Looe Head where two pairs nested on the saltmarsh shingle.

Non-island sites required more security. Five pairs took up roof top locations, 2 were on lake islands, 1 on a breakwater and another on a disused barge.

Three of the roof top locations were adjacent to Holes Bay. One at Wessex Gate Retail Park, 1 behind West Quay Road and the other on a disused building near the lifting bridge. The fourth pair were on the roof at Parkstone Yacht Club, with the fifth pair on the roof of the Purbeck School in Wareham. A pair nested on the island of the clay pit at Gold Point, Arne and a pair also set up home on one of the small manmade islands in Poole Park.

The other two sites were on the Breakwater at Poole Quay and an abandoned rusty barge at the southern end of Poole Port where rust fragments formed the nest hollow.

Island sites were used by 87% of pairs. Brownsea Island accounted for 39% of the total breeding population.

Discussion

A total of 80 pairs is a significant increase on the previously accepted range of between of 20-35 breeding pairs. Time to ditch the "breeds sparingly" narrative after 90 years, Poole Harbour has a thriving breeding population of Oystercatchers.

Although previous breeding population estimates were very likely underestimates due to insufficient recording, the numbers of pairs recorded during this survey do represent a genuine increase in the size of the breeding population.

Table 2. Breeding Oystercatcher pairs for 1994 and 2021

Island	1994 pairs	2021 pairs	% increase
Round	2	3	50
Long	2	6	200
Green	2	10	400
Furzey	7	10	43
Brownsea	20*	31	55
Total	33	60	81

* 12-20 pairs were actually the numbers offered but the maximum figure of 20 is being used here for comparison as 20 pairs were also recorded in 1992 and 1995.

The total number of pairs recorded was an 81% increase on 1994. All islands have seen a significant increase, with Green Island's gains particularly impressive.

Brownsea is by far the most important site for breeding Oystercatcher in the Harbour although its dominance has been previously exaggerated by the lack of records from other sites, typically resulting in numbers in excess of 90% of the total harbours records in most years.

During this survey, the number of pairs on Brownsea Island represented just under 40% of the total population.

Nesting was mainly confined to the islands, where nests cannot be predated by foxes, and human disturbance is much reduced. Suitable shoreline areas elsewhere in the harbour were largely ignored, with just 2 pairs nesting on Shag Looe Head.

It would seem that Oystercatchers can tolerate the close proximity of humans when they can find a nest site that is out of reach. For example, the manmade island at the northern end of Poole Park. A busier place in summer you cannot find, with daily groups of noisy kids on kayaks passing within feet.

Height is also not an issue. Traditionally a ground nesting species, some of the Harbour's birds have now taken to rooftops.

During a Poole Harbour breeding gulls survey (Hopper 2016) all flat roof top areas in the Poole Harbour recording area were surveyed. As well as the sheer number of breeding gulls found, the other noteworthy find was a pair of Oystercatcher nesting on the Parkstone Yacht Club roof. They were the only roof nesting pair found during the 2016 survey. During this survey five pairs were located on rooftops. Evolution before our very eyes!

Oystercatchers were already partly predisposed for such an adaptation. Adult birds have a much bigger tendency to collect food for their young than most other waders. Their chicks expect a lot of their food to be brought to them.

For many waders, loss of habitat is the main driver of declines in breeding numbers. For Oystercatcher the main issue is predation and disturbance. We have seen evidence of this during this survey where ideal nesting habitat is forsaken in areas where foxes and humans can roam. Where no local secluded islands exist, what better than a flat roof of a yacht club for example. There is one issue however, they are also popular with large gulls which will think nothing of downing a young Oystercatcher chick, so it is not all plain sailing.

A key factor in the success in the UK of this species as a breeding bird is their adaptability. This is most clearly exemplified by a pair of Oystercatcher nesting on the roof top of a school some three kilometres up the Frome Valley, where shingle is replaced by asphalt and bivalves by earthworms.

Redshank

Introduction

Redshank breed in a variety of damp habitats, the most important are saltmarsh and water meadows. It is an amber-listed species of conservation concern in the United Kingdom, with most recent BTO estimates of breeding population changes showing a drop of 42% between 1995 and 2018. Much of these losses have come from the loss of wetland sites through drainage but over 50% of saltmarsh breeding birds have also been lost since 1985. Today around 25,000 pairs of Redshank breed in the UK with half of these now nesting on coastal saltmarshes.

In 1979, an RSPB survey revealed that 85% of Redshank territories in Dorset were in wet flood meadows. Now it is barely 5%. The rest are dependent on the health of the saltmarshes of Poole Harbour.

Historical introduction

In 1888 Mansel-Pleydell described Redshank as one of our commonest wading birds but apparently only began breeding in Poole Harbour around 1880. It soon became established, rapidly spreading across the harbour saltmarshes and then westward up the Frome Valley following the flooded meadows.

There is no indication of the size of the breeding population until after the severe winters of the early 1960's, during which time only single figure counts were achieved. The surveys however were far from comprehensive with significant parts of the harbour not included. The suggestion was that perhaps 10-12 pairs were breeding along the southern shores of the harbour.

In 1966, regular breeding surveys began at the newly established RSPB reserve at Arne, at the same time providing some insight into the potential direction of the harbour population as a whole. Six pairs were located during the initial survey, doubling to 12 pairs by 1973. Numbers remained stable into the 1980's and then slightly increased again to 15 pairs by the mid 1990's. In 1997, however, the population had reduced to just 7 pairs. And this is where it has remained since.

The first harbour-wide saltmarsh breeding Redshank survey was conducted in 1994 (McClure & Payne). They recorded a minimum of 103 pairs. The next survey in 1997 (Price) recorded 85 pairs and in 2004 (Cook) the population was down to 69 pairs, a drop of 33% in that 20 year period. In 2014, however, an RSPB survey in 2014 (Archer & Branston) came up with a rather curious population estimate of between 115 and 147 pairs.

Away from the saltmarshes, breeding has in the past also occurred on some of the wet heath and wet meadows of the Harbour, although specific records are very limited. Morrison 1992 mentions that Studland and Godlingston Heath regularly held 4-7 pairs. No doubt other heathland areas have also held pairs in the past, along with many wet meadow areas such as the Lower Frome Valley.

In the 2014 survey, two pairs were recorded at the water meadows of Arne Moors, Keyworth and Lytchett fields.

Method

All Saltmarsh, wet meadow and wet bog areas were investigated. The method followed Cook (2004) which was based on a modified version of the generic wader monitoring method developed by O'Brien and Smith (1992).

- Walk a route that ensures all areas are approached to within 100m
- Record all Redshank

- Record all pairs of Redshank
- Visit each site at least twice, at least 10 days apart and in good weather

The generic method records the total number of birds on each visit and the mean number is taken as the number of breeding pairs. The modified version allows obviously paired birds to be counted as a single registration.

Two visits were initially planned for each site. In the event some sites required a further visit when it became clear that many birds in April were still behaving as wintering birds. All surveys were conducted from 19th April to 19th June

Fig 1. Saltmarsh survey sites



1-Brand's Bay, 2-Newton Bay, 3-Ower N, 4-Ower Bay, 5-Fitzworth N, 6-Fitzworth W, 7-Wytch Farm, 8-Wych Lake East, 9-Middlebere, 10-Middlebere W, 11-Slepe Moor & Salterns, 12-Coombe & Grip Heath, 13-Long Island, 14-Round Island, 15-Arne Bay & Patchin's Point, 16-Swineham, 17-Keysworth & Shag Looe Head, 18-Wood Bar, 19-Otter Island, 20-N Lytchett Bay, 21-Holes Bay

Results

The survey found 60 pairs of Redshank. Of these, 52 were at saltmarsh sites. Five pairs were identified at the wet meadow behind the seawall at Keysworth, 1 pair at pools adjacent to Salterns Copse, a pair at pools near Nath Point and a pair also attempted to nest in the middle of Hartland Moor. No birds were recorded at the previously occupied sites of Arne Moors and Lytchett Fields.

The most important sites were Keysworth saltmarsh with 14 pairs, Middlebere peninsula with 8 pairs and Slepe & Salterns with 6 pairs.

All pairs barring the three at Brand's Bay were located in the south western part of the harbour, from Fitzworth Point across to Shag Looe Head.

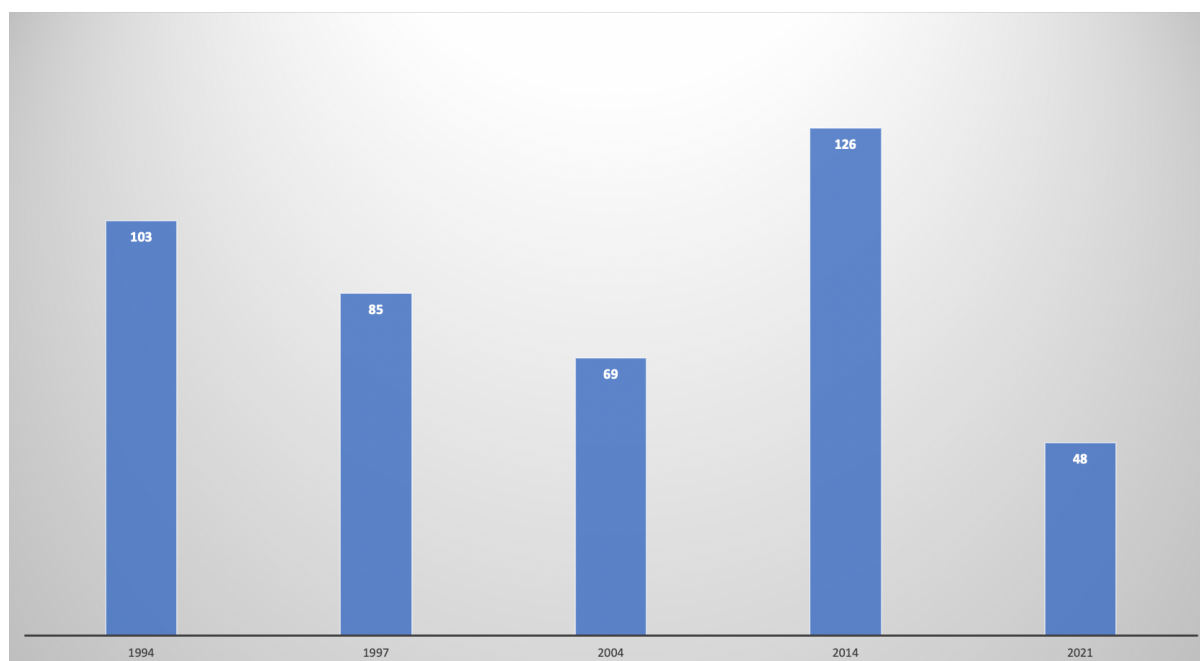
For the first time in any of the surveys, no birds were recorded north of Shag Looe Head.

The surveys of 1994, 1997 and 2004 surveyed only saltmarsh sites and of these Long and Round Islands were not included. Excluding these counts from this survey to allow direct comparison gives 48 pairs.

This compares with 103 pairs in 1994, 85 pairs in 1997, 69 pairs in 2004 and 99-126* pairs in 2014.

*The 2014 survey report offers three alternative numbers of breeding pairs for the harbour; 74, 115, and 147, determined by three different interpretations of the data. The count of 74 is based on an interpretation not used by any other previous surveys. The count of 115 is calculated using the modified standard estimate (used by Cook 2004 and this survey at least). Adjusting this figure to exclude the saltmarshes of Long and Round Islands takes the comparable total to 99 pairs. The count of 147 is derived from the recommended interpretation of the generic wader monitoring method developed by O'Brien and Smith (1992). Adjusting this figure to exclude the saltmarshes of Long and Round Islands takes the comparable total to 126.

Fig 2. Poole Harbour's saltmarsh breeding Redshank population counts (excluding Long and Round Island)



Comparing the results to just the first three surveys, this year's total can be seen as a progression of the downward trend.

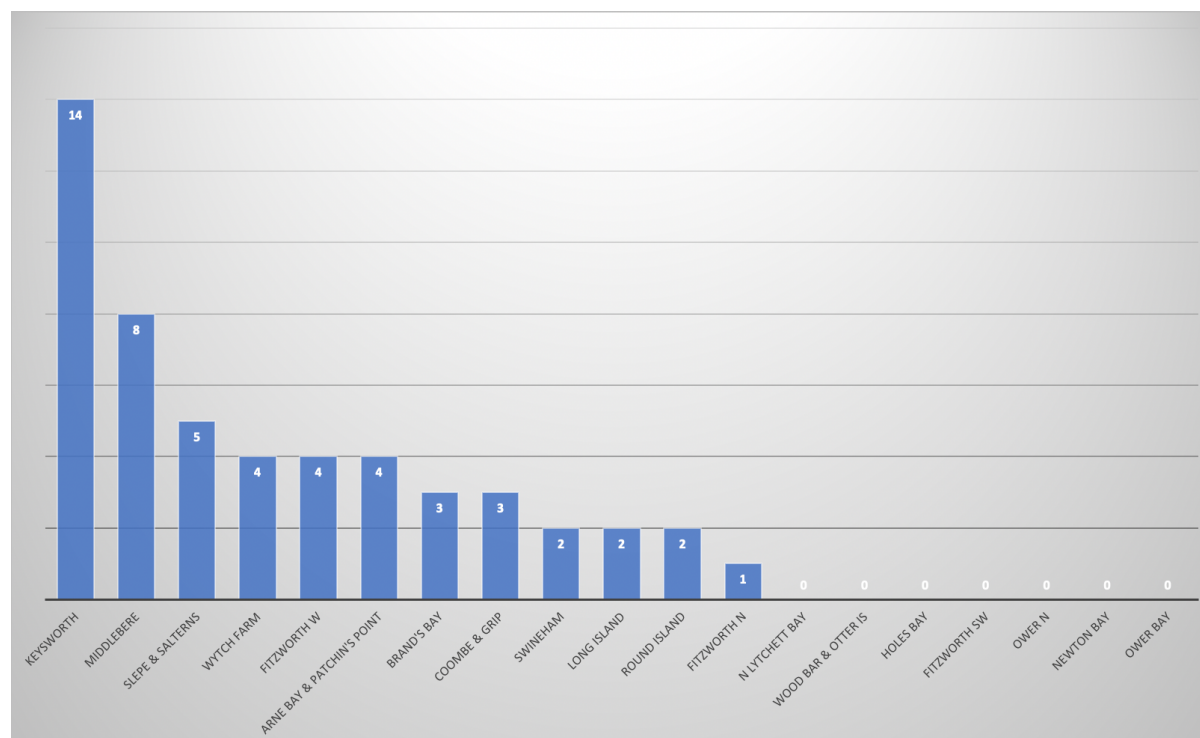
Including the result of the 2014 survey, the population appears somewhat erratic.

Results by site

Table 1. Breeding Redshank pairs by saltmarsh site

Site No.	Saltmarsh site	Pairs
1	Brand's Bay	3
2	Newton Bay	0
3	Ower N	0
4	Ower Bay	0
5	Fitzworth N	1
6	Fitzworth W	4
7	Wytch Farm	4
8	Wych Lake East	0
9	Middlebere	8
10	Middlebere W	0
11	Slepe Moor & Salterns	5
12	Coombe & Grip Heath	3
13	Long Island	2
14	Round Island	2
15	Arne Bay & Patchin's Point	4
16	Swineham	2
17	Keysworth & Shag Looe Head	14
18	Wood Bar	0
19	Otter Island	0
20	N Lytchett Bay	0
21	Holes Bay	0
	Total	52

Fig 3. Breeding Redshank pairs by saltmarsh site



The saltmarsh of Keysworth & Shag Looe head is by far the most important site in the harbour, holding nearly 27% of the saltmarsh population.

Including the five pairs present at the water meadows just behind the seawall, the Keyworth site accounts for just under 32%.

Table 2. Breeding Redshank pairs by saltmarsh site for 1997, 2004, 2014 and 2021 with broad population change

2021 Site No.	Saltmarsh site	1997	2004	2014	2021	Indicative change
1	Brand's Bay	4	4	7 - 8	3	Slightly down
2-4	Newton Bay to Ower Bay	0	0	0	0	Same
5	Fitzworth N	4	4	1	1	Down
6	Fitzworth W	5	5	12 - 13	4	Slightly down
7*	Fitzworth SW	0	0	1	0	Down
7	Wytch Farm	16	2	9 - 13	4	Down
9	Middlebere		15	12 - 12.5	8	
11	Slepe Moor and Salterns	7	9	12.5 - 18.5	5	Down
12	Coombe & Grip Heath	3	5	3 - 5.5	3	Stable
15	Arne Bay & Patchin's Point	4	4	4.5 - 7.5	4	Stable
16	Swineham	3	3	8.5 - 9	2	Slightly down
17	Keyworth & Shag Looe	18	9	16.5 - 24.5	14	Stable
18-19	Wood Bar & Otter Island	6	3	5.5	0	Lost
20	N Lytchett Bay	13	5	5.5 - 6	0	Lost
21	Holes Bay	2	1	0.5 - 1	0	Lost
	Total	85	69	99 - 126	48	
19	Long Island	-	-	8.5 - 10.5	2	Down
20	Round Island	-	-	7.5 - 10	2	Down
	Total			115 -147	52	

* For this survey Fitzworth SW was included with Wytch Farm

With some rather curious looking numbers for some of the sites in 2014, evaluations of the status of the sites are based largely on comparisons with the 1997 and 2004 numbers.

Six sites are down, three sites are slightly down and three sites, all in the north of the harbour are lost. No sites have shown an increase in pairs. A crumb is that Keyworth numbers for this survey are higher than the 2004 survey. Only three sites are stable, with two of these part of the RSPB reserve at Arne, so at least they have managed to stop the rot here.

Results discussion

This survey produced the lowest breeding Redshank population count to date, but the situation may not be quite as bleak as it seems. There is every possibility that this was a particularly bad year for Redshank, indeed for many of our breeding birds. The spring weather was terrible.

April was one of the coldest and driest on record, with the lowest average minimum temperatures since 1922 and rainfall almost non-existent. Temperatures hardly improved into May which were well below the seasonal average; the month being dominated by low pressure bringing heavy downfalls of rain. It was the 4th ever wettest May.

Just to add to the problems, although by no means unprecedented, the April spring tide was also particularly high with much of the saltmarsh during that time inundated. Redshank eggs can survive flooding and this is one of the species adaptations but some will inevitably be lost. Redshank will also re-lay but there wasn't too much evidence of that later in the survey with very few pairs getting to chick hatching stage.

The absence of birds on the saltmarshes of the northern shores however, was not due to the poor spring. For these areas, the issue is Sika Deer and human disturbance. Redshank require a particular quality of saltmarsh that has a mosaic of uneven patchy sward with diverse heights. Taller tussocks to hide the nests and more open areas where chicks can feed.

Otter Island and many areas of the Lytchett Bay saltmarshes now resemble grass lawns thanks to Sika Deer. (For a full insight into this introduced species in the Harbour one should refer to Branston and Archer 2014.)

There has also been a significant increase in human disturbance, particularly an increase in people with dogs, some thinking nothing of traipsing across the saltmarsh areas. There has also been a big increase in the popularity of water sports, with people regularly alighting on the saltmarsh areas.

The consensus is that Sika are having a large impact on the condition of many of Poole Harbour's saltmarsh areas through trampling and overgrazing. There was plenty of evidence during this survey that this is still occurring.

Culling was introduced at Arne in 2006 and is still ongoing. Although numbers of breeding Redshank are much reduced since the 80's and 90's, Arne is one of only two areas in the harbour where the breeding Redshank population has at least stabilised.

Issues in the methodology producing over-estimates

The standard methodology of O'Brien and Smith (1992) one is supposed to adopt was developed on the large swathes of saltmarsh on the Wash. It was found that counting every single bird that was present on the saltmarsh as a pair when tested had a stronger correlation to the actual number of nests, than counting song flighting males or finding nests. Not a particularly high bar, given the difficulties of finding nests or indeed encountering singing males that are not away feeding.

Where saltmarshes are expansive, can only be approached to within 100m and the nearest intertidal feeding areas are half a mile away, then this method may indeed work fairly well, given the likelihood of missing birds.

However, when snaking around the myriad creeks in the relatively small saltmarsh areas of Poole Harbour inadvertently covering many areas to within much smaller distances of 100m, combined with the very close intertidal areas allowing feeding males to be in close attendance, a significantly higher percentage of birds will be encountered and using this method will overestimate the population.

The degree of overestimation will increase as the breeding season progresses, when both pair birds will mob intruders once the chicks have hatched. Two birds present here will still be interpreted as two pairs using the standard method.

The unsuitability of this method has been amply demonstrated by the 2014 survey where the authors were obliged to declare 147 breeding pairs.

The 'modified standard estimate' method at least allows the observer to identify clearly paired birds, ie when mobbing together over a nest area, but this is still a rather strict definition. Clearly the rules must be firm to limit subjectivity, particularly where volunteers of varying degrees of experience are employed, but actions of paired birds can be more subtle than just overhead mobbing.

The recommended start date is 15th April. This is potentially too early. It certainly was for this year's survey. WeBS data over the years have shown that Redshank numbers in April can be significantly higher than in May, indicating the presence of late leaving and passage birds. The methodology does

instruct to exclude non-breeding flocks of more than six birds but Redshank don't always feed in flocks of six! Many indeed feed alone.

During the 2014 survey there was a strong disparity in numbers between April and May for at least two of the sites. For example, Fitzworth W recorded 18 birds in April and 8 in May and Lytchett Bay recorded 10 birds in April and 2 in May. Lytchett Bay is watched every day and it has been confirmed that the declaration of 6 breeding pairs (mean count of 10 and 2) was completely wide of the mark, with 2 pairs present through the spring. We must presume the situation was the same for Fitzworth W. where 13 pairs were declared at a site that has recorded 5 pairs in each of the previous surveys and 4 in this one.

The Cook (2004) survey for some reason did not start until 20th May so had no such potential issues.

Counting every bird seen also assumes no non-breeding summering birds. This is something that cannot really be avoided and Redshank are known to breed in their first summers but the higher the numbers recorded the higher the number of potentially non-breeding birds that will be included.

Conclusions

The conclusions remain the same as previous surveys. The threats to breeding Redshank are over-grazing by Sika Deer, increased human disturbance, foxes, the continued erosion of the saltmarsh areas and potentially rising sea levels. With this spring in mind, we can now probably add increasing weather extremes.

Lapwing

Introduction

Both Mansel-Pleydell (1888) and Blathwayt (1945) considered this species to be a common resident in Dorset. In 1967, Lapwing were recorded as breeding in suitable habitats adjacent to the western side of the harbour. The size of the breeding population was not known but was probably never more than 15 pairs.

A decline in numbers, however, was apparent by the 1970's in line with a rapidly declining UK population. Nationwide declines were due largely to a change in agricultural practices but it is unclear whether any Lapwing were using arable land within the harbour anyway. Records around that time all refer to 'wet' areas such as the Brand's Bog, Studland.

By 1976, Lapwing were already absent from the 10km square SY98 that covers the entire western half of the recording area from Wareham to Rempstone, and as far north as Holton Heath, when all other Dorset 10km squares held breeding birds. Ironically, this is now one of the only 10km squares in Dorset that does have breeding Lapwing.

During the 1980's, data from Poole Harbour continued to be very scant. It wasn't until the 1990's when the gravity of the Lapwing situation became apparent, that monitoring was stepped up and breeding records were urged to be submitted. Data remained sporadic but it was clear that Keyworth was an important site, with a visit in 1991 ringing 14 *pulli*. Data from this site does not appear again until 2014 with 1 to 2 pairs reported and 2 pairs again in 2015.

In 1995, 4 pairs bred at Lytchett Fields, with two territories held in 1997 and 1998, falling to 1 pair in 1999 which proved to be the last breeding attempt to date.

In 1998, Bestwall held 2 to 3 pairs, with a pair on Wareham Water Meadows in 1998, 2001 and 2012. Displaying birds were noted at Swineham in 1998, 2001 and 2005.

In 2004 a single pair on Arne Moors turned into 11 pairs in 2005. "Careful management at Arne Moors" saw the population rise to 15 pairs in 2006. The success however was short-lived with 12 pairs in 2007 reducing to 6 pairs in 2008 after which the data dries up along with the site. In 2016 there were "probably 3 pairs", in 2018 "1 or 2 pairs" with 1 pair in 2019.

Since its formation in 2008, Sunnyside Farm has hosted at least 1 pair of breeding Lapwing every year, with 2 pairs recorded in 2011.

In 2019 two pairs attempted to breed at the southern end of the Piddle Valley.

Method

During this survey all potential sites within the Poole Harbour recording area were investigated including arable fields.

Results

Only two sites were found to hold breeding Lapwing, but an encouraging 12 pairs of birds were found. Eleven of them on the meadows at Keyworth and a pair at Sunnyside Farm.

Curlew

Introduction

Curlew apparently first appeared as a breeding bird in Dorset in the 1870's in the neighbourhood of Poole Harbour. The population expanded in the early 1900's establishing itself at many east Dorset heathland sites. By the 1960's, they were back in retreat and already disappearing from sites.

The few specific records relating to Poole Harbour are Godlingston Heath, where birds were said to be present in the breeding season, Wareham Common, with breeding birds in the mid 1980's and breeding at Upton Heath in 1981, 1982, 1985 and 2000. A pair reported from Arne in 2014 and a singing bird at Hartland Moor was recently reported.

Method

All potentially suitable sites within the Poole Harbour recording area were investigated.

Results

A pair of Curlew were found in the central part of Hartland Moor.

The only other event of note was a bird singing at Godlingston Heath on 25th May. It was not present on subsequent visits.

The breeding attempt at Hartland Moor failed. The reason is not known but it is very likely that the nest was predated by a Fox. During the very first survey, a Fox was observed walking through the middle of the wet heath. There was also a pair of Redshank nesting in the same part of the bog, they also failed.

Little Ringed Plover

Introduction

The arrival and subsequent spread of breeding Little Ringed Plovers in England and Wales is one of the ornithological success stories of the 20th century. In Europe, breeding birds tend to use natural habitats, but for most UK birds, working or disused gravel pits have been the site of choice with natural sites the exception.

Poole Harbour saw its first bird in 1959, which at the time was only the second Dorset record. Since then however, and only up until very recently, this species remained stubbornly scarce in the Harbour despite the increasing numbers of records elsewhere in Dorset. Even into the early 2000's there were still just one or two records a year, limited to Brownsea Lagoon and Lytchett Bay.

In 2003, 2 birds turned up at Swineham gravel extraction site. The pair went on to breed, providing Poole Harbour with its first breeding record. Two chicks were successfully raised. In 2004, a pair were seen displaying in early May with up to 7 birds present by the middle of the month but no evidence of breeding was found. In 2005, 2 birds were seen in April and July. In 2006, 2 birds were present in April with 1 displaying but moved on. For the rest of the harbour nothing changed with just 1 bird at Brownsea in August and 1 at Lytchett. In 2007, again 2 birds for the first two weeks of April at Swineham but these had moved on by May.

In 2008, a new site entered the lexicon. Arne Clay Pit at Gold Point. Two birds were found here in June and "may have bred". Also 2 birds again at Swineham gravel pits in April but they didn't stay. In 2009, 2 birds were again present in July at Arne Clay pit and in 2011 a pair was discovered on 4 eggs. There are no details of their success.

In 2013, 7 birds at Lytchett fields proved to be the vanguard of a significant increase in numbers of visiting birds to this newly improved site. In 2014, birds were recorded on 40 dates with a minimum of at least 17 individuals. By 2016 the numbers of birds involved were too many to track. A strong passage in July peaked at 12 birds on 20th.

With high numbers becoming a regular occurrence, it was only a matter of time before a pair attempted to breed. In 2019, hopes were raised when a pair lingered into May. Copulation was observed and birds were present into June but an apparent family party in late June was thought not to be from Lytchett.

Finally, in 2020 however a pair did breed and in late June 2 freshly fledged juveniles were with them.

Method

All potentially suitable sites within the Poole Harbour recording area were investigated, including one just a stone's throw from the Harbour boundary.

Results

Five pairs were found. Three at Lytchett fields, 1 at Keyworth water meadows and a pair at Holme Lane gravel pit.

None of the Lytchett fields pairs were successful, the success of the pair at Keyworth was unknown but the Holme Lane gravel pit birds managed to raise two young.