



SOUTH EAST DEVON
HABITAT REGULATIONS
PARTNERSHIP

South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

Habitat mitigation team updates.

*Fergus Pate,
Principal Delivery Officer
Teignbridge District Council
October 2021*



Exeter
City Council



Teignbridge
DISTRICT COUNCIL
South Devon

Legal comment/advice:

There is no direct legal comment to be made at this time, each and any individual issue will need to be considered as it arises.

Finance comment/advice:

Any financial implications are set out in the report.

Public Document: Yes
Exemption: None
Review date for release: None

Recommendations.

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

- 1. Notes the updates provided by the Habitat Mitigation Officers and Devon Loves Dogs project co-ordinator.**
- 2. Receives a further update at the next meeting of the Executive.**

Equalities impact: Low

Risk: Low.

The purpose of this report is to provide a regular update from the habitat mitigation delivery team. This enables the Executive Committee to maintain a good understanding of the initiatives, partnership working and day to day activities of public-facing staff. Continued and effective delivery of the Strategy and the development this enables remains of very high importance to all partners.

1 Habitat Mitigation Officers (HMOs)

- 1.1 The additional and temporary 0.5 full time equivalent (FTE) HMO post to provide flexibility and increased efficiency during the last 10¹ months has meant that we have been able to cover more ground. Utilising volunteers, we have been able to coincide the use of our branded gazebo as information point “pop ups” in various locations and our site patrols.
- 1.2 We have been using the gazebo as an information point across the protected sites. This has been particularly useful in areas of high foot traffic as we are able to get our key messages such as no bbq/dogs on path/lead out to visitors as they arrive. We use Devon Loves Dogs (DLD) goodie bags as a way to approach visitors and engage positively.
- 1.3 In July we joined up with our heathland partners to participate in Heath Week – an annual, week-long event celebrating the Pebblebed heaths. We helped out at the Creative cabin, a trailer decorated with all things nature. It acted in a similar way to our pop ups but drew a larger crowd as there were other heathland events taking place throughout the week. It’s a great spot to hand out relevant information to visitors both new and old - and a great chance to catch up with our partners and share information.

¹ See “Core Staff Capacity” report Nov 2020 (3rd recommendation)

- 1.4 We have been working closely with other organisations and our partners. We recently attended our first external event using the gazebo, at Newton Popleford fun day. It is the closest village bordering the heaths at Harpford Common. Dylan, Assistant Warden from the RSPB attended with us. It was good to work alongside each other and spread our key messages mixed in with more detail about the site that the RSPB manage. It also keeps us up to date with the works that are taking place onsite.
- 1.5 We attended an event hosted by the Teignbridge rangers at the Dawlish Countryside Park SANGS. It was encouraging to see lots of visitors using the site, many coming from Dawlish Warren and hearing how it has changed their walking habits. Working with the ranger Jon Steward for the day opened up more opportunities to work together at future events.
- 1.6 During August and as we head into our over-wintering bird season, we increased our presence at the duck pond in Exmouth. We have been supported by various members of the EDDC Countryside team, which helps to show we are unified in our messaging.
- 1.7 We have frequently been out on the boat throughout the summer months talking to water users and checking up on our wildlife refuges from the water. It's the only way to check that all of our buoyage is in place ready for the winter season and it is critical that we are regularly visible to users out and about on the estuary.
- 1.8 We continue to carry out surveys of human activity, bird numbers and any disturbance events (known as vantage point counts²) around the estuary for ongoing monitoring.
- 1.9 Our last newsletter was sent out in June to 622 subscribers, focussed on our key summer messages.
- 1.10 We've been using the website Orlo³ to help us with our social media scheduling. This allows us to write our posts in advance which takes the pressure off when we are onsite patrolling. Our follows on all three platforms are steadily increasing and we are able to see what posts work best.
- 1.11 We were joined by ITV for a boat patrol, along with Councillor Wrigley. As in previous years, this has really helped to spread the messages about the Exe wildlife refuges far and wide - and we've had a lot of positive feedback from the public on this piece. The focus was on disturbance and our overwintering birds.

² See separate report *"Exe wildlife refuge monitoring programme"*.

³ See separate *"Communications Report"*.

Near future

1.12 As we head into our autumn winter period we focus our efforts down on the estuary and shift the conversation to overwintering birds. We have a number of articles lined up for the next couple of months for local newsletters and journals in order to engage with a wider audience.

1.13 We are assisting with the Exe estuary clean-up which takes place during our wildlife refuge season so will be giving a quick brief to the clean-up crew about the winter wildlife and how to avoid disturbing the birds.

1.14 We have a number of online events that we are due to attend. A conservation conference, a local parish presentation and a heathland event. The "Connecting Actively to Nature" (CAN) programme looks to encourage over 55s to get more active. The project officer has approached us to organise a walk and a talk along the estuary in November or December 2021.

1.15 The next newsletter will be sent out towards the end of September - spread the word to any of your nature loving friends. It will include all things estuary and will of course include our favourite bird, the Dark-bellied Brent goose!

2. Devon Loves Dogs

2.1 In mid- April I started my new temporary role as an HMO, alongside my part time role for DLD - I've had a busy spring and summer! I have thoroughly enjoyed my additional role, it has significantly enhanced my knowledge and understanding of the species and habitats that we aim to protect and it has been great for integrating as part of the wider team.

2.2 However, I will concentrate on DLD for this update. My main focus over the summer has been on pop ups with the gazebo and my series of Waggy Walks. I restarted walks on June 22nd and in total we've had 9 walks (3 PHCT, 3 FE, 1 DCP, 1 with new partner NT at Salcombe Hill) and 1 at Cranbrook Country Park with the site ranger.

2.3 The format of these walks has remained the same, with some additional Covid measures, one of which is that we now ask people to book a place. I'd like to thank Anne Mountjoy and Will Jones at EDDC for enabling me to utilise the Wild East Devon online booking system. This has resulted in increased administration but proved invaluable, especially when we had to cancel a walk during the heatwave in July.

2.4 Walks have been attended by a good mix of new members and regular walkers. I have also noticed an increase in first time dog owners and boisterous lockdown puppies! We have set a maximum group size at 15 and most walks have had 11-15 people and up to 12 dogs on them. We have had some spaces lost by people booking and then not turning up and we've also had a number of

cancellations due to self- isolation and Covid. Going forward I have monthly walks booked with Kim Strawbridge (Site manager, Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust) until December and I'm in the process of arranging further walks with other partners.

2.5 Membership has continued to increase steadily, despite Covid restrictions to our work. We have gained 154 new members so far during 2021 bringing the total to 795. In addition the circulation figures of the DLD quarterly e-newsletter have increased to 1052.

2.6 I took part in Heath Week at the end of July and ran a Waggy Walk with Kim Strawbridge that was well attended. Although the usual large festival type events didn't run this year, we helped to man the Creative Cabin. This decorative EDDC events trailer was set up in a different location on the Heaths each day. Free dog goodie bags were available along with information about the other Heath Week events and a range of self-led trails and activities that people could get involved with. Along with the HMOs, I attended our first external event of the year at Newton Poppleford Fun Day in August and it was great to be able to engage children with the infamous Poo Game.

2.7 Pop Ups with the branded DLD gazebo have been provided at numerous locations across the Pebblebed Heaths, at Dawlish Warren Nature Reserve, DCP with Jon Steward and at the Imperial Recreation Ground, Exmouth with Jon Gardner from EDDC Countryside.

2.8 I have continued working with the wider dog mitigation groups under the umbrella group SCCAMP (Southern Counties Canine Access Management Partnership) and our series of short films by Dog Trainer and Behaviourist Natalie Light have just been completed.

2.9 The strength of this group is in partnership and we all contributed a small financial contribution to achieve this series of educational films for all our use. The first introductory film was launched in August and we have 5 other short films available now, from our DLD website. The films cover a range of topics and are designed to help people have an enjoyable dog walk and encourage a closer bond and increased training and control.

The five films cover:

- Dog owner etiquette and preparing your dog to succeed
- Training tips games and activities
- Training tips for distractions
- Training tips for loose lead walking
- Training tips for recall

2.10 Looking forward, the focus is now moving to overwintering birds on the Exe after the start of the Exmouth wildlife refuge on 15th September. To support our Pop Ups on site, I will also be focussing my social media posts and newsletter around the importance of protecting these areas from disturbance over the autumn and winter.

2.11 I attended the “Big Doggy Day Out” at Bicton on 3rd October and the “Great British Dog Walk” at Canonteign Falls on 10th October. I will be running regular Waggy Walks with all of my partners and am looking forward to being able to promote the SANGS at South West Exeter Ridgetop Park to my followers and members.

2.12 Despite the many challenges of this year, I feel we have had a successful summer and I have particularly enjoyed being able to re-establish face to face interactions with both our wider team, partners and colleagues. I am especially grateful to the HMOs, Amelia and Sama, for their knowledge sharing and endless patience as I have juggled both roles.

2.13 DLD remains informed, willing and ready to work on issues of mutual interest with our mitigation partners. I continue to actively seek a more integrated and co-ordinated way to work with our partners to inform, engage and educate the public – as originally envisaged in the mitigation Strategy. I would welcome the efforts of our partners and our Executive Committee to help me use my expertise to best serve our wildlife. So, I’ll close with an open request to please put me in contact with the right people.

**South East Devon
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Executive Committee**

Natural England comment:

A table of activities with dates would be helpful. We are pleased that it has been possible to interact with the public at so many face to face events this summer.