



SOUTH EAST DEVON
HABITAT REGULATIONS
PARTNERSHIP

South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

Habitat mitigation team updates.

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East Devon District Council
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Exeter
City Council



Legal comment/advice

There is no direct legal comment to be made in relation to this update report.

Finance comment/advice:

There is no direct finance comment to be made in relation to this update 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 This year's Wildlife Refuge season at Exmouth local nature reserve was the most positive we have had since the project began. So many visitors came to visit the engagement gazebo at the Duck Pond to talk about the estuary bird life and the uplift it has given them over the last couple of difficult years. Many mentioned how spending time on estuary nature reserves and seeing the influx of over-wintering birds has helped their wellbeing at the darkest time of the year.
- 1.2 The telescope has been a fantastic tool to enable visitor engagement and help with wildlife identification. The support of the watersports community – kites, paddleboarders and windsurfers - has been overwhelmingly inclusive. Anecdotally, I feel that we have observed far less disturbance to birds and a greater diversity of species within the Wildlife Refuge this year because of it.
- 1.3 Reaching the dog walking community is still challenging, simply because of the number of individuals who enjoying walking the shore - and the majority of refuge infringements have been dog walkers again this year - but teaming up with Julie (Devon Loves Dogs) at Duck Pond pop-ups has proven really beneficial.

- 1.4 The winter season sees ranger time split predominantly between estuary reserves. Whenever possible, rangers have been present at least twice a week on a receding tide at Exmouth Wildlife Refuge – as this is the tidal state at which waterbirds most benefit from undisturbed feeding. Dawlish Warren NNR is visited twice weekly and almost always on a Sunday when we are scheduled to work a weekend because of the visitor pressure experienced here RSPB Exminster & Bowling Green Marsh are visited at least fortnightly and the patrol boat is out on the Exe SPA as frequently as tide and weather conditions will allow (scheduled for at least once a week). Walking patrols are still performed on the Pebblebeds weekly, though are reduced in duration.
- 1.5 The team were pleased to welcome members of the Officer Working Group out on boat patrols during October and November, offering insight into our responsibilities on the water and the challenges birds face on over winter on the Exe estuary.
- 1.6 We led a walk with the South West Coast Path “Couch to Coast” initiative in early December, attended by 15 residents, talking about the project and bird life around the estuary and Pebblebed Heaths. This was really well received and an absolute pleasure to undertake.
- 1.7 In November 2021, after nearly 5 years of dedicated service with our team, we all wished Amelia well as she left to start her new role with EDDC Countryside. In December we helped to run some of the practical elements of the recruitment interviews and wish Trudi Righton (Amelia’s replacement) a fantastic start as she joins the team in early February 2022.
- 1.8 Sama is now working from home, populating the new South East Devon Wildlife website, which we hope to have functional by the end of January when she begins maternity leave. Interviews for someone to cover her maternity will take place in early February.

2. Devon Loves Dogs

2.1 Autumn has been another busy season for Devon Loves Dogs. Since my last update I have run 5 Waggy Walks, three with Kim Strawbridge, Reserves Manager at various locations across the Pebblebed Heaths, one at Morganhayes near Colyton with Rob Greenhalgh from Forestry England and one at Decoy Country Park with Teignbridge Ranger Jon Steward. All walks were well attended and great fun and we even had presents for dogs and mince pies for humans on our last walk before Christmas.

2.2 External events have remained pretty quiet, I was due to attend a Halloween event at Cranbrook Country Park but sadly this had to be cancelled due to the site being water logged, I did take the Devon Loves Dogs display along to the annual forum for the Friends of the Pebblebed Heaths and thoroughly enjoyed the range of presentations and had some interesting discussions with attendees about Devon Loves Dogs and the wider partnership.

2.3 My winter e-newsletter was sent out on 9th December to a total of 1164 recipients. This figure has grown by 95 since the previous newsletter sent on 30th September. Of the total recipients we saw a 58% open rate and a 10% click rate. The top link clicked was our YouTube video about dog etiquette, opened 32 times, followed by my visit to the Pebblebed Heaths, opened 21 times.

2.4 Membership of Devon Loves Dogs has also been growing steadily with an additional 44 people signing up in the same period, bringing the total to 839 currently.

2.5 Our main focus of work, in both my roles with DLD and as HMO has been over wintering birds around the estuary and so the bulk of our time has been spent at the Duckpond in Exmouth and at Dawlish Warren, with additional patrols at the RSPB Exminster marshes. This has been the first refuge season with both gazebos in use and we have found this approach of having a display, dog goodie bags, wildlife information and being able to let people view the wildlife through the scope has been hugely beneficial and encourages more interest and enthusiasm for the wildlife.

2.6 A couple of personal highlights for me have been the shared patrol boat visits with various members of both OWG and the wider Committee. After such a long period of time with limited face to face meetings it was a really great opportunity to meet up and enjoy the estuary together.

2.7 We were also fortunate enough to take part in a beaver training session with Devon Wildlife Trust and have a site visit of both the Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP) and beavers on Clinton Devon Estates land. We are often asked about both of these subjects in our roles and after learning more about beavers it became apparent that the relationship between beavers, dogs and their owners is going to become a bigger issue in the countryside in the future.

2.8 A few indoor activities have taken place, including training in social media and website accessibility. The Devon Loves Dogs social media platforms have focussed on a range of issues that affect dogs and their owners including the wildlife refuges and fireworks. During December I shared member's festive photos of their dogs in a countdown to Christmas Eve. This proved popular, with lots of people engaging, particularly on Facebook which continues to work well for us in terms of interactions.

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Natural England comment:

We note the update provided by the habitat mitigation team and would like to welcome Trudi as she begins her new role.