



SANDWICH BAY BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST



Restharrow Scrape Development Project

The wildlife changes on Restharrow Scrape

I have been involved with the Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust from before the Restharrow Scrape Project all the way through to its completion. I have witnessed first-hand how the wildlife on Restharrow Scrape has changed over the course of The National Lottery Heritage Fund Restharrow Scrape Project.

Different times of the year now see different numbers and varieties of bird species. During the breeding season we can now see Barn Owls (a Schedule 1 species) hunting around the edges of Restharrow Scrape and breeding in the nest box provided in the rear meadow. Nesting in the meadow we also have Skylarks and Corn Buntings, two much-declined farmland birds, and Yellow Wagtails breed nearby and come into the wetland area regularly throughout the summer to look for food.



On the islands and banks Canada Geese, Egyptian Geese, Herring Gulls, and Black-headed Gulls have all nested for the first time.



The latter have proven particularly successful with around 30 nests counted in 2020 and 2021. This is one of the only breeding colonies for this amber-listed species in this area of East Kent.



Mediterranean Gulls have been seen displaying among the colony and it is hoped they will also stay to breed soon. Tern species should also be attracted to breed on the site and small numbers of Sandwich Terns have already been seen.

Species such as Little Grebe are now far more successful in raising offspring and Tufted Ducks breed in far higher numbers than they used to.



This is primarily due to the increase in the size of Restharrow Scrape which means there is now less competition for nesting space and less reduction in water levels over the summer months. The deeper channels around the edge dissuade mammalian predators. Lapwing pairs continue to use the site and Avocets (Schedule 1) show an interest each year.

One of the more noticeable changes on Restharrow Scrape is in the wildfowl numbers during winter. Wildfowl (of almost all species) are more numerous with counts of Coot around four times higher than previously. The deeper and more open water favours diving ducks which were usually only scarce visitors to the previous scrape.



Wintering Geese have been more frequent and use the Restharrow Scrape area for bathing and respite, an example of how the scrape complements the wider wetland and marshland landscape. Large flocks of White-fronted Geese have been particularly noteworthy for the last two winters. In February 2021 there was a significant cold snap across Europe and the UK. The deeper water meant Restharrow Scrape did not completely freeze over (which it would previously do) and the surrounding banks provided shelter from the icy winds. This meant Restharrow Scrape was perfect protection for wildfowl and waders. There were around 100 Wigeons and 600 Teals, smaller numbers of Pintails, and triple figures of Snipes in and around the wetland and meadow areas.

Although the surrounding area has always been good for Lapwings there has never been significant numbers on Restharrow Scrape previously. This changed when we re-developed the site and winters since have seen up to 400 birds utilising the site. Golden Plover (part of the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA designation) are now also regular visitors.



The site continues to be attractive to passage birds as well as winter/summer visitors. The wetland is perfectly placed for waders to stop by and feed or rest. Little Ringed Plovers, Common Sandpipers, Jack Snipes, Black-tailed Godwits, and Bar-tailed Godwits all pass through the area regularly.

The wider expanse of water has meant that 'large' gulls such as Herring Gull are now using the site to roost and bathe during the day. This has in turn produced lots of records of Yellow-legged and Caspian Gulls on Restharrow Scrape, both of which were practically unheard of before the re-developments.



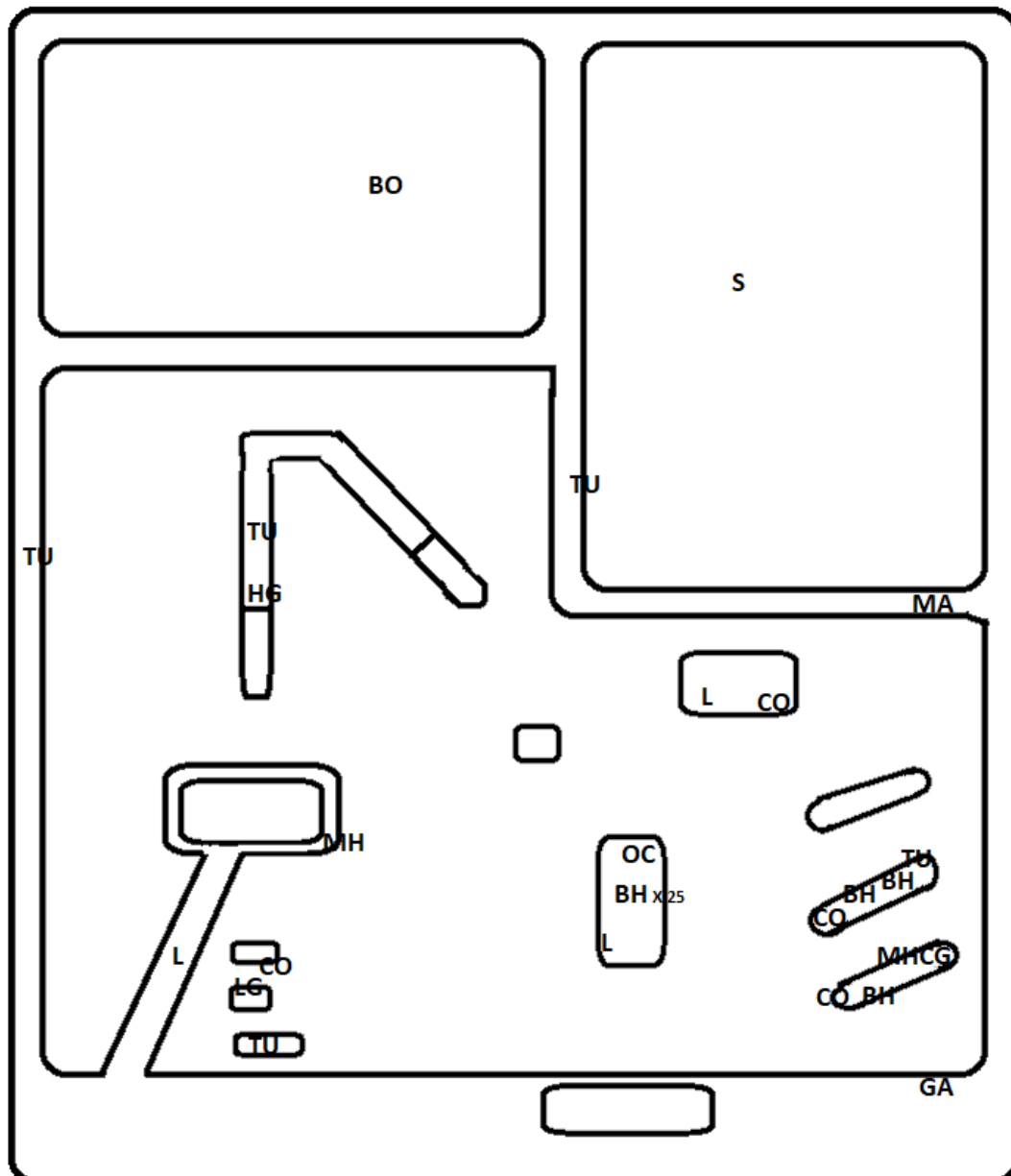
There have been noticeable changes in taxa other than birds too. The spoil excavated from the site was used to create the banks surrounding the wetland. Over the summer months these banks have been a visual spectacle of wildflowers. The scarce Yellow Bartsia proliferated along the banks, islands, and surrounding meadows of the Scrape. In turn, the area has been busy with native pollinators such as bees and butterflies. Odonata on site have increased substantially since the re-development. In May 2021, extraordinary numbers of the Red-veined Darter were seen and a pair of Lesser Emperor dragonflies were observed egg-laying in the wetland.



It is thought that the Nationally Rare Dainty Damselfly has also colonised the site from a pool nearby and will hopefully be confirmed in summer 2022.

Breeding birds of Restharrow Scrape 2020

Using the newly devised record sheet:



CG Canada Goose – one pair, failed

MA Mallard – one pair, 13 young

GA Gadwall – one probable pair, failed?

TU Tufted Duck – five broods of 35 young (10y, 7y, 7y, 6y, 5y)

LG Little Grebe – one pair, two broods (1y, 3y)

MH Moorhen – two pairs

CO Coot – four pairs

OC Oystercatcher – one pair, failed twice

L Lapwing – three pairs (2y, 1y, 3y)

BH Black-headed Gull – 29 nests, 48 young fledged

HG Herring Gull – one pair, failed

BO Barn Owl – one pair, three young fledged

S Skylark – one pair, unknown

By Steffan Walton, Warden, SBBOT, 14th April 2022.