

Review and analysis of changes in waterbird use of the Mersey Estuary SPA, Mersey Narrows & North Wirral Foreshore pSPA and Ribble & Alt Estuaries SPA

Annex 1a - Example of the questionnaire sent to WeBS counters

First published 27 May 2015

QUESTIONNAIRE

Changes within Mersey Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA)

Dear Observer

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) are co-ordinating a study into the wintering bird numbers and distributions on the Mersey Estuary SPA on behalf of the Environment Agency (EA), with the support of the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), English Nature (EN) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). The aim of this study is to try and determine why a number of the species that have been designated as being important on this SPA are declining.

The enclosed questionnaire is intended to collect information, which will be of high conservation importance, and is important in informing future management of the SPA. We realise the time constraints that you are under, but anticipate that this form should take no more than half an hour to complete in most instances. It is not expected that everyone will be able to fill all of the space, or be able to answer all the questions on the questionnaire. We greatly appreciate your response as you know the site well and your advice is very valuable to us.

As part of their programme of work, EA is obliged to review whether any of the consents that it dispenses could be having an adverse impact on SPAs. To meet these requirements, recent work undertaken by the BTO on the trends in wintering bird numbers (using Wetland Bird Survey data) has determined that 3 out of the 10 designated species evaluated on the Mersey Estuary SPA appear to show signs of decline at the site. These were identified from examining changes in each of the designated species site populations over 5-year, 10-year and 25-year time periods. Population declines of between 25% and 50% are flagged as "Medium Alerts" and declines of greater than 50% as "High Alerts". All species evaluated for which the Mersey Estuary is important and those species for which "High Alerts" and "Medium Alerts" have been triggered are listed below.

Evaluated Species: Great Crested Grebe, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Pintail, Grey Plover, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank

High Alert:* Great Crested Grebe^{5,10}, Pintail^{5,10,25}, Grey plover⁵
Medium Alert:* Grey Plover¹⁰

* Superscript values by species' names indicate the time period for which the Alerts have been triggered (5, 10 or 25 years).

Attempts are being made to explain these apparent declines. One method being used to assist in this process is to gather data from professionals and local experts, who in many cases have built up an intimate knowledge of the site and its wintering bird populations over many years. The aim of this questionnaire is to gather information on any changes that have occurred at the Mersey Estuary SPA over the last 30 years which may have impacted on these wintering bird populations either directly (e.g. pollution incidents or very cold winters), or indirectly (e.g. changes in sediments leading to changes in habitat quality).

Your local knowledge of this area is an essential element of this work. We are particularly interested in any changes at the site that you think may have impacted upon bird numbers and bird distribution. The information you provide will be used to inform the EA Review of Consents process and in addition will help provide background information that can be fed into the SPA management process.

With respect to changes within the SPA, please give as much detail regarding location and date as possible. The form is set out in such a way as to prompt your thoughts.

Please do not feel restricted by the form as to the number of potential impacts you may be aware of or any additional comments you wish to make. An extra sheet (section 6) has been provided for this purpose.

Please return the questionnaire in the Freepost Self Addressed Envelope (no need to include a stamp) to **Neil Calbrade** by **XXXX XXth 2013**. If you have any further queries please contact me by phone on 01842 750050 or e-mail Neil.Calbrade@bto.org.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation.

Yours faithfully

Neil Calbrade

Questionnaire (Page 1 of 6):

Factors potentially affecting the Mersey Estuary SPA waterbird populations

Please return by Oct 17th 2003 to **Michael Armitage**, British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford, IP24 2PU (Tel: 01842 750050) (Michael.Armitage@bto.org)

THE COMPLETION OF SECTION 1 IS OPTIONAL

1 Your details:

Name (optional):

Address (optional):

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Daytime telephone number (optional):

e-mail (optional):

2 Based on your knowledge and experience of this SPA, which of the following events or changes have occurred at the site over the last 30 years?

Please tick "Yes", "No", or "Don't know" for each issue listed below. If there has been some event or change at the site that is not listed, please enter it in the "Other (please specify):" box.

You will be able to give details of any events or changes that have occurred in the next sections of the questionnaire.

(in no particular order of importance)	Yes	No	Don't know
Habitat loss or change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in saltmarsh area and quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in intensity of disturbance due to human activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in raptor populations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in surrounding land use (e.g. housing, agricultural practices)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flood defence developments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in fishing activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in vegetation type	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in invertebrate populations or communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in water quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New discharges/changes in discharge regimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pollution incidents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in water abstraction regime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in landfill/waste operations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Changes in physical regime (e.g. water level, surface flooding)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Severe weather events (e.g. notably harsh winters)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A suitable 'new' site for waterbirds has been created nearby	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Questionnaire (Page 3 of 6):

Factors potentially affecting the Mersey Estuary SPA waterbird populations

4.1 Over the last 30 years what management regimes/natural events have impacted upon the site (please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)?

e.g. The completed public footpath has led to increased human recreational disturbance in the SPA

a.
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b.
.....

c.
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d.
.....

e.
.....

4.2 When and where did these management regimes/natural events occur? Please mark the location and extent of the event/impact on the other map, giving the event/impact the letter used for it above e.g. "a", "b", etc. (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

e.g. The public footpath completed in 1994 runs from "village A" to "town B" on the north side of the SPA

a.
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b.
.....

c.
.....

d.
.....

e.
.....

Questionnaire (Page 4 of 6):

Factors potentially affecting the Mersey Estuary SPA waterbird populations

4.3 What effect did these management regimes/natural events have upon different elements of the site, such as sediment, water quality, vegetation, etc.?

e.g. The public footpath has led to increased visitors – no other obvious impact

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

4.4 In your opinion, how did these affect bird populations, if at all?

e.g. Waterbirds, especially teal and mallard, stopped using the saltmarsh near the path

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

Questionnaire (Page 5 of 6):

Factors potentially affecting the Mersey Estuary SPA waterbird populations

5 Please list any sources of information that you are aware of:
(*e.g.* scientific papers, articles in county bird reports *etc.*)

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6 Continuation sheet and additional comments

Questionnaire (Page 6 of 6):

Factors potentially affecting the Mersey Estuary SPA waterbird populations

6 Continuation sheet and additional comments