

Alderney West Coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar Site Management and Monitoring Strategy



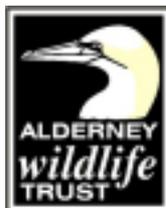
FIVE YEAR Project Review 2007-2011

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Annual Alderney west coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar site Strategy

Five Year Review 2007-2011

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Introduction

In 2005 an area of Alderney's West coast, as well as the island of Burhou and its associated islets and reefs were designated as wetlands of worldwide importance under the Ramsar convention. The convention requires participants to develop a framework to promote the conservation and the wise use of the wetlands in their territory. In 2006 a management strategy was produced to provide a framework through which Alderney could meet the requirements of the convention.

Alderney was the first of the Chanel Islands to produce a management strategy in 2007. The 2007-2011 strategy included a five year action plan, and states that the strategy itself be reviewed in 2012.

This report gives an overview of what has been achieved over the last 5 years and reviews the initial goals and objectives of the Ramsar project.

Section 1:

1. Have the Goals and Objectives from the 2007-11 strategy been achieved?

Alderney's first Ramsar management strategy set out the following goals and objectives: Each point is listed below and the extent to which it has been achieved is discussed in brief.

1.1. *Strategic goals*

1. Maintain and enhance species populations and marine habitats of the Alderney West coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar site.

This has been achieved with a good to moderate success rate. In certain areas adequate information exists to assess populations, e.g. Seabirds, in other areas further work is required to fully understand the current biological character and status of the site.

2. Achieve the sustainable use of the Ramsar site and surrounding waters to protect the site for current and future generations

This is an on-going aim and in its current format is difficult to assess.

3. Develop Environmental Legislation in the form of an Alderney Wildlife Act which will allow for the creation of marine and terrestrial protected areas.

This has not yet been achieved. The AWT has, however, secured funding through the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) via the Tubney Trust for strategic capacity building. It has been agreed with the CEO of the SoA and the AWT Board that this funding should assist in the development of a wildlife conservation law, as agreed by the General Services Committee of the States of Alderney. Such a law should include terrestrial and marine environments and should be developed over the course of the next 5 years.

1.2 Objectives

- 1. To ensure effective monitoring of key seabird colonies to assess populations and breeding success of priority species.**

“A sound evidence base is an absolute pre-requisite for developing successful conservation strategies for the Channel Islands’ seabirds. In this regard Alderney is doubly blessed in that not only does it host some of the most important seabird colonies in the whole of the geographical region of the Norman-Breton Gulf, but through its commitments to improving the knowledge base for its internationally acclaimed Ramsar site, it has some of the very best data on seabird populations and productivity in the area. It is indeed the envy of the other Chanel Islands in this respect!” - Paul K Veron, Seabird Monitoring Co-ordinator, La Société Guernesiaise.

Through the actions recommended by the Ramsar management strategy Alderney now carries out some of the most in-depth seabird studies in the Channel Islands.

Detailed data on populations and breeding success of key species including Puffin, Lesser Black-back and Herring gull, have been collected each year on Burhou. Usable data has also been gathered for Northern Gannets (the populations of which were one of the major reasons for the initial Ramsar site designation). Other seabird colonies in the area, however, have been less well studied.

- 2. To maintain the numbers and assemblage of seabirds within the Ramsar site (to at least Seabird 2000 levels)**

Through the seabird monitoring work carried out on the Ramsar site to date, data has been gathered which enables us to evaluate population change in three of the main species breeding on Burhou since Seabird 2000 counts (see fig 1. and table 2. in appendix). Lesser Black-backed gulls have increased dramatically since 2000, whereas Great Black-backed and Herring gulls have decreased from 2000 levels. Counts of the Alderney gannetries (Les Etacs and Ortac) in 2000 and 2005 show that the gannet population has continued to increase.

Some of the methods used to count during the seabird 2000 surveys are not directly comparable to work carried out by AWT (Ramsar site managers) this is especially notable for Atlantic Puffin - Seabird 2000 counts were made of individuals on land whereas work over the past 5yrs has used apparently occupied burrows (AOBs) and raft counts to estimate population levels. Since the time of day and year can affect counts of rafting individuals (Soanes et al 2010) a reliable level of change cannot be calculated from raft data. It is likely puffin numbers have increased from 2000 levels as the current

population level would equate to at least 320 individuals- significantly higher than the 180 individuals seen in 1999-2000.

Percentage change values have also been calculated based on population levels before the management strategy was implemented (2006 levels) and the most recent years data (2011). Puffin, Lesser Black-backed gull and Great Black-backed gull populations have all increased (though none of these increases were statistically significant when tested). Herring gull numbers, worryingly, show a fairly steep and consistent decline in numbers (see appendix fig 1.), this is both a local and national trend.

Data is either lacking or insufficient for these kinds of calculations to be performed on the other seabird species nesting on Burhou. Information on population levels of seabirds on mainland Alderney is also not sufficient to enable a comparison with 2000 data. The next full seabird census of the Channel Islands is scheduled for 2013-2015, which will enable a fuller picture of population trends in the region to be ascertained.

The assemblage of seabirds within the site is largely the same as 2000 levels, although there are proportionally many more Lesser Black-backed gulls now than there were.

3. To ensure effective monitoring of the extent and condition of key habitats and mammal species for which the Ramsar site has been designated

Work on habitats and non-avian species within the site has been carried out as part of this strategy, however, the emphasis on the strategy was heavily prioritised towards seabird monitoring.

The most successful area of works has been the sub tidal (Seasearch) surveys. There is currently no long term sub-tidal monitoring programme as recommended in the 2007-11 plan (though the Seasearch programme have completed several surveys on the island).

Results from early attempts to carry out biotope surveys of sections of the sites intertidal area are of limited use as the data was not digitised at the time of undertaking. However, from this initial work intertidal survey methodology and experience has grown significantly within the AWT team and will be key to monitoring marine habitats in the future.

Close monitoring of rat populations on key seabird sites has been conducted and control measures implemented to protect seabird nesting habitats. More work is needed in this area to ensure effective monitoring and to extend its coverage.

4. To maximise the potential of the islands and marine environment to support vibrant marine life and seabird populations, through appropriate management and protection measures.

This is an area where the current works would be greatly improved by the creation and implementation of environmental legislation or marine protected areas in Alderney. Management on Burhou appears to have positively influenced Puffin populations. Some progress has been made, in protection measures through education and public information campaigns, i.e. the production of boating and Burhou best practice Guides, Ramsar site leaflets and local education., The Trust also personally follows up on boat incidents within site and discusses issues with the local community.

5. To provide a framework for decisions on use of the Ramsar site and promotion of its importance amongst local people and visitors

At this time the AWT and States of Alderney have been unable to use the current plan as a tool to assist in decisions regarding the use of the Ramsar site. The current plan has however assisted in raising awareness and appreciation of the value of the site to both local people and visitors. This has been undertaken through an awareness campaign focusing on various educational events, information points and leaflets, press and media coverage at both a local and national level.

6. To ensure regular reporting against all plan objectives and review management actions accordingly

Annual reports have been compiled to report all management and monitoring work carried out within the site to the States of Alderney. Management actions have been reviewed where necessary e.g. Herring gull issue, modified by joint agreement of the Ramsar Steering Group, GSC and AWT. Certain seabird specific objectives have been reviewed annually; however, this document represents the first comprehensive review of all plan objectives.

Section 2:

2. Successes and shortfalls of the 2007-2011 Action Plan

2.1. Key Achievements of the 2007-11 strategy:

- The Burhou seabird project has been a major part of the Ramsar work to date. The data collected is now some of the most detailed and regular reporting of breeding success in the Channel Islands and data has also contributed to the National JNCC Seabird monitoring programme.
- Burhou's Puffin population has increased steadily over the management period; it is probable that the gull exclusion work and habitat control measures have contributed to this increase.
- Increasing the Burhou closed season until the 31st July and enforcing this via signage has helped to ensure late nesting Puffins are not disturbed. Making people aware of vulnerable bird breeding sites via signage during the open season has undoubtedly helped reduce disturbance and destruction of their breeding habitats.
- Reducing human presence during the 'closed season' to a maximum of 3, who are required to keep disturbance to an absolute minimum may well also have been a major factor in the increased puffin productivity. By way of comparison during the 2007 season a voluntary work party of 5 people took pneumatic drills to the island to repair the landing bridges during puffin fledging period – at this time such late breeding season disturbance had been considered acceptable (or not been considered at all).

- The production of the annual Ramsar Strategy Review for the GSC has been a very useful tool in documenting the works undertaken each year in an easily accessible format. The report and presentation given to the Committee each year has helped AWT, who are acting as site managers on behalf of the Committee, to maintain a close relationship with GSC and keep them informed as to the development of the Ramsar site.
- A great deal of work has been done to increase public awareness of the site including developing and installing information boards on Burhou and the mainland (though these may soon need replacing), production of leaflets about the site and its wildlife, running regular walks and events about the site and in promoting the site through local and national media sources.
- Surveying of the Ramsar site's intertidal zone and portions of its sublittoral environment is of increasing importance in view of the growing interest in the development of marine renewable energy. This places the GSC in a more informed position as to the potential benefits and negative impacts of renewable energy development on a key environmental and economic resource.
- Connections have been developed and maintained with a wide range of organisations and individuals throughout the scientific, governmental and NGO communities, yielding skills and support otherwise unavailable to Alderney. The principal mechanism for this contact is the Ramsar Steering Group.

2.2. Areas of work identified within the 2007-2011 plans which have not been achieved (level of priority for action as identified in the first Ramsar Plan is shown in brackets):

- Alderney still does not have an adequate Oil spill action plan or a process for reporting oiled wildlife. *(High)*
- A review of gravel extraction levels on Platte Saline was never completed *(High)*
- A full seabird survey of Coque Lihou has not been achieved, largely due to boat, time and weather constraints. It was recommended that this survey should be completed at least once every 5 yrs. *(High)*
- Habitat Phase 1 and/or Phase 2 surveys were never fully completed in any areas of the Ramsar shoreline. *(Med)*

2.3. Areas of work which have been carried out but require additional work to adequately fulfil action points:

2.3.1. Seabirds:

- Gannet – An aerial photographic census was carried out in 2011: pictures still need to be sorted and numbers counted.

- Gannet - Adult survival studies and colour ringing have not been carried out as hoped though the Channel Island Ringing program, this is largely due to resource limitations.
- Cormorant – Very little work (with the exception of 2008) has been achieved on estimating cormorant population and productivity, this was initially recommended to be monitored annually and has not been possible largely due to their main nesting location on little Burhou being inaccessible at most times of tide.
- Storm Petrel – annual playback surveys and ringing studies were recommended for comparisons to be made between methods and to gain better population estimates. Playback surveys were carried out in 2007, 2008 and 2011. Ringing was carried out in 2008 (and 2011 for BBC filming purposes) only – issues were identified with timing of ringing surveys which need to be addressed.
- Common Terns – Should have been monitored annually for numbers and productivity. Sporadic counts of the breeding population have been made over the years but no solid productivity data has been collected. This again is largely due to the inaccessibility and difficulty viewing the tern nesting sites.

2.3.2. Habitats:

- Biotope surveys of intertidal areas – should be carried out every five years. Some work was collected around Clonque Bay, Hannaine and Burhou but this data was never digitally mapped and some data is not in an adequate format to complete mapping.
- Intertidal indicator species monitoring – was investigated as part of a PhD the results of which should be available by 2013 (M. Broadhurst)
- A formal Hottentot fig eradication/ control programme has not been set up although manual removal of the plant is undertaken by the AWT around the island including areas within the Ramsar site.
- Seasearch surveys have been carried out in some areas of the site, however, there are many more sites which could be assessed.

2.3.3. Other Fauna/Flora

- Grey Seal surveys have been carried out using sightings and counts from local tour boats. The information gained is not believed to be sufficient to give accurate population estimates or to determine breeding status.

- Rat assessment and control has been carried out on Burhou (Rat Free) Hannaine (Rats Present) and Haument des Pies (Rats Present). The last time these measures were carried out was 2009 - further surveys are required in these areas and on other seabird rocks.

Section 3:

Accounts 2007-2011

An annual budget for the site was set by the States of Alderney in 2006, based on the presumption that the AWT would undertake the sites management without charging staff costs. The sum allocated to the site was £6,000 of which £1,000 was for the care and upkeep of the accommodation on the island. However, as little of the accommodation allocation was required by the Burhou Warden some of these additional funds have been allocated towards the overall strategy.

Several major changes in fund allocation have taken place during the term of the strategy, the most important of these was:

- During 2007 no billing structure had been established so lump sum invoicing is shown.
- The requirement that all site management should be compliant with Health and Safety requirements 2007-2008
- The requirement by the Alderney Harbour Office that as the work undertaken on Burhou could not be described as 'pleasurable' and even though no actual costs were raised against the work, all access to the island must be undertaken on a commercially compliant vessel, costed for 2008 at £16,000 (MV Voyager). At this time it was decided that the Trust should undertake the capital expenditure to purchase and operate the required vessel.

Table 1: States of Alderney and Alderney Wildlife Trust costs 2007-2011 (not including labour)

States of Alderney						
Expenditure headings to date	2011 to date	2010	2009	2008	2007	Total
Boating	£2,633.97	£3,172.18	£2,734.11	£1,510.12	£0.00	£10,050.38
Surveyor and survey	£1,458.28	£1,757.65	£1,787.98	£1,461.22	£5,762.00	£12,227.13
PuffinCam	£0.00	£0.00	£552.32	£559.01	£0.00	£1,111.33
Repairs to Burhou Hut	£0.00	£280.26	£215.04	£17.55	£0.00	£512.85
H&S/training	£530.75	£475.00	£1,055.88	£2,255.32	£238.00	£4,554.95
R&D	£674.54	£0.00	£446.67	£200.00	£0.00	£1,321.21
Total	£5,297.54	£5,685.09	£6,792.00	£6,003.22	£6,000.00	£29,777.85
LESS AWT Project cost contribution			-£792.00	-£3.22		
Invoiced	£5,297.54	£5,685.09	£6,000.00	£6,000.00	£6,000.00	£29,777.85
AWT Contribution						
Boating (estimated during 2007)			£7,000.00	£8,000.00	£200.00	£15,200.00
Surveyor and survey	£1,040.00	£1,040.00	£1,220.00	£1,000.00	£1,000.00	£5,300.00
External contributions raised by AWT	£2,000.00				£1,000.00	£3,000.00
Total	£1,040.00	£1,040.00	£8,220.00	£9,000.00	£2,200.00	£23,500.00

Conclusions:

- The Management of Alderney's Ramsar site has been successful.
- The work we have accomplished has seen a significant increase in local regional knowledge and has helped enhance populations of certain species (especially Puffins).
- The main focus of the work to date is ornithological, though some progress has been made on inter and sub tidal work. There is a need to broaden the scope of the work in the future to gain a better understanding of all aspects of the sites biology. This would ensure Alderney is appropriately informed to advise on the "Wise Use" of the site and how to adequately protect it.
- The current management strategy has succeeded in guiding the monitoring and management of the site and has also helped raise awareness and give both local people and visitors a greater appreciation of the value of the site.

- The strategy has been a live and dynamic process rather than a static document, with annual reviews and re-evaluation of objectives where necessary.
- The structure of the management process whereby the GSC approves the work AWT undertakes on their behalf and reports to the committee annually, has worked well. Both parties are kept informed and updated about management plan processes and actions.
- The annual reporting procedure has made the process of evaluating the last 5yrs work comparatively easy.
- A significant proportion of the original goals and objectives have been met. There are only a limited number of actions where some form of progress has not been made (largely due to limited resources and conditions) i.e. Biological Surveys of offshore islets like Casquets.
- The process of re-evaluating of management actions where required has also worked well. Relevant 'external' parties such as the scientific Ramsar Steering Group (RSG) have been kept informed of the work being carried out in Alderney, and management actions have been altered appropriately where concerns have been raised e.g. Gull control issue.
- This management style has been appropriate and should be continued to take things forward for the next 5yrs.