



# **Alderney's West Coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar Site**

## **Management Strategy -ARS2- Five-year Review 2012-2016**

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## Executive Summary

The past 5 years the strategic focus has been to 'broaden the scope of work in order to gain a greater understanding of all aspects of the ecological status of the Ramsar site, whilst maintaining key interests in seabird populations'. Through the work undertaken by the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT), some key successes have been made, all these success are described in more detail within this document:

- LIVE (webcams) with Puffin and Gannet Cam has drawn significant attention to Alderney from the UK and Channel Islands
- Track A Gannet has helped collect baseline data to help establish foraging habits
- PhD study on Gannets and Shags has boosted the public enthusiasms for seabird species
- Annual public Marine Mammal surveys
- Some excellent data gathered for the Seabird Census
- No Gulls nesting within 200m of the Puffin colony
- Public awareness campaign to protect Ringed Plovers
- 2015 there was no evidence of Hottentot-fig on Burhou
- Population models after the 2014 seabird wreck have shown how important seabird monitoring is in understanding population fluctuations

Through these keys successes, we've been able to establish future improvements for the next 5-year Ramsar Strategy (ARS3):

- Stakeholder engagement is needed, emphasis on those using the waters with the Ramsar site.
- Public awareness on the vulnerability of Common Terns nesting on Bibette Head
- Reducing the disturbance of the breeding Gulls on Burhou
- Annual surveying of Burhou for small mammal populations
- Maintaining the public interest and support by monitoring Puffin populations and developing future in-depth studies on them

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## 1. Introduction

On 25<sup>th</sup> August 2005 the Alderney West Coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar Site was designated and gained global recognition as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

The site covers 15,629ha of land and sea and was the first Ramsar designated site in the Bailiwick of Guernsey.

In 2006 on behalf of the States of Alderney (SoA), the General Services Committee (GSC) requested the support of the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) in the preparation of a management strategy for the islands Ramsar Site. This is required under the commitments of the Ramsar Convention.

This report reviews each of the strategic objectives of the Management Plan ARS2 and gives an overview of the past five years of the Ramsar Site's management.

## 2. Has the strategic focus of the Management Strategy been met?

The strategic focus, aims and objectives of ARS2 are outlined below and discussed in brief.

### 2.2. Strategic Focus

*To broaden the scope of work in order to gain a greater understanding of all aspects of the ecological status of the Ramsar site, whilst maintaining a key interest in seabird populations.*

Over the course of ARS2 seabird monitoring has continued to drive work within the Ramsar Site. Monitoring protocols were inspected thoroughly and changes made accordingly in 2013 with new recording forms designed to ensure ongoing standardised data gathering.

The marine output has included defining the intertidal, benthic and pelagic marine environments within the Ramsar Site. However, the aim to include further sublittoral and benthic ecological assessment has not been achieved due to a shortage of resource.

## 2.3. Strategic Aims

*Facilitate a greater understanding of the ecological status of the Ramsar site by establishing an environmental baseline for both the marine and terrestrial environments within the site.*

With the Living Seas Officer leading the marine works programme the AWT is establishing baseline data for key marine environments (intertidal and terrestrial) within the Ramsar Site. Phase I and II terrestrial habitat surveys will be completed under ARS3 and it is hoped that further benthic and pelagic assessment is an outlying aim of the next 5 year strategy.

*Maintain and where appropriate enhance species populations and marine habitats of the Alderney West Coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar site. Special attention will be given to the sites with colonies of breeding seabirds as indicators of site health.*

Public engagement programmes to try and reduce disturbance on resident seabird populations were a mainstay of the last 5 years. Signage and exclusion zones around Ringed Plover nests on Platte Saline proved effective to protecting the breeding birds. This will continue annually and be extended to Clonque and Saye where Ringed Plover were seen prospecting in 2015.

Invasive species control continues to be applied across the Ramsar site and 2015 saw the first Hottentot-fig free year for Burhou.

ARS3 will research alternative methods of monitoring European Shag in order to minimise disturbance to and therefore increase the population size of the three Gull species of Alderney. Signage and exclusion zones around Ringed Plover nests on Platte Saline proved effective to protecting the breeding birds. This will continue annually and be extended to Clonque and Saye where Ringed Plover were seen prospecting in 2015.

*Develop environmental legislation for Alderney which can be used to help ensure the sustainable use of the Ramsar site and surrounding waters and protect the site for current and future generations.*

The Ramsar Site management strategies are the most in-depth documents of their type within the Channel Islands and as such have been useful tools for developing understanding of the site and enabling critical assessment of both the baseline ecology and the effects of protection measures. In 2014 the General Services Committee approved a review of the existing Bird Protection (Alderney), Ordinance 2015, with a view to -utilising this legislation to help reduce the impacts of disturbance on key seabird populations. This work was not delivered during the timeframe of ARS2 but it is intended that The Alderney Conservation Act will be completed by 2018 and will integrate the Bird Ordinance if possible to further ensure the sustainable use of Alderney's natural environment across the island and its waters.

## 2.4. Strategic Objectives

### 2.4.1. Marine

*To increase our understanding of the marine environment within the site by collecting baseline data.*

- Establishing baseline data for benthic and pelagic environments, following recommendations from the benthic and pelagic environment desk-based review. The report is currently in draft form.
- Future baseline data surveys (i.e. physical parameters, benthic bathymetry, sub-tidal video or sediment analysis and fisheries review) should be completed with local, regional and international groups and/or experts, where possible.
- Intertidal Phase I and II habitat surveys for Clonque Bay were completed in 2014 and 2015 respectively and will be repeated on a five-year cycle. Similar surveys must still be conducted across Burhou and other offshore islets within the Ramsar Site.
- Benthic bathymetry, video works, sediment analysis and pelagic physical parameters studies have yet to be completed.
- A range of marine mammal species surveys each year, are ongoing. This includes: grey seal population dynamic estimates, seal photo identification catalogue, land/boat effort based observation surveys and collate opportunistic sighting information from marine users and the public.
- Important species assessments are ongoing. This includes recording the presence, location and population dynamics of species such as the green ormer (*Haliotis tuberculata*) and invasive species, such as Japweed (*Sargassum muticum*).

### 2.4.2. Terrestrial

*To increase our understanding of the terrestrial elements of the site by collecting baseline data.*

Unforeseen events such as polyisobutylene discharges (2013) and the seabird wreck (2013/14) contributed to a regrettably limited terrestrial output for the Ramsar Site throughout ARS2.

- Phase I and II habitat surveys for Burhou and the other islets within the Ramsar site are still required.
- Significant survey effort was conducted on Casquets in 2014, recording marine and terrestrial flora and fauna.

### 2.4.3. Seabirds

To continue building on the ARS1 work monitoring seabird populations and breeding success in the site and its surrounding waters.

All known seabird populations within Alderney's Ramsar site have been monitored for productivity and population size annually with the exception of the Gannets where the population size is monitored on a five-yearly cycle. However:

- No AON Gull counts took place in 2015 due to adverse weather conditions.
- Shag monitoring ~~has been was~~ put on hold ~~in for~~ 2016 due to excessive disturbance to the breeding Gulls on Burhou. ~~Alternative methodologies will be researched in 2016 to enable continued monitoring in future years.~~
- Greater Black-backed Gulls populations were not counted in 2016 due to there nesting location of Little Burhou.

*Review population trends annually and where appropriate implement management to help maintain or enhance populations.*

This particular objective has been actioned with huge success.

- 2016 will see the final data gathered for the Channel Islands' contribution towards Seabird survey 2013-16.
- Minimal habitat management has been required on Burhou. Management of the nest boxes for the European Storm-Petrels has continued with moderate success. In 2016 we will be considering bracken control in front of the hut as it is thought the spread of bracken could be linked to the Puffins' moving towards the east of the islet.
- The Gull exclusion zone continued in 2013 but has not been necessary since as no Gulls have nested within 200m of the Puffins.
- After due consideration establishing a rotation survey plan was deemed unnecessary and it was decided to continue the annual survey effort, with the exception of the five-yearly cycle of Gannet population counts.
- A university study was conducted in 2014 to clarify the presence of small mammals on Burhou or lack thereof. The study concluded there was nothing of concern but suggested subsequent survey, the first of which will be carried out in 2016.

#### **2.4.4. Invasive Species**

*Marine and terrestrial surveys to map and monitor the potential invasive species Slipper Limpet (*Crepidula fornicata*), Japweed (*Sargassum muticum*), and Hottentot-fig (*Carpobrotus edulis*).*

- Surveys have been conducted for the Slipper Limpet and Hottentot-fig, and the Hottentot-fig population has undergone control. As yet there has been no real survey effort for Japweed, however this species will be the subject of an MSc study in 2016.

#### **2.4.5. Education & Publicity**

*To develop an academic research programme using a combination of PhD (Case) and taught MSc students. This will allow the development of academically reviewed research for low residual costs and will thus support the continued development of the site's education and publicity programme.*

- Two MSc studies have already been carried out in and around Alderney's Ramsar Site, one focusing on the invasive Brown Rat and its possible presence on Burhou and Alderney's mainland, the other on the ecological composition of Braye Bay.
- Last year saw the completion of Vicky Warwick-Evans' PhD which began a tagging programme for the Gannets of Ortac. The tagging is set to continue each year, but is dependent on sponsorship.
- This year will see three further MSc studies, all focusing on the marine environments found within the Ramsar Site.

*To increase awareness of the site for both locals and visitors.*

- Since 2013 our education programme LIVE: Teaching Through Nature has run in schools within the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and on the UK mainland. Via live stream webcams children have been introduced to the life cycle of Burhou's Puffins and last year the Gannets of Ortac. Unfortunately Gannet Cam failed to engage audiences to the same extent as Puffin Cam. The logistics and costs of Gannet Cam are such that given its limited appeal it has been decided not to re-install it for 2016. Puffin Cam has been hugely successful both in schools and with the wider public. When the Puffins have fledged the cameras are relocated to allow intimate access to the Storm Petrel colony on Burhou.
- A suite of events is offered within and outside of St Anne's school, many of which target a more mature demographic. This includes the Wildlife Trust Wildlife Week which hosts off-island experts and a full summer season of boat tours.
- Interpretation panels have been designed for placement on Burhou and overlooking Les Etacs. In 2015 the AWT trialled an exclusion zone with appropriate signage to safeguard the breeding plovers on Platte Saline. This proved successful and gained public support. It will be continued with updated signage on Platte Saline, Saye and Clonque as birds have been seen prospecting at these sites.

#### **2.4.6. Advisory & Legislative**

*Production of Ramsar Stakeholder List and Ramsar Stakeholder Group.*

- In accordance with the strategic objectives of ARS2 a Ramsar Stakeholder List has been created. The Stakeholder Group will be formed under ARS3.

*Production of a list of Conventions Alderney is signatory to.*

- A list of Conventions Alderney is signatory to is now included in project reviews.

*Production of Oil Spill Action Plan.*

- Alderney has its own Oil Spill Action Plan appended to the Marine Counter Pollution Plan for the Bailiwick of Guernsey.

#### *Development of environmental legislation for Alderney.*

- Writing environmental legislation for Alderney in the form of the Alderney Conservation Act has not yet been completed and will be carried forward into ARS3.

#### *Develop and utilise links with the French Normand-Breton Marine Natural Park.*

- Alderney is working increasingly with contacts in France, and will this year host a government minister for a tour of the Ramsar site as well as contributing data to a French Bird Atlas.

#### *Investigate scope for a co-operative Channel Islands Ramsar network.*

- The setting up of a co-operative Channel Islands Ramsar network has been investigated. It is not possible to operate as a Ramsar Convention recognised Regional Regional Initiative as the Convention requires a higher number of participating parties. However, steps are being taken to establish a more fluid inter-island Ramsar network to share best practice relevant to the Channel Islands.

### **3. Key Successes**

- Marine Mammal surveys have been conducted annually through a citizen science and public awareness event. Recording forms have been made available at the Harbour Office, the Visitor Information Centre and the AWT shop. The response has been incredibly positive and the call for records will continue; 2016 has already seen a regular update going out in the news section of Quay FM.
- Standardisation of all seabird monitoring has established best practice for all continued monitoring effort. Surveys carried out in 2015 for the UK national Seabird Census gathered excellent data on Alderney's seabird populations and has been partially completed this year as Greater Black-Backed Gulls (GBBG) were not counted.
- The creation of a Gull exclusion zone on Burhou, where any nesting attempts made by Gulls near to the Puffin breeding colony were removed, proved successful. In 2015 no Gulls nested within 200 metres of the Puffin colony.
- Establishing a small awareness campaign to protect the breeding efforts of Ringed Plover on Platte Saline included temporary signage, a small exclusion zone around nests and a decoy exclusion zone to draw attention away from the occupied nest site. The public responded well and one pair raised chicks twice. However, it is believed that the chicks were later predated. Signage and the exclusion zones continued in 2016 with the addition of Saye and Clonque.



- Hottentot-fig has historically been controlled on Burhou under ARS1 and ARS2, however in 2015 no evidence of the plant was found. Monitoring will continue to ensure the islet remains free of the invasive species.
- Vicki Warwick-Evans' PhD study involved tagging a selection of Gannets and Shags from Alderney's Ramsar Site. Tracking the Gannets' summertime foraging trips proved incredibly successful, not least because of the response from the public which has been hugely positive.
- LIVE (Webcams) – development of education programme regularly reaching over 20 + channel Island Schools and additional UK Schools. Reaching in excess of 1,000 channel Island Primary students a year since 2013. Core to the programme is the LIVE PuffinCam, and in 2015 GannetCam, which in 2016 was reaching approximately 3 times the public audience of the VisitAlderney website, drawing significant attention to Alderney.
- Track A Gannet (TAG) – established in 2015 and running onwards in 2016, TAG is providing GIS tracking baseline data to help establish foraging data which can be used to model population dynamics and assess potential impacts of future developments within range of Alderney's Gannetries.
- Seabird Wreck 2014 – In 2015, population models were developed to show how the population of puffins might continue to decline after the wreck. Without monitoring of puffin burrows we would not be able to fully understand the effect of losing a large number of immature birds can have on a population. Puffins, like the blonde hedgehog, have become a very important iconic species for Alderney, due to LIVE (Webcams). Without the Ramsar officer and the AWT, Alderney would not have become an important part of collecting and translating data from the Channel Islands and France for the UK.
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#### 4. Future Improvements

- Further stakeholder engagement is needed, with an emphasis on those using the waters within the Ramsar Site. This will be the primary focus of ARS3.
- The Common Tern breeding colony at Bibette Head is vulnerable to predation and public disturbance due to its being accessible at low tide. It is hoped that an awareness campaign will be undertaken in ARS3, along with recruitment of a local, voluntary Tern warden to engage with the public.
- In 2016 there was no monitoring of the European Shags on Burhou due to excessive disturbance to the breeding Gulls. It is therefore necessary to consider other survey techniques. The AWT is looking to non-human methods, possibly using drone photography. This may also make it easier to study populations on Coque Lihou and Little Burhou. These methods would also be helpful in counting the population of GBBG nesting on Little Burhou.
- The MSc study on the small mammal populations on Burhou found that there is not currently a problem, but suggested subsequent survey to ensure this is maintained. So far no such survey has been undertaken. This must become part of the annual action plan.

- Alderney's Puffins are vital to maintaining public interest and support but the population is fragile and appears to be in decline. It is important to continue to monitor the puffin colony and apparently occupied burrows to achieve a greater understanding of our Puffins in order to better protect them.

## 5. Conclusion

Management of Alderney's Ramsar Site has and continues to be fluid and flexible, responding to shifting priorities as and when necessary:

- Seabird Wreck 2014
- European Shag monitoring
- Gannet Cam

Public outreach and citizen science activities have been successful. It is imperative that this momentum continues to ensure long-term public support and make use of local knowledge.

Working alongside the States of Alderney and with close links to the States of Guernsey has ensured transparency and has established a network of support for sharing best practice. It is hoped that this can extend outside of the Bailiwick to the Channel Islands as a whole.

The Alderney Wildlife Trust relies on funding from the SoA and a volunteer workforce to operate. A significant number of the strategic objectives from ARS2 have been met. Where they have not this has largely been due to access to resources or adverse weather conditions.

In all it is clear that the ARS2 has largely been a success, and where limitations have occurred they have been identified and can be responded to through ARS3.