

Alderney's West coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar Site Annual Action Programme 2015

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1. Introduction

Alderney's Ramsar site will have its 10th Anniversary this year on the 25th August 2015, also marking the beginning of the 4th year of work within the second five-year Management Strategy for the Alderney West Coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar Site.

This document will highlight the planned works to be carried out during 2015, taking into consideration the requirements Alderney West Coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar Site Management Strategy 2012-2016 (Bohan, 2012) and the Annual Ramsar Project Review 2014 (Broadhurst & Morley, 2014; In House Publication).

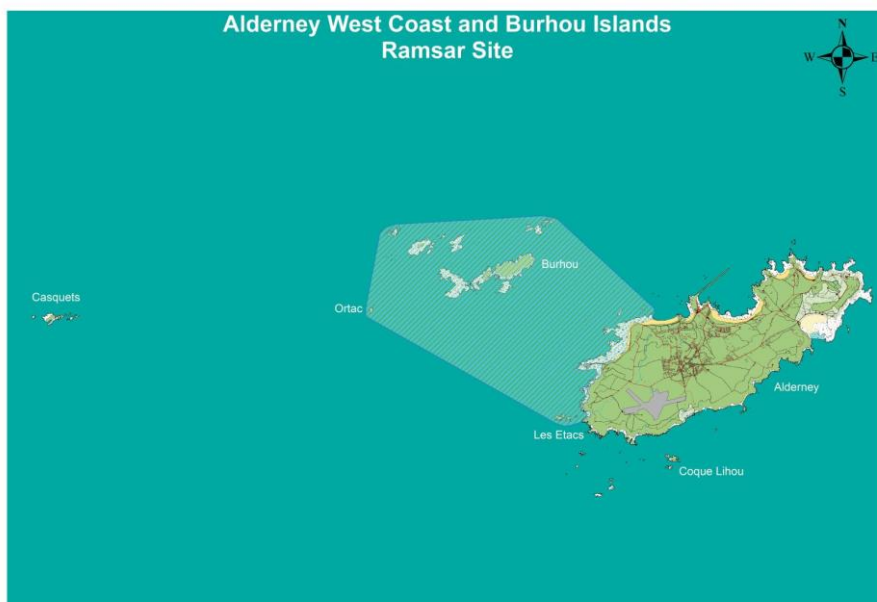


Figure 1. Shows the Ramsar site boundary in relation in Alderney and all other surrounding islets.

2. Background

On 25th August 2005, Alderney's West Coast and the Burhou Islands were designated as wetlands of worldwide importance and in turn became the first Ramsar site in the Bailiwick of Guernsey. The Ramsar site covers 1,500 hectares of both land and sea (almost double the area of Alderney).

In 2006, the General Services Committee (GSC), on behalf of the States of Alderney, requested the support of the Alderney Wildlife Trust in the preparation of the management strategy. This is required under the commitments of the Ramsar Convention. The completed Ramsar site strategy outlines the need to monitor seabird population trends (including population and distribution assessments) and continues the management of these populations where necessary; within which the island of Burhou is an important component.

The objectives of the site strategy are assessed annually through various scientific research projects and active conservation management techniques. The Ramsar Management and Monitoring Plan are undertaken by the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) on behalf of the States of Alderney (Morgan, 2011; In House Publication).

3. Objectives

To meet with the objectives of the current 2012-2016 Ramsar Site Management Strategy, the following areas of work to be covered in 2015.

Please note that by approving this Action Plan General Services Committee is agreeing to all the proposed work therein. Similarly the AWT commits to the delivery of that work as described (accepting the availability of resources necessary and favourable weather conditions to undertake the work) and accepts the Committee's requirement to inform the States Engineer if any aspect of the work requires significant alteration from the parameters contained within the Action Plan; or if any new element of work not described in the Action Plan is found to be required, prior to their altering the details of the Action Plan.

Seabirds:

- Continuation of all seabird monitoring on Burhou, Alderney and all other Islets.
- Placement of a Gannet camera (Gannet Cam) on Ortac and re-installation of Puffin Cam on Burhou to coincide with our LIVE: Teaching Through Nature programme.
- An aerial survey of both Gannetries (Les Etacs and Ortac) as part of a 5-year colony census.
- Continuation of Storm Petrel ringing with the Channel Island Ringing Scheme using playback methods to accurately estimate the breeding population.
- Sign post placement for public awareness of nesting Ringed Plovers at Platte Saline and Clonque, along with regular monitoring of both sites.
- Sign post placement for public awareness of nesting Common Terns at Bibette Head.
- The final year of the University of Liverpool PhD, tagging Gannets on Les Etacs and Ortac to further study the foraging behaviour of Gannets in relation to changes in their ecosystem.
- Participation in the 2015/16 National Seabird Census for the Channel Islands as a part of a wider UK National Seabird Census.

Terrestrial:

- Phase 1 Habitat survey of Coque Lihou, South Cliffs and Burhou.
- Small mammal trapping on Burhou using Longworth traps and Hair traps.
- Control of Hottentot Fig on Burhou and continuation of monitoring with intent to have a more extensive review of current data in the 2015 report.

Marine:

- Marine intertidal habitat mapping of Burhou and South Cliffs.

- Marine intertidal species quadrat surveys of Burhou and Clonque Bay.
- Intertidal strandline survey of Clonque Bay.
- Intertidal species surveys of Clonque Bay, which include locally important species and invasive species.
- Desk-based bathymetry and abiotic parameter study of the Ramsar Site, from available GIS marine resources.
- Sub-tidal video habitat and species assessments of Clonque Bay, using snorkel and video techniques (dependent on weather and time).
- Potential intertidal or sub-tidal eelgrass survey, using snorkel and video techniques (dependent on weather and time).
- Continue marine mammal species surveys which include; grey seal population dynamics assessment, grey seal photographic ID catalogue, and effort based land/boat surveys.
- Continue promoting marine mammal species and other marine species recordings by relevant marine users and the public.

Events:

- Continuation of boat tours on Sula to further increase public awareness of the Ramsar site whilst also contributing to overall costs.
- Continuation of LIVE: Teaching Through Nature Programme.
- Participation in the Ramsar World Wetlands Day 2015 (Sunday 1st February) in the way of a promoted beach clean on Clonque.

Legislation:

- Establishing an Alderney Conservation Act, starting by increasing public awareness of the AWT and Ramsar site.
- Review of a Bird Protection Law.
- Use any potential opportunities that may arise to establish a Channel Islands Steering Group to ensure standardisation and thus comparable data between Islands.

Pending:

- Any marine renewables work that may be contracted and undertaken within Alderney's territorial waters.

- Navitus Bay windfarm PhD proposal on post-installation Gannet monitoring.
- MSc projects sent to York University, student pending.

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4. Work Programme

4.1 Seabirds

4.1.1 Monitoring

All seabirds across the West Coast of Alderney and the surrounding islands (Burhou, Coque Lihou, Ortac and Les Etacs) will continue to be monitored across the breeding season in accordance with the JNCC Seabird Monitoring Handbook.

4.1.2 Cameras

The re-installation of the Puffin monitoring camera on Burhou will go ahead again before the breeding season starts in March. As well as providing up to date images of the Puffins for the general public, the images will also be used as part of an on-going educational programme, LIVE: Teaching Through Nature, which is aimed at Primary school children both in the Channel Islands and UK.

Due to technical issues last year, the new addition of a Gannet Camera on Ortac was unsuccessful. Our aim this year is to resolve the problems from last year and have the camera up and running in preparation for the coming breeding season.

4.1.3 Aerial Census

2015 marks the date for the 5 yearly Gannet colony census. Using a locally sourced aircraft and photographer we hope to be able to take highly detailed photos of the gannetries on Ortac and Les Etacs to obtain an accurate estimate of both populations. This will also be done in accordance with the Channel Islands Seabird Census (4.1.7) which will be part of a larger UK wide National Seabird Census.

4.1.4 Ringing

Thanks to the continued work of the Channel Islands Ringing Scheme it is hoped that the existing ringing effort will continue. This work will include ringing all gull species present on Burhou, inclusive of Lesser-black Backed, Greater-black Backed and Herring Gulls, in July. Around the same time we also hope to ring Storm Petrels using playback methods, this worked extremely well last year and extremely accurate population estimates were able to be calculated (Broadhurst & Morley, 2014; In House Publication). Ringing of the Les Etacs and Ortac Gannetries will continue in June or July, with a move towards the use of both standard and new colour rings currently being discussed.

4.1.5 Public Awareness Signs

It is intended that as in 2014 public awareness signs will be placed along the beaches at Platte Saline and Clonque (a new successful breeding area as of 2014) to increase awareness about nesting Ringed Plovers. This would be done in mid-April. The AWT has also been in contact with sites with breeding Ringed Plovers in the UK to gain suggestions on how to further protect and increase the breeding success of our small populations.

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Common Terns also continue to breed at Houmet des Pies, which at low tide is easily accessible from Bibette Head. Therefore it is the intention of this Action Plan that the AWT seek permission from the Building and Development Control Committee for seasonal public awareness signs to be sighted around Bibette Head in an attempt to prevent as little human disturbance to these birds, during the breeding season, as is possible (late April).

4.1.6 University of Liverpool PhD

2015 is the final year of field work for University of Liverpool PhD, tagging gannets on Les Etacs and Ortac, to help further study the foraging behaviour of Gannets in relation to changes in their ecosystem. The results of this study will be extremely helpful in determining the future of proposed renewable energy developments.

4.1.7 Channel Islands Seabird Census

The UK National Seabird Census is conducted approximately every 10 to 15 years, the results of which help in ascertaining accurate population estimates on the state of the seabird populations across Britain and Ireland. The Channel Islands hope to add to the UK Seabird Census by establishing a Channel Islands Seabird Census, starting in 2015 and finishing in 2016; the results of which would be fed into the UK National Seabird Census.

4.2 Terrestrial

4.2.1 Phase 1 Habitat Survey

In conjunction with the proposed Phase 1 habitat survey on Alderney this summer, it is hoped an extensive Phase 1 habitat survey will also be done on Burhou, Coque Lihou and the South cliffs.

4.2.2 Small Mammal Trapping

Using both Longworth traps and hair traps on Burhou we hope to determine which mammal species are present on the island and eventually establish population estimates of each species.

4.2.3 Invasive Species Management

Hottentot Fig control will continue on Burhou with intent to hopefully create a long term plan on its removal in the end of year Ramsar review.

4.3 Marine

4.3.1 Intertidal Mapping Surveys

Marine intertidal habitat mapping surveys will be undertaken across Burhou and Alderney's South Cliff area, where possible (dependent upon weather conditions and boat availability). The survey follows guidance from the JNCC and has been used to produce marine habitat maps of other sites within Alderney (including Clonque Bay and Hannaine Bay, which are located within Alderney's Ramsar Site).

4.3.2 Marine Intertidal Species Quadrat Survey

A marine intertidal species quadrat survey will be conducted within Clonque Bay. This survey follows guidance from the Marine Biological Association and will include potential collaboration with local youth groups and the school. The survey method has been used in the past to produce quantitative information of marine species within Hannaine Bay.

4.3.3 Marine Intertidal Strandline Survey

Marine intertidal strandline surveys will be conducted across Clonque Bay, Hannaine Bay and Platte Saline Bay. This survey follows guidance from the Marine Biological Association and will include potential collaboration with local youth groups and the school. The survey method is used to produce quantitative information of marine species found across strandlines, and has been used throughout the Channel Islands and UK.

4.3.4 Marine Intertidal Species Surveys

Marine intertidal species surveys will be conducted within Clonque Bay. Species surveys will assess species, such as locally important species (i.e. Green Ormer, *Haliotis tuberculata*) and invasive species (i.e. Japweed, *Sargassum muticum*). This survey follows guidance from the Marine Biological Association and will include collaboration with other Channel Island organisations, including La Société Guernesiaise.

4.3.5 Potential Intertidal or Sub-tidal Eelgrass Surveys

Marine intertidal or sub-tidal eelgrass surveys will be conducted across specific areas within the Ramsar Site, where possible (dependent upon weather conditions, survey equipment availability and boat availability). This survey will use snorkel and drop-down camera video techniques, following guidance from the JNCC. The survey method has been used to identify eelgrass within other locations across Alderney (i.e. Braye Beach Bay and Longis Bay).

4.3.6 Marine Sub-tidal Video Habitat and Species Assessments

Marine sub-tidal video habitat and species assessments of specific areas within the Ramsar Site will be conducted, where possible (dependent upon weather conditions, survey equipment availability and boat availability). This survey will use snorkel and drop-down camera video techniques, following guidance from the JNCC. The survey method has been used to identify marine habitats and species within other locations across Alderney (i.e. Braye Beach Bay and Casquets Islet).

4.3.7 Marine Mammal Species Surveys

A number of marine mammal species surveys will be conducted across the Ramsar Site. Surveys will include; grey seal population dynamics assessment, grey seal photographic ID catalogue, and effort based land/boat surveys. These surveys follow guidance from the Sea Watch Foundation and the Cornwall Seal Group and have been used throughout Alderney, to record marine mammal species both quantitatively and qualitatively with the public (through observational spotting events and promotion of marine mammal species recording forms)

4.3.8 Bathymetry and Abiotic Parameter Studies

Two desk-based studies which aim to assess the Ramsar Site's bathymetry and abiotic parameters will be conducted this year. These studies will use data from available web-based GIS marine resources.

4.3.9 Promoting

Continue promoting and engaging with the public and specific marine users (i.e. commercial shipping companies, tourist vessels) regarding the marine environment within the Ramsar Site. This includes promoting the recording of marine life within the Ramsar Site through the production of recording forms and organising marine events (i.e beach cleaning, rock-pooling sessions and marine mammal observational watches).

4.4 Events

4.4.1 Boat Tours

The AWT boat, Sula of Braye, will continue to be used both in the transportation of staff (to Burhou, Les Etacs and Ortac) and for public boat tours to the surrounding islands to further increase public awareness of the Ramsar Site, whilst also contributing to overall costs of the seabird monitoring effort.

4.4.2 LIVE: Teaching Through Nature

Now in its second year, the Live: Teaching Through Nature programme will run from 20th April until 30th July and will incorporate many aspects of Alderney's history and wildlife. The programme will use the cameras on Burhou and Ortac to give the children an idea of seabird behaviour in breeding colonies, specifically Puffins on Burhou and Gannets on Ortac. The project will also help children understand how we as ecologists monitor the birds. The live camera feed and more information on the project will be available at <http://burhou.livingislands.co.uk/> throughout the season.

4.4.3 Ramsar World Wetlands Day 2015

On Sunday 1st February 2015 a beach cleaning event was held on Clonque beach. The event was predominantly aimed at children, but it was also open to the general public, with the sole aim to raise awareness about the importance of keeping our beaches clean. This is especially true when many of the beaches on Alderney provide respite for many of our seabirds – the reason the Ramsar site was designated.

4.5 Legislation

4.5.1 Alderney Conservation Act

As described in the Ramsar Management Strategy initial work needs to be started to consider the creation of an 'Alderney Conservation Act', which will specifically establish criteria for the protection and wise use of the Alderney Ramsar site. This work will start with the public awareness campaign run jointly by the AWT with the States of Alderney.

4.5.2 Bird Protection Law

As approved by the Committee to review the Bird Protection (Alderney) Ordinance 2005, with a view to ensuring greater protection for Alderney's resident and migratory birds.

4.5.3 Establishment of a Channel Islands Steering Group

With the help of the other Channel Islands the aim is to establish a Channel Islands Steering Group. This makes sure that every Island has representatives that are easily contactable regarding immediate conservational, terrestrial and marine monitoring issues.

4.6 Pending

4.6.1 Potential for Contracted Marine Renewables Work

In relation to any proposed Marine Renewables developments in the Channel, there is a possibility some of the staff may be contracted to conduct paid survey work.

4.6.2 PhD Proposal

Funding may be given for a PhD to study and tag Gannets post-installation of Navitus Bay Windfarm. This would benefit the Ramsar site by providing us with 3 more years' worth of data which would

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otherwise dramatically decrease after the current University of Liverpool PhD student has completed her fieldwork.

4.6.3 University of York MSc Project

Three different MSc projects were sent to the University of York to be decided upon by the students. The three project titles were;

1) Ecology of intertidal rock-pool habitats.

Assessment: The project will entail investigating species biological diversity and composition of intertidal rock-pool habitats on Alderney, using field-based methods. This will include researching different rock-pool habitats (i.e. *Ulva* spp, *Sargassum muticum* and *Corallina officinalis* rock-pool habitat types) in terms of: species bio-diversity, composition and ecological status (i.e. invasive/rare species). Surveys will be completed across different intertidal environments (including bays within the island's Ramsar Site, harbour and recreational areas). Research methods will include timed species searches and environmental parameter assessments (i.e. size, depth of rock-pools, water temperature).

2) Barnacle population dynamics: measuring future climate change impacts on Alderney.

Assessment: The project will entail investigating barnacle species population dynamics across different intertidal environments (bays and shoreline heights) within Alderney. This will include barnacle species presence, bio-diversity, population density (% proportion), individual age structure (adult or juvenile) and predator presence. The field-based survey methods will follow the 2008 MarClim survey protocol, which uses barnacle species as a biological indicator of climate change impacts

3) Investigating the invasive species, *Sargassum muticum* on Alderney.

Assessment: The project will entail investigating the invasive intertidal algae species, *Sargassum muticum* on Alderney, using field-based and desk-based methods. The field-based survey methods will include determining the presence, distribution, frequency and the composition of associated marine species (i.e. attached marine species) of this invasive species within different intertidal environments. Desk-based methods could include comparative assessments from previous anecdotal surveys and records using GIS analysis.

5. Bibliography

A.Bohan (2012) Alderney West Coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar Site Management Strategy 2012-2016. Version 1. In House Publication.

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