

Wildlife Recording on Seaford Head Local Nature Reserve



Next year we will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Seaford Head as a Local Nature Reserve in 1969. By the end of the 1970's much of the current reserve area had already been designated an SSSI, overseen by a Management Committee with a core objective to establish and maintain a record of the reserve's Flora and Fauna.

The original area of the reserve, and still its largest part, was, and remains, under the ownership of Seaford Town Council, and after a number of different arrangements a short-term maintenance lease covering that area was established with Sussex Wildlife Trust in 2012. A detailed Management Plan was written by Graeme Lyons which included the first comprehensive record of reserve species as produced by SxBRC. This 2012 species list consisted of about 1465 species recorded within the 1km grid squares which cover and overlap the reserve. Consequently some of these records fell outside the precise boundary of the reserve.

Seaford Natural History Society (SNHS) played a major role in establishing the reserve, with members on the Management Committee, and as volunteers assisting with maintenance.

Individual members submitted species records, notably of birds and plants (including an annual survey of the Moon Carrot population led by Chris Brewer), and beginning in 2015 we established a project of monitoring, on a weekly basis, the flora and fauna of two ride-side scallops cleared of scrub by SWT working parties. This helped in understanding the benefits to wildlife of the scrub control, which has been a feature of work across the reserve. The scallop monitoring revealed 43 positively identified new reserve species in 2015 of which the Ornate Shieldbug (*Eurydema ornate*), pictured above, and only the second recorded in Sussex, was the highlight.

Encouraged by our new Chairman, Jim Howell, 2016 saw an increased interest in species recording by SNHS members, especially on the Seaford Head reserve. Within The Society we got members recording Bumblebees and Shieldbugs – an initiative of Graeme’s - and our species record submitted to the SxBRC at the end of the year continued to increase, from 33 in 2014, to 108 in 2015, and 128 in 2016 (of which 29 were more new records for the reserve by Society Members). In addition, an invertebrate survey by Graeme Lyons and Chris Bentley resulted in many more new species being added to the reserve list.

Coincidentally, during 2016, both Graeme and ourselves recognised the need to update the 2012 species list, matching precise grid references with the exact reserve boundary. Graeme’s list forms part of his Master List of species in all SWT-managed reserves. The otherwise matching SNHS species list for the reserve, also includes the additional species which have been recorded in the National Trust sections of the reserve on the Cuckmere floodplain, and on the Foreshore. This new definitive list showed a total of 1358 species in the SWT part of the reserve, increasing to 1664 with the addition of the Foreshore and National Trust sections.



Common Broomrape

AND SO TO 2017

Inspired by the accurate assessment of species on Seaford Head, early in 2017 SNHS established a Recorder Sub-group of 14 members. This group decided to focus recording and surveying activities mainly on Butterflies and on Reptiles/Amphibians, but also on properly recording species which were known to be present on the reserve, but missing from the definitive list.

With support from SWT, as managers of the reserve, from Bob Foreman and from Peter Atkinson of Butterfly Conservation we established two trial Butterfly Transects prior to registering at least one as an official transects in 2018, subject to a few tweaks in the light of results and comments from participants. We want to maximise the usefulness of the surveys by providing data that informs future reserve management, and highlights other seasonal and annual changes in species composition. One of our Society Recorders, Paul Chalmers-

Dixon has undertaken a detailed, comprehensive analysis of the 2017 butterfly records to assist these aims – see example below.

Flight patterns from observations of some common species during the survey

	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct
Comma						
Common Blue						
Gatekeeper						
Large Skipper						
Red Admiral						
Small Copper						
Small Heath						
Small Skipper						

0	>0 to 5	>5 to 10	>10 to 25	>25 to 50	over 50
Key: Percentage of each species seen in each week					



Adder and grass snake

With establishment advice and support from Chris Drewery of Sussex Amphibian and Reptile Group, 50 refugia were positioned around the eastern part of the reserve and monitored at varying frequencies depending on the time of the year. This confirmed that Adders were present in greater numbers, and over a much wider area than previously known. In the process, Mice, Voles, Lizards and Grass Snakes were also added to the species list.

In the Spring, Bob Foreman kindly provided us with an update of records submitted since the earlier assessment, bringing our SWT section total to 1403 and overall SHLNR total to 1698.

Aware that some groups – Moths and Fungi in particular – had been greatly under-recorded, the Society ran a Moth-trapping event, led by Steven Teale, as part of its Summer Events Programme, and we were also privileged to host the Sussex Fungi Group on a recording visit.



Speckled Yellow Moth

These events recorded 30 and 24 new species respectively that had not been previously recorded in the Reserve.

These included the Portland Ribbon Wave Moth which had not previously been recorded in any SWT reserve. Amongst the fungi we recorded *Sowerbyella radiculata*, *Perreniporia ochroleuca* and *Entoloma pseudoturci*, all of which were similarly new to SWT reserves. Individual Society Members efforts, especially Chris Brewer with his extensive plant records, added many more.

As a result of all this activity, the Society's species record for 2017 contained in excess of 550 entries, of which 121 were new for the Reserve. A further update from Bob will add still more once we finish processing it. All told, at the end of 2017 the total for the SWT section of the LNR has increased to 1538 from 1358 at the start of the year.

In September, SNHS were delighted to receive confirmation of a new 25 year management lease between SWT and Seaford Town Council, which will facilitate longer term planning and investment in the reserve.

AND FOR 2018

Largely it will be more of the same activities. The intention is to operate an official Butterfly transect, and to extend the Reptile Survey into another area of the reserve, plus trying to identify individual Adders in order to enhance our knowledge of numbers and movements. A further Moth Event is scheduled, and we hope to attract the Fungi Group back to explore a different part of the reserve. Other species which are under-recorded and need additional expert input include Spiders, Mosses and Lichens.



We will continue to encourage more members (experienced and novices) to join our Recorder Sub-Group, explore their interests and consider what additional activities our resources will support. An exciting new community project launched by SWT will help us to achieve these ambitions.

A major challenge is always in identifying species correctly since we recognise that in many cases they can't be identified just from guide books and pictures. Microscopic identification and independent validation are often essential. We use iRecord and County Recorders whilst recognising that all these facilities have limitations.

Whether we succeed in achieving Graeme Lyons' challenge, of entering the top ten Sussex Nature Reserves for recorded species, remains to be seen.

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<http://www.seafordnaturalhistory.org.uk/>