



A wetland for the future: The RSPB's priorities and vision for the Humber Estuary

Mike Pilsworth

Humber estuary

- Second biggest coastal plain estuary in the UK.
- Drains 5th England
- International important SPA, SAC, RAMSAR & SSSI
- Over 165,000 wintering and passage wildfowl and wading birds
- Important breeding bird populations
- Hugely important for other biodiversity



A priority landscape

Incorporates existing designated site; SSSI, SPA, SAC RAMSAR and landscape around estuary which supports functionality of the SPA

One of the RSPB's 18 Priority landscapes in England 37 across UK

Lawton principle:
'Bigger, better and more connected'





Passage and wintering birds

- SPA / SSSI feature
- Several species recent/ongoing declines others increased e.g. pink footed goose and avocet
- Over 165,000 wintering and passage birds
- WeBS red alert for bar-tailed godwit & redshank – declines thought to have be driven or exacerbated by site specific pressures
- Historical losses and known current pressures:
 - coastal squeeze
 - increasing human activity
 - development
 - recreational disturbance

Key features supporting SPA wintering birds

- Intertidal area, mud sand and saltmarsh
- Vital feeding area for many wader species
- Difficult to recreate high quality mudflats



Key features supporting SPA wintering birds

- Roosting sites
- Important for saving energetic resources
- Particularly susceptible to human disturbance
- Network of available sites required
- Usage varies though seasons, tidal cycles and time of day



Key features supporting SPA wintering birds

Estuary hinterland/ farmland

Essential to the bird assemblage in particular:

- Curlew
- Golden plover
- Lapwing
- Pink footed goose



SPA breeding birds - reedbed species

Marsh harrier

- Over 40 pairs with SPA using tidal and freshwater reedbed
- Population stable but dependant on continuation of reedbed management

Bittern

- Currently up to 5 booming males and up to 4 nests within SPA
- Need wet areas of reedbed and associated habitats
- Require active management of sites to keep habitat suitable





Priority breeding birds - avocet

- SPA designation of 64 pairs
- Requires shallow lagoons for breeding
- Mixed success often high levels of predation – requiring a network of sites to use
- Requires multiple potentially wetland sites around estuary which can be periodically dried out

Priority breeding birds - little tern

- The 2007 SPA designation population was 51 pairs based on a 5 year mean (1998 – 2002)
- Current population only 27 pairs in 2019 and restricted to 1 site which is threatened with coastal erosion
- Require undisturbed beaches free from predators to nest



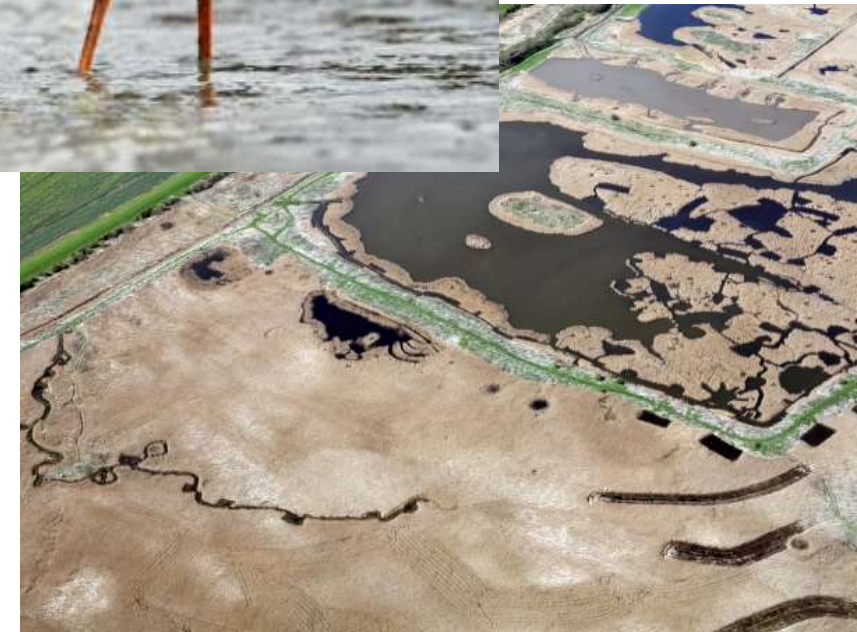
Delivering the vision



Image Copyright A.P.S (UK)

Nature reserves

- RSPB directly manage over 1600Ha of land largely with SPA
- Manage habitats so that they deliver positively for birds and wildlife and contribute to SPA and SSSI conservation objectives
- Aim to increase breeding, wintering and passage wetland bird numbers on the Humber
- Sites become resilient to climate change
- Aim to increase area under conservation management



Increasing ecological connectivity between the Estuary and its hinterland

- Sustainable water management and flood risk management
- Addressing coastal squeeze and managed realignment
- Freshwater wetland creation and wildlife friendly farming practices
- Seek opportunities to restore floodplain connectivity and floodplain habitat





Working with others

- Working positively with Local Authorities, developers and statutory bodies, agencies
- Ecological enhancement and positive net gain
- Not just site protection, opportunities for biodiversity gain – SPA conservation objectives and wider benefits
- Sustainable development, farming and water resource management

Partnership projects within estuary

Cleethorpes recreational disturbance group

Partnership with NELC, NE, HNP, LWT

Tackling bird disturbance issues on the most visited part of the estuary

Easington Little tern Project

Project with SBOT, EA, NE, YWT & SHCS

Improved fortunes of last little tern colony on estuary

Partnership helped to secure external funding



Partnerships around the estuary

Water For Farmers and Wildlife project

Working with EA to develop new and innovative ways for managing water on farmland to benefit agricultural production, flood risk and biodiversity



Working with industry

Creating and enhancing wetland habitats

- Island creation on working site
- Reedbed habitats after mineral extraction



Building support

- Increasing understanding and appreciation of estuary within local communities
- Wildlife interest
- Natural capital
- Flood risk management
- Climate change.

Direct support through:

- Volunteering
- Understanding bringing changes in behaviour







Thank you for listening