

# **Flamborough Head European Marine Site Management Scheme**

**Annual Report  
2021**





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## Introduction

This report forms a key part of management for the Flamborough Head European Marine Site (EMS) and details the progress of partners in furthering the conservation of this internationally-important marine area. Due to the impacts of the Covid-19 global pandemic, some priorities highlighted in the 2019 Annual Report were not able to be progressed as planned. As such, the report covers activities carried out across two years (from January 2020 to December 2021).

In March 2020, the United Kingdom joined numerous other countries around the world in enforcing a national 'lockdown' to restrict the spread of the Covid-19 virus. As a result, the Flamborough Head EMS Management Scheme, supported by East Riding of Yorkshire Council, moved all activities online and adapted quickly to the sole use of digital communication and engagement. The Project Officer, and EMS partners, continued to ensure that the legal protection afforded to the site was upheld and, where projects could be progressed, they were done so in a Covid-secure manner. Nevertheless, the progress of activities which required strong public engagement or in-person meetings was reduced. This included volunteer recruitment and training for the Environmental Incident Wildlife Response Plan, student and volunteer activities to monitor recreational activities and, the development and implementation of new management projects.

Despite the restrictions on movement and face to face communication over the last two years, key projects and activities have been able to continue, including the Yorkshire Marine Nature Partnership (YMNP) Development Project. This successful project, majority funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, has established a new governance structure for coastal and marine environmental management across Yorkshire. Further details about the project and planned changes to management of Marine Protected Areas, including the EMS, are described on page 6.

Equally, ongoing seabird productivity monitoring continues to be vital in understanding the SPA and the pressures faced by the seabird colony, alongside recreational activity and disturbance data collected across the site. Operation Seabird (a partnership project with the Police, RSPCA and others) has been created as a tool to increase public knowledge of Yorkshire's sensitive wildlife and share resources amongst cross-sector organisations. More information about this innovative project can be found on page 4. It is hoped that the easing of pandemic restrictions will continue in 2022, which will allow in-person volunteer, partner and public engagement to begin again, in earnest.

## Condition Assessments and Conservation Advice

*This work supports Aims 1 and 2 of the Management Scheme*

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, including reduced capacity amongst statutory agencies, meant that no formal condition assessments were completed within the EMS during 2020 or 2021. However, a new Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is being developed to underpin the north section of the Flamborough and Filey Coast Special Protection Area (SPA). Surveys to support this designation were carried out in summer 2021, with a formal consultation expected to begin in late 2022.

No significant updates have been made to the Conservation Advice provided for the EMS. All Conservation Advice packages can be found [here](#).



*Juvenile thongweed on chalk*

## Seabird Monitoring Programme

*This work supports Aims 1, 2 and 5 of the Management Scheme*

With support from a core group of volunteers and staff, the RSPB were able to complete a limited Seabird Monitoring Programme in 2020. Whilst a reduced number of plots were monitored and some changes to the methodology were required, this vital data has ensured a continuation of the SPA's long-term productivity dataset. In 2021, with a lower-level of restrictions through the summer months, a full monitoring programme was successfully completed. The information below summarises the 2020 and 2021 monitoring results. Full reports will shortly be available on the YMNP website.

- During 2020, seven kittiwake productivity plots were monitored, resulting in mean a productivity of 0.61 chicks per apparently occupied nest, which is slightly higher than previous years. In 2021, a similar productivity of 0.62 was recorded across the full 18 plots.
- A simplified methodology was used to monitor gannets during 2020, which indicated a mean productivity of 0.80 chicks fledged per pair. In 2021, productivity dropped slightly to 0.74, however the long-term population trend continues to be robust.
- Only four guillemot plots were monitored in 2020. The data indicated a reduced productivity from 2019 levels, at 0.55 chicks per apparently occupied site. This reflected many anecdotal reports of birds occupying sites without eggs, and nests failing before fledging age. Some gannet disturbance and displacement was also reported, which may have impacted productivity. Whilst gannet presence at monitoring plots was recorded again in 2021, productivity increased to 0.67 chicks per apparently occupied site.
- Similarly, four razorbill plots were monitored in 2020, resulting in a mean productivity of 0.58 chicks per apparently occupied site. Again productivity was lower than recorded in 2019, however in 2021, productivity increased to 0.70, creating a slight increase in the long-term trends.
- Fulmar productivity was measured from a small sample in 2020 and a slight drop in productivity was recorded during 2021, however the long term trends are thought to be relatively consistent for the species within the SPA. Herring gulls, on the other hand, appeared to recover from a particularly poor year in 2019 with increases in productivity across both 2020 and 2021.
- The lockdown imposed in early 2020 and limited resources in 2021 meant that the count of puffins gathering on the water ahead of the breeding season, was not completed.

Despite Covid-19 restrictions, RSPB staff were able to continue with the kittiwake colour-ringing project at North Landing, Flamborough. During 2020, a total of 92 birds were resighted and an additional 19 birds were successfully ringed.

In 2022, Natural England are expected to deliver a national Seabird Conservation Strategy, which will highlight the pressures faced by England's seabirds and potential management measures to support the colonies. It is hoped that this strategy will further highlight the importance of the SPA colony and the pressures faced by climate change, offshore developments, recreational disturbance and other human activities. The Management Scheme and the RSPB will be working to ensure that the SPA is properly represented and any resources available for seabird management are appropriately distributed.



*Gannet at RSPB Bempton Cliffs*

## Recreational Disturbance - Monitoring Project

*This work supports Aims 2 and 3 of the Management Scheme*

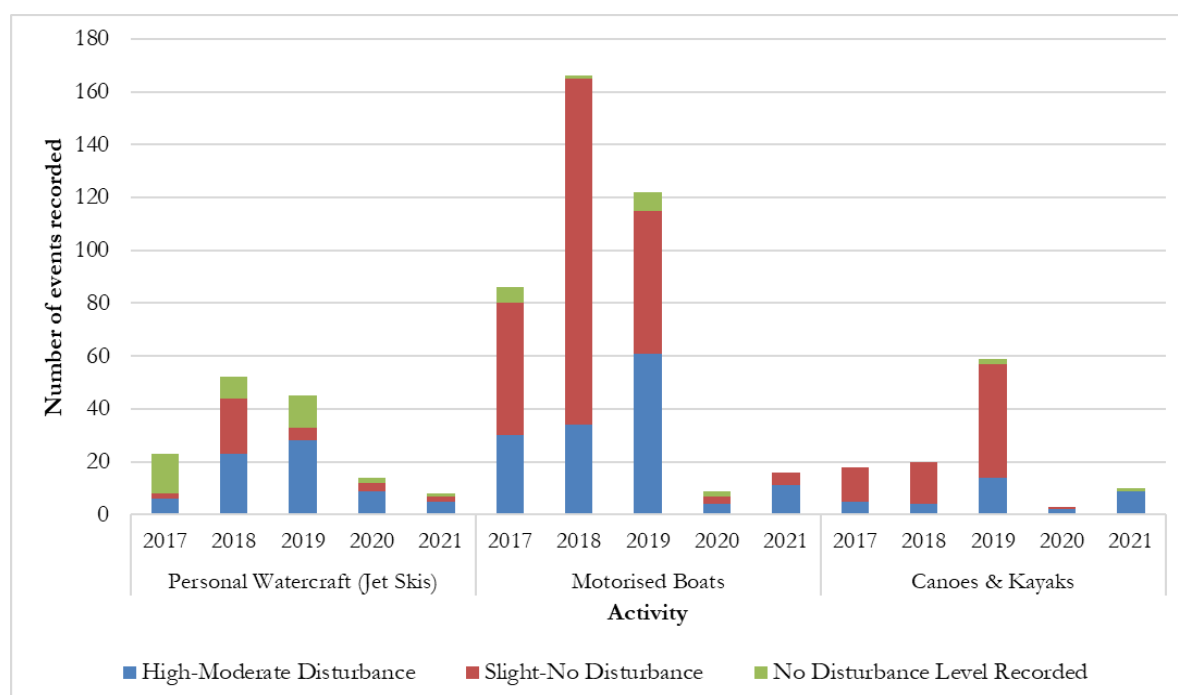
Since 2013, volunteers from partner organisations around the EMS have been encouraged to report recreational disturbance events to the Management Scheme's Project Officer. This data was supplemented by more intensive monitoring carried out by students and other interested volunteers. However, multiple lockdowns and travel restrictions over the course of 2020 - 2021 resulted in a lower level of both ad-hoc and intensive recreational activity reporting around the site. As illustrated in the table below, a total of 70 reports were received, which were primarily related to the movements of motorised boats and personal watercraft (Jet Skis).

This low-level of reporting does not necessarily translate to a low-level of recreational disturbance on-site, as anecdotal evidence would suggest that there was a significant increase in visitors to the EMS as restrictions on movement began to ease. Many organisations across the area have reported increased disturbance to seabirds, seals and other wildlife as a result of the 'staycation' surge experienced in summer 2020, and to a lesser extent in 2021. As such, the low-level of reporting since the pandemic began may also reflect the Management Scheme's reduced ability to engage with the public and local community groups.

**Table 1: Summary of 2020 - 2021 Activities and Disturbances**

Total Number of Reports	Total Number of Disturbances	% High-Moderate Disturbance	% Slight-No Disturbance	% No Disturbance Level Recorded
70	44	63%	26%	11%

It should also be noted that a new engagement and disturbance reporting tool 'Operation Seabird' was launched in partnership with a number of regional organisations in summer 2020. This positive initiative, which is described in more detail on page 4, encouraged more reporting of disturbance incidents to the Police via 101, rather than through the Management Scheme's reporting systems. From 2022 onwards, it is hoped that a joint recording system for the Yorkshire coast can be established, which will enable managers of sensitive sites to be fully informed of any reports received by the Police, and vice versa.



NB: Graph shows data collected by, or on behalf of, the Management Scheme only.



## Recreational Disturbance - Operation Seabird

*This work supports Aims 2 and 3 of the Management Scheme*

In partnership with the RSPCA, North Yorkshire and Humberside Police forces, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), RSPB, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and others, Operation Seabird was established in summer 2020. The aim of the initiative is to raise awareness of sensitive wildlife in the area and the importance of responsibly enjoying the coastline.

To date, Operation Seabird partners have carried out two high-profile annual launch events for the initiative, which were well received by local and regional media. The events were supplemented by regular 'Action Days' carried out by enforcement officers from the Police, RSPCA and MMO. This active public engagement allowed partners to highlight wildlife sensitivities in the area, explain legal requirements to conserve wildlife, and demonstrate the excellent partnership-working that forms the foundation of Operation Seabird.

By combining the resources of all agencies involved, Operation Seabird has been able to engage with members of the public, wildlife tour operators, local authorities and community groups across the Yorkshire coast. This engagement has supported the Management Scheme's work to monitor recreational disturbance around the EMS and has seen additional reporting through the Police's 101 system. From 2022 onwards, it is hoped that a joint reporting system can be established which will ensure that the Management Scheme, the Police, RSPCA and other statutory partners all receive the same information regarding a disturbance event in a timely and effective manner.

The success of Operation Seabird on the Yorkshire coast has been recognised by two national policing awards, including one which specifically acknowledged the Management Scheme as a core element of the partnership. Furthermore, Operation Seabird has been adapted and adopted by other Police forces and management partnerships across the country, demonstrating the importance of tackling recreational disturbance along other coastlines and estuaries.

### Future Work

Operation Seabird will continue to be a vital tool in the monitoring and management of recreational disturbance around the Flamborough Head EMS, alongside voluntary agreements with user groups, ad-hoc monitoring and student research projects. Operation Seabird partners will look to establish a joint reporting system to streamline the current process and reduce any confusion about reporting disturbance amongst the public and volunteer groups. Furthermore, information about the initiative, including a framework for establishing an Operation Seabird project in other areas, is available online.

It is recognised that the messaging used within Operation Seabird needs to be simple and effective, in order to engage with a wide range of stakeholders. The Management Scheme acknowledges, however, that recreational activities around the EMS often require more nuanced guidance to take into account specific environmental, legal and wildlife considerations. Moving forward, the Management Scheme



*Operation Seabird partners gathered for the 2022 annual launch event*

will utilise the tools available within Operation Seabird to engage with specific user groups and seek updated or new voluntary measures for the sensitive wildlife around the EMS. Any additional guidance developed will complement the broader messaging of Operation Seabird.

## New MPA Management Structures

In summer 2019, the Management Scheme was awarded a grant to support the YMNP Development Project, following a successful application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The two-year Development Project aimed to establish a new coastal partnership for Yorkshire which would provide the resources, mechanisms and leadership to enable more active collaboration and coordinated management across the coastal and marine environment. Uniquely, this would also include cohesive management of Yorkshire's inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPA) and a holistic approach to ecosystem-scale issues, such as climate change.

Despite the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Development Project has met all of the funder's objectives and has now successfully concluded. A YMNP Executive Board has been established to lead the new partnership through a period of transition, in which the agreed governance structures will be created and long-term financial support secured.

During the course of the Development Project, an MPA Management Discussion Group was established to bring all of Yorkshire's MPA managers and key partners together, for the first time. The Flamborough Head EMS Management Scheme Relevant Authorities' Group formed the core membership of this discussion panel, alongside a small number of other authorities responsible for Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ). These meetings enabled managers to understand more about their legal requirements, expand their knowledge of management processes like marine planning and, identify where coordinated management of MPAs might be beneficial.

To allow these conversations to continue, and to secure future management of Yorkshire's inshore MPAs, it was agreed that the discussion group should be formally established as a new, autonomous MPA Management Sub-Group under the umbrella of the YMNP. This structure would see the expansion of the Relevant Authorities' Group to include those engaged in MCZ management, and invite key partners to engage with the group. Site-specific management issues could still be addressed, but there would be an increased focus on ecosystem-scale progress.



*Runswick Bay MCZ, part of the new MPA Management Sub-Group alongside Holderness Inshore MCZ*

All management actions, reporting and research within the Flamborough Head EMS will continue as normal, under the new MPA Management Sub-Group from March 2022. A new five-year Management Plan for the site is in development and may be used by partners to explore where actions could be adapted for other MPAs. Authorities will also be asked to consider projects which address ecosystem-scale issues across Yorkshire's MPA network, such as coastal water quality or the impacts of climate change, which has not been possible in the past.

### Resources

Historically, the Management Scheme has greatly benefitted from the employment of a Project Officer, who has ensured actions are progressed, provided local knowledge and support to Authorities and, been a single point of contact for the EMS. The intention is to continue with this resource under the new YMNP structure with an expanded remit to consider management of all inshore MPAs, subject to sufficient funding. The MPA Management Sub-Group will also have access to other YMNP staff and resources, including the Executive Board, Advisory Panel and working groups. In the long-term, it is expected that this will lead to sustained maintenance and improvement of Yorkshire's MPAs, alongside a greater awareness and recognition of the designations within wider marine management actions.

## Priorities for 2022

The 2022 - 2026 Flamborough Head EMS Management Plan is currently in development and will be published later in the year. This document details the protection afforded to the site and sets out how it will be managed over the next five years, including an annually updated Action Plan. Once the new MPA Management Sub-Group is established, the Action Plan may also be amended to reflect ecosystem-scale projects.

Once published, the new Management Plan will be held on the [YMNP website](#). Information, documents and project details from the old Flamborough Head Special Area of Conservation web pages have already been transferred, including the [Flamborough Head Storyboard Project](#). The resources held on this modern and engaging website are evolving all of the time and the pages relating directly to the Flamborough and Filey coast designations are continuing to be updated. In the long-term, the website will enable the general public and YMNP partners to report wildlife disturbance incidents, share SPA monitoring reports and, encourage more awareness of the coastline's sensitivities.

With a lower level of restrictions expected during 2022, it is hoped that volunteer and community group engagement can recommence. This will greatly benefit a number of projects around the EMS, including recreational disturbance monitoring, Operation Seabird and the Environmental Incident Wildlife Response Plan. Students will also be invited to carry out research around the site once again, on behalf of the EMS managers. Alongside local universities, a new partnership with the Scarborough University Technical College has recently been established, enabling younger students to develop their environmental research skills and knowledge.

From March 2022, Relevant Authorities for the EMS will be joined by authorities responsible for MCZ management in quarterly discussions about site-specific and regional MPA issues. This structure change will be a significant milestone in the history of the site and is expected to strengthen management in the long-term. Nevertheless, there will be a period of transition and a new Chair for the group will be required to lead the discussions, guide project development and liaise directly with the YMNP Executive Board. Ensuring the smooth and effective operation of the new group will be a priority for the YMNP, in order for the EMS to be appropriately represented at a regional and national level. This will be particularly beneficial during the consultation and publication of Natural England's Seabird Conservation Strategy in late 2022.

On a regional scale, the new MPA Management Sub-Group, and specific EMS partners, will engage in the expected development of the Yorkshire Wolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This new designation will include Flamborough's chalk cliffs and will complement existing protection afforded to the area. Partners are also engaged in parallel discussions regarding the possibility of a geopark across the East Yorkshire region, to include Flamborough Head and Filey, alongside the Holderness coastline and Spurn point.



*The 'Drinking Dinosaur' at Flamborough Head*



## Aims of the Management Scheme

**Aim 1:** Ensure no management measures or unregulated activities adversely impact the conservation features, through regular condition assessments and implementation of Habitats Directive procedures.

**Aim 2:** Work to maintain and improve protection of the conservation features through the sharing of appropriate scientific research and site specific information.

**Aim 3:** In order to support the work of the Management Scheme, raise public awareness about the site's importance and support sustainable recreation and tourism practices.

**Aim 4:** Monitor both recreational and commercial fishing activities, ensure all relevant permits are observed and support sustainable practices, whilst engaging with the local fishing community to increase environmental awareness.

**Aim 5:** Ensure that any non-fishing commercial activity within or adjacent to the EMS does not negatively affect the conservation features, and work to reduce the risk of marine pollution to the site.

**Aim 6:** Appropriately manage the marine environment through the monitoring of consented discharges, achieving water quality standards and ensuring all coastal environmental incidents are dealt with effectively, whilst creating a safe environment for recreational and commercial users.

**Aim 7:** Ensure that activities of the Management Scheme promote the conservation of seascape and landscape character in a way which is compatible with safe maritime practices and the values of sustainable development.



For further information please contact the YMNP Development Officer at:

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Additional details on the management of this internationally-important area can also be found in the 2016-2021 Flamborough Head European Marine Site Management Plan which can be downloaded at:

**[www.yorkshiramarinenaturepartnership.org.uk](http://www.yorkshiramarinenaturepartnership.org.uk)**