

Flamborough Head European Marine Site Management Scheme

**Annual Report
2018**





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Introduction

This report forms part of the Flamborough Head European Marine Site (EMS) Management Scheme's annual review and details the progress of the Management Scheme's work throughout 2018. The UK voted to leave the European Union in 2016. Whilst there is still uncertainty about what this decision may mean for nature conservation in England, all legal designations and management measures are expected to remain in place for the foreseeable future. The development of an 'Environment Bill' during 2019 may provide further clarity on the management and conservation of the natural environment, however, until legislative changes occur, site management will continue as normal.

The updates provided by Relevant Authorities and Key Partners during the annual review of the 2016 - 2021 Management Plan have informed this report, alongside summaries of actions progressed by the Project Officer on behalf of the Management Scheme.

Following a public consultation in 2014, the Flamborough and Filey Coast Special Protection Area (SPA) was designated this year, providing specific protection to additional seabird species, the terrestrial cliffs north of Filey and 2km of inshore waters. More information about this new designation is provided below. It has also been a spectacular year for spotting migratory marine wildlife around the EMS, with basking sharks, breaching porpoise and a humpback whale enjoyed by many people along our coastline this summer. These impressive marine visitors and our newly designated seabird colony, are a timely reminder of the value of the Management Scheme's work and the importance of working in partnership to protect and manage this internationally-important site.

Formal Designation of the Flamborough and Filey Coast Special Protection Area

Following an extended period of consultation and review, the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA is now a formal designation. This new designation supersedes the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs SPA, which was notified in 1993, extending the existing protection to include four named bird species, the seabird assemblage and, areas in both the terrestrial and marine environments. Since the designation proposals were announced, and the site became a pSPA, the Management Scheme has included this site in all management discussions and appropriate measures, following National Planning Policy guidelines. As such, there will be no immediate change in management, however local planners should be aware that only the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA need now be considered during the planning process.

In parallel with this new site, the terrestrial boundaries of the Flamborough Head Special Area of Conservation (SAC) have also been amended landward, in order to provide an area for the features to 'roll-back' in the event of cliff erosion. The new SPA follows similar landward boundaries.

It is national policy that all international designations (such as SPAs and SACs) be underpinned by nationally-designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Natural England will now be working closely with stakeholders and partners to establish a new SSSI to support the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA in the national context.



Gannet in flight

The Management Scheme, and key partners, will celebrate the formal notification of the new SPA during the spring, when local media will be invited to learn more about our unique coastline.

Condition Assessments and Conservation Advice

This work supports Aims 1 and 2 of the Management Scheme

During August, Natural England carried out phase 1 biotope mapping surveys of the intertidal area within the Flamborough Head SAC. This work was supported by officers from North Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NEIFCA), the Management Scheme Project Officer and intertidal mapping experts from Newcastle University. The surveys aimed to replicate previous studies by examining the distinct environmental conditions found in the intertidal zone (biotopes). The number and extent of these different environmental conditions, and the associated species found within them, were recorded across eight transects. Once appropriately analysed, this information will indicate whether the components which make up the reef feature of the SAC have changed significantly since the last condition assessment. The results of this analysis should be available in 2019, however early indications suggest that the reef feature is in a good condition.



Surveying kelp at Thornwick Bay



A chiton found during the surveys

Earlier this year, a Conservation Advice package for the SAC was published by Natural England following a period of revision and consultation. This package offers site managers and other interested parties guidance about what activities could negatively affect the conservation features of the protected area, along with general management information. A revised Conservation Advice package for the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA is expected to be published in 2019.

All current and draft Conservation Advice packages can be viewed [online](#).

Relevant Authority Updates

This work supports Aims 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7 of the Management Scheme

There are eleven organisations that have legal responsibilities towards protecting and managing the Flamborough Head EMS (known as Relevant Authorities). These Authorities, and many other organisations, work together as a partnership to ensure that this important work is completed. Many of these Authorities also have responsibilities towards other marine designations along the Yorkshire coastline. Since 2017, the Relevant Authorities' Group has been developing proposals to establish a wider partnership which will coordinate and facilitate the management of marine conservation designations and inshore waters across the Yorkshire coast, alongside continuing to support and facilitate public engagement and education projects. A wider partnership would bolster the existing Management Scheme whilst providing over 20 years of management experience and knowledge to other important coastal areas in this region. After building significant support for these proposals over the last few months, the Relevant Authorities' Group will continue to liaise closely with partners to maintain this momentum and identify potential funding streams. The current effective and cohesive management of the EMS will not be affected.

Seabird Monitoring Programme

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

The RSPB continued their seabird productivity monitoring around the SPA this year, on behalf of Natural England, providing an essential insight into the health and resilience of our colony. The beginning of the seabird breeding season was hampered by the 'Beast from the East' and subsequent storms. This unsettled weather delayed the auks' return to the cliffs, with the puffin pre-breeding count taking place more than two weeks later than last year. Similarly the first gannet egg was spotted three weeks later than 2017 and productivity of some kittiwakes appears to have been reduced.

- Gannet productivity continued to be relatively strong during 2018 at 0.80 chicks per nest. This is lower than the 10-year average, however, which perhaps reflects that the birds were not in peak breeding condition. Indeed, anecdotal reports from researchers working on Bass Rock suggested that birds caught for tagging early in the season were lighter than expected; it is likely that gannets in the SPA were similarly affected.
- Kittiwake productivity at Bempton/Flamborough was lower in 2018 (0.55 chicks fledged per nest) than the average for the previous nine years (0.77 chicks fledged per nest). It is highly likely that the birds were affected by the spring storms, as many pairs were seen to occupy ledges or build nests, but then not go on to breed. Continued low productivity of this species is particularly concerning due to significant population declines seen at other colonies.
- Average productivity of guillemots and razorbills was higher than in 2017, with razorbills demonstrating a significant improvement (0.72 in 2018, 0.56 in 2017). There were fewer reports of corvid predation this year, which may have positively impacted breeding success on the monitoring plots.
- Puffins rafting on the sea in the early breeding season were counted for the third consecutive year. The total count in 2018 was 4,279 puffins, however it is important to stress that this survey merely provides an indication of colony size and is not designed to be an accurate census.
- The monitoring results for both herring gull and fulmar indicated a decline in productivity this year. Similarly, ad-hoc surveys of breeding shags at Briel Nook (Flamborough Head) recorded a much lower number of nests than in previous years.



Razorbills at Briel Nook



Cliffs at Thornwick Bay

Seabird Tracking

For the second year, the RSPB Bempton Cliffs reserve team supported a kittiwake GPS tracking project led by RSPB Conservation Science and part-funded by Ørsted (formerly DONG Energy). A total of 30 tags were deployed and 11 birds were colour ringed as controls. This year, the tracking project was extended to gannets, with 10 tags being successfully attached and 22 additional birds colour ringed.

The tags recorded the location, speed and height of the birds, allowing scientists to gain a better understanding of how these important species interact with wind turbines in offshore installations within the Hornsea development zone. The data is currently being analysed by the RSPB Conservation Science team.

Recreational Disturbance - Voluntary Agreement Developments

This work supports Aims 2 and 3 of the Management Scheme

In spring, users of personal watercraft (PWC, Jet-Ski) were invited to an information event at the Fosse Hill Jet Ski Lake. The aim of the event was to share information about the SPA's sensitivities and how many activities, not just PWCs, can negatively impact the protected seabird colony. Around 25 PWC users engaged with the Management Scheme at this event and participated in a positive discussion about how the code of conduct could be promoted further. During the meeting it was suggested that a registration scheme be trialled for PWC users in the area, modelled on a successful project in North Wales. After discussions with local authorities, it was agreed to continue with, and improve upon, encouraging best practice amongst the user group, whilst the logistics of a registration scheme are further explored.

The Civil Aviation Authority regulations around recreational drone use, and pilot's responsibilities within protected areas, are not well-known amongst the general public. As such, the Project Officer is drafting a short piece of guidance for recreational users which will highlight the potential issues and signpost to the national guidance on drone use. This information will be displayed on East Riding of Yorkshire Council's website in due course and it is hoped that other Authorities will also display similar information. To raise awareness of the regulations governing the use of drones, the Project Officer engaged with a wide range of services from East Riding of Yorkshire Council and shared this information with the Relevant Authorities' Group for dissemination.

All other voluntary codes of conduct remain active and unchanged.



Seal on Filey Brigg

Recreational Disturbance - Monitoring Project

This work supports Aims 2 and 3 of the Management Scheme

The first recreational disturbance report of the 2018 season was received on 15th April (ad-hoc report, PWC), followed by motorised boats and kayak activity on 22nd April. In total, 283 activities were observed around the EMS, resulting in 109 disturbance events, as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of 2018 Activities and Disturbances

Total Number Activity Reports	Total Number Disturbances	% High-Moderate Disturbance	% Slight-No Disturbance	% No Disturbance Level Recorded
283	109	61%	24%	15%

Of the five most frequently reported activities (PWC, motorised boats, canoes & kayaks, aircraft and angling), motorised boats continue to be the activity most frequently observed with 166 instances recorded in 2018, as demonstrated by the graph below. This is to be expected, however, as the protected area sits between two busy commercial and recreational harbours. PWC activity was recorded 52 times this year, whilst angling activities across the site were recorded on 28 occasions. Proportionately, levels of high-moderate and slight-no disturbance attributed to motorised boat use have remained relatively stable since 2013, as demonstrated by Figure 1. In 2018, 20% of reports relating to motorised boats recorded high-moderate disturbance (35% in 2017 and 31% in 2016). Reports of high-moderate PWC disturbance almost doubled on 2017 figures, however (44% in 2018 and 26% in 2017). Disturbances linked to canoes & kayaks, aircraft and angling continued to be low this year, despite the increase in angling activity observations.

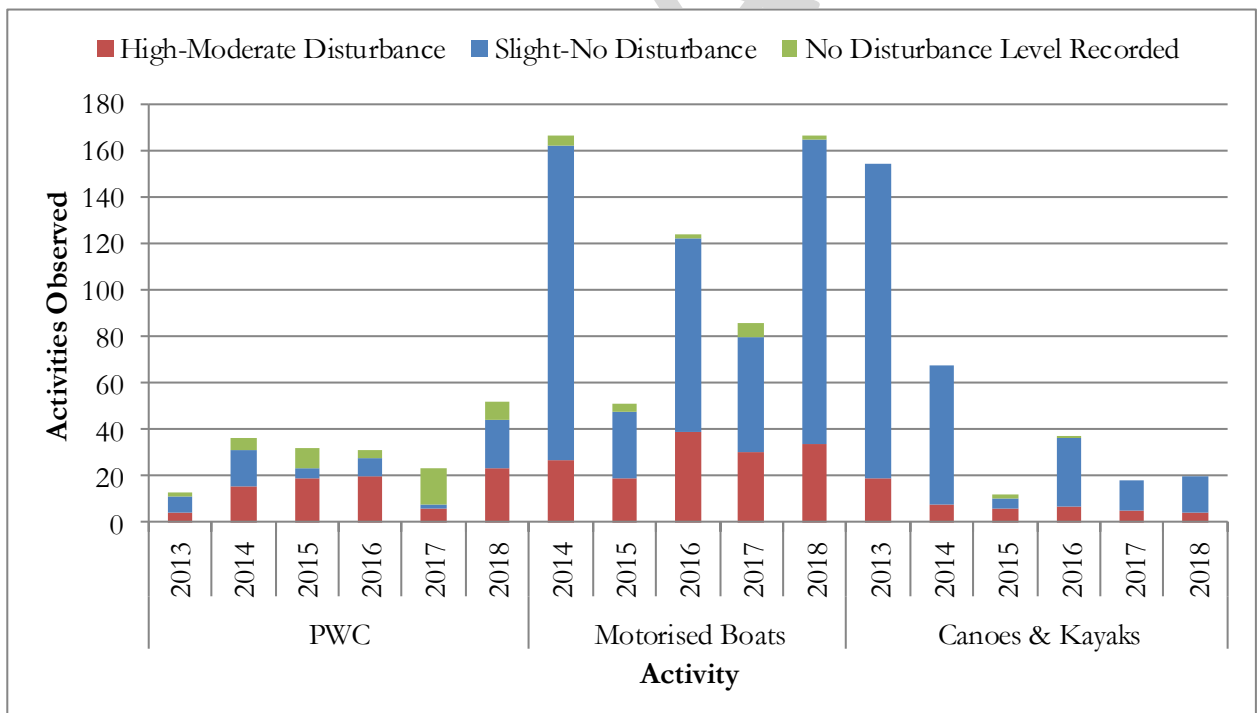


Figure 1: Levels of Disturbance Events for the Three Most Reported Activities 2013 - 2018

Outlier removed from data: Motorised Boats (2013) n=421

Environmental Incident Wildlife Response Plan

This work supports Aims 2, 3, 5 and 6 of the Management Scheme

Over the past few years, the Management Scheme has been working with a variety of different partners to develop and establish a response strategy for environmental incidents affecting the internationally-important wildlife and habitats around the EMS. This work has progressed well in 2018, with the development of a strategic plan and the recruitment of a volunteer ‘bank’ to support the actions of partners.

The strategic plan sets out how the Wildlife Response Management Group (chaired by the Flamborough Head EMS Project Officer) will work together to share and disseminate information in the event of an incident, coordinate volunteers and provide facilities for triage of affected wildlife. The Project Officer will act as liaison between site-level organisations and local authorities, regulatory bodies and national response organisations during an incident. A number of volunteers have been trained to assist wildlife during a response, however this resource is not intended to be used for environmental clean-up in the event of a pollution incident.



Volunteers preparing to conduct a wildlife survey

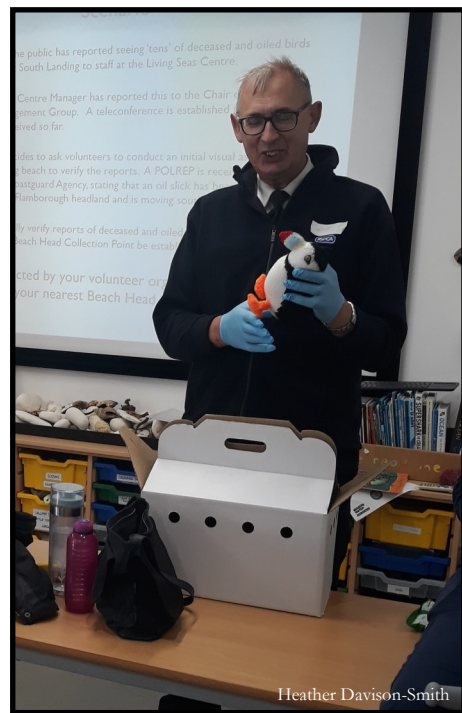
During a volunteer training event in September, volunteers were given the opportunity to practice two elements of wildlife response: conducting wildlife surveys along the shoreline and supporting the RSPCA in their wildlife care duties. Equipment for the volunteers, including specially-designed high visibility jackets and the publication of the plan, has been supported through grant funding from East Riding of Yorkshire Council and the North Yorkshire and York Local Nature Partnership. In early 2019, ‘action boxes’ will be strategically placed around

the protected area to enable volunteers to quickly access important equipment during an incident. This will enable initial wildlife surveys to be carried out as soon as an alert is raised, supporting a more efficient and effective local response.

The Management Scheme aims to increase the number of volunteers engaged in this project over the next couple of years to improve our resilience and ability to respond to such incidents. Although there are many emergency plans and procedures for dealing with environmental pollution along the coast, this plan is unique in that it is specifically concerned with identifying, assisting and recording wildlife casualties of environmental incidents. As such, the Management Scheme hopes to share the lessons learned through development of this strategy, and any appropriate templates or files, to other organisations interested in establishing a similar plan.



**Environmental Incident
Wildlife Response Plan**



RSPCA Inspector Geoff Edmond demonstrating seabird triage

Wildlife Encounters

2018 has been a spectacular year for wildlife around the protected area, demonstrating, once again, how important this coastline is for marine species. Towards the end of the summer season, it is common for small groups of minke whales to pass through the area, sometimes coming close inshore as they follow their prey. The Project Officer and RSPB staff were treated to excellent views of two minkes feeding off the headland in late July, but were awed when a different type of whale joined the minkes on their journey. It took the group a short while to truly believe that the distinctive pale underside and jagged white fins were that of a humpback whale, repeatedly fin slapping the water surface and showcasing it's unique tail fluke as it dived. Although humpbacks are seen in the North Sea, it is unusual for them to be so close inshore and visible from land. As word spread, photographs started to immerge - proof, if ever it was needed, that a giant of the ocean had waved at a small group of very lucky people stood on the cliffs at Flamborough Head.



Humpback whale fin slapping off Flamborough Head



The humpback stealthily passed by Bempton Cliffs earlier in the day

As if that wasn't enough, and alongside the thousands of swirling seabirds that regularly make their home on these cliffs, visitors were also treated to sightings of at least two basking sharks. As the second-largest fish species in the world, they are becoming a more common visitor to our coast, swimming with their mouths wide to filter out tiny plankton from the water. Even our resident harbour porpoise, a usually sedate species unlike their more acrobatic dolphin cousins, provided entertainment for many on board the Yorkshire Belle by uncharacteristically breaching from the water.



Basking Shark off Flamborough Head



Harbour Porpoise breaching - an unusual behaviour

The wildlife found around the Yorkshire coast is an important element of the local economy, with a growing focus on nature-based tours and eco-tourism in the area. It is important that all visitors to the coast, whether locals or tourists, understand the importance of wildlife-watching responsibly and are able to fully enjoy this amazing coastline without negatively impacting it's marine life. The Management Scheme will continue to work with partners to share this message in 2019 and explore new opportunities for awareness-raising initiatives.

Priorities for 2019

The Management Scheme will continue to raise awareness of the site's sensitivities through additional public engagement, novel management measures and further recreational activity monitoring. We will also continue to work with the Marine Management Organisation and Natural England to explore strategic management of recreational disturbance issues, helping to raise awareness, on a national level, of how such pressures can impact important wildlife. To limit and record negative impacts on wildlife during an environmental incident, the response plan will be published and tested throughout the year. Additional volunteers may be recruited, where resources allow, to assist in this process.

As a partnership, funding opportunities will be explored to support the sustainability of the Management Scheme and the potential for more coordinated and cohesive management on a regional scale. The development of a wider partnership for the Yorkshire coast could help to unlock opportunities for the EMS and support management at a ecosystem level.

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 Flamborough Project 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.flamboroughheadsac.org.uk