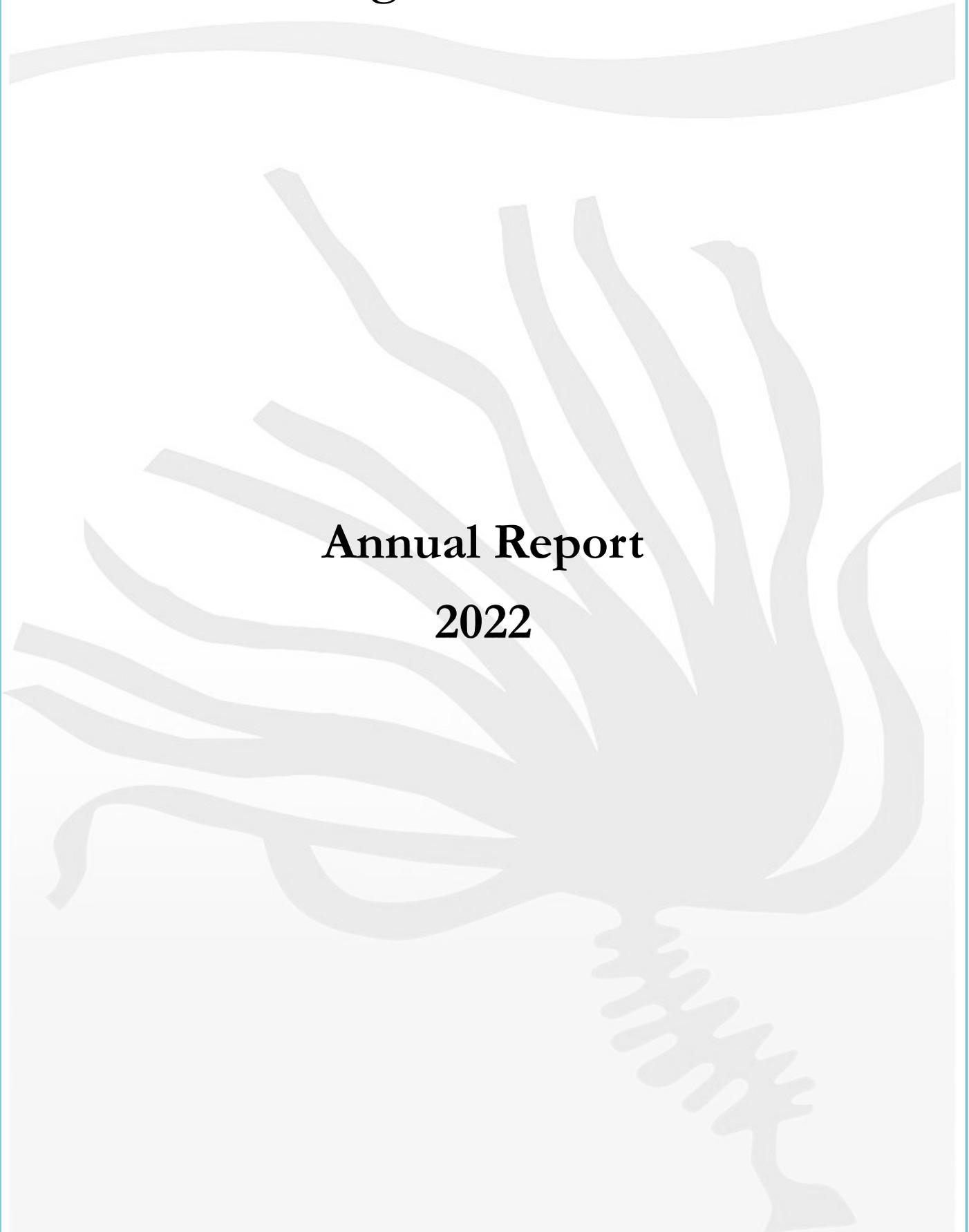


Flamborough Head European Marine Site Management Scheme

**Annual Report
2022**





Compiled by Heather Davison-Smith (Yorkshire Marine Nature Partnership Development Officer)

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.

The easing of Covid-19 restrictions this year has meant that face to face engagement and volunteer training activities have begun to recommence. During spring, 18 volunteers joined staff from local organisations to practice their roles in wildlife response; learning where resources should be focussed if an environmental incident were to impact the seabird colony. The RSPB were also able to conduct a full monitoring programme in 2022, including a whole colony count, with support from a dedicated team of volunteers and staff. The results of this important monitoring showed a mixed bag of successes and concern. The arrival of Avian Flu in the colony during the late summer also caused concern amongst coastal managers, and the RSPB will be keeping a close eye on the seabirds as they return for the 2023 breeding season.

The new MPA Management Group (part of the wider Yorkshire Marine Nature Partnership) continues to meet virtually and explore how collaborative MPA management could be a key part of emerging policies and strategy. This year there have also been significant updates to the YMNP website, including a dedicated MPA management section. The web space now provides information about each MPA on the Yorkshire coast, alongside signposting to further details held by other organisations.

A key achievement of this year is the publication of the new 2022 - 2026 Flamborough Head European Marine Site (EMS) Management Plan. The revised five-year plan sets out how Relevant Authorities and key partners will work together to uphold and progress the conservation objectives of the EMS, and demonstrates the value of partnership working. The embedded Action Plan will be annually reviewed and used by Authorities to measure progress, highlight challenges and identify new opportunities for 2023 and beyond.

Management of MPAs

This work supports Aims 1 and 2 of the Management Scheme

This year, a 'one-stop-shop' for Marine Protected Area (MPA) management information was published on the YMNP website. This portal provides details and signposts to more information about each MPA on the Yorkshire coast, including the Flamborough Head Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the Flamborough and Filey Coast Special Protection Area (SPA). Links to maps, management plans and conservation advice are all available through the portal: [MPA Management](#).

Natural England are continuing to progress a new Flamborough and Filey Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designation. This new cohesive coastal site will bring together three existing SSSIs, provide additional protection for the intertidal rocky shore area and for the features of the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA. A full public consultation is expected to begin in mid 2023.



Caves at Thornwick Bay

Seabird Monitoring Programme

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

The full programme of seabird monitoring was successfully completed this year by a dedicated team of staff and volunteers from the RSPB, on behalf of Natural England. A full colony count was also completed this year, following on from the last count in 2017. The results show a mixture of success and concern, with Avian Flu impacting the colony later in the season:

- The SPA still holds the UK's largest mainland breeding seabird colony, with over 333,000 breeding adults present during the summer months - an increase on the 2017 colony count;
- Guillemot and Razorbill numbers have significantly increased over the last 5 years however Razorbills experienced their worst breeding season ever recorded in 2022. This was likely due to corvid predation at some of the monitoring plots and may not be indicative of the wider colony;
- A pre-breeding count of Puffins as they rafted on the sea in early spring indicated that the SPA colony remains relatively stable;
- Herring Gull populations continued to decline, although Fulmar did not show a significant decrease in numbers this year. Nevertheless, both species recorded poor breeding seasons;
- Kittiwake numbers have dropped again since the 2017 count, however Kittiwakes recorded their best breeding season since 2010 this year. It is unclear why Kittiwakes experienced such good productivity, although the settled weather would have been an advantage;
- Gannet numbers have not changed significantly since 2017, but they were particularly impacted by the arrival of Avian Flu. The lowest recorded productivity results for Gannets demonstrated a significant loss of chicks and adults in parts of the colony.

Whilst the impacts of Avian Flu were felt across the colony, the devastation observed in other seabird colonies further north did not seem to be reflected within the SPA. Transmission of the disease may have been limited by the structure of the colony, which allows birds to be more spread-out, and the arrival of Avian Flu in late summer meant that many auk and some kittiwake chicks had already fledged. There's still a lot of concern for the seabirds though, as Avian Flu continues to circulate through the winter months and the long-term impacts of the disease remain to be seen. The RSPB's Conservation Science team will be keeping a close eye on the colony next year.

The 2022 productivity and full colony count reports, along with all previous monitoring reports, can now be found on the YMNP website: [Seabird Monitoring Programme](#)



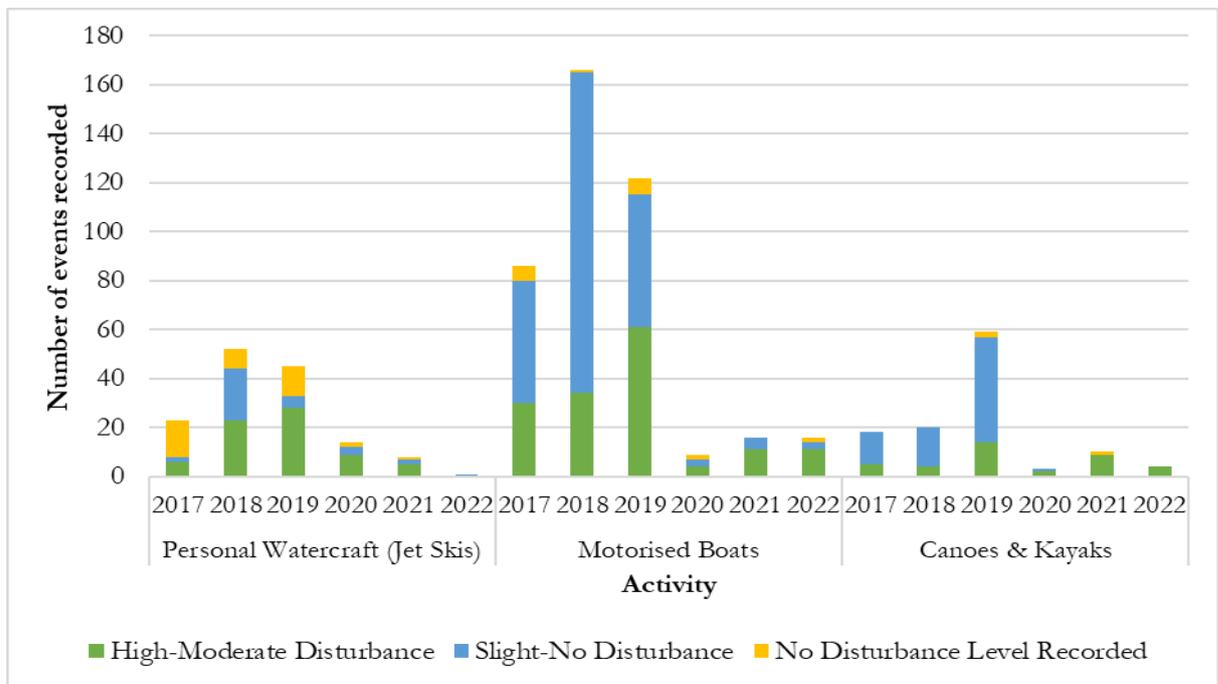
Herring Gulls nesting at Briel Newk

Recreational Disturbance - Monitoring and Engagement

This work supports Aims 2 and 3 of the Management Scheme

The recording of recreational activities and wildlife disturbance has continued throughout 2022, although the numbers of ad-hoc reports submitted to the YMNP have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. A new online reporting form has been well-received and engagement with key partners, such as the RSPB and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has continued to raise awareness about reporting mechanisms amongst volunteers and staff. Equally, the work of Operation Seabird has improved people’s knowledge about the sensitivities of the seabird colony and supported improved partnership working. These activities and collaborations may have resulted in a reduction in disturbance events recently, however it will be important to continue monitoring to measure any significant change in the long-term.

In total, 35 reports were received of recreational activities disturbing the breeding seabirds around the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA. The majority of reports were for motorised boats, however there were also a significant number of reports of low-flying aircraft. This category included drones, civilian aircraft and paragliders. Across all activities, 57% of all reports were recorded as causing a high-moderate level of disturbance to the breeding seabirds.



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

Figure 1: Levels of disturbance events relating to seabirds for the three most reported activities 2017-2022

This year, volunteers from the Yorkshire Seal Group have also been sharing reports of disturbance to seals at Flamborough Head. The seal colony here has grown exponentially in recent years, with a small bay frequently being used as a resting place for up to 100 seals. The Yorkshire Seal Group volunteers share information about the seals to walkers and encourage people to give the seals space, although there are no formal access routes down into the bay due to the dangerous cliffs and erosion. East Riding of Yorkshire Council has installed signage and is continuing to explore other options to reduce disturbance to the seals.

New five-year Management Plan

This work supports all Aims of the Management Scheme

A new five-year management plan has been produced for the Marine Protected Area (MPA) around Flamborough and Filey, this year. The 2022 - 2026 Flamborough Head European Marine Site (EMS) Management Plan demonstrates how Relevant Authorities work, both individually and collaboratively, to conserve and manage the SAC and SPA designations. The text of the document has been fully refreshed for this new reporting cycle with information about new legislation and policy, updated management measures, and the revised governance arrangements for MPA management under the YMNP. Additionally, five new case studies have been added to Appendix C, showcasing the work of the Management Scheme over the 2016 - 2022 reporting period.

Each Relevant Authority is now in the process of officially adopting or supporting the new plan, in recognition of its importance as a management tool for the EMS. Relevant Authorities will report on projects within the embedded Action Plan annually, with support from the YMNP, to monitor progress and identify any emerging challenges or opportunities. The new Management Plan is available online: [2022—2026 Management Plan](#)

Environmental Incident Wildlife Response Plan Training

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

In May, the Environmental Incident Wildlife Response (EIWR) Plan volunteers brushed up on their emergency response skills. The EIWR Plan brings organisations together to share resources and knowledge in the event of a man-made or natural incident affecting wildlife around the Flamborough Head EMS. Coordinated by the YMNP, group members include the RSPCA, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, RSPB, British Divers Marine Life Rescue and, Scarborough Sea Life Centre.

This spring, volunteers and staff from each of the partner organisations came together to practice what to do in the event of an offshore oil spill affecting seabirds and seals. This included how volunteers could gather and share vital information 'on the ground', ensure that specialist teams reach any wildlife in distress and, use local knowledge to support a regional response. The training provided a useful opportunity to test the processes within the response plan and make any necessary amendments or suggestions for the future.

All elements of the EIWR Plan, including volunteers resources and wildlife identification guides, are now available on the YMNP website: [EIWR Plan](#)



Volunteers conducting a wildlife survey during training

Priorities for 2023

Throughout 2023, work will continue to monitor and manage recreational disturbance issues around Flamborough and Filey. Where resources allow, this will include direct engagement with user groups, particularly motorised boat operators, to share best practice guidance for enjoying the coastline responsibly. There are also plans for additional research into the impacts of disturbance on the breeding seabird colony, to help managers understand where management measures should be focussed. Similarly, further training will be offered for EWIR volunteers in 2023, to support ongoing development of the Response Plan.

On a broader scale, the YMNP will be working with local and regional partners to build knowledge around Local Nature Recovery Strategies and how the marine and coastal environment will be incorporated into these new plans. The coastal zone must be considered as part of this national process, however the YMNP will be exploring how marine ecosystems beyond mean low water can also be effectively and accurately represented, including MPAs. Over the next year, national discussions around marine Net Gain may also move forward, alongside marine nature capital accounting. The YMNP will work with partners to ensure that MPAs are fully considered in these emerging processes, wherever possible.

As the seabirds begin to return to the cliffs in the spring, the RSPB and other coastal managers will be monitoring the colony closely for signs of Avian Flu. Whilst the seabirds have dispersed for the winter months, it is expected that the disease will still continue to circulate slowly through the populations, potentially increasing again once the birds return. Productivity monitoring and any additional research next year will be crucial to understanding how Avian Flu has affected the colony. There is no way of knowing what the long-term impacts of the disease will be and it is likely that the effects will not truly be seen for some time, however the RSPB are hoping to re-count the Gannets in 2023 to maintain a close watch on the population.



Flamborough Headland, from Briel

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:

ymnp@eastriding.gov.uk

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.yorkshirerarinaturepartnership.org.uk

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