UK SPOONBILL
WORKING GROUP

Newsletter 2

February 2021

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Introduction to the Newsletter

Welcome to our second edition of the UK Spoonbill Working Group Newsletter! Firstly, I hope everyone has kept as safe as possible and free from the dreaded Covid 19 virus we have been plagued with since a similar time last year. For all of us working in conservation it has undoubtedly left its mark, spawning as it did a year of so many uncertainties and post Lockdown disruptions, particularly on nature reserves at the crucial springtime breeding season peak. Organisations faced different policies and lockdown rulings, which meant many reserves either had no, or very minimal, wardening presence and species monitoring. Thankfully, that did not ultimately have an adverse effect on the fortunes of our growing Spoonbill population. In fact, it is so pleasing to report that 2020 was the best nesting season since the species return to the UK.

The most exciting news and development of the year was of course the success of the Suffolk colony at Havergate Island. After so many false hopes and disasters, with predation issues going back to the late 1990s, it was great that this last year 4 juveniles fledged from a total of 3 nesting pairs, the first successful breeding in Suffolk since 1668 when the UK's original population nested for the last time. It was so encouraging to hear that the anti-predator fencing was the answer for ultimate success, a lesson for us all perhaps.

Meanwhile, Fairburn's population grew and Holkham also celebrated more good news as 56 juveniles reached the flying stage: a record number in the 10th year of the colony's existence. The fact that some 345 youngsters have now been raised at Holkham has undoubtedly been a major kickstart to the UK's revival of breeding Spoonbills. We are now seeing more movement between the core Spoonbill sites of colour ringed birds, illustrating perfectly how small the UK is for the growing numbers and how these birds intermingle. Another encouraging and exciting development was the presence of summering Spoonbills at a further 4 heronries around the country. Some of these were immature birds and this was undoubtedly the reason why breeding did not occur. This should not be seen as a negative, far from it. It took some 6 years for Holkham's colony to finally take off after years of failures, and a lot of the birds that were appearing initially were immatures. Such behaviour is very much the start of new site colonisation. If the now established core breeding sites (Holkham, Havergate and Fairburn) in 3 very distinct and distant geographically separated parts of the UK

continue to thrive, there is no reason why other sites would not be established. With more protected wetlands than in the past, feeding opportunities should be great too, because this is just as an important factor as providing safe nesting localities. At this stage it looks as though the future prospects of the UK's Spoonbill population is looking very rosy!

Another great addition to this year's newsletter is a summary of the wintering population at Poole Harbour. This is another important link in the modern story, aptly illustrated by the movements of certain colour ringed individuals that have now been seen at multiple UK sites. How long in these apparently milder winters will it be before other wintering populations start to spring up?

As with the last newsletter a big thank you to all contributors. As we said last year, the newsletter is only being shared with group members and those directly involved with Spoonbill conservation. As you will see there is mention of 3 sites herein where we have been requested not to divulge details. We feel this is a perfectly reasonable request as the species is still rare and liable to be easily disturbed in the early days of colony formation or prospecting, and we have of course respected that wish. A copy of this newsletter is also shared with the Rare Breeding Bird Panel.

I have included a list of Group members so if any of you feel there is someone missing from the UK Spoonbill story please put them in contact – I would like the Group to cover all interested parties, an across-the-board suite of conservation organisations would be great. We are currently more biased to Holkham Estate and RSPB happenings, but that is the nature currently of where the Spoonbills are residing. However, I feel that other private estates, county wildlife trusts, regional National Trust managers etc should be welcomed if there is a Spoonbill connection. It would be great to engage with those who are hoping to attract Spoonbills through management work, whoever they maybe.

Andy Bloomfield, Holkham Estate Senior Warden of Holkham NNR and UK Spoonbill Working Group Co-ordinator and Newsletter Editor

Pic Andy Bloomfield

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Pic Andy Bloomfield

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those who have supplied site reports, photos, and information that have made this newsletter possible. It is great to have the Birds of Poole Harbour team on board for this issue, thanks for joining. A big thanks to Dave Fairhurst and Aaron Howe for their extra support.

2020 Breeding Site Reports

2020 Total UK Breeding Population

A minimum total of 36 – 39 Breeding pairs at 3 sites producing 65 fledged juveniles. A further 19 birds at the very least summered at 4 other sites. By far the best 'modern' season in the UK.

Site 1. Holkham NNR, Norfolk

Andy Bloomfield, Holkham Estate Senior Warden for Holkham NNR

Holkham's heronry, Decoy Wood taken April 2020. Pic Holkham Estate

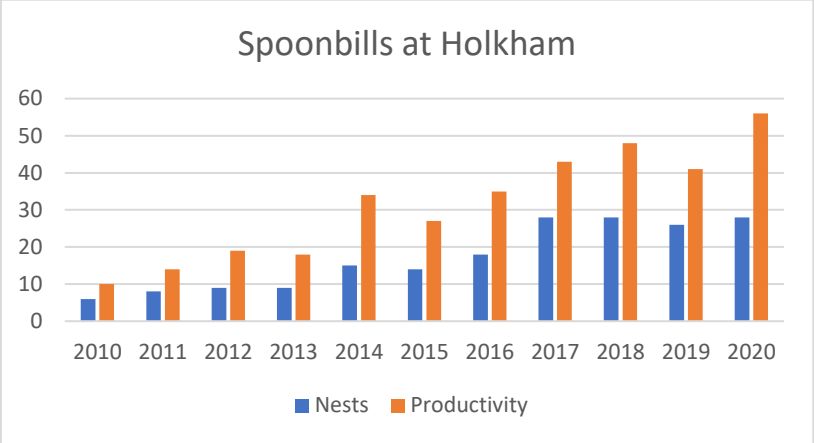
2020 Breeding Season: - a minimum of 28 pairs nested producing 56 fledged youngsters.

Yet another fantastic breeding season. This year it was impossible to gain a truly accurate number as the bulk of the birds nested deep in the willow thicket, well out of view once the leaves were out. It was down to observing daily during the fledging period, and then undertaking co-ordinated counts along the north Norfolk coast to see how many family groups had left the Reserve. Some drone surveys were undertaken early on, but this did not work out to be a fully comprehensive method as some nests were hidden within the depths of the wood. Our figure of fledged youngsters was based on using an average of 2 youngsters per pair. However, we do know there were broods with only 1 and broods of 3 this year, but this method was felt to be the only way of coming up with a figure. We also encountered at least 4 failed nests, hinting that the actual population of 28 pairs was most likely an underestimate. Regarding future monitoring, we will continue as best we can with the same combination of constant observations alongside drones, but it could be that if the population continues to grow, we may only ever be able to come up with estimates such as we have this year.

The first Spoonbills returned on February 6th, the earliest return date. Numbers quickly picked up to 8 on 16th and 18 on 22nd. By February 23rd, at least 3 pairs were involved with nest building activities. By March 7th as many as 27 birds were counted. Our first dedicated look at the colony was done on March 24th and unsurprisingly the first sitting birds were seen: 8 in total. By March 30th 9 sitters were counted, increasing to 13 on April 3rd and 15 on April 7th. Thereafter it became impossible to see further progress, although it was apparent more birds were still arriving and settling.

The first youngster was heard on April 10th, with the first birds fledging on May 11th/12th. Thereafter fledging continued unabated with at least 39 juveniles on the wing by June 24th and a month later, on

July 24th as many as 56 were counted along the north Norfolk coast. Favourite sites for birds once departed from Holkham were Burnham Deepdale and Stiffkey Fen, whilst this year one of our first fledged birds went to Snettisham. Across the Wash, Frampton in Lincolnshire started to attract more birds, whilst one of our breeding birds (with colour rings) was noted as far off as Potter Heigham (60 km away) during the incubation period, and then taking its young there once fledging was complete. The last juvenile to leave the Holkham colony was on August 4th, whilst the last sitting bird deserted for reasons unknown on July 31st. The population and breeding success at Holkham since 2010 is as follows:



From this data we know that up to 345 juvenile Spoonbills have fledged from Holkham in 10 years.

Post breeding flock of mainly fledged juveniles at Holkham; June 2020. Pic Andy Bloomfield

Regarding the future of the Holkham heronry, actions are certainly being made to safeguard the original wood, extend its boundaries and indeed there are thoughts of creating a new one. Holkham's Decoy Wood has undergone lots of changes through its life. It dates back to 1740 when it was initially planted and used as a duck decoy for around 100 years, when it was then left redundant. Even when Holkham became a National Nature Reserve in 1967, it received little attention. By then it was a very dry wood, with the islets consisting of older oaks amidst bracken, surrounded by poplars planted in

the 1950s. When the Nature Conservancy Council started plans to turn the surrounding grazing marshes into a wetland for breeding and wintering waders and wildfowl in the late 1980s, it was then that Decoy Wood started to gradually transform into the wood we know today. As the wood is linked to the ditch system, any change of water level is then continued throughout the wood. With the marshes being managed for waders and wildfowl there was of course a need for far higher water levels than previously required and as the marshes became wetter, the wood subsequently turned more into a swamp with reeds and willows dominating. At that time little thought was given to the wood as it seemed quite insignificant with little biological interest. The transformation however had accelerated and was rather rapid in the wood's lifetime.

Unfortunately, a major setback in the wood's management occurred around the year 2000 when English Nature decided the wood would be better felled and converted to a reedbed for Bitterns. About a third of the original wood (mostly oaks and poplars) went and a large pool was created. No Bitterns have ever nested, although a booming male did frequent the finger of reeds at the western extremity for 5 years in succession. With the various waterbirds colonizing from 1993 onwards (Grey Herons initially, Little Egrets in 2002), it seems such a shame that the vision was not there for the colony of birds we now have, as it might have saved the wood from the initial felling. Hindsight of course is a marvellous thing and no one I suppose could have foreseen such a rapid changeover of species. We can at least be thankful that the remainder of the wood was never felled.

Whilst the wet woodland we currently have is great for attracting Spoonbills, Cormorants, Grey Herons and egrets (Great Whites began nesting in 2016 and Cattle Egrets in 2020), what we do know now is that its lifespan is looking very limited. With all successional habitats, change is inevitable, and it is now very apparent by comparing photographs, that a demise in willow accelerated by higher water levels, has been gradually happening and indeed accelerating within the last 10 years. The wood and perimeter of pools and reeds beds covers an area of approximately 5 hectares, yet the key nesting area of willows within the wood is just over a single hectare and the actual colony now only covers an area of .75 hectare. Not only have we seen willows decline due to higher water levels, but there has been a rapid die off of oaks and poplars caused by Cormorant guano, and no natural regeneration due to the relatively recent arrival of a small herd of Red Deer. As the Cormorants have killed off the larger trees, so they have now started to move into the willows. This could well accelerate the wood's demise further still. With all those factors in mind there was clearly a case for addressing the problems.

Holkham's grazing marshes and pinewoods, February 2020. Pic Holkham Estate

Major work commenced in the fields surrounding Decoy Wood in the autumn of 2020 to allow for field water to be held up within features, thus maintaining wader and wildfowl habitat, yet enabling us to drop the ditch levels and run the wood slightly drier. Red Deer and Muntjac are being culled legally and replanting of willows around the north eastern edge, and oaks on a bare piece of higher ground commenced in 2019. In this winter of 2020/2021 a great effort was made to plant more trees: some 4,500 willows, 20 hawthorns and 40 Oaks. This will continue again in the winter of 2021/22. Thinking further ahead, hopefully in 2022, work will commence in making a completely new replica Decoy Wood. An adjacent wet field of 2.5 hectares has already been highlighted as being suitable. Beyond that another wood on higher ground, but still adjacent to Holkham's marshes (less than a kilometre away) would perhaps be an alternative if (or when) sea levels rise.

With all this in mind, we are certainly trying to catch up and make up for past mistakes. Future proofing by planting willows should certainly help in the short term and running lower water levels should hopefully prolong the existing habitat. In the meantime, we are hopeful we can continue to produce good numbers of fledgling Spoonbills and more colonisation will continue at other sites around the country. Then we will have done our job!

Pics Andy Bloomfield

Site 2. RSPB Fairburn Ings, Yorkshire

John Glendinning, RSPB Volunteer

Pic Joe Seymour

2020 Breeding Season; - 5-8 pairs produced 4 fledged youngsters.

As described in Newsletter 1, the Spoonbill colony is in a dense mature Willow thicket on small island in a lake (locally called the Moat). The same area had breeding Cormorant (85 nests), Grey Heron (26 nests) and Little Egret (c12 nests) all in close proximity to the breeding Spoonbills.

Historical perspective

	2017	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
No. of breeding pairs	**1**	**1**	**2-3**	**5-8**
No of fledged young	**4**	**3**	**2**	**5**

Observations

Personal observations were undertaken outside the lockdown period on most days (weather permitting) from c0600-c1000 hours and on an evening c1900-c2100 hours. During the first lockdown period visits were short and infrequent and conducted only on a morning.

Nest Sites

No sites were used from previous years. All sites were very difficult to observe (and distant - over 400m away from observation points) and some nests were completely obscured.

The nests that could be seen were assumed to be either old Cormorant or old Grey Heron nests from a previous year. Nests were modified with fresh material (twigs and rush) taken from adjacent empty

nests (e.g. Grey Heron and Coot) and from the lake's shallow rushy edges within c400m of the nest site. Most nest enhancement was observed to take place after incubation had commenced (also, perhaps after the chicks had hatched)?

The Spoonbill colony is within the central willow island. Pic Keith Boyer

There were three breeding areas within the heronry:

Site A

This was the first to be occupied (on 9th April) and was in a section in the southwestern corner very high up in the canopy. 3 nests were in close proximity (perhaps within 10 m) although these appeared to be abandoned within 3 weeks. Due to the lockdown, information is patchy as visits were severely restricted at this time. It was not used after these initial breeding attempts.

Site B

This was also high in the canopy on the southern edge of the heronry.

A pair began nesting here around 5th May, but they are assumed to have failed as no chicks were seen.

A second pair, close to the pair (mentioned above), bonded by a disregarded nest They looked like they were going to breed, but the male was usurped by a late arriving bird (first seen on 31st May). This proved quite fortunate as the new male was rung in Germany (and was a bird that had nested at Holkham in the past) and as the female was also distinctive (it had a missing outer primary in one wing) it was possible to spot the comings and goings at the nest, and in most cases work out whether female or male was incubating etc.

The reformulated pair began incubation around 14th June. Not sure of its significance, but on the 26th June the female was seen to be repeatedly circling the nest site. Chicks (3) were first spotted in the nest on 5th August, of which 2 fledged around 14th September. Once fledged one of the juveniles left with the adult female and neither returned (these birds may relate to an adult and juvenile seen at nearby St Aidans in mid-September and early October). The other chick was cared for solely by the male, both of which remained close to the natal area to feed. They were last observed on 5th October.

Observations revealed that the female was generally incubating at 0600hrs and the male was seen to take over the incubation role any time between 0800hrs and 1100hrs. At this point the female would then usually leave the vicinity of the nest and preen for around 30-60 minutes in the shallow water

before flying off east (presumably to the Humber). However, this was not set-in stone and on one occasion the female was not seen for 2 days during which time the male was never observed to leave the nest.

Site C

This site, in the southeast corner was lower down than the other sites and extensive. It was very difficult to observe with the birds largely out of sight. Apart from the nesting pairs it was also a communal roosting site containing mainly immatures and subadults. Birds nesting at sight B often roosted away from their nest here.

A pair are thought to have started incubating here in late April and two young fledged from here in mid-June. The adults and offspring soon left Fairburn and were not seen again.

2 more pairs hatched 2 chicks each in this area by 16th July at least, but only one juvenile fledged (on 5th August). This juvenile, and an attending adult remained at Fairburn until 3rd October. The juvenile and adult were seen feeding at various locations on site and on occasions the juvenile would be left unattended while the parent was away feeding on a distant part of the reserve or at nearby St Aidan's RSPB.

In addition to the above, on 28th April a 3rd Calendar Year bird was seen bonding with an adult female. On 6th July a 2nd CY female was seen mating with a 4th CY male, they were later seen taking material into a nest site. Neither of these 2 instances have been incorporated into the "breeding" pairs data.

Pic Keith Boyer

Movements

Most often noted between 0600-0800am flying into the Reserve from the east, and to a lesser extent from the west, and on an evening generally between 2000-2130hrs again mainly from the east. Most of these movements included non-breeders/immatures.

Conclusion

The breeding population was estimated at 5-8 pairs. A large increase from last year's (2-3) However, productivity was low with only 5 juveniles fledging (from at least 9 chicks seen). It appears as though 4 possible breeding attempts failed before any eggs had hatched.

The maximum number of Spoonbills seen on any one day was 18 (excluding juveniles/chicks) and a varying number of subadults were present on most dates, particularly in June and July. Very few of these were 2nd Calendar Year birds- most were either 3CY or 4CY, so the breeding population may continue to increase in the near future.

Pic Joe Seymour

Site 3. RSPB Havergate Island, Suffolk

Mike Marsh, RSPB Warden

2020 Breeding Season: 3 pairs fledged 4 youngsters, the first successful breeding

Eurasian Spoonbills have been attempting to colonise the Alde/Ore estuary in Suffolk since 1997, but until now they have never been successful. Then in 2020, 3 pairs fledged a total of 4 chicks at RSPB Havergate Island. A brief history, and the exciting events of 2020, are documented below.

The first breeding attempt on the Alde/Ore was at NT Orfordness in 1997, when 3 nests were built in a large colony of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls and at least one egg was laid. Unfortunately, this attempt ended in failure, as was the case for subsequent breeding attempts at the same site in

several years up to 2008, including 2002 when 10 nests were built. One of the reasons for the failures was most likely disturbance and predation by Red Foxes which is also thought to have been one of the main contributing factors in the decline and almost complete disappearance of the gull colony there over the same period.

Havergate Island. Pic Dave Fairhurst

Although the large gull colony at Orfordness was in rapid decline, the numbers breeding at Havergate were on the rise and at the same time the number of Spoonbills being recorded there was also increasing. It was thought that the habitat was suitable for Spoonbills to establish a breeding colony, and since 2007 the RSPB staff have been making efforts to encourage this to happen. Initiatives have included building artificial nests on the ground, erecting artificial nesting platforms, providing piles of nesting material and putting out model decoy birds. Their efforts were finally rewarded in 2019 when 5 pairs nested. The nesting area was a grassy island covered by tussocks of Sea Couch also used by many nesting pairs of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. It is similar in many ways, although on a smaller scale, to site that had been used at Orfordness (about 5km upriver). Unfortunately, there was not a successful outcome. Young hatched in at least 3 of the nests, but they were predated by a Badger and none survived.

As a result of this disappointment, it was decided to dig out the 350m ditch surrounding the nesting area and install a partially submerged predator fence. The fencing work was completed over the winter months and it was then a waiting game. Would the breeding Spoonbills be back or had the predation event of 2019 deterred them from returning?

2 birds, an adult and an immature, had been present during the winter months, appearing in December 2019 and staying until at least February 13th. The first sign of spring migration was an adult that was seen on March 19th, possibly the same bird that had seen nearby at Orfordness on March 8th. Unfortunately, our visits to the reserve in the spring months were few and far between due to the Covid-19 restrictions, so records for this period are a bit patchy. However, we did record 3 birds on April 8th (included a Dutch colour-ringed bird) and then 5 on Apr.15th, all of which were unringed. The colour-ringed bird remained in the local area for a few weeks, being seen at Hollesley Marshes in late

April. It then moved north to the Holkham colony in Norfolk where it was confirmed to have bred. It is therefore possible that these April birds were just passing through, using Havergate as a stopover en route to colonies at Holkham or in the Netherlands.

This slow start to the spring was disappointing and it was feared that we would not see any breeding activity this year. Luckily, this was soon to change when in May a small flock took up residence. Up to 15 birds were present in the second half of the month and then regular counts of 10-16 birds in June. Importantly these birds frequented the now fenced nesting island, spending most of the time near the artificial platforms and decoy birds where the nesting took place in 2019. The signs were now looking very promising and plenty of interaction between the birds was observed, including mutual preening, "playing" with sticks and copulation. Unfortunately, due to the distance (450-500m) from our observation points and the height of the vegetation, it was very difficult to monitor exactly what was happening and often it was hard to even be sure how many birds were present. In order to gather more information on the state of play a drone (with zoom lens) was flown over the area on May 15th and then again on 20th. On the first date there was no evidence of any nesting activity, but unusually 2 pairs had separated from main flock near the artificial platforms at the front of the island and were standing about 30m away in the grass in the middle of the island. We felt that this was an interesting development and something to keep a close eye on, and so it proved. The drone flight on 20th clearly showed that there were now 2 obvious nests in this location, one with a bird apparently incubating (Nest A) and the other (Nest B) containing at least one egg and an adult standing alongside. A further drone flight on 29th showed birds sitting tight on both nests.

Two Spoonbills incubating, Havergate Island 29/06/2020. Pic RSPB

On June 11th it was noted that the nesting birds were acting very aggressively towards any other individuals that tried to land near the nests, so it was suspected that either the eggs had hatched or were close to doing so. The drone was put up next day and confirmed our suspicions, at least 2 small chicks being visible in one of the nests. Over the next few weeks, the progress of the chicks was

monitored using a combination of field observations and drone flights. It is interesting to note that a third pair partly built a nest near to the other 2. However, it appeared to be a half-hearted attempt being more of an untidy pile of sticks than a proper nest, no eggs were ever seen, and the sticks soon disappeared probably having been stolen by the birds from the adjacent active nests.

At the end of June there were the first signs of the young leaving the nests, at least 2 being observed running around, begging for food from the adults and occasionally flapping their wings. Over the next couple of weeks, they became more active but remained close to the nests. They were often seen flapping or raising their wings, and then on July 20th came the moment we had all been waiting for, a first proper flight. 2 of the youngsters were seen to fly 30m from the nesting area to the front of the island. They then flew again, briefly landing outside of the fence, before flying back to the nesting area. At long last we had fledged Spoonbills, the first to have done so in Suffolk for over 300 years! After the disappointing events of the previous year this was certainly an emotional moment for all concerned.

A brood of three and a brood of one half-grown Spoonbill young. Pic RSPB

Over the next week we were able to confirm that all 4 of the youngsters had fledged and at least 2 were regularly seen feeding outside of the fence. The first sign of the young leaving Havergate was on July 26th when one was seen to fly strongly south with a group of 10 adults. This was presumably a feeding foray as all 4 youngsters were seen back on site a couple of days later.

In late June we became convinced that there was another active nest in the SE corner of the island, about 35m from the others. It was well hidden in the vegetation so from our observation points we could not be 100% certain, but again the drone provided the information that we needed. On July 3rd it showed that there was a nest containing 4 eggs with an adult in attendance in the location we

suspected (Nest C). Unfortunately, this nest was not successful. The adults incubated for about 4 weeks, but no young were ever seen.

In July it was often hard to get an accurate count of the number of adults that were present on the island as they were usually standing close together or part hidden by vegetation. Most counts were of 12-18 birds, but these were probably underestimates, with higher counts of 22 on July 3rd and 30 on July 20th & 30th (these counts included the 4 fledged young). Good numbers continued to be seen throughout August with several counts of 20-25, but very few were seen after the end of the month. The notable exception was on Sept.12th when a flock of 46 was briefly present before flying off upriver, a new Suffolk record.

In early September, on a day when no Spoonbills were present, the nesting island was visited so that the fence could be checked and the nests inspected. The nests were made mostly of woody plant

The third nest. Pic RSPB

stems, probably *Umbelliferae* or *Brassicaceae sp*. One of the successful nests (Nest B) also contained two large pieces of plastic, a blue piece that had clearly been visible in the drone pictures and a long brown piece that we had seen one of the adults playing with early in the season. The unsuccessful nest (Nest C) was found to contain some small eggshell fragments, so it is possible that some of the eggs did hatch.

As already mentioned, the drone proved to be an invaluable tool in monitoring the progress of the nests and this is summarized in the table below.

	Nest A middle of island (left)	Nest B middle of island (right)	Nest C SE corner of island
15/05/2020	pair present, no nest visible	pair present, no nest visible	nothing
20/05/2020	adult incubating	adult standing by nest, nest containing at least one egg	nothing
29/05/2020	adult incubating	adult incubating	nothing
12/06/2020	2+ small chicks in nest	adult incubating	nothing
19/06/2020	3 medium-sized chicks in nest	1 medium-sized chick & 1 egg in nest	adult present in area but no nest visible
03/07/2020	3 large chicks near nest	1 large chick in nest	adult incubating, 4 eggs
10/07/2020	3 large chicks near nest	1 large chick near nest	adult incubating
20/07/2020	3 large chicks in nest area	1 large chick in nest area	adult incubating
30/07/2020	3 fledged juvs.	1 fledged juv.	adult incubating, 2-3 eggs

Although Havergate was the site used for breeding, very little feeding activity was observed there. It is possible that they might have been nocturnal feeders there, but it seems more likely they were using local freshwater sites on the mainland as evidenced by the following observations:

At Hollesley Marshes (5km to the SW) small numbers were seen intermittently in May/June, peaking at 6 on June 1st, but dropping water levels meant that the site became unsuitable for feeding by late June. A new, accidentally created wetland, on the River Deben at Ramsholt Marshes (13km to the WSW) provided ideal feeding habitat in late June to August and 7 birds were present here on June 30th followed by several double-figure counts in July with a peak of 16 on 15th/16th. Numbers started to decrease in August and very few were seen after the middle of the month. Juveniles were seen there on August 7th (2) and 11TH (4) and were almost certainly the fledged chicks from Havergate.

In late August, the attention switched upriver to the inter-tidal area at Hazlewood Marshes (10km to the NNE), a site where there has been a regular congregation of Spoonbills in August/September in recent years. Up to 12 were present in late August, building up to a peak count of 44 on September 11th after which numbers quickly declined.

Hopefully, now that chicks have been successfully fledged at Havergate, we are hopeful that this will see the establishment of a flourishing colony there in the years to come. If they do, it will be interesting to see how they continue to utilize the wetlands in the wider local landscape and how this contributes to their success.

Fledged juveniles at Havergate Pic Steve Everett

Site 4. RSPB Burton Mere Wetlands and the Dee Estuary, Cheshire

Graham Jones RSPB Site Manager of the Dee Estuary

2020 Breeding Season: Up to 8 summering birds but no nesting attempts

The first Spoonbill was back on the early date of 17th March with birds then present throughout, with a peak of 8 at Parkgate in late September. However, they did not show any interest in breeding, with no courtship or nest building observed. Most of the birds had some black in the wings, suggesting they were all immature, so hopefully they will continue to return as they mature. We remain as optimistic as ever that we will have breeding Spoonbill in the not too distant future.

We did have a much better season with regards Great White Egret, with 3 pairs fledging an incredible 11 young (4:4:3). All 3 birds nested within the heronry as they did last year. And it will be interesting to see if they continue to nest high up within the tree canopy with the other herons, or begin to utilise what would be considered the more typical breeding habitat of carr and reedbed habitat that we have on site.

A pair of Cattle Egret in full breeding plumage were present up to late March, and were seen often observed displaying, but for some reason they did not stick around to breed this year. As I write this (Dec 2020), we have up to 20 Cattle Egret, a reserve record, so here's hoping that they will attempt to breed again next year.

Site 5. A site that wishes to remain nameless at present in the North of England.

Several birds were visiting a heronry creating thoughts that nesting might be possibility. Unfortunately, despite the presence of up to 6 birds (5 of which were immature) nothing was ever proven. It does however bode well for the future and we are promised if (when hopefully!) success occurs all details can be revealed.

Site 6. A site in north Norfolk

A small woodland heronry with breeding Grey Herons and Little Egrets attracted the occasional Spoonbill through the summer, although inaccessibility and lack of viewing opportunities prevented any confirmation of nesting attempts. A similar scenario had been noted since 2018. Any sites such as this are definitely worth continual monitoring as they could very likely progress into future nesting colonies.

Site 7. A site in north west Norfolk

Another heronry, complete with Grey Herons and Little Egrets, attracted up to 3 adult Spoonbills throughout the spring and summer, leaving some observers to suspect breeding might have been in progress. At the moment the identity of the site will not be widely broadcast, but hopefully that will change in the future if and when success is achieved.

Ultimately nothing further was seen or certainly not enough to confirm breeding, although it certainly might have been attempted. When an adult and a juvenile appeared on a nearby scrape more excitement ensued, although the chain of observations was most likely as a result of the first birds fledging from Holkham and moving along the coast. Future events will hopefully be monitored more closely, and it will be interesting to see if next year we are reporting on success.

Pic Keith Boyer

Wintering Spoonbills in the UK

Wintering Spoonbills have started to become a far more regular phenomenon in the UK in the last 10 years, with the most regular flock in Poole Harbour, Dorset. The rise in numbers seems almost comparable with the rise of the Holkham colony, but without colour ringing it is impossible to say just how close this link has become. One big clue however, in the connection has been the repeated sightings of a Dutch ringed bird that has now nested 4 years in succession at Holkham. Apart from a brief trip back to Holland, it has now pretty much started to live in the UK, moving regularly moving between Holkham and Poole, with odd visits to Suffolk too. It is surely inevitable that if milder winters prevail, wintering numbers might well grow, and other sites will be favoured. It would be good for the UK Spoonbill Group to be made aware of all wintering sites, so perhaps we can pull information together in future newsletters. Any information or regular observers/sites please let us know.

Over wintering Spoonbills in Poole Harbour

***Paul Morton – Birds of Poole Harbour charity*.**

Shipstal Point, RSPB Arne. Pic Birds of Poole Harbour

Poole Harbour is a large, vast, and most importantly, shallow harbour on the south coast of England in the county of Dorset. It has urban fringing only on the northern shores. The rest of the harbour fringes are a mix of low spartina saltmarsh, forestry, mixed agriculture, pristine lowland heathland, and some poor quality reedbed due to Sika Deer pressure. With an average depth of only 1m across the area, Poole Harbour acts as an important refuge for a whole host over overwintering waders, wildfowl, and water birds. There are multiple landowners around the harbour edges including the

RSPB at Arne, BCP (Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole) council along the northern shores, and the National Trust at Studland as well as several private landowners. The harbour is extremely rich for birds and therefore is afforded several important designations including the Poole Harbour SPA (Special Protection Area) of which Spoonbill are a feature species, multiple SSSI's (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), several SAC's (Special Areas of Conservation) as well as being a designated RAMSAR site. With its numerous shallow channels and difficult to access areas on a low tide, Poole Harbour is a perfect site for Spoonbill as they take advantage of the plentiful supply of food and quiet feeding areas.

History of the Spoonbill in Poole Harbour

Pic Birds of Poole Harbour

Spoonbill formerly bred in Southern Britain in the 16th Century, known then as the shovelard. It is assumed that at this time all brackish estuaries were occupied by breeding Spoonbills. Quite possibly including Poole Harbour. Writing in 1799, Richard Pulteney described Spoonbill as an accidental visitor, being seen 'a few years ago near Poole'. Although in his 1888 work, Mansel Pleydell quotes Pulteney as saying that in his day, 'it was not infrequent to be seen in the neighbourhood of Poole'. Whatever the situation, there were only 3 documented records during the 1800's. One was shot in Lytchett Bay in June 1841, one was in Poole Harbour in November 1848 and an immature bird 'was shot at Poole' in October 1881. Perhaps in reality there were more occurrences; for example, a gentleman call Mr Pike mentioned he had seen Spoonbills 'several times in autumn about Poole Harbour and the Corfe division of the estuary and were also occasionally observed in spring'. There were then 3 more birds in 1906, 4 in 1917 and apparently 5 birds on December 25th 1938, followed by a few more records in the 50's and 60's. There was an increase in records in the late 70's and early 80's, followed by 4 blank years at the end of the 80's until 2 birds wintered in 1989, since when records have been annual. The same bird is thought to have been responsible for a series of winter records through the early 90's, until 2 birds wintered in 1995.

Numbers remained low with 1 to 3 birds being seen each year, until a remarkable count of 17 birds at Bestwall on the 9th October 2006 that heralded the start of something big! The following year saw 27 birds, then a bit of a retracement with numbers dropping to 14 in 2010, but rising back to 28 birds in

2011. 34 birds in 2013 were then followed by an even more remarkable run of recorded breaking counts year on year, peaking at 75 in October 2017 (Hopper, 2018).

Poole Harbour and Spoonbills

Spoonbill behaviour is very predictable in Poole Harbour, much more so than their recent over-wintering totals. Over the last 10 years the January counts of over-wintering populations have been as follows:

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
16	17	27	35	40	24	32	40	22	27

These totals do not tell the whole story though, with the harbour seeing record-breaking numbers of Spoonbill in recent years. As the breeding season draws to a close elsewhere, we usually see our first returning Spoonbills in early August with the Brownsea Lagoon being the designated meeting place. Through August, September and early October numbers build weekly until mid-October when we see our peak counts. In Oct 2017, 75 Spoonbill were logged, in Oct 2018 there were 71, in Oct 2019 there were 62 and in Oct 2020 only 42. It seems that after mid-October a percentage of Spoonbill leave the harbour, which then leaves our faithful cohort to decamp from Brownsea and spend the rest of the winter on Shipstal Point at RSPB Arne from mid-October onwards. If you want to see Spoonbill in Poole Harbour then Shipstal is the place to go, but they are only there at high tide. As the tide begins to drop, they head off to favoured feeding zones, most notably the Wareham Channel, but they also feed in the Middlebere and Wytch Channels, as well as Lytchett and Holes Bay in the north of the harbour when the temperature begins to drop. It seems they like the slightly warmer water of the urban bays of Poole Harbour when temperatures sit near zero.

Colour-ringed Spoonbills.

During a targeted Poole Harbour Spoonbill survey between November 2016 and April 2018, 6 ringed birds out of 7 seen could be conclusively identified: 5 of them hailed from The Netherlands, the other from Denmark.

YfGa/GYL Ringed in The Netherlands in 2014, first seen in Poole Harbour at Brownsea Lagoon October 2014.

B(AE)/W(AE) Ringed in The Netherlands in 2006, first seen in Poole Harbour at Brownsea Lagoon November 2007. In 2008 it was seen at Arne on 23rd October, subsequently wintering on the Tamar, Cornwall. In 2010 it passed through Poole Harbour again before wintering on the Tamar for a couple of months to then return to Brownsea on 11th January 2011. In the winter of 2011/12, it decided that Poole Harbour was far enough west and spent the entire winter here. Subsequently spending each successive winter here since. Last seen in January 2021

YaB/YGYf (where ‘a’ is aluminium and ‘f’ is flag) Ringed in The Netherlands in 2014. Spent its first winter in Suffolk, went back to The Netherlands for just 3 weeks in May before heading back to Suffolk, where it then remained until March 2017, moving up to Norfolk in the spring until at least June. *(this bird has subsequently nested in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 and has again wintered at Poole in 2020-21 – Ed)*

YfGa/GYL Ringed in The Netherlands in 2014. First seen on Brownsea Lagoon October 2014. Wintered 2015/16 Poole Harbour. Wintered northern France in 2016/2017 but then seen as a migrant at Arne

19th March 2017, before heading back to The Netherlands for the summer. Back in Poole Harbour September 2017 staying the winter.

GYfG/Ba Ringed in The Netherlands in 2007, has spent most winters in Devon. Seen passing through Poole Harbour on 27th August 2011.

V027 Ringed in Denmark in 2013. First seen in Poole Harbour at Brownsea Lagoon October 2014. Seen again Brownsea Lagoon October 2015.

Hopper.N (2018) The Ciconiiformes of Poole Harbour herons and their allies
https://www.birdsofpooleharbour.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/NEW-The-Ciconiiformes-of-Poole-Harbour-_compressed.pdf

Pic Birds of Poole Harbour

Other News

Exciting news from RSPB Titchwell!

In the Autumn of 2020, the RSPB was successful in securing £3.4million of funding through the EU LIFE Programme. LIFE on the Edge will benefit seven coastal SPA's in England to increase and improve the quality of habitats found within in them. This means that for RSPB Titchwell Marsh we will be able to restore the freshwater marsh and freshwater reedbed for key breeding birds, including Bitterns and Avocets, improve the Freshmarsh for passage waders, and create habitat within the reedbed to attract breeding Spoonbills. With funding secured we plan to deliver the project between August - October 2021. For more information on the project, get in touch lizzie.bruce@rspb.org.uk

Pre-roosting Little Egrets and Cormorants at Titchwell. Pic Les Bunyan

What Holkham has learnt from colour-ringed Spoonbills

Andy Bloomfield

Pic Andy Bloomfield

Introduction

The reporting of colour ringed Spoonbills is a really important part of data collecting that I am sure most of us reading this will be involved with, or if not please do so. In the short space of the 10 years Spoonbills have been nesting successfully at Holkham, we have learnt some fascinating behavioural traits from colour ringed birds that we would have otherwise missed. Also, with the advent of colonies forming at Fairburn in Yorkshire and Havergate in Suffolk, the movement between sites is also becoming very apparent. For Spoonbills in the UK, it seems we are a very small island indeed! When we bring in the story of the aforementioned wintering sites in the south of England, so another plethora of interesting data starts to illustrate yet more patterns. Favoured stop off and wintering spots might well turn into future nesting sites. As in Europe, the importance of these other sites for feeding and stopping off on migration are really important in the Spoonbill's movements and for the species conservation.

The one thing that of course has not yet happened is the ringing of UK born Spoonbills. Following advice from the Eurasian Spoonbill International Expert Group, Holkham was deemed an unsuitable ringing site. The mix of species nesting and all at different stages of their breeding cycles at any given time – and within an impossibly difficult site to access, makes Holkham a non-starter. Also, with the species still being very rare and only in the first real stages of colonizing other UK sites, a definite air of caution needs to be shown before rushing into any ringing programmes. Potential disturbance should be a serious driver of such caution. Certainly, ground nesting Spoonbills would be a better option for ringing than tree nesting birds, but we really need to see how the species does before any commitment is made. This is not meant to be overly pessimistic as the prospects for furthering our knowledge on movements and behaviour is immense.

The following birds have all added information to the story of Holkham's Spoonbill and illustrate clearly why ringing has proved invaluable.

The UK's celebrity Spoonbill


The most regularly returning male Spoonbill to Holkham; on the left carrying a stick in 2018 whilst on the right he is pictured at Havergate, Suffolk in August 2018. (Left A. Bloomfield, Right D. Fairhurst)

If ever there was a celebrity in the UK Spoonbill world, it would be the above male (yellow/metal/blue left leg, yellow /green/yellow flag right leg). He first appeared at the Holkham colony in 2017 and as it was the first year of intensive studying, he became code named C1. In time the combination of green and yellow turned this to Canary 1 (the Canaries being the nick name of Norwich City, Norfolk's football league team).

Nicknames aside, it is his movements around the country that has given him his 'celebrity status'. Since being ringed as a chick at Onderdijk, Vooroever in the Netherlands on 12/05/2014, he has pretty much turned into a resident of the UK. His first resighting was on 08/09/2014 at Dungeness in Kent. He then moved to Oare Marshes the next day and then onto Old Hall Marshes in Essex on 17/09/2014, before relocating at Havergate in Suffolk on 22/09/2014. Remaining for the winter in Suffolk until at least 26/04/2015, his so far only reported return to the Netherlands then occurred when he was seen at Texel between 08/05/2015 and 21/05/2014 before returning to Suffolk on 26/05/2014. Suffolk then became his home, apart from a flying visit to Titchwell in Norfolk in September until the Spring of 2016. Then his movements became more numerous, visiting Lincolnshire (Alkborough Flats) on 15/04/2016 before returning to Suffolk on 17/04/2016, then Cley in Norfolk on 03/05/2016 and again returning to Suffolk on 04/06/2016. Suffolk was then home again for the winter (being noted at Orfordness, Hazelwood Marshes, Havergate, North Warren and Hollesley).

His first appearance at Holkham was on 10/03/2017 where, as a 3 year-old bird, he nested for the first time, fathering 3 youngsters. 25/10/2017 was notable as being the first date he was seen at Arne in Dorset. The Poole Harbour/Lodmoor area then became its new wintering ground up until 13/03/2018 when he was back at North Warren in Suffolk, en route back to Holkham for his second breeding season commencing on 30/03/2018. This year he again nested but was thought to have failed as no youngsters were ever seen with him. What was interesting, was a sighting from Welney (some 60 K away) on 01/06/2018, a considerable distance for an off-duty bird. At the end of the 2018 nesting season, he was then back in Suffolk at Havergate on 22/08/2018 before heading to Poole in Dorset on 21/10/2018 and then back to North Warren, Suffolk on 31/12/2018. The remainder of the winter was

again spent in Suffolk until 22/02/2019, before returning to Holkham on 25/02/2019 for his third year of breeding, this time fathering a minimum of 2 youngsters. Between 11/08/2019 and 19/08/2019 he was again in Suffolk, although this time he moved down to Dorset to spend the remainder of winter staying from 01/01/2020 to 23/02/2020. On 01/03/2020 he was back in Suffolk again en route to Holkham, where he arrived at the colony on 03/03/2020. Nesting occurred for the fourth time and this time he was paired with another colour ringed bird (Black flag/yellow/pale left leg, metal/red/yellow right leg) from which two juveniles fledged. This proved interesting in itself, as after fledging the two were never seen together again, confirming that pair bonds do not last beyond a breeding season. After breeding in 2020, he was last seen in Norfolk on 24/07/2020 before moving to Ramsholt in Suffolk the next day. By the 17/08/2020 he was again back in the Poole Harbour area of Dorset for yet another winter.

In summary, we have learnt that Poole and Havergate are definitely linked to the Holkham colony. Poole is 318 km away from Holkham in a straight line, but obviously further if the coast line is followed. Either way, wintering in the UK is obviously better than a more arduous autumn migration flight to the continent or beyond. We can also glean the importance of the Suffolk wetlands for stopping off. Although not quite midway between Holkham and Poole it provides more feeding opportunities presumably than a cross country journey would. In turn, stop off points certainly in the case of Suffolk, are also wintering sites, which of course in the case of Havergate then becomes a breeding locality. Another advantage certainly proven by Canary 1, is that wintering in the UK, be it Suffolk or Dorset, makes a quick return to Holkham easier. For a male such as Canary 1, an early return to the colony means it can in theory claim the best spot in the colony to display from and/or have the pick of returning females. All of this leads to one so far unanswerable question, why is Norfolk deserted in the winter? Is it the genetic engineering of migration installed in the current generation of Spoonbills perhaps?

A returning female

One of the oldest and most frequent returning colour-ringed birds to Holkham, a female that has appeared in each year since 2015. Bringing in nesting material on right.

This particular female was ringed on 12/07/2011 as a chick at Terschelling, Boschplaat in the Netherlands. It was seen in its native Netherlands until August 2011. No winter sightings were made although it appeared in France in April 2012 and then Germany in August 2012. Again, no winter

sightings but a reappearance in the Netherlands in April 2014. Here it remained at Terschelling approximately 14 – 18 km from its birthplace until July 2014. Again, no wintering sightings but on 04/03/2015 it was at Manche in France, before turning up at Holkham for the first time on 03/04/2015, where it was assumed to have nested. It has returned to Holkham each breeding season since. It certainly produced young in 2017. Interestingly, that season after fledging it was then seen back in the Netherlands 27/07/2017 at Terschelling again, before moving to Charente Maritime in France in September 2017. A clue to its wintering sites came on 14/01/2020 when it was seen at Beauvoir-sur-Mer, Le Pauvrier, France before moving back again to Holkham on 13/02/2020. It was assumed to have failed in the 2020 nesting season and indeed having been seen nest building, it was then seen back in Terschelling in the Netherlands on 04/05/2020 where it remained until its last sighting on 23/06/2020.

Having failed in 2020 at Holkham and relocated to the Netherlands it will be interesting to see if she returns in 2021. What has been interesting about this bird's behaviour is that whenever she has been breeding at Holkham it is her who does the majority of flying back and forth for nest lining material, a habit mostly undertaken by the male in other pairings at Holkham.

The swapping of sexual partners

French male at the nest and dominant displaying Dutch-ringed male at Holkham both in 2017

One aspect of Spoonbill behaviour we soon confirmed at Holkham was the swapping of sexual partners. This probably would not have been quite so easy to have determined had it not been for the fact that in both instances the males were colour-ringed. The female of the pair above left, had already been seen to have mated with an unringed male following a period of courtship and nest building, it thus came as a surprise when this French-ringed male (from Lac de Grand Lieu, Loire-Atlantique where it was ringed as a chick on 02/05/2012), moved in and took his place. An egg was seen in the nest at the time the French bird was seen for the first time on 08/05/2017 and it was assumed that this was actually as a result of the initial pairing, although that could not be definitely proven. Unfortunately, the pair's youngster was predated, although he was more successful in both 2018 and 2019. He failed to reappear in 2020.

The male above right (a Dutch ringed bird from Vlissingen, Sloegebied, ringed as a chick on 31/05/2012), was a very dominant bird in the peak of his advertising displays and stick gathering. He

was first seen at Holkham on 14/05/2017. The last definite sighting was on 18/05/2017. He was frequently seen chasing off any Spoonbill that came anywhere nearby, and due to having one of the most luxurient crests of any Spoonbill seen at Holkham, he became nicknamed 'Big Chief'. When he finally found a mate and built a nest, all seemed well. It was assumed all was well as a sitting bird could be seen deep within a willow thicket (from 29/05/2017), so it came as a complete surprise when we heard he was displaying with same amount of vigour at Fairburn in Yorkshire on 26/05/2017. It is very easy to lose track of birds at Holkham once nesting begins, as they are often out of sight within the willows, yet it was fascinating that somehow such an aggressive male was usurped by a rival. Enough in fact to send him to Yorkshire! Presumably by the time of this happening there were no more spare females at Holkham.

Links with Fairburn and the North

A German-ringed male that nested in 2018 and 2019 at Holkham before moving to Fairburn in 2020

So whilst Big Chief's movement was the first proven instance of Holkham and Fairburn being linked by birds, it was certainly not the last. The above German ringed male (ringed as a chick at Niedersachsen, Mellum on 10/06/2011), also turned out to have tendancies to move north. Despite turning up initially in Norfolk in June 2014, he then spent the next two months commuting to and from Alkborough in Lincolnshire. In the spring of 2015 he was seen again in May at Alkborough, before showing up at the Holkham colony in June 2017. In 2018, he was back at Holkham where this time he nested successfully producing one fledgling. There then followed a report from Alkborough of him still with a begging youngster by his side on 26/07/2018. This of course caused some confusion locally as it was initially assumed to have been from an unknown breeding site on the Humber. It did infact confirm that a distance of some 127 Km is still a manageable distance for a family unit to move and maintain its ties. It is probably fair to say had the family not had a colour ringed bird in the mix, we would have undoubtedly reported another UK breeding site that year. Those ties with the north were obviously maintained as following another nesting season and successful breeding at Holkham in 2019, he was back at Alkborough on 04/08/2019, before returning to Norfolk on 09/08/2019. In 2020 he was seen once more at Holkham on 20/05/2020, but on 31/05/2020 he was seen busy nest building at Fairburn in Yorkshire! Here he successfully reared 2 fledged youngsters. It will be interesting to see where he

settles in 2021. What it does prove is that the link between Alkborough, Fairburn and Holkham is now as apparent as Holkham's link with Suffolk and Dorset.

Feeding distances

A new Dutch colour-ringed male that flew as far as the Norfolk Broads when off duty.

Whilst it might seem very obvious that all the summer sightings from the north Norfolk coast are linked to the Holkham colony, this has been proven frequently thanks to records of colour ringed birds. We know that most of the males incubate during the day and fly out to feed in the evening and through the night. We also know that very few birds actually feed directly around Holkham itself, preferring instead the salt marshes of the coast. Other fresh water marshes such as Titchwell, Burnham Deepdale and Burnham Norton are favoured sites to the west, and east of Holkham places such as Wells North Point, Stiffkey Fen, Cley and sometimes Salthouse/Kelling are favoured. This means distances of 12 Km to the west and 22 Km to the east are frequent for either feeding birds or off duty birds. Longer distances have also been recorded and confirmed by the colour ringed birds. As already described above, Canary 1 has been noted moving as far off as Welney some 60 Km away on 01/06/2018, although sadly we do not know how long it was there for.

Another similar long-distance movement was noted in 2020. This involved the above male (ringed as a chick at Markiezaat, Spuitkop, Netherlands on 08/06/2017). He arrived at Holkham for the first time on 27/03/2020 and went on to nest and produce a single juvenile. He was last seen at Holkham on 12/07/2020. During his time at Holkham on one occasion he was seen some 60 Km away at Potter Heigham within the Norfolk Broads. Potter Heigham has proved to be a site for summering Spoonbills in 2018-2020, but mostly immatures. On 15 and 16/05/2020 he was seen loafing there and it was assumed when news got back to Holkham, that he had perhaps deserted a nest that was difficult to observe. This proved not to be the case however, as he was back incubating on 24/05/2020. It proved 2 things: a) that 60 km is a distance that can be undertaken by breeding birds to feed when off duty (we were unaware of the Welney record of Canary 1 at the time) and b) that 2 days is a period of time

that the other sex can be left alone at the nest. Subsequent enquiries revealed that such a time period has been noted before (C. Pigniczki, Hungary). Interestingly, once the Holkham male fledged his youngster, it was Potter Heigham where they went. We therefore brought yet another site into the Holkham story. With the Broads being a former historical home of the Spoonbill and also closer to Suffolk, could this link in the chain of sites develop into a future breeding locality?

As you can see a wealth of information has been obtained from Holkham thanks to the presence of colour ringed birds. There is much more to be found out, some information may only be confirmation of behaviour from the Continent, yet with the UK population still in its infancy there will undoubtedly be far more new information forthcoming too.

Reporting colour-ringed Spoonbills

Here is a reminder of how to go about recording any colour-ringed Spoonbills. If possible, obtain a photograph to confirm any tricky combinations or doubts in colours.

Left Leg First

Y = Yellow

N = Black

B = Dark Blue

P = Light Blue

G = Dark Green

L = Light Green

R = Red

a = Metal Ring

xf = Coloured Flag (x=Colour)

note 1: The colour of the flag reveals something about the country where the spoonbill was ringed. The Netherlands: yellow flag (Yf) or black flag (Nf), Germany: white, lime or green flag, Belgium: blue or black flag, Portugal: light blue flag, Mauritania, and Croatia: red flag, Hungary: blue flag.

note 2: Red rings lose their colour and could look pinkish or orange.

The following text is repeated from the previous newsletter and is written by Petra de Goeij of Werkgroep Lepelaar:

Records of Colour-ringed Spoonbills are collated and processed by the group Werkgroep Lepelaar in the Netherlands. As some of you may already have discovered, a new colour-ringing scheme for Spoonbills in The Netherlands began in 2019. In the past 11 years, spoonbills have been colour-ringed with 4 colour-rings, a coloured flag and a metal ring. However, because we almost ran out of unique combinations, as well as because of aesthetic objections that the colourful combinations sometimes caused for some observers and nature enthusiasts, we decided to change to a different colour-ringing scheme. From 2019 onwards, Spoonbills in the Netherlands will be ringed with a white PVC-ring with an inscription of 4 black letters/numbers on the left leg (tibia) and a metal ring on the right tibia.

Such white inscription rings are also used in the Camargue in southern France. Yet, the French and Dutch birds can be distinguished on the basis of the first letter of the inscription: in the Netherlands, the inscription always starts with an N, in France with an A or F. Observations of Dutch inscriptions, starting with an N, should be sent to **werkgroeplepelaar@gmail.com**, while observations of French inscription-rings should be sent to our French colleagues at Tour du Valat (**blanchon@tourduvalat.org** or **champagnon@tourduvalat.org**).

To avoid reading mistakes due to similar looking letters and numbers, we only use the following letters/numbers: ABCDFHJLNPRSTUVXZ and 12345679. However, the first experiences already showed that the 2, 7 and Z can cause confusion. It is thus very important to be able to see the upper and lower part of the inscription.

We are very curious to hear your experiences with reading these new rings in the field and hope to receive many observations of spoonbills with these new, but of course also with older, rings!

UK Spoonbill Working Group Data Base of Colour-ringed Spoonbills.

With a greater number of colour ringed Spoonbills appearing in the UK annually, and now so many different observers involved in their recording, it was felt that a data base for each bird seen would be a positive step forward. This means that anyone in the Group can access life history files in a specially created Dropbox facility. This has all kindly been set up by Aaron Howe of the RSPB. To save any confusion, could we send Aaron any updates and he can add the information to the files. Photographs would be good too. As we all know it is not always easy to read combinations and indeed, photographs are a great tool in aiding with the process.

Here is the link to the files we have so far; http://bit.do/ukswg and email any sighting or updates to aaron.howe@rspb.org.uk and he will update the archives.

Eurasian Spoonbill International Expert Group

The Eurasian Spoonbill International Expert Group (ESIEG) was founded by a small number of like-minded enthusiasts and experts from around the World. It became the expert group of the organisation AEWA (Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Birds). Regular workshops and meetings have occurred between 1992 and 2018 to connect scientists and conservationists working along the entire African-European migratory pathway of the species. A Eurasian Spoonbill Action Plan was produced in 2008 and has been worked upon and updated since.

The Group has an active Facebook page and website http://storkibisspoonbill.org/conservation/the-esieg/. The Dropbox facility of this UK Spoonbill Working Group http://bit.do/ukswg has access to the most recent publication and conclusions from the last International Workshop.

2021 was the year in which the next International Workshop was planned. This is currently earmarked for September in Croatia, but there is currently a great deal of uncertainty whether this will happen due to Covid restrictions. It could be that if Covid prevents it happening it will be rescheduled or occurs virtually. Updates on future outcomes will appear in due course on the ESIEG Facebook page.

List of Group Members

Andrew M.	Burnham Deepdale Marsh
Ausden M.	RSPB
Baldock G.	NWT
Bloomfield A.	Holkham Estate
Booth C.	
Cardman R.	
Dolman P.	
Dutch	Werkgroep Lepelaar
Eele P.	Holkham Estate
ESIEG	
Fiennes J.	Holkham Estate
Fuller R.	
Glendinning J.	Fairburn
Harold R.	
Heath P.	Broads Authority
Lord Leicester	Holkham Estate
Lyles D.	
Merricks P.	
Mitchell P.	
Moffat F.	
Morton P.	Birds of Poole Harbour
Overdijk O.	
Prowse S.	National Trust
RBBP	
RSPB Burton Mere	
RSPB Fairburn	
RSPB Havergate	
RSPB Titchwell	
Sills N.	
Smith R.	NWT
Taylor J.	RSPB
White G.	RSPB
Wileman D. and P.	