**BIRDS ON THE FLOODBANKS**

Here is a short note Craig has put together re birds on the flood banks. Hope this helps.

Simon Christian

**Breeding birds** – The main notified interest most at risk here from disturbance is breeding waders. Breeding waders have experienced a rapid decline across the UK over recent decades, with species like Snipe declining by up to 80%.   Most of the UK population of Snipe on lowland wet grassland is now confined to reserves where specific management (including access management) is targeted.  Curlew are also experiencing a rapid decline, possibly linked to climate change, with the species tracking eastwards and now largely extinct in Ireland and absent from large areas of western England.

There is documented evidence to show that recreational access, especially compounded with dogs off leads, causes breeding waders to move or to fail in breeding attempts.  This can be due to a number of factors – decreased time feeding leading to the birds being in poorer condition, disturbance off the nest which may cause birds to desert nests or abandon breeding attempts, or by direct trampling/predation by dogs of nests or young.  Although many of the breeding waders nest in the meadows, disturbance on the flood banks themselves will have an effect over the ings (which is some areas, like at East Cottingwith) are quite narrow.  Some breeding waders do nest on the riverbanks (especially if unseasonal floods push birds onto higher ground off the Ings) and some species, like redshank, spend the majority of their time feeding on the river bank edge.

This isn’t confined to breeding waders – other key ‘ings species such as skylarks, Meadow Pipits,  increasing numbers of Corn Buntings, occasional quail and indeed, increasing numbers of Corncrakes use the flood banks as key habitat for feeding and nesting.  There has been a few papers/notes produced in the past about access and breeding bird disturbance and several anecdotal bits of evidence to support – breeding bird distribution in 2001 when there were closures re Foot and Mouth produced a different distribution of breeding birds on the flood banks (as well as wintering birds) – and it is worth noting that there are more birds using the North Duffield Ings and north Duffield Carrs areas of the flood banks where there is very tightly controlled no access.

**Wintering birds**

With regard to wintering birds this includes all of the key wintering species of waterfowl – wildfowl and waders.  Although numbers of wintering wildfowl have remained stable or increased over recent decades, the largest increases have been in the areas (refuges) with well controlled access – such as Bank Island, Wheldrake Ings and North Duffield carrs.

There is also good evidence from the WeBs counts going back to the 1960’s.  Over that time, some wintering waders (Redshank, Ruff and Dunlin) have shown a decline (particularly since the 1990’s.

Redshank

Down from an average of 350-to around 50-100

Dunlin

Down from c 1000 to c150-250.

90% of these wintering birds were to be found on the flood banks during the wintering period (Oct – Apr).  Although it is not possible to know why these species have declined, the majority of birds still wintering in the valley do so on the Ings now, the flood banks being largely devoid of wintering waders. This is thought to be partly the result of the increased level of disturbance in terms of them being more regularly disturbed and thus preventing feeding.  This pattern is mirrored by that of Ruff, but not by species that traditionally use the Ings rather than the flood banks (Lapwing and Golden Plover) which have shown no such declines over time).

There is also evidence that other wintering birds have also been affected by increasing disturbance – e.g. wigeon numbers wintering on the river have declined over the last 20 years despite numbers remaining in the valley as a whole. Teal (which do not use the river banks as much) have increased throughout the site.  2001 also provided useful data in terms of foot and mouth closures – birds had a completely different distribution around the site with more birds using Bubwith Ings when the flood bank PROW was closed.

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