**District Dispatch**

You may not be aware, but Chichester Harbour is a nationally and internationally important site for coastal birds. Tens of thousands of wading birds and waterfowl migrate to the harbour for the winter, and threatened species of seabirds and waders breed at the harbour in the summer.

 The bird populations of Chichester Harbour are under significant pressure. Disturbance from people and dogs impacts a bird’s ability to survive the winter, migrate and breed in the summer. Due to this, we are encouraging dog owners to keep their dogs close to them when walking in Chichester Harbour, to help protect these internationally important over-winter wading birds. We know that people love their dogs and want to walk them in this beautiful setting. However, research indicates that during the winter period, when dogs are off the lead and enjoying themselves, they can unintentionally disturb the winter migrating birds that feed on the mudflats in the harbour.

 The birds are internationally protected and need to build up enough energy to fly back to their summer breeding grounds. When a dog comes along, the birds will naturally fear a predator and stop feeding and fly away to escape. Unfortunately, these disturbances harm the birds because they use all their energy flying away when they need to be on the ground feeding and conserving energy. It can take a bird a whole day to refuel the energy lost. This means that they are not gaining enough weight to survive the summer migration or successfully breed.

 Short daylight hours in winter, plus the fact that many of these birds feed at low tide, mean that feeding time is limited, so it’s vital that disturbances are minimised. Unfortunately, the cumulative impact has a serious effect, and we want to raise awareness among dog owners so that people, dogs and wildlife can co-exist. We’re asking dog owners to make sure they know where the sensitive parts of the harbour are, and to ensure their dogs stay close to them when visiting these areas.

 Chichester District Council is a member of Bird Aware Solent, a partnership of coastal local councils and conservation bodies from Selsey to the New Forest. The aim is to help people enjoy the coast without disturbing the thousands of birds that over winter there.

 Bird Aware has developed a Coastal Code to help people. They ask people to look out for birds feeding or resting on the coast; to take care not to scare or disturb them; to move further away if birds become alert and stop feeding; to stay on paths where they exist; and always follow requests on signs.

 If you are walking with your dog, they suggest exercising your dog away from coastal birds to avoid disturbing them; keep your dog in sight and on a short lead if you cannot rely on its obedience; to please clean up after your dog; and if you are going out on the water to contact the local harbour authority for special guidance. You can find out more about this at: <https://birdaware.org/solent/coast-and-country-canine>

 The Chichester Harbour Conservancy also have information about this on their website at: [www.conservancy.co.uk/nature-recovery/nature-recovery-focus-areas/coastalbirds](http://www.conservancy.co.uk/nature-recovery/nature-recovery-focus-areas/coastalbirds/) This page not only explains how the conservancy are helping to reduce disturbance, but how they are also creating habitat. Working with the RSPB and other partners, they are expanding and enhancing breeding and high tide roosting sites for birds within the harbour. The aim is to provide habitat that is resilient to the impacts of climate change.

 We really appreciate your help with this because it is vital that we work together to protect both the harbour and the birds that migrate to it.

 Best wishes,

 Cllr Jonathan Brown

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environmental Strategy at Chichester District Council

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