

The Lowestoft Kittiwake Project

The March meeting of the Blyth Valley and Southwold Suffolk Wildlife group welcomed Rupert Masefield, from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, to tell us about the local Kittiwake project. Many people will be aware of the great numbers of kittiwakes nesting in Lowestoft, and Rupert discussed both the bonus of a nature success story, and the nuisance that this abundance of birdlife has brought with it.

Kittiwakes are of the gull family, but they are smaller, and spend their winters in the harsh north west Atlantic waters. They come ashore in spring to nest, usually on tiny cliff ledges, and raise their two chicks. They feed exclusively on fish and sand eels, and each parent takes it in turn to fly out to sea for food, covering huge distances over three to four days. Kittiwakes are in serious decline globally, but numbers are increasing in Suffolk, and Lowestoft has become a centre of breeding. No-one really knows why, but kittiwakes first started to move into the town in the 1950's, and their numbers have continued to increase. The smell of large amounts of guano, and the noise of so many birds, has caused a nuisance to town dwellers, and over the years many measures have been tried to persuade kittiwakes to leave public buildings, and move to artificial sites. However, some measures, such as netting, were potentially harmful to the birds. As a result, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust has brought together local interest groups to form the Lowestoft Kittiwake Partnership, aiming to find safe solutions. There is to be a Kittiwake Officer who will work with local people and businesses to keep kittiwakes safe and reduce the problems with nesting on buildings. The offshore 'kittiwake hotels' you may have seen, were constructed by a windfarm company as mitigation measures for sea birds. Decoy kittiwakes are being used to encourage nesting activity, and it is hoped that with time, these will be inhabited by these attractive but vulnerable birds.

Our next meeting is on Thursday, April 11th, 7.30pm, at the Southwold Arts Centre, IP18 6JP. There will be a brief AGM, followed by a film, 'Secret Rivers – the Waveney, part two', featuring Paul Heiney. There will be refreshments. Admission free.

Penny Mansfield

contact us at swtblythvalley@gmail.com