

The Thanet Coast Project

The First Five Years!

2001-5



The **Thanet Coast Project** was set up in July 2001 to take forward many of the wildlife related actions in the **North East Kent European marine sites Management Scheme (2001-6)** that were not being dealt with by other organisations. The Project Officer/Manager started work in Summer 2001, and was joined by an Education Officer in the Autumn 2004. The Project is based at Thanet District Council.

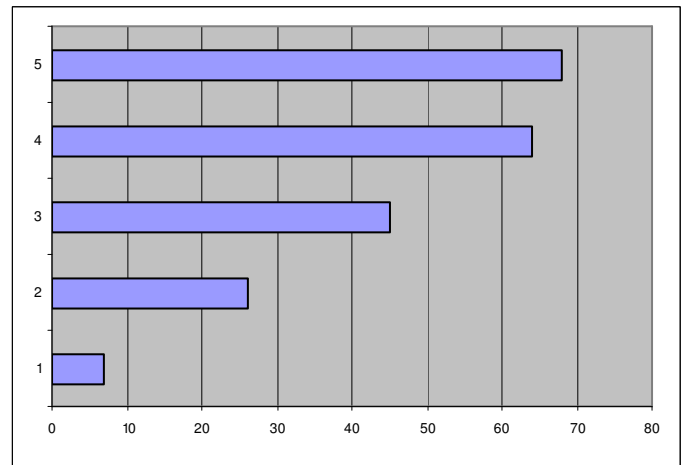
The Project's remit is to:

- **Make people more aware of the importance of the bird & marine life and how to avoid damage to it.**
- **Implement Management Scheme action**
eg. Help local users produce, follow & monitor codes of conduct
- **Encourage and run wildlife related events and make links with wildlife and green tourism, coastscape and the arts.**
- **Be a focal point for enquiries**
and gathering information on coastal wildlife.
- **Keep people informed**
eg. newsletters, articles & stakeholder meetings to keep everyone up to date with progress.

Engaging with people

Developing links with people has been the key to raising public awareness of the importance of the marine wildlife and coastline, by:

- **Communications**
 - Media: *news releases; articles; radio interviews;*
 - Project representation: *presentations; displays; site visits; meetings*
 - Networking: *within local authority; with project partners and coastal user groups*
 - Responding to public enquiries & requests for information
 - Keeping people informed: *newsletters; leaflets; website www.thanetcoast.org.uk; coastal stakeholder meetings*
- **Implementing Action** - specific management scheme action: *including awareness posters; interpretative signs/panels; volunteers & monitoring.*
- **Workshops** – *engaging with coastal user representatives; developing the coastal codes*
- **Public events & activities** - *see p2-3*



The profile of the project has increased steadily each year, with a growing number of press articles and radio interviews (*above: 2001-5 & no. of articles*).

- **Community educational activities** – *from youth to business groups promoting marine and wildlife issues.*



The Project's twice yearly newsletter '**thanet coast**' receives high praise as one of the most colourful local newsletters around! 8,000 copies are now printed and distributed.

Management Scheme and Thanet Coastal Codes

The *North East Kent European marine sites Management Scheme (2001-6)* was produced by the relevant authorities in conjunction with local coastal stakeholders using 'consensus-building' workshops.

The *summary leaflet* illustrates the important nature conservation and geological features - showing that the Thanet coast really is an asset for all. All our

coastal and marine activities have the potential to affect these features, and the main focus of the *action plan* is to consider what needs to be done to keep the geology, plant and animal life in good condition. Whilst many of the actions are within the remit of the relevant authorities - there were some recreational activities that local individuals and groups could act upon.

Local people agreed that a series of voluntary 'codes of conduct' could help safeguard wildlife, while allowing locals and visitors to enjoy their coastal activities. The guidelines agreed were:

- **To include information about how to avoid harming the bird & marine life**
- **To encourage responsible use of the coast**
- **To include safety issues relating to the activity**

It was also agreed that the *codes would be written by stakeholders deciding together*, and should encourage self-regulation by user groups, and *the codes would be kept under review and monitored to check they are working*.



The workshops took place during 2001-2, and the Thanet Coastal Codes were first launched in Nov. 2002, and then updated and revised in 2005.

This is the first time that a set of specific codes has been drawn up by local users for a protected marine site in the UK. For some specific recreational activities, where the effect was deemed to be minimal, or where participatory numbers are low, advice can be given directly to the users concerned.

Thanet Coastal Codes

Shore-based recreation

Seashore Code

Horse Riding

Dog Walking

Field Trips

Water-based recreation

Powercraft Activities

Wind-powered

Fishing & Harvesting

Bait Digging & Collecting

Shore Angling

Harvesting Shellfish & Fixed Netting

One new 'Research Code' for researchers has also been produced in conjunction with the *North East Kent Coastal Scientific Advisory Group* in 2004.



Some impressive results from the introduction of the *Thanet Coastal Codes* have been recorded already.

The level of disturbance to turnstones from coastal activities was reduced by as much as 40% in the first year. However, the codes were produced alongside other specific actions - such as turnstone posters, information signs and temporary coastal bird wardens - and these all played their part.

Issues arising

Numerous important national and local issues have come forward over the last 5 years, many not included within the scope of the original Scheme. It is likely that these will be discussed during the scheme review during 2006, which will take into account the principles of a wider 'ecosystem approach'.

These issues include:

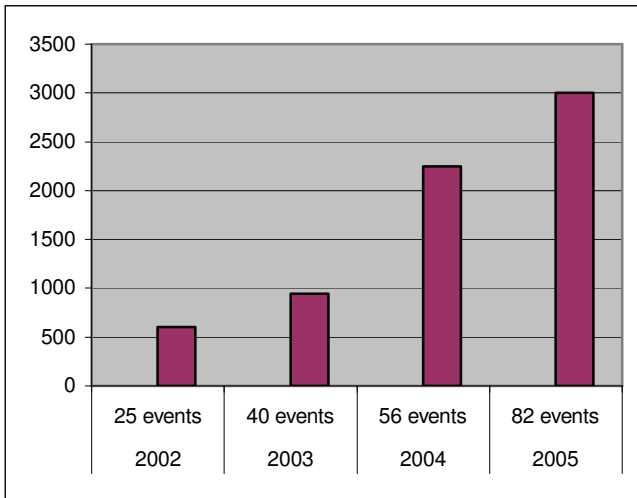
- Algal blooms *and public awareness*
- Seaweed management issues: *driftweed*
- More introduced species - *such as Wakame*
- Oil pollution impact - *oil-affected seabirds*
- Coastal litter - *and practical action linked to Beachwatch (with Marine Conservation Society)*.
- Better wildlife and human activity recording - *with local volunteers and Kent Shoresearch (Kent Wildlife Trust) and other national groups*
- Seals - *local colonies on the offshore sandbanks, Phocine Distemper Virus (the project was the local E.Kent contact during the 2002-3 epidemic); green tourism links and potential disturbance.*
- Cetaceans - *sightings or bycatch records.*
- New recreational activities - *such as kite surfing and buggying.*
- Future shoreline management will need to take into account the impact of future *climatic changes* and the prospect of the chalk reef disappearing: 75% of the Thanet chalk coastline has sea defences which prevents the natural processes of retreat.

Other issues that get extensive local publicity are *dogs on beaches* (as an environmental health issue) and *seagulls* (nesting, juveniles and very protective parent seagulls).

Other suggestions raised by stakeholders - including the establishment of a Thanet Coastal Park or rejuvenation of the Thanet Coastal Path have not yet been taken forward.

Events and activities

The Thanet Coast Project's diverse public events programme has gone from strength to strength since it started in 2002 with the number of events and participants taking part steadily increasing!



This approach to raising awareness, interest and engaging with people has followed a distinctive style. The events encourage healthy outdoor activities whilst promoting links between local marine and coastal wildlife, green tourism, the local marine environment, coastscape and, more recently, the arts.

In addition, these figures exclude the stakeholder workshops, community and school activities – which more than double these figures!

The array of public events and activities include:

- **Seashore safaris** – for families on school holidays
- **Rock Doc walks** - bringing coastal rocks to life
- **'Wildlife Sailing'** - to the seals & sandbanks
- **Secrets and their seaweeds**
- **Rocky Shore Discovery Tour**
- **Beach cleans**, and other
- **Themed walks and cycle rides**



Seaweed & their secrets,
Natural History Museum



Seashore Safari
with Kent Wildlife Trust

The main focus for events has been centred around initiatives such as *Marine Week* (Wildlife Trusts & partners); *Low Tide Day* (River Oceans); *Beachwatch* (Marine Conservation Society) and *World Ocean Day*. *Seashore Safaris* are amongst the most popular activities taking place in various bays each summer. These encourage awareness through wildlife

exploration and recording on the rocky shore, the latter complementing the *Kent Shoresearch* recording by coastal wardens and volunteers.

New links have explored working alongside local artists to help develop links between people and places, such as:



■ **Life's-A-Beach+ 'SeaThanet Coast2005' art exhibitions**



■ **Environmental art with local artists**



■ **Thanet Coast's Big Draw** – artists & local people



■ **Winter Sand-barriers** - local authority/JCB & artists

Beach cleans are one of the tasks that most people can readily join in. Held in spring and autumn, these focus on the coast between Birchington and Reculver (where authorities do not collect) and Pegwell Bay - the largest National Nature Reserve in Kent.

Education and community links



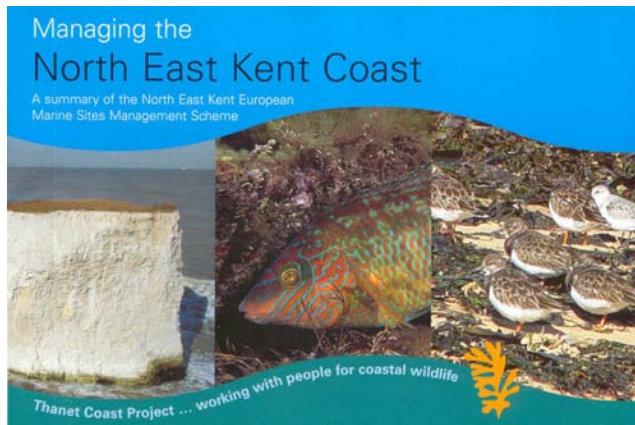
■ **Nature trails** (left) designed by Millennium Volunteers

■ **Beach games** & rock-pooling with 16+ Youth Forum (top right)

■ **Beach cleans** (Ursuline Outdoor Pursuits Group shown) with links to Clean Kent Campaign

The **Education Officer**, Naomi Biggs, started in August 2004, with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund to 2006. The main tasks include running and training volunteers for the new *Thanet Coastal Warden Scheme*; running regular coastal stakeholder meetings; and developing new educational links with local community groups and schools – which in 2005 involved over 3,500 pupils in safety coastal codes talks, and another 2,000 in community events.

What has the project achieved from 2001-5?



Looking at the first five years of the Thanet Coast Project, some of the main achievements include:

- **Profile:** a dramatic rise in the profile of coastal nature conservation in North East Kent
- **Identity:** a new reputation of quality and distinctive style, with high quality 'Thanet Coast' newsletters, leaflets and displays
- **Web-site:** www.thanetcoast.org.uk to ease public access for coastal information
- **Thanet Coastal Codes:** working with coastal users to resolve conflicts & promote responsibility and good practice.
- **Thanet Coastal Warden Scheme:** enabling local people to adopt patches of coast and to be the 'eyes and ears' of the project.
- **Stakeholder meetings:** regular opportunities for local coastal representatives to be involved in the management of the area.
- **Coastal Events and Activities:** a new extensive and varied programme of things to do around the coast – Thanet's largest open space!
- **Community and educational projects:** working with local groups on coastal awareness projects
- **Environmental Art:** new and inspiring ways of raising public awareness and appreciation about the importance of the coastline.



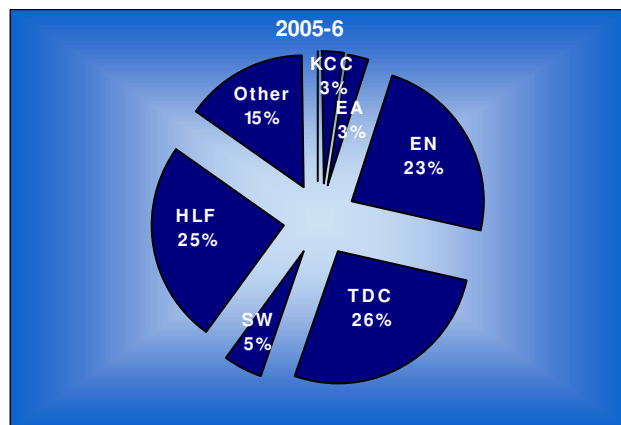
Thanet Coastal Warden Scheme is one of the most exciting new projects, developing new links with local volunteers and helping input into the Management Scheme. By the end of 2005, nearly 90 volunteers have taken on this voluntary role, undertaking training to help monitor coastal activities and wildlife, report incidents and champion the importance of our local coast and marine environment.

This coastal warden scheme is only the second coastal in the country and is an excellent example of building greater links between the internationally important natural asset of the North East Kent coastline, the local community and with coastal users.

And in 2006!

We hope to do even more, with:

- **an extensive public events and activities programme!**
- **developing work with volunteers, coastal users and partners** to work with local people to help safeguard the coast and resolve issues
- **A full revision of the Management Scheme** with coastal stakeholder dialogue workshops



Sponsors 2001-6

Initially, the project worked with partnership resources of just under £40k/year for staff and project running costs. This increased to approx £76k/year for the two staff members from 2004-6. Thanks go to the generous support of the core funders - **English Nature; Environment Agency; Kent County Council; Southern Water and Thanet District Council** - with initial support from the **European Regional Development Fund** and **ALSF** - and more recently the **Heritage Lottery Fund, Pfizer Ltd**, and the generous help and support of **numerous volunteers!**

Funding Required?

The current project funding is due to end in the summer of 2006 and so can only develop and build on these past achievements if further funding can be secured.

If you would like to further information about the Thanet Coast Project or would like to **sponsor** or make a **donation**, please contact:

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www.thanetcoast.org.uk
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