

## Gannet numbers rocket

While many seabirds around the British coast are declining, not least where pollution is being cleaned up, gannets along the 27km of 120m cliffs around Flamborough Head and Filey have increased since 2000 from 2,550 pairs to 13,400. The RSPB say they have no idea why.

## Disappearing Scotland

Research into old maps since the 1890s and extrapolating suggests that a fifth of Scotland's coastline is at risk from erosion. Since the 1970s the extent of erosion has increased by 39%, which would normally result in corresponding silting elsewhere but this is down by 22% at the same time. Post glacial uplift is continuing in Scotland. So, where is it all going? Are the English taking it?

## Shark attack

A board surfer at Bantham on the south Devon coast suffered what is thought to be the first shark attack in British waters. The 900mm long shark, believed to have been a smooth hound, grabbed his thigh and began thrashing. It swam off when he hit it. He suffered a lacerated hand and extensive bruising but would have been more seriously injured if he had not been wearing a thick winter wetsuit on this June day.

and very hard to get off it again. Paddlers are now allowed to use the tunnel if there is no oncoming traffic and if they have a light facing forward, a whistle and a buoyancy aid. The tunnel is 1.5km long. Tunnels up to 400m long may be used elsewhere if there is good line of sight or 650m with a one way system. Tunnels are one of the unaddressed safety issues PI have with CRT, who have failed to explain why these apparently random numbers have been picked. CRT have failed to consider other ways of getting round their concerns and have failed to signpost portage routes which are sometimes long and complex or even downright dangerous, much more than going through the longest tunnels.

## Cleaner Clyde

The quality of water in the River Clyde is improving significantly, better than SEPA expected. Investment of £600,000,000 is being made in sewerage and treatment plants in the area between 2010 and 2021 and fish barriers and concrete channels are being removed. There is less pollution from treatment plants and agricultural sources and overflows from sewers have been reduced.

SEPA have also reported 2016 EU classifications for their 84 designated bathing beaches. Excellent beaches were up from 17 to 26, 36 were considered good, 11 were sufficient and poor beaches were down from 17 to 11.

Of 104 nominated bathing beaches in Wales, 80 are excellent and only one fails the EU's compliant requirement.

## Beavering away

Enthusiasts have welcomed the large number of dams built across rivers by beavers released in the West Country. They have been effective in causing mud and fertilizers to settle out, leaving cleaner water while siltation is taking place. However, farmers in Scotland have been complaining about the damage done to agricultural land and forestry by beavers released there. There are also concerns about the possibility of large amounts of water being released if dams fail during floods, as they have done at times. There is a strict system of inspection by approved engineers for man made dams. Even the EA are not enthusiastic, wanting to be in control of where flood protection is placed. The pair of Devon beavers have built 13 dams on 180m of stream in six years and it is not hard to foresee the effect of significant numbers of beavers damming our rivers.

## EA wearing cameras

EA enforcement officers in NE England are wearing body cameras in a six month trial. The claim is that they will not be switched on unless they encounter a hostile situation and that people will be told when they are being filmed. This likely to be at illegal waste sites and on fishery and navigation patrols. Navigation would hardly seem likely to offer the threats of dumping and

poaching perpetrators and is likely to be seen in the context that the EA themselves institutionally ignore the law relating to navigation rights. The scheme could well be spread across the rest of the country. Whether it results in canoeists on rivers disputed by the EA increasingly carrying cameras in return, as some already do, and what that would achieve remains to be seen. Will they film minors in canoes?

## Angling in decline

Figures issued by the EA show a 9% decline in the issue of rod licences for salmon and sea trout compared with the mean figures for the previous five years. In that period, salmon catches were down 22% and sea trout by 16%. Salmon stocks are the lowest on record despite a 74% reduction in salmon net licences issued by the EA since 1985. Highest catches in England were on the Tyne and in Wales on the Wye, rivers where canoeing sees some acceptance by the EA.

Junior licence sales fell by 53% from 2009 to 2016 but increased by 25% last year as the EA are now giving licences free to 12-16 year olds in an effort to halt the decline. The EA say youngsters are turning to games consoles, TV and social media instead, not that most people have noticed an increase in TV viewing. There is no mention of young people turning to healthier and more fashionable outdoor activities and there is total silence on kayak angling, which is growing fast.

At least salmon and sea trout are doing better than European eels, which are now at less than 5% of their 1980 numbers.

## More MCZs

Consultations on a third and final tranche of Marine Conservation Zones around the English coast are to be conducted early in 2018. Defra are still refusing to say what the implications will be before all the designations are in place except frequent suggestions that their interests will take precedence over those of everybody else. The Marine Management Organisation now accept that 'there are increasing stakeholder observations and reports that bird species become, at least partially, acclimated to disturbance from some marine activities.' This breakthrough is welcomed as we seek to get across the message that much wildlife does not seek a sterile environment with all human activity removed. The MMO intend to investigate this and come to conclusions by the end of 2020.

## IWA directory updated

John Pomfret's excellent *IWA Directory of the Inland Waterways of Great Britain* has been updated and takes on board some comments made by PI following the last edition. In the desperately complicated situation of what is or was or was not a navigation the directory is a valiant attempt to make some sense of it all. John also explains where he has drawn the line in excluding waterways used by small craft. It is available on the IWA website.

# INCIDENT FILE

## Amazon murder

Emma Kelty, a 43 year old former junior school headmistress, was murdered in September while making a source to sea descent of the Amazon. She was 44 days into her journey and was 240km short of Manaus on the Solimões River. Earlier she had paddled 1,000km of white water, accompanied by a guide, but had then changed to a folding kayak and was paddling alone. She had camped on an island.

It appears that a group of drug addicts from a local village assumed that she was carrying drugs and shot her from outside her tent, hitting her in the arm. She was sexually assaulted, her throat cut with a knife and was thrown into the river, where she died and was lost.

The gang stole her money, two mobile phones, GoPro camera, tablet and inReach GPS device and fled into the jungle. Although there was no phone signal in the area, they accidentally set off the location facility on the GPS device, the details being passed to the Brazilian police who were able to go to where they were hiding, something they would not otherwise have been able to do. By this time a fight with a rival gang had resulted in the death of the ringleader, who had previously been involved with other murders, but his accomplices were apprehended.

A couple of days after the story broke, explorer Jacki Hill-Murphy presented a scheduled lecture *Expedition to Travel the Length of the River Amazon* to the Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution. She dedicated it to Emma, as she would with subsequent presentations of the lecture. She told PI that, apart from the usual dangers to a women travelling alone, the important message here is never to stop in the red zone, the route used by Columbian drug traffickers, although there seems no way that this can be avoided on such a descent.