Jersey Ramsar Advisory Group (JRAG) meeting minutes

12th May 2025, 18:00 (St Helier Yacht Club)

Attendees:

- Chairman (AM)
- Jersey Heritage (Geopark) (JH)
- Jersey Marine Conservation (JMC)
- Maîtresse Île Residents Association (MIRA)
- National Trust for Jersey (NTJ)
- Natural Environment (Land Resource Management) (LRM)
- Natural Environment (Marine Resources) (MR)
- Parish of Grouville (Gr)
- JRAG administrator (Admin)

Apologies:

- Écréhous Residents Association (ERA)
- Jersey National Park (JNP)
- Parish of St Ouen (StO)
- Parish of St Helier (StH)
- Parish of St Martin (StM)

Agenda items

1. Welcome

AM thanked the St Helier Yacht Club for allowing us to hold the meeting at the club and outlined the agenda and speakers. He noted that turnout was lower than usual and thanked those in attendance. He then introduced the new JRAG administrator, thanking the Government of Jersey for providing funding for this. He stressed the importance of JRAG as an independent advisor to Government and a means to collate the efforts of stakeholders and interested organisations.

2. Updates from the Chair

The Chair gave a number of updates:

- With JRAG now independent of the Government of Jersey, an official JRAG email account has been created - jrag.jersey@gmail.com. Contact details will be moved across to be held independently of Natural Environment. Consent is required for this under data protection rules and a Privacy Notice and Consent Form was handed out to all present. They will be emailed to those not in attendance.

- The ci-ramsar.com website is up and running, managed by the Alderney Wildlife Trust, who kindly also include information from Guernsey and Jersey. It should soon include Ramsar management plans, JRAG meeting minutes and other information.

- The World Wetlands Day in February was acknowledged to be a great success and an indication of the interest in wetlands matters.

- JNP's Pawsitive Impact campaign encouraging dog owners to help protect wildlife, farmland and natural sites was praised. AM has requested that conduct on beaches and around seabirds be included. There was discussion of the problem of dogs disturbing seabirds. It was noted that greater education about the impact this has, and raising awareness that it is an offence, may help. The difficulties around policing beaches were acknowledged and Gr was keen to facilitate better policing if practical.

ACTION:

- **Admin** to ensure distribution of Privacy Notice and Consent Form to those absent.
- **Gr** to raise the issue of policing dogs on beaches at the next police meeting (and other parishes would be encouraged to do likewise).
- **Admin** to add to the agenda for the Executive Committee to discuss more publicity and education in relation to dogs disturbing seabirds for next winter.

3. JRMA Annual Scientific Report 2024

The Annual Scientific Report is a key responsibility of the JRMA. Although technically not required to produce one for 2024, this has been done in order to bring together existing knowledge as a baseline for monitoring trends in future Annual Reports. Suggestions for other areas which ought to be included were invited and it was stressed that the Report is a mechanism to bring together the work being done by both governmental and non-governmental bodies.

It is hoped that the Report will be finalised before the autumn 2025 JRAG meeting. Publication is desirable, but will require Ministerial sign off. It was suggested that a summary paper may also be beneficial, along with publicity to raise awareness of the Report.

MR and LRM ran through the draft Report, focussing on areas not reported on at previous meetings, including:

- Seabird monitoring - including the Société Jersiaise's datasets for the SE coast for Brent Geese and waders and increased monitoring on the reefs. A decline in wader numbers will be further investigated, also looking at the wider picture for these species beyond our borders. The state and implications of the raptor population were also discussed.

- Bat monitoring - a collaborative project between JMC, Jersey Bat Group and the Société Jersiaise to monitor bats at the Minquiers and Écréhous. While there is no evidence of bats roosting on the reefs, there is significant activity, with migratory species passing through and bats going to the reefs to feed.

- Terrestrial flora on the reefs - current data have been collated and there will be low level monitoring in future, consistent with monitoring the long term trends of non-dynamic data.

- Fish migration and habitats - work is being done by a PhD student using acoustic tagging to monitor rays and establish whether those in our waters are a distinct population from those in the UK, and whether applying the same quotas is appropriate.

- Seagrass - expansion of the seagrass beds in Grouville Bay is a good indicator of the site's health, with the oyster beds possibly offering protection from currents. NTJ expressed concerns about the aggressive spread of seaweed near Le Hurel Slip, which may need monitoring.

MR also gave an update on some of the wider work of JRMA, including signage (on which input is encouraged and options for digital signage were briefly discussed) and fostering greater cross-border cooperation, such as inter-island meetings and approaches to the French authority responsible for managing the large Ramsar site in Mont Saint-Michel Bay.

The use of cameras to monitor visitor numbers at the Écréhous was discussed. This is resource intensive for MR (both in terms of maintaining the cameras and assessing the data) and it was questioned whether this was the best use of resources. Various options were suggested, including reducing monitoring to every few years (to gather long term data), extrapolating data from Customs and Trace figures, and/or continuing to gather data without analysing it (with a view to AI assisting with this in future).

At the next meeting updates will be given on the Marine Spatial Plan and major works, including the harbour development. It was explained that the harbour development will involve dredging and dumping and that MR are working with consultants to plan mitigation and ensure the plume is correctly modelled. Sampling is also being undertaken in advance of the project to provide a reference point for monitoring once works commence.

ACTION:

- **MR** to oversee completion of the Report and work towards publication.
- **MR** to review options for cameras/visitor number monitoring at the Écréhous.

4. Archaeology update

A fascinating summary was given of archaeological finds to date in the intertidal zone and around the reefs. These finds include evidence of possible seawalls, standing stones, sentinel stones, a possible portal dolmen, quarry marks, quern stones, seal bones and other signs of habitation. More detail will be available in the JRMA Annual Scientific Report.

Archaeologists from the University of Brest will be visiting for five days in September to assist with excavations and help provide greater clarity.

5. Jersey Marine Conservation work update

JMC delivered an update on their seabed and grey seal survey work (with more detail being provided on the drone survey in the JRMA Annual Scientific Report).

Work is ongoing to establish the health of the breeding seal population. Seals are sensitive to disturbance (it was stressed that anything closer than 150m is likely to disturb them) so thermal imagery is being used to assist with monitoring. It was reported that breeding appears to be becoming confined to the Écréhous, with a sharp decline at the other reefs, so there are concerns that they may be disturbed by rising visitor numbers at the Écréhous during the winter.

It was reported that one seabed site being surveyed had been subject to dredging, providing a useful (if unwelcome) insight into the effects of mobile gear, with species including pink sea fan coral being significantly impacted. By comparison, the Écréhous site, which is closed to mobile gear, still has high species richness, although variety and density are still declining.

Work on eDNA samples has been undertaken with the University of Exeter to provide a more scientific perspective to support observations.

JMC expressed their gratitude to the organisations who support their work, including Ports of Jersey, Jersey Community Foundation, Parish of St Martin, Roy Overland Trust, and others. MR rely on JMC for seabed surveys, so consistent funding is vital to avoid data gaps.

6. Close

AM thanked all the speakers and closed the meeting.

Next meeting

Monday, 13th October 2025, 18:00 - 20:00, St Helier Yacht Club