

2020.06.30

17 Deputy K.F. Morel of the Minister for the Environment regarding the protection of wildlife at Les Ecréhous: (OQ.177/2020)

Will the Minister update the Assembly on any work being undertaken to ensure that wildlife at Les Écréhous remains undisturbed by residents and visitors to the region? Will he confirm that where any endangered species are being disturbed, he will take the appropriate action to ensure that these disturbances quickly come to an end?

Deputy J.H. Young (The Minister for the Environment):

I thank the Deputy for his question, because it gives me an opportunity to report the increase in the number of breeding birds in this colony this year, possibly due to the lack of human action during the period of lockdown, but of course that has led to particular areas of bringing those birds into issues of potential conflict with humans. In order to manage that during the nesting period, May to August, environmental officers have met with the Écréhous Residents' Association and the St. Martin Honorary Police and worked with the ornithology section of the Société. Now, we do have a longstanding code of conduct in this S.S.I (Site of Special Interest), but recently we visited the reef and cordoned off the nesting areas where the nesting terns and Roseate terns are. Roseates are in fact one of the most scarce U.K. seabirds. With the support of the residents, we have done that. We have put out signs and also agreed the key messages. These are important: no dogs on the reef and no drones. Those are strong measures and also we provide co-ordination, support and enforcement and we work with the other parties. The terms of enforcement, we do have a Wildlife Law. It is an offence for people to damage or destroy any nest of a bird while it is in use or being built or obstruct access to that nest, but obviously that is the current law and that is difficult to enforce, particularly obviously we do not have a resident warden and we rely on external reports. But we will have the new law in progress, which is the new Wildlife Law, which will provide stronger measures of protections. Those are the actions.

4.17.1 Deputy K.F. Morel:

The Minister mentioned that where nests are disturbed, there will be action taken. Could the Minister explain how this is done, as recently there have been reports of nests being disturbed and Roseate terns not returning to those nests? Would a warden not be a better way forward, rather than relying on reports?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, of course it would. I think a resident warden or at least a summer-only warden, particularly during the period of summer when the breeding birds form their colonies, yes, it would be a good idea, but I am afraid it comes down to resources. I know that Chausey does have a summer warden, but I cannot over-stress the importance of this particular colony. We understand that the one in St. Malo has failed due to rat predations, but this is an important one. Yes, it is on our list of how we can improve resources. We visit there as frequently as we can with the fishing team, but I want to praise the St. Martin Honorary Police and the local residents, who are really helping us in this.

4.17.2 The Deputy of St. Martin:

I am grateful to the Minister for those words, but will he agree with me that over the years, large areas of the Les Écréhous are committed over to birds and nesting and that we have to work together to find a way forward here for the residents to be able to enjoy their huts and the birds to be able to nest in peace and quiet?

Deputy J.H. Young:

Yes, I do. I was reading up about these birds. I am not a great expert, but they do form these very, very close colonies and when those colonies are, if you like, affected by human beings, then they defend their nests fiercely by bombing people and so on. But we are a victim of our success here. It is such a beautiful place, we have got the increase in numbers, but I think the only way is to find an accommodation. The way I have said, I cannot see any other way to do it. I suppose we could have a webcam out there where we could watch offenders and follow up that evidence, but at the moment we do not have. That would be a very expensive thing to do. We rely on local devices with local recording.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

A supplementary, Sir?

The Deputy Bailiff:

If you do not mind, I would like to bring this question to an end now. Obviously other Members can ask further questions when we get to Questions to Ministers without notice. The reason that I say that is that we can deal with questions 18 and 19 when we come to Questions to Ministers without notice, but question 20 can only be dealt with at all in this session, so I am going to move on to question 20 now, otherwise that question simply will not be asked today and we only have 2 or 3 minutes left of Oral Questions with notice. I am going to move now to question 20, which Deputy Tadier will put to the representative of the Jersey Community Relations Trust, who of course is not a Minister, so cannot be asked questions in the Question Time that follows to all Ministers. Deputy Tadier, question 20, please.