

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Sunnica Energy Farm](#)
Subject: Sunnica Solar - Stone Curlew
Date: 13 February 2024 10:29:17

Dear Mr Wheadon

Stone Curlew

I hope it is not too late to inform you of information that has only recently come to light, relevant to Natural England's decision to deny any functional linkage of Stone Curlew in this area to the Breckland SPA.

In their Response to the Secretary of State's Consultation of 15 January 2024, Dr Ann Noble and Isleham Parish Council both referred to a large gathering of 50+ Stone Curlews observed around Isleham last autumn, which was subsequently discovered to have been in September and October. After the deadline, it came to light that this unusually large gathering coincided with the abandonment of their premigration roost at Cavenham Heath, after a dog invaded the reserve. The reserve manager at Cavenham confirmed he had not been told of the Isleham roost but was aware of the abandonment of the roost on the 29th August if not shortly before, and that a smaller number reformed in October before migrating in November.

Despite considerable effort (hence the delay in sending this), I have been unable to obtain sightings in the Isleham area (actually Freckenham-Isleham) between late August and the 25 September, the date of my informant's first sighting; his last sighting was on the 16 October. However, Anglian Water's Ecology Team have been monitoring their new pipeline and should be able to provide more detailed data if requested, hopefully filling in the missing dates; they were, understandably, reluctant to pass on commercial information to me. But even if it is not possible to correlate dates it does not preclude the possibility that the Stone Curlews had dispersed into the wider area (there are also reports of large numbers seen in Lakenheath and Icklingham) before regrouping at Cavenham prior to migration.

The coincidence of one large roost disappearing at roughly the same time as an unusually large roost is observed less than six miles away must add a serious level of doubt level to Natural England's determination to deny that there is any functional linkage between the area covered by the Sunnica Solar scheme area and the Breckland SPA.

In fairness, Natural England cannot be expected to appreciate the significance of this area to the wider SPA if they are not informed of the facts. For the best of reasons, birders are often reluctant to share information, even with the authorities, so these sightings were not reported to the RSPB, BTO or Natural England, but were given to the Cambridge Bird Club as it was the first time he had ever seen Stone Curlew in Cambridgeshire. I have now passed on his sightings to the Senior Reserve Manager - Breckland NNRs, in the hope that

they will be passed on to Natural England, giving them the opportunity to reassess their decision.

While it is impossible to state with any certainty that both groups are one and the same, equally it cannot be proved that they are not, so it would surely be safer to reserve judgement. Alternatively, perhaps the SPA could be widened to include this area, as Stone Curley are clearly happy to nest and roost here, possibly using this area as a fall back when disturbed elsewhere. They may even be over-wintering here: a local farmer informed me that he had seen a Stone Curlew in his fields within the last week.

Yours sincerely

Sandie Geddes
Freckenham resident
Unique No. 20031091

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