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Use of gulls rather than terns to evaluate American Mink *Mustela vison* control. A response to Craik (2008)

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I thank Clive Craik for the opportunity to clarify points made in the 2006 paper. Clive presents a convincing argument that gull rather than tern productivity was a better indicator of the benefits of mink control during his study. However, I maintain that I was justified in restricting the analysis to terns in my study for three reasons:

The Hebridean Mink Project was designed to produce conservation benefits for a range of taxa that included terns, but not gulls. Therefore I was obliged to test the efficacy of the project in terms of changes in the breeding success of terns, since that of gulls was irrelevant to the project's objectives.

In contrast to Clive's study area, gulls and terns on the Western Isles occupy discrete habitats that differ with respect to mink predation risk. Gulls nest inland on moors where mink are rare, while terns nest on the coast where mink are more common. As such, gull productivity on the Western Isles will be less sensitive to removal of mink than that of terns.

An analysis of Clive's own data demonstrated that tern productivity during 1998–2006 at colonies protected from mink was on average 253% higher than that at unprotected ones (Ratcliffe *et al*. 2008). As such, tern productivity clearly has a greater value as an indicator of the effects of mink removal than Clive's commentary suggests.

I concede the point in the Footnote concerning the detectability of mink predation being less than one. Quantifying the likelihood of an unprotected colony escaping mink predation is therefore difficult, but data certainly show that unprotected colonies can, on occasion, escape predation and experience high productivity. Hence, detecting the effects of mink control statistically requires sampling at a large number of colonies, and certainly more than the two sampled on Lewis in 1992.

Reference

Ratcliffe, N., Craik, C., Helyar, A., Roy, S. & Scott, M. 2008. Modelling the benefits of mink management options for terns in West Scotland. *Ibis* 150 (Suppl. 1): 114–121.