the Seabird Group

NEWSLETTER 101

October 2005 and February 2006

CONSERVATION NEWS

SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT; POSSIBLE SEAWARD BOUNDARY EXTENSIONS TO BREEDING SEABIRD COLONY SPAs

Under the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), the UK has resolved to identify Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for rare or vulnerable species listed in Annex I of the Directive and for regularly occurring migratory species. The current suite of the UK's SPAs, largely restricted to the terrestrial environment, includes 96 sites classified for breeding seabirds (Figure 1). Between 9% (although the minimum for most species is >30%) and 100% of the UK breeding populations of seabird species are protected within these sites, which are both geographically extensive and ecologically diverse. This is a significant step forward in the conservation of seabirds, but as such, only allows for the protection of their nesting habitat. So, while this network of sites is comprehensive and satisfies the SPA selection guidelines for the terrestrial and intertidal zones (Stroud *et al.* 2001), it does not accommodate the activities of seabirds that occur in or on the sea within the current SPA boundaries.

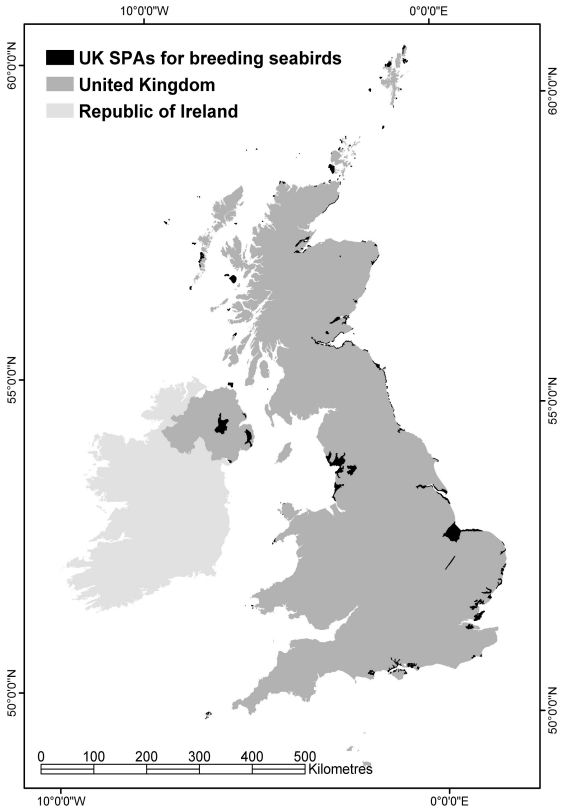

Figure 1. Map of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, showing the distribution of the UK's 96 breeding seabird SPAs

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The Seabirds and Cetaceans unit of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) in Aberdeen is currently carrying out work to identify possible SPAs in the marine environment. Currently, we are working towards identification of appropriate seaward boundary extensions to existing breeding seabird colony SPAs, which would provide for essential maintenance activities such as bathing, preening and courtship displays. Seaward boundary extensions to existing breeding seabird colony SPAs are currently being considered for certain species and of varying distances from the shore, for example, Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin and Northern Gannet (McSorley *et al.* 2003), and Northern Fulmar (McSorley *et al*. 2005).

Radio-tracking Manx Shearwaters from the mainland with Bardsey in the background, August 2005 (photo Claire Pollock).

As part of this work, JNCC is studying dispersion patterns of 'rafting' Manx Shearwaters in waters adjacent to colonies with a view to identifying possible seaward boundary extensions to existing terrestrial SPAs. There are currently four SPAs for Manx shearwaters: Skomer, Skokholm and Middleholm, (151,000 pairs); Rum (120,000 pairs); Aberdaron Coast and Bardsey Island (16,183 pairs); and St Kilda (4,803 pairs) (Stroud *et al*. 2001, with updated population estimates from Mitchell *et al.* 2004). Each of these hosts more than 1% of the estimated world (in this case, biogeographic) population of 338,000 – 411,000 pairs, and thus qualify for SPA status (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Stroud *et al.* 2001). This suite of SPAs currently holds over 71% of the world's and 99% of Great Britains's breeding population of Manx Shearwaters.

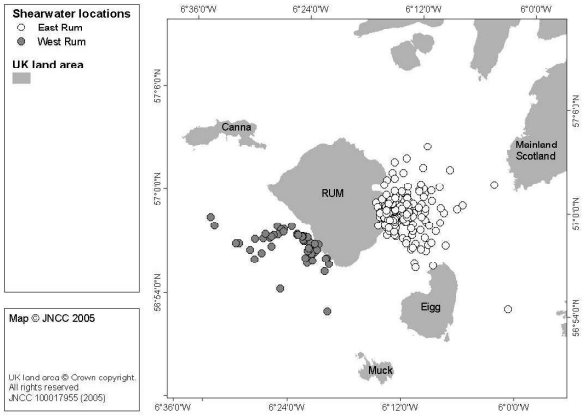

Figure 2. The distribution of rafting Manx shearwaters recorded by observers radiotracking on the west and east of Rum in 2004.

During the breeding season Manx Shearwaters form large 'rafts' at dusk around their colonies, formed before the birds come ashore during darkness (Brooke 1990). Determining the locations of these rafts, based on direct visual observations at this time of day, is not possible because rafts occur at dusk and often persist well after dark. In 2003, a JNCC radio-tracking pilot project was carried out on Skomer, with support from the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW). Results suggested that radio-telemetry was a very promising method for determining the location of the dusk aggregations, with tagged breeding Manx Shearwaters regularly using the waters adjacent to the colony prior to coming ashore to attend the nest. This radio-telemetry work continued in 2004 at the Manx Shearwater colony on Rum (Figure 2), with the support of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and CCW, and continued in the summer of 2005 on Bardsey with the support of CCW and the Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory. Determining the locations of these dusk aggregations has allowed us to identify possible seaward extensions to the existing SPA boundaries, thereby according these internationally important populations of birds some protection on land and at sea. Based on this work, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which includes representatives of the UK nature conservation agencies, has endorsed our recommendation that existing SPA colonies for Manx Shearwaters be extended by at least 4 km into the marine environment and further (at the discretion of the relevant country

agency), where the available information justifies this (out to 9 km in the case of Bardsey).

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have helped in the Manx Shearwater work, especially Juan Brown (Skomer), Ed Hawam, Sean Morris and Andrew Ramsey (Rum) and Steve Stansfield and Adrian George (Bardsey). Thanks also to Helen Baker, Colin Barton, Matt Davies, Ben Dean, Tim Dunn, Ian Mitchell, Sue O'Brien, Matt Parsons, Claire Pollock, Ailsa Reid, Andy Webb and Andrea Woodward for their help in the field.

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For more information about Marine SPAs, please visit: http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1414

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POTENTIAL COASTAL AND MARINE NATIONAL PARKS IN SCOTLAND

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has been asked by environment and rural affairs minister Ross Finnie to provide him with advice on potential sites and scope of a new Coastal and Marine National Park in Scotland. The advice is to be submitted by the end of March and will be subject to wide public consultation if the minister decides to proceed with establishing a park in 2008.

Wrasse: a typical species which is likely to benefit from the development of marine parks (Graham Saunders).

A list of potential sites was been compiled, including locations in Argyll, Lochaber and Skye, the Northwest Highland Coast, the Western Isles, Shetland, and the Solway, Clyde and Moray Firths, and out of these SNH will suggest priority areas for consideration as a future coastal and marine national park.

The locations were identified using a number of factors, such as the area's importance for wildlife, landscape and the historic environment, the range of opportunities it provides for people to access and enjoy the natural and cultural heritage, and its potential for management as a National Park.

SNH Chairman John Markland said: "This is a very exciting opportunity for Scotland, and SNH has been delighted to take on this task. National Park designation is a great accolade and the selected area should benefit from an increased profile and the strengthening of management and associated resource inputs. This is also an opportunity to raise awareness of Scotland's rich and diverse coastal and marine natural heritage."

As well as carrying out its own assessment of a potential park, SNH gathered external opinions and ideas from members of the public through meetings in coastal areas as well as two seminars in Inverness and Glasgow. SNH has also written to over 300 people to seek views on

the park, while a stakeholder group of national coastal and marine interest groups, as well as SNH's website, help to provide a forum for discussion and feedback.

For more information on the work SNH has carried out on development of a coastal and marine national park in Scotland look up www.snh.org.uk and go to 'c' in the A-Z

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SCOTLAND'S BREEDING SEABIRDS AS BIODIVERSITY INDICATORS

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (http://www.biodiversityscotland.gov.uk) includes the identification of a set of practical indicators which will allow measurement and reporting of progress in achieving the Strategy's biological objectives, and measure parameters such as species populations, species status and species diversity. One of the proposed indicators is Scotland's breeding seabird populations.

The JNCC's Seabird Colony Team, based at Aberdeen, along with RSPB and Scottish Natural Heritage, are currently developing an analysis of trends in breeding seabirds in Scotland, showing patterns of change in their abundance and demonstrating their utility as an indicator of biodiversity. The analysis will be based upon statistical modelling of individual population trends for 12 seabird species and will also look at trends of selected species groups, such as sandeel-specialists and discard-feeders.

These 'Seabird Indicators' will be derived mainly from data from the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP), co-ordinated by JNCC, and with the input from a great many partners, and a dedicated group of volunteer counters, without whom the SMP would be much less complete.

The SMP has provided annual estimates of colony size (and breeding success, adult survival, etc) for a sample of colonies around Britain and Ireland since 1986. Since data from the SMP is updated annually, it is envisaged that the indicator using SMP data will also be updated annually. This is the case with other indicators that are already starting to use data from the SMP, including those for the UK Government's Sustainable Development Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy for England, currently under development.

Although there are many challenges that need to be resolved in the interpretation of such indicators, they are undoubtedly a high-profile mechanism for raising the profile of seabirds and their changing fortunes in the minds of decision makers and the public at large.

Partners of the SMP are: Scottish Natural Heritage, Countryside Council for Wales, English Nature, Environment and Heritage Service (Northern Ireland), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, The Seabird Group, British Trust for Ornithology, Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group, BirdWatch Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service (Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government – Republic of Ireland).

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PROPOSED CLOSURE OF CEH RESEARCH STATIONS

On December the 8th the Natural Environment Research Council released a statement of intent which proposed the closure of four of the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology research stations (Banchory, Dorset, Monks Wood and Oxford) and the loss of up to 200 members of staff out of a total work force of 600 (http://www.nerc.ac.uk/consult/ceh/). This has been widely objected to by a number of environmental and non-governmental organisations and has also been raised in parliament as an important issue. The consultation process was officially closed on Feb 15th 2006 and NERC council will reconvene on March 8th to discuss their proposals. The Seabird Group has written to NERC outlining their objections to the closure of Banchory Station. The letter, which was sent to Professor Alan Thorpe of NERC, was as follows:

16 January 2006

Dear Professor Thorpe

Closure of CEH Banchory

The Seabird Group is a non-governmental organisation concerned with the science, conservation and promotion of seabirds. We are an international group centred on the UK, primarily due to UK's importance in the context of the world's seabirds. We were stunned by the recent announcement of the proposed closure of the Brathens site near Banchory and its likely implications for CEH's seabird research and are writing to add our concerns to those of the many others that will have written in the context of the wider closures proposed for CEH by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

Research on seabirds has been carried out by CEH Banchory more or less since its foundation. The list of seabird publications by researchers based at this site is probably unmatched by any other UK based institute and features ground-breaking research on puffins and many other seabirds, on the development of monitoring techniques and long-term studies of seabird breeding biology. The researchers at Banchory have continued in this mould to develop their studies and most recently have been working on the effects of the main drivers on seabird population size that occur away from the colony: fish biology (and the effects of fisheries) and climate change.

It has become particularly pertinent and important to understand and disentangle the effects of these indirect effects on seabird numbers. If these were not to be disentangled then there is a strong possibility that fishery closures (or other management action) could occur that neither would benefit seabirds nor the fishery being managed. Equally, choosing not to take action by attributing deteriorating seabird conservation to climate change might mean that possibilities for management intervention would be lost.

We understand that there may be plans to maintain CEH's seabird monitoring capacity at a fairly basic level. While this may be welcome, this misses the main, vital work being carried out by CEH's researchers on climate change and fisheries effects on seabirds. We note that if the current researchers are to continue this work, they would need to relocate elsewhere and we would have severe doubts that the team carrying out this research would stay together through this given the one-third reduction in overall staff numbers that appears also to be occurring in CEH. This is the only major team studying the diverse effects of fisheries and climate change on seabirds in the temperate north-east Atlantic and there is a great risk of dispersal of researchers to other countries should the move occur.

The considerable advantage of having this science based in northeast Scotland, with easy access to most of the main seabird colonies in the UK and in close proximity to the Fisheries Research Laboratory and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's Seabird and Cetaceans Unit in Aberdeen would be lost. We note some press statements about NERC moving from "site"-based research to "programme"-based research. This seems to entirely miss the point that world-class research is by people and that people and teams are not just commodities that can be traded and moved around at will if their science quality and output is to be maintained.

We are not experts on the funding of science nor on the economics of running research organisations, but we find it extraordinary that these dramatic overall changes in CEH that will cost a minimum of £45 million to address a current annual overspend of £1.2 million.

We urge you to reverse the proposed closure of CEH Banchory and avoid the consequent risk of devastating UK's main strategic long-term seabird research programme. We realise that NERC's budget for CEH is not entirely in NERC's hands, so I am copying this letter to the Office of Science and Technology and the two most relevant local politicians to the Banchory site, Sir Robert Smith MP and Mike Rumbles MSP. We may also use this letter in the context of media inquiries.

Yours sincerely

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BREEDING SEASON UPDATES

A SUMMARY OF SEABIRD BREEDING ON SKOMER ISLAND IN 2005

2005 was one of the best seabird breeding seasons on record on Skomer, with no prolonged periods of stormy weather and an apparent plentiful supply of fish.

Most striking was the massive increase in Guillemots – by 39% on 2004. At 19,711 individuals, this is the highest count since records began, and the biggest annual increase ever recorded (Figure 1). The first significant increase in study plot counts (by 15% overall) occurred since 1999. Is it possible that the observed increases are a result of influxes of birds from colonies further north and east which experienced total breeding failure in 2004? With over a million birds out there, even if only a tiny percentage of birds moved between colonies a significant change in numbers could be observed.

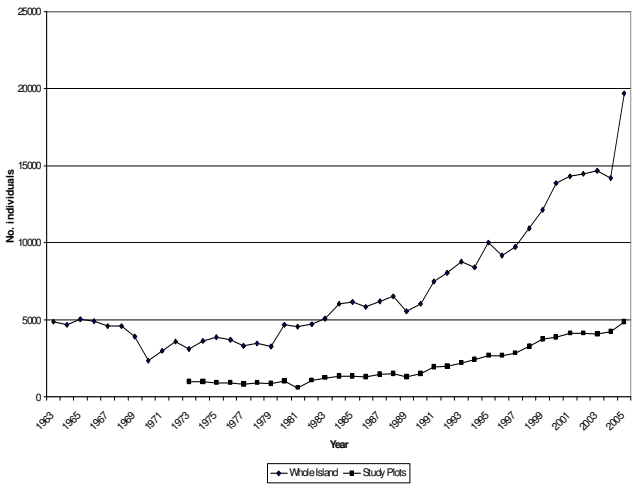
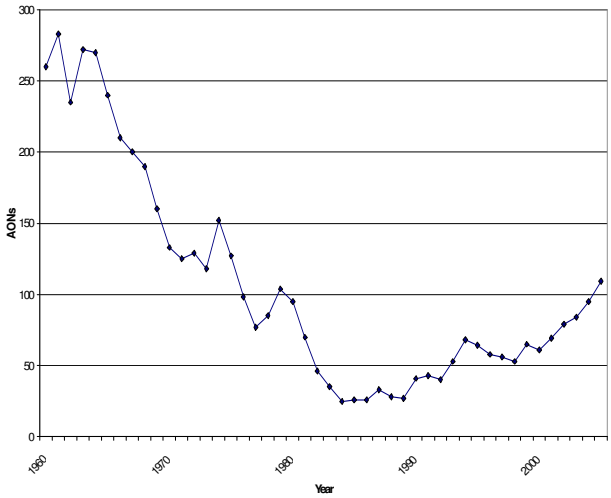


Figure 1. Guillemot numbers on Skomer Island 1963-2005 and study plot counts 1973-2005.

Razorbills also experienced a sharp increase in numbers (by 27% on 2004), and at 5759 were also at their most numerous.

The Lesser Black-backed Gull estimate was an increase of 20% on 2004 (13,537 pairs), and the breeding success (0.56) was the highest for some time. Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls also experienced above-average productivity (at 0.87 and 1.40 respectively), and the breeding population of the latter was the highest for 30 years (109 Apparently Occupied Nests, Figure 2).

Figure 2. Great Black-backed Gull breeding numbers on Skomer Island 1960-2005.



Kittiwakes bounced back from the blip of 2004 (2281 AON counted), and a breeding success of 1.01 is the highest since records began (in 1989).

Puffins enjoyed their third best breeding season on record (productivity 0.84), and a maximum spring count of 10,717 was the second highest since records began (in 1989).

The only blot on the copy book was a below-average Manx Shearwater productivity (0.56), though eight years of playback data from 18 study plots suggest an increase in breeding numbers.

Acknowledgements
Much of the seabird monitoring on Skomer Island is carried out by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales and Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology under JNCC contract.

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HANDA'S SKUAS 2004-2005

Following the recent crash of the Shetland Great skua colonies, younger, southern colonies such as St Kilda and Handa (supporting 212 pairs in 2005) have become increasingly important in ensuring the species' future in the UK. Handa's bonxies produced 0.88 chicks per pair in 2004 making it the most productive colony in Britain. We have been studying the breeding and feeding ecology of Great and Arctic skuas on the island for the last 3 years. Trevor Jones monitored the entire Arctic and Great skua colonies in 2003. (See Newsletter No. 96, p1-3.) Since 2004 our research has been supported by funding from SNH and a grant from the seabird group.

In 2004 research focused on the interaction between bonxies and Great black-backed gulls (GBBs). The 2 species nest in close proximity on Handa, with some nests only 15m apart. Results from behavioural observations showed that number and proximity of GBBs altered adult bonxie foraging behaviour, with increased pressure to be on territory guarding chicks. Proportions of addled eggs for pairs near GBBs were five times that of pairs nesting away from GBBs, possibly due to increased disturbance during incubation. The former were observed to spend less time incubating.

Adult bonxie displaying (Trevor Jones 2004)

Other interesting interactions were also witnessed, for example a GBB taking a fledgling over to the bonxie club-site and appearing to antagonise the birds, a risky strategy since predated GBB fledglings and juveniles were found in bonxie territories in 2004 and 2005.

Since 2004 we have fitted bonxie (and in 2005 Arctic) chicks with large Canadian colour-rings that can be read with binoculars. These rings, being simpler to read than 4 colour-rings, have made it easier to identify fledglings and so monitor productivity and should increase information on emigration to other colonies and monitoring of chicks returning as adults to Handa to breed.

In 2005 our focus was on Bonxie diet and chick growth. Unfortunately, in keeping with this year's trend productivity fell by over 90% with the majority of pairs failing at chick stage, making our chick growth data incomparable with last year's. Increases in egg predation were also observed in both skua species as well as more chicks being left unattended, with the same pairs exhibiting very different behaviour to last year. Lay date although not later as in many seabirds this year, was compressed into a single, high peak, suggesting that normally earlier breeding birds had waited for conditions to improve before laying.

Arctic skua chick with BTO and colour rings (Claire Smith 2005)

Collection of pellets along transects (begun in 2003) reveals that birds make up over 60% of Bonxie diet, with many birds having a 'generalist' diet comprised of a mixture of fish, bird, rabbit, molluscs and crustaceans. Preliminary analysis of otoliths collected from pellets this year suggest that the fish that Handa's Bonxies mainly feed on are Norway Pout and Whiting. These fish swim at depths of

30-100m and so the birds probably obtain them as discards.

Arctic Skua productivity this year was half that of 2004 although levels of post-fledgling mortality (caused by bonxies picking off fledglings) were slightly lower as less bonxies were on territory during the Arctic fledging period. This year we developed a standardised methodology for recording post-fledgling mortality.

Arctics either produce very small pellets or none at all, due to their small size and that the majority of their food is obtained through kleptoparasitism. However, this year they were eating a higher proportion of birds on territory including, wood pigeon, rock dove, snipe and meadow pipits.

Our project will continue to monitor diet and foraging behaviour using radio-tracking of adults Bonxies, observations and pellet collection in 2006. As well as continuing to monitor chick growth and productivity of both species.

The Handa Island Skua Monitoring Programme would also like to thank the Highland Ringing Group and the Seabird Group for funding equipment costs.

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ORKNEY SEABIRDS IN 2005

Red-throated Diver

On Hoy, 138 sites were checked of which 57 were occupied although at five of these only a scrape was found and it was probable that no eggs were laid. Nineteen nests failed (12 during incubation, four at the chick stage and three unknown) while the other 33 were successful in rearing 41 chicks (25 x b/1 and 8 x b/2). Productivity per occupied site was therefore 0.72 and per successful site, 1.24. The equivalent figures in 2004 were 0.91 and 1.38 so that 2005 was a slightly less successful season than the previous one.

In the West Mainland, 16 pairs reared 12 young to fledging or near-fledging, a productivity of 0.75, again somewhat down on last year's figure of 1.00.

On Rousay, four nests were monitored of which one failed, two nests reared b/1 and one reared b/2. The single site on Shapinsay was not occupied this year.

The excellent breeding success of this species in 2004 was an anomaly in what was a desperately bad season for most sandeel feeders. 2005 has seen a return to more normal, but nevertheless good, level of success.

Fulmar

On Eynhallow, there were 88 nests from which 25 chicks hatched and 16 young fledged, a productivity of 0.18. Many of the failures seemed to occur early in the breeding cycle and data from nest loggers suggest that birds are being left incubating for too long by their mates and finally give up before the partner returns from foraging, thus leaving eggs open to predation. Once a chick had hatched, its chances of survival were greater than in 2004 (64% compared to 27%). Of those nests that failed with young chicks, it was noticeable that a second adult was never seen at the nest.

On the Mainland, 374 nests were monitored at three sites. One of these sites was in the West Mainland, where at Costa Head, 52 young were reared from 120 nests (productivity 0.43). In the East Mainland, 82 young fledged from 164 nests at Mull Head (productivity 0.50) and 40 young from 90 nests at Gultak (productivity 0.44). Mean productivity at these Mainland sites was therefore 0.47, a very considerable improvement on the 2004 figure of 0.08.

On Papa Westray, 82 AONs produced 22 chicks, a productivity of 0.27.

On Rousay, there were 56 AONs in the study area, 23 young remaining on 5th August but observations could not be continued after that date. If all these young fledged, productivity would have been 0.41.

On North Ronaldsay, 54 chicks survived to the ringing stage at the end of August but the original number of AONs was unknown.

On Hoy, the two plots at the Old Man and the Bay of Creekland held 116 AONs from which 26 young were reared, a productivity of 0.22.

Reports from Shapinsay indicated a normal start to the season but with very few chicks in nests by August.

On Copinsay, 417 AONs were recorded on 18th May compared to 1182 in 1999; however, this year's count was probably too early to be comparable.

In summary, the productivity figures for this season show marked variability around the islands varying from a low of 0.18 on Eynhallow to 0.5 at Mull Head, East Mainland. All, however, show an improvement on last year's record lows. Fulmars feed not on sandeels but on plankton and on discards from fishing boats. Last year's very poor breeding success was thought to be possibly the result of warmer sea temperatures causing a decrease in plankton availability. Why we should be seeing such variability in Fulmar breeding success in different parts of the islands in 2005 is unclear.

Gannet

The new colony on Westray continues to thrive, increasing to 27 AONs and getting 14 chicks through to 2nd September.

Shag

Five monitored nests on Papa Westray reared eight chicks, a productivity of 1.60, the only productivity data we have for this species.

Elsewhere, a visit to Halcro Head, South Ronaldsay found 13 nests in which there were the following broods - 2 x b/1; 4 x b/2; 1 x b/3; 1 x b/4; and the following clutches – 1 x c/1; 1 x c/2; 2 x c/3; 1 x c/4.

The general impression on Rousay was of fewer nests than usual while on Swona, on 29th June, 28 nests were located with some old, traditional sites found to be unoccupied. Four broods of three and two brood of two chicks were ringed while three other nests were just at the small young, incubation and even the building stage.

49 nests were counted on Auskerry in early July and 85 on Copinsay on 18th May (70 in 1999).

Anecdotal information from Shapinsay suggested that Shags did well although there was evidence of the usual extended breeding season being even more strung out this year as one pair was still found to be laying eggs in August. Similarly, on Copinsay, a nest found as late as 9th August had two just-hatched young.

Cormorant

On Taing Skerry, there were c.150 active nests, five nests still having just half-grown chicks at the end of August. More birds seem to be nesting later at this site every year. The declining colony on Seal Skerry, North Ronaldsay held just six nests on 17th June.

Arctic Skua

Numbers of breeding pairs decreased at all sites and breeding began very late. The first nest found as part of a RSPB research project was not until 7th June, some three weeks later than expected. Eight islands were visited in order to set up study areas but, in the event, only three areas held enough birds to establish such sites – Papa Westray, Eday and Rousay.

On Papa Westray, birds settled very late, there being only 10 nestss by 10th June but with a further 19 pairs settling by 16th June and new nests still being found as late as 6th July! Eventually, 26 nests were found in the study area and 40 eggs were laid but only seven chicks were found and only four fledged. Small droppings found in four of the nests indicated that chicks had hatched in them but had been quickly predated. The productivity of 0.15 per nest in the study area was identical to last year on the Hill as a whole. This year, on the North Hill as a whole, there were a further 11 AOTs making an overall total of 37 from which a total of 11 chicks fledged, giving a decidedly better productivity of 0.30.

On Eday, there were eight AOTs within the study plot and seven nests were found; a further six birds were present but did not set up

territory. 11 eggs were laid but only three chicks hatched. However, all three of these chicks survived to fledging. Productivity was 0.43 per nest.

On Rousay, there were nine AOTs in the study plot and six nests were found; a further four birds were present but did not set up territory. Ten eggs were laid, five chicks were found and three fledged. Productivity was therefore 0.50 per nest.

Overall in these three study areas, 39 nests were located, 61 eggs were laid, 15 chicks were found and eight chicks fledged successfully. Mean productivity was therefore 0.20.

In the Lushan valley in the West Mainland, birds settled so late that it was abandoned as a possible study site. Eventually, however, 8-10 pairs did attempt to breed and raised at least three chicks. 11 more pairs were located on the Birsay Moors RSPB reserve but their breeding success was not known.

On Flotta, there were five AOTs on the Golta peninsula and three nests were found but their outcome was unknown. Also on Flotta, the West Hill held c.20 birds in late June but, although there was some territorial behaviour, no nests could be found.

On Hoy, the putative Binga Fea study plot never held more than a single bird. Elsewhere on the island, however, there were apparently more pairs than last year but no data on breeding success were available.

On Rothiesholm, Stronsay, only six AOTs (five nests) were located in this colony that just a few years ago held more than 40 pairs. A single pair on North Ronaldsay reared one chick. On Shapinsay, no birds at all bred on the East Hill.

In summary, Arctic Skuas are one of the species being worst affected by the current food - shortage problems. Numbers of breeding birds have plummeted all over Orkney and although breeding success of the birds that did appear is decidedly better than last year, this species is in trouble and is going to take a long time to recover.

Great Skua

On Hoy, there was an improvement on the situation in 2004. The breeding season was very late, about two weeks behind normal. In the study plot at Stourdale, only 17 territories had been established by 24th May although a further 17 pairs were present in the area. On 6th July 38 AOTs were located compared to 45 in 2004, 51 in 2003 and 65 in 2000. However, by 27th July, only 22 territories remained occupied. Of these, one had b/2 and 15 had b/1 while one nest still contained a single egg. The latter nest failed but all the young are thought to have survived to fledging, some not doing so until early September. The remaining five territories appeared to be occupied but no eggs or young were ever found. Productivity was therefore 0.45, double the figure for 2004.

On Papa Westray, eight chicks were reared from 14 AOTs, a productivity of 0.57 compared to 0.27 in 2004.

On the Birsay Moors RSPB reserve there were 25 AONs but no information on productivity was obtained. On Rousay, subjective impressions on the western maritime heaths indicated that few young had been reared. However, on North Ronaldsay, a single pair reared two chicks, the first time birds have bred successfully on the island.

2005 thus seems to have been a much better one for Bonxies but numbers are depressed and breeding success is not at the levels of a few years ago.

Black-headed Gull

Orkney's largest colony at the Mill Dam, Shapinsay held 620 AONs and reared at least 150 chicks, well down on last year's record production of 400-500 chicks from 425 AONs.

On North Ronaldsay, numbers in the Hooking Loch colony were down and few young were fledged.

On Egilsay, they seemed very unsettled, moving between four different sites laying a few eggs and moving on before settling near Cott where 21 nests were found. A few small young were seen but none fledged.

Black-headed Gulls, unlike most of our seabirds, are not affected by sandeel availability and, other than weather, we are unsure what controls their breeding success.

Common Gull

On Burray, the Littlequoy colony held c.110 adults on 10th June and 55 chicks were ringed. Success appeared good as large chicks and flying young were noted on 25th June. Nearby, a colony at Klondyke had large, nearly-fledged chicks on 17th June. Also nearby, a colony of 30 adults had failed by 8th June although another small colony of just 16 adults did rear a few young.

In the East Mainland, two colonies had contrasting success. One of 170 birds at Sandside, Deerness seemed to rear reasonable numbers of young but another of 60 adults at Craebreck, Holm appeared to fail totally.

On the Pentland Skerries, a visit on 15th July revealed a colony of 300 adults with 100 fledged young and a further eight unfledged chicks ringed. There were eight AOTs on Copinsay.

On Hoy, the Whaness colony held c.180 AONs on 8th May. The first fledged chick was seen on 13th June and two days later, 54 near-fledged young were counted, a productivity of 0.3. At the Sandy Loch colony, there were 44 AONs on 18th May and 42 fledged young by 29th June included several broods of three; productivity was 0.95.

On North Hill, Papa Westray, there were only eight AONs and only a single chick was reared. In the Lamb Head area of Stronsay on 19th June, there were 75 adults in the colony and 50 chicks were ringed.

On The Noup, Westray, a colony held 75 adults on 2nd July; 40 young had already fledged and 21 unfledged birds were ringed.

On the Birsay Moors RSPB reserve in the West Mainland there were seven colonies. Three of these held 83 AONs while the other four held 590 individual adults. The Loons reserve held 357 AONs and Loch of Banks, 32 AONs. At none of these was breeding success data collected. On the Hobbister Reserve, 66 individual adults were counted.

Common Gulls, like Black-headed Gulls, are unaffected by shortages of sandeels. They appear to be dependent on terrestrial invertebrates, especially earthworms, whose availability is controlled by soil dampness. 2005 was an average year for this species.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

On Papa Westray's North Hill reserve, four chicks fledged from ten AONs, a productivity of 0.40. On Westray, on 2nd July, a colony of 15 pairs was located in the Fitty Hill area but only two chicks could be found.

Mixed colonies of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Mull Head, Deerness and Swart Howe, Holm had good breeding success with many near-fledged and fledged young in early July.

At a colony on the Birsay Moors RSPB reserve, 150 adults were present on 14th April, 110 on 28th April and only 65 on 7th June. Some young did fledge but the colony obviously declined markedly during the course of the season. Elsewhere on the reserve, three colonies held 425 individual adults and two others held 56 AONs but there was no information on breeding success. On the Hobbister reserve 352 adults were recorded.

Herring Gull

On North Hill, Papa Westray, there were 10 AONs from which only two chicks fledged, a productivity of 0.20, only a little better than last year's figure of 0.13.

On The Noup, Westray, a small colony of 12 adults was located on 2nd July; 20 chicks were found. To the south in the Fitty Hill area a colony of 25 pairs had 17 ringable chicks.

In the Lamb Head area of Stronsay there were 100 adults in the colony on 19th June and 88 well-grown chicks were ringed.

As noted above, mixed colonies of Herring and Lesser Black-backs had good breeding success at Mull Head, Deerness and Swart Howe, Holm

while at Sandside, Deerness there were 15 Herring Gull nests with large young present. 42 nests were counted in a colony at Burray Ness on 15th June but their outcome is not known.

At the Birsay Moors colony noted above, 80 adults were present on 14th April, 60 on 28th April and only 35 by 7th June although at least some young fledged. Elsewhere on the Birsay Moors reserve, there were 51 AONs in three colonies and 169 individual adults in two others. On the Hobbister reserve, 300 adults were recorded, while on Marwick Head there were 13 AONs.

Great Black-backed Gull

On North Hill, Papa Westray, 31 AONs produced 13 chicks, a productivity of 0.42, down on last year's 0.62. A small colony in the Fitty Hill area of Westray held 10 pairs on 2nd July and five chicks were ringed.

On Rothiesholm, Stronsay, 500 adults were present in the colony on 19th June but there were fewer nests than expected and what chicks were found were very small; only nine were ringed.

On Swona, the number of nesting birds was well down and only 30 chicks were ringed compared to 65 in 2004 and 46 in 2003. There was a similar story at Mull Head, Deerness with numbers of breeding pairs considerably reduced. The Copinsay colony that once seemed to be receiving birds leaving colonies elsewhere in the south isles, held only 288 AOTs compared to 695 in 1999.

On Hoy, the once enormous Stourdale colony held only 72 AONs although this was slightly up on last year's 65. 15 fledged chicks were seen on 22nd July.

On the Birsay Moors reserve, there were 11 colonies; four of these held 34 AONs while the other seven held 254 adults. The Hobbister reserve held 34 individual adults.

Fitty Hill, Westray held about 50 adults on 13th July with small numbers of fledged and near-fledged chicks.

A new nesting site was the Outer Holm of Stromness where there were two nests on 3rd June.

This is another species that is really struggling at present. The once huge colonies on the Calf of Eday, Stronsay, Copinsay and Hoy are now but a shadow of their former selves and show little sign of recovering

Kittiwake

This year's breeding season was very late, probably at least two and perhaps three weeks later than normal, probably due to a lack of available food early in the season. However, there was then a flurry of activity as sandeels seemed to become available and were being reported by fishermen in many areas. Unfortunately, in some areas, the food supply seemed to dry up and birds eventually struggled to rear young although, in others, breeding success was reasonably good.

A total of 575 AONs were monitored by JNCC at five sites on the Mainland, three in the West and two in the East. Overall, 422 young were reared, a productivity of 0.73. The breakdown at individual sites was as follows:

Plot	Nests/ Productivity	Fledged
Marwick Head	130 0.78	101
Mull Head	97 0.76	74
Gultak	57 0.72	41
Row Head	119 0.76	91
Costa Head	172 0.67	115

The mean productivity of 0.73 at these five sites contrasted sharply with 2004 when not a single chick fledged from monitored nests on these cliffs! It also came as a surprise because it was

felt that the very late start to their season would preclude such numbers of young being produced. However, the birds stuck at it and produced the goods!

Elsewhere, however, the picture was not as optimistic. On Fowl Craig, Papa Westray, 84 monitored AONs fledged just three chicks, a productivity of just 0.04 and an indication of just how poor food supplies were in this area this summer. The only good thing that could be said of this species on Papay in 2005 was that it fared marginally better than it did in 2004 when no young at all were reared.

On Rousay, 83 monitored AONs produced 23 young, a productivity of 0.28, an improvement on the 2004 figure of 0.04 but still pretty dismal.

A visit to Westray's Noup Cliffs on 13th July gave a subjective impression of most ongoing nests having single chicks with reasonable numbers having two; no broods of three were seen.

42 nests were counted on Auskerry on 9th July but most were still on eggs or very small chicks. There were only 433 AONs on Copinsay, a 90% reduction on the figure of 4256 AONs recorded in 1999.

On Shapinsay, detailed data were unavailable but a high failure rate was noted and young were still in the nest in early August.

On Muckle Skerry (Pentland Skerries) a sample of 39 nests was observed during a visit on 15th July. Nine had already failed, seven had still incubating or brooding adults, seven contained b/1 and 18 had b/2. On nearby Swona, on 29th June, the small colony of 20 nests comprised three nests with very small young, seven still with eggs and 10 that were empty.

2005 was thus a decidedly better year than 2004 but it should be remembered that the better breeding success in many areas is from a vastly reduced number of birds actually attempting to nest as the Copinsay figures clearly show!

Sandwich Tern

There was a small colony at a new site on Lamb Holm this year. It held 18 nests on 16th June when 12 chicks were ringed. However, only one large chick could be seen on 12th July.

Arctic Tern

In general terms, there was a north/south split in the success of our Arctic Terns in 2005 with colonies in the south performing decidedly better than those in the north, the latter failing almost completely.

On Papa Westray, 1050 adults were counted in four sub-colonies on the North Hill reserve on 10th July. During that visit, sample counts gave 32 nests with c/1, 121 nests with c/2 and only one nest with c/3. On that date, chicks were just hatching and none were seen that were more than c.4 days old. Thereafter, however, the colonies began to decline and chicks began to die so that only a single fledged chick was ever seen on the whole reserve! Most adults had left by the beginning of August, leaving behind eggs and chicks.

Elsewhere on Papa Westray, the Backiskaill colony held 70 adults on 27th July and 150 on 3rd August (possibly the result of failed birds from elsewhere being attracted to an ongoing colony). 12 adults were still defending territory at the end of August but no fledged chicks were seen. Offshore, on the Holm, there were three sub-colonies totalling 170 adults on 1st July. Two of the sub-colonies were still ongoing on 23rd July but no chicks were seen.

On neighbouring Westray, a colony at Aikerness held held 500 adults on 2nd July and 75 nests were found, 63 with c/1 and 12 with c/2. By 11th July, only 250 adults were present with 10 chicks and lots of eggs but nothing remained on 25th July. At The Noup, the colony held 250 adults on 2nd July and 25 nests were found, all with c/2. By mid-July only 80 adults remained and no young fledged from this site. A colony of 100 adults at Tuquoy Bay on 8th June and 220 adults on 13th July but had declined to 40 adults by 26th July and no chicks could be found. At The Ouse, 48 adults were present on 8th June, only 30 by 2nd July. A single nest with c/3 was found on 11th July but nothing remained two weeks later.

On North Ronaldsay, the largest colony was at Loch Park where there were 400 adults present

and 43 chicks were ringed on 8th July. Many more nests with eggs were present but Bonxie predation was quite heavy and two days of heavy rain in mid-July resulted in total failure. Elsewhere on the island, there were four other small colonies, the largest being one of 60 adults at Trinley. However, only two fledged young were ever seen although a large chick was found at Brides Ness as late as early August and may have fledged by the following week.

On Auskerry, birds arrived on the island later than usual but soon disappeared and although a visit between 8th-10th July found 10 adults, none were nesting.

On Rousay, three small colonies were located but breeding success was unknown. On nearby Egilsay, a colony on the Manse Loch beach held 90 adults on 7th July; 10 nests were located one of which had a newly-hatched chick. On 27th July, six young had fledged and there were still six unfledged young of various ages plus seven nests still with eggs. The final outcome was unknown.

A colony of 40 pairs on the Furrowend Ayre, Shapinsay reared at least 12 young.

Colonies in the South Isles fared somewhat better but things were by no means rosy! On Swona on 29th June, there were five sub-colonies with a total of 1000 adults. 148 chicks were ringed but the great majority were just a few days old and many birds were still on eggs. By 15th July, the numbers of adults in these colonies had declined to 710; a further 70 chicks were ringed and 11 fledged young were noted. Also on 15th July, the Muckle Skerry held 1100 adults in three sub-colonies; 158 chicks were ringed but the colonies were very staggered in their breeding stage, from very large chicks to birds still on eggs. Flotta's Golta peninsula was visited on 7th July when the colony there held 800 adults and 270 chicks were ringed. The impossibility of re-visiting any of these colonies meant that the final breeding outcome was unknown. However, birds were certainly getting well beyond the stage that most north isles birds reached.

Another south isle, Burray, had contrasting fortunes. A colony at Burray Haas held 400 adults on 21st June and there were many flying young and large chicks there on 12th July; 173 chicks were ringed. However, on the other side of the island, at Littlequoy, a colony that held 300 birds on 16th June was totally deserted by 25th June. Another small colony of 50 adults was present at Klondyke but the outcome was unknown. A little way to the north, on Lamb Holm, there were two small colonies, each with 40 adults on 26th June.

On Hoy, there were just four AONs on 22nd May and three almost-fledged young on 28th July. At Cantick, on 9th June, there were 120 adults but only 15 AONs; six fledged young were seen there on 18th July. Three pairs at Housnea produced at least two fledged chicks.

307 adults were counted on Copinsay on 18th May and about a dozen fledged chicks were seen on 15th August, although at this late date others may have already left. The colonies on the Holms of Stromness held only 27 adults on 3rd June; breeding success was unknown.

Another species in real trouble, Arctic Tern numbers in Orkney have fallen by some 70% over the past 25 years. Although considerable numbers of young were ringed in some of the south isles colonies, the difficulties of getting to some of these sites prevents us from knowing just what the fledging success was and there was a feeling that, even in some of the big colonies, things were going downhill towards the end of the season. It will take a good number of years of much-improved breeding success in order to restore this species' fortunes.

Common Tern

The colony at the old, wooden Lyness Pier was reoccupied this year and c. 30 young fledged from c.30 AONs.

Little Tern

Only a single pair was known to establish territory this year, at a south isles site. Despite all odds, they managed to rear two chicks to fledging!

Guillemot

At Marwick Head, West Mainland, the JNCC monitoring plot held 67 nests from which 22

chicks fledged, a productivity of 0.32. Those at Mull Head, East Mainland, held 74 nests from which 26 chicks fledged, a productivity of 0.35.

On Fowl Craig, Papa Westray, there were 133 nests within the survey plots (177 in 2004) and 29 chicks fledged; productivity 0.29.

On Swona, on 29th June, a small accessible colony that is watched each year held 15 small chicks and at least 15 eggs.

A whole colony count on Copinsay on 18th May (a rather early date) gave a total of 4674 adults compared to 18675 in 1999.

The productivity figures for the Mainland and Papa Westray are barely better than 2004 when a sharp drop to this sort of success level occurred. The mean productivity at Mainland sites between 1986 and 2002, for example, was 0.72.

Unlike their neighbouring Kittiwakes, which of course are splash-divers rather than deep-divers, Guillemots did not seem to delay their breeding season and perhaps suffered as a result.

Razorbill

A difficult species to monitor on Orkney because of its predominantly crevice-nesting habits, the hard data on breeding success data came from Papa Westray where only a single chick fledged from 28 AONs within the survey plots, a productivity of 0.04. However, five other chicks did fledge from the rest of the Fowl Craig.

On Swona, however, although the number of AONs was unknown, 20 chicks were ringed on 29th June.

A whole colony count on Copinsay revealed 322 individual adults compared to 577 in 1999.

Black Guillemot

On North Ronaldsay, the April census recorded 566 individual adults, a record count and 30 birds up on 2004 and well above the 2003 figure of 353. 37 chicks were ringed from 27 nests during July, 10 broods of two and 17 broods of one. However, an extremely late chick was discovered still in a nest on 13th September!

On Papa Westray, the April census found 176 birds around the North Hill compared to 193 in 2004 (not 165 as stated in last year's report). Around the Holm of Papay, the April count numbered 101 (compared to 125 in 2004 and 142 in 2003).

On Auskerry, on 8th July, 27 nests were located. Of these, two had already failed, one's contents could not be seen, four were still incubating c/1, two were incubating c/2, seven contained b/1 and 11 held b/2; 24 chicks were ringed.

Visits to Swona on 29th June and 15th July resulted in 15 nests being located; one had already failed, one still had c/1, one held c/4 (presumably the result of two females laying in the same scrape!), four contained b/1 and eight held b/2; 17 chicks were ringed.

Being primarily Butterfish-feeders, Tysties are much less affected by sandeel shortages than many of our seabirds. Nevertheless, the declines in the Papa Westray area have been very marked over the years and one theory is that birds may have redistributed themselves to North Ronaldsay.

Puffin

Puffin rarely figures in this report because of the inaccessibility of most colonies and their burrow-nesting habits. Anecdotal information in 2005 suggested that numbers on both Hoy and Rousay were up on recent years while on Shapinsay, c.12 pairs on the East Craig was about usual for this site. In contrast, on Copinsay only 69 individuals were counted compared to 205 in 1999; however, it is difficult to have confidence in the meaningfulness of such counts for a species whose colony attendance varies so much according to the time of day.

Acknowledgements

A report of just a few pages like this one belies the fact that an enormous amount of effort goes into collecting the data on which it is based. Hundreds of hours of work are involved and my thanks go to the following people for all their help: Bob Adam, Chris Booth, Peter Breignan, James Cadbury, Mike Cockram, Colin Corse, Keith Fairclough, Derren Fox, Paul Higson, Paul Hollinrake, Jo Hulsman, Andy Knight, Graham

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My sincere apologies for any accidental omissions.

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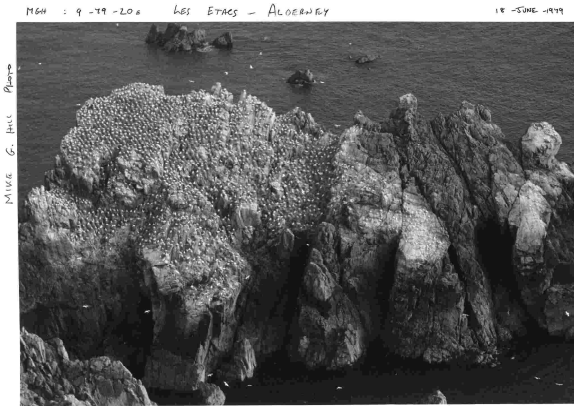
ALDERNEY NESTING GANNETS

The Channel Island of Alderney has had its nesting Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus* counted for the first time in six years. In July this year, an aerial survey of the two Gannet colonies gave a grand total of 7,409 apparently occupied sites, an increase of 24 percent over the 1999 figure.

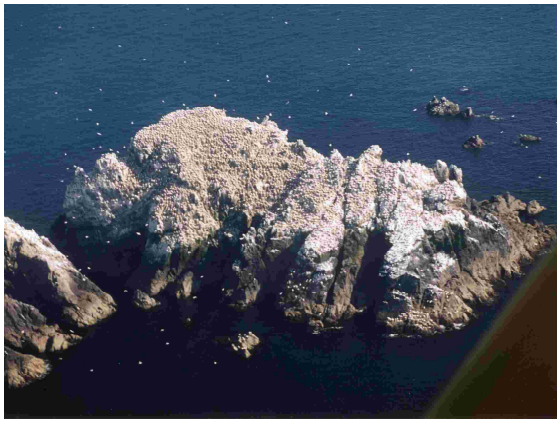
The Gannet colonies are on islets close to Alderney's west coast.The colony on the islet of Ortac appeared to be full in 1999, and numbers were practically unchanged this year at 2,547 apparently occupied sites. Most new nests are in Alderney's other Gannet colony, which is on Les Etacs (also known as the Garden Rocks). This increased from an estimated 3,450 apparently occupied sites in 1999 to 4,862 this year.

But the Les Etacs colony is now at full capacity as well. The census was carried out by the Alderney Ornithological Group. "Thanks to the generosity of a local pilot, we were able to photograph both Gannet colonies from a light aircraft", explained Alderney Ornithological Group member Jeremy Sanders. "Ortac was quite easy to photograph, but the nests on Les Etacs are on different stacks, facing in all directions, and we had to circle a few times to get all the pictures".

Alderney's first recorded nesting Gannet was a single bird on Ortac in 1940. It had a nest with one egg. When islanders returned to Alderney after the war, there were already several hundred Gannets nesting on both Les Etacs and Ortac. "This count is of particular interest, as Alderney's two colonies were the only ones not included in the Seabird 2000 census of British and Irish gannetries" said Alderney Bird Recorder, Mark Atkinson. "And except for one colony in Brittany, they are still the most southerly gannetries on the eastern side of the Atlantic". The previous census, in 1999, was carried out by Jamie Hooper, of La Société Guernesiaise.



Les Etacs Gannet Colony (Mike Hill 1979)



Les Etacs Gannet Colony (Jeremy Sanders 2005)

The two photographs are of the main part of the Les Etacs Gannet colony in 1979 and 2005. The colony has more than doubled in size since 1979 picture. Then it totalled only 1,978 apparently occupied sites. The nesting area has spread from the left-hand side of the picture and now covers the entire length of the rock. "Our survey shows that Alderney has a lot more Gannets than was previously thought", said Jill Watson, former Alderney Bird Recorder. "Keeping track of the changes in the numbers of seabirds is an important part of the work of the Alderney

Ornithological Group, and provides a valuable record for the future".

The standard survey method for counting Gannets is to mark off apparently occupied sites on an enlarged aerial photograph. The nests are hidden from above, so you count each nesting bird, or pair if both birds are present. The nests are packed tightly together, so it's quite a laborious job. An average of several counts is the standard technique. There is always a margin of error.

Alderney's Gannets arrive in late January each year, and leave at the end of September. Each pair of Gannets raises just one youngster. ere are 24 British and Irish gannetries including Les Etacs and Ortac. The largest is on the Scottish island group of St Kilda, with 59,622 apparently occupied sites at the last census. The smallest was a single pair of Gannets on St Margaret's Island in South Wales.

The world population was estimated at 417,000 pairs last year. On that figure, Alderney's two Gannet colonies make up just 1.77 percent of the world's nesting Gannets.

The Alderney Ornithological Group *works to conserve and preserve Alderney's diversity of birds and bird habitats, and to census bird populations.*

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SOOTY TERNS IN THE SEYCHELLES

Sooty Tern breeding season in the Seychelles

Historically, the onset of the Sooty Terns' laying season in the Seychelles has been associated with the onset of the south-east monsoon, with laying commencing in early June, or occasionally late May. This is known from records, going back to the 1920s, from the industry involved in harvesting and sale of eggs in the Seychelles. Laying is preceded by a long period of pre-breeding behaviour, initially involving the assembly of birds near the nesting islands, beginning in late January/February. Later, they begin to fly over the nesting area, initially during the night but subsequently also during the day. In late April/early May some birds land in the nesting area during the night. This becomes increasingly regular, more and more birds become involved and the time spent on the ground increases, with birds eventually settling on the ground during the day. Just before laying commences, Sooty Terns remain on the ground throughout the day. Initially, only a few eggs are laid each day, but the numbers that lay increases very rapidly with the onset of "mass-laying", in which laying is highly synchronised throughout the colony. When this process was monitored in 1973, 75% of the c. 395,000 eggs laid that year were laid in a 9-day period.

This pattern is typical for the major colonies of the Seychelles and Amirantes for which at least outline details are known: Bird, Aride, Recif and Desnoeufs. African Banks appears to differ slightly in timing, with eggs laid earlier there than in the other colonies.

In recent years, however, there has been a tendency towards earlier laying on Bird Island although this has not been a uniform trend. Dates of laying of the first eggs are: 2000 – mid-May, 2001 – 28 April, 2002 – late May, 2003 – 25-26 May, 2004 – 14 May.

The 2005 season on Bird Island

The nesting season of Sooty Terns in the Seychelles in 2005 was unprecedented. In 2005, huge numbers of Sooty Terns arrived over Bird Island in January. They began settling during the day on beaches, on a sandbank at the southern end of the island and at the southern end of the airstrip, but not in the traditional colony area at the north-west of the island. On 17 February an egg was found at the top of the western beach, and on 27 February two eggs were laid at the southern end of the airstrip, with two more subsequently laid on the southern sandbank. On Aride, Sooty Terns also arrived over the island early in January/February.

The large number of Sooty Terns remained over Bird Island into March, when they transferred to the main colony area, landing during the day around midday, with much displaying on the

ground. No eggs were recorded. Later in March the number of birds over the island diminished and this situation prevailed until early May, when they again began landing during the day. Eggs began to be laid in mid-May but only in small numbers, and this continued until early June, when mass-laying began.

On Aride, egg-laying began in the second week of April but similarly lacked its normal synchronicity. This continued into mid-May, when more intensive laying was observed in parts of the island.

Possible factors underlying the 2005 events

In his PhD thesis, Sebastien Jaquement (2005) has shown that Seychelles Sooty Terns normally breed when primary productivity, as determined by satellite measurements of chlorophyll concentrations in surface waters, rises at the onset of the south-east monsoon in the Seychelles area. Primary productivity supports the higher trophic levels on which Sooty Terns and other top marine predators depend for food. The extremely early onset of breeding activity recorded on Bird and Aride in February 2005 may thus reflect an increase in food abundance at this time. Two possible causative factors for such an early increase in food availability are:

1) The tendency towards earlier breeding over the last 5 or so years might be indicative of an earlier increase in primary productivity in recent years than formerly. In this case the 2005 breeding events in February might just be an extreme step in what appears to be a current trend. The replacement of a rapid increase in primary production at the beginning of the south-east monsoon with a more uniform patter of primary productivity could allow Sooty Terns to breed sub-annually. This occurs in other parts of the world, e.g. Ascension Island (Atlantic Ocean), where they breed approximately every nine months. In Seychelles this could result from changes in oceanic conditions, e.g. current directions and strengths, salinity, locations of convergences/divergences, tuna migrations etc., possibly in response to climate change.

Early breeding in 2005 could result from an extreme event that led to an abnormal increase in primary productivity. The obvious candidate is the 26 December 2004 tsunami, generated by the large submarine earthquake of the north-west coast of Sumatra. The tidal wave from this extended to the East African coast. In the Seychelles, some damage was caused on the east coast of Mahe whereas on Bird and Aride its effect was seen as an increase in the number of tidal cycles over a short period on 26 December. Seychelles appeared to escape the full force of the waves, which might have lost energy on their westward passage when they encountered the Seychelles-Mascarene ridge. Turbulence created here and over the Seychelles Bank might have increased nutrient availability at a time when this does not normally happen, leading to a flush in primary productivity to which the birds could have responded by commencing early breeding activity. Such a tsunami-generated flush of productivity would, however, have been temporary, so that any increased availability of food would have been short-lived, perhaps leading to an early curtailment of breeding activity, as was recorded.

2) Alternatively the damage caused by the Tsunami could have been much more severe close to the earthquake region. Knowledge of Sooty Tern, and other seabird, numbers and distribution are more poorly known in the eastern Indian Ocean than in the west. The little information that is available shows that Sooty Terns breed on different schedules on some of the island to the east of Seychelles, for example with evidence of breeding throughout the year in the Lakshadweep and St Brandon. Parts of the Maldives were extensively damaged and the ornithology of this archipelago is not well documented. If an island with an unknown colony was washed over by the tsunami, destroying the Sooty Terns' habitat, birds beginning their breeding cycle in January-February might have moved elsewhere in search of nesting areas. Unfortunately, the birds that settled on Bird Island did not begin incubation, and could not therefore be observed from close range for rings and so we do not know whether these birds comprised any ringed individuals, which would have indicated a Seychelles origin.

There are thoughts that reduced numbers of Sooty Terns are attempting to breed on Bird Island in 2005. If this proves to be the case, a possible explanation could result from these birds' attempted breeding in February (if indeed these were Bird Island birds). During a breeding

cycle, dominant hormones change and at a later stage thyroid hormones increase and stimulate moult. If a proportion of the birds that underwent breeding activity in February reached the stage where moult was initiated, they would not have had time to complete their moult before May, when the main breeding season began. The short interval between February breeding activity and May breeding could have precluded birds that participated in the former attempt from breeding in the latter.

Most of this is highly speculative, and although a few facts and details may be added, the scenarios are likely to remain speculative due to lack of hard evidence. Nevertheless, the 2005 events are fascinating and the timing of breeding in future years will be exciting to follow.

Acknowledgements. I am grateful to Georges and Margaret Norah for providing information on early season events on Bird Island, Dylan Evans for similar information from Aride, and to Marie-France Savy for information from Bird Island on events during the later laying season.

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SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS REPORT

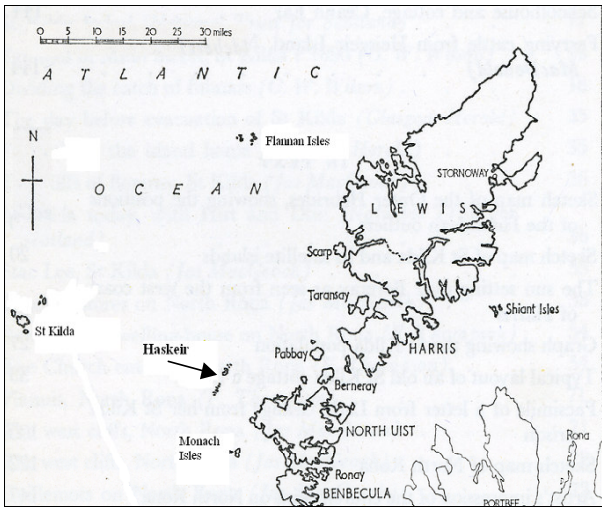
A REPORT ON A RECENT VISIT TO HASKEIR ISLAND, NORTH UIST 26-28TH JUNE 2005

Aims of the expedition

1) To survey and provide a record of all breeding birds.
2) To investigate and prove any possible breeding of Leach's Storm-petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa)*

Description and location

Haskeir or Haisgéir Mhor (*Great Haskeir)* as it is called in Gaelic lies 6½ nautical miles WNW of Griminish Point, North Uist at a latitude of 57º42' N and longitude 7º41' W or at Grid Ref NF615820. The island, which belongs to North Uist Estates is currently designated an S.S.S.I because it is an important Grey Seal rookery and is 41 acres or 16.6 hectares in area, approximately half a mile long and less than a quarter of a mile wide at the widest extremity. It is located 111 km from the deep water of the continental shelf (1000 m isobath).



Map of the Outer Hebrides indicating the location of Haskeir

Haskeir Aag or Haskeir Eagach (*Notched Haskeir*) a group of five jagged rocks rising to a maximum of 83ft are also part of the archipelago. They lie one mile to the south-west across a deep-water channel and have small quantities of breeding seabirds (S.C.R.2002). It is reputed there was once a Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) colony here a long time ago (Freeman 1940).

The island is hornblend Lewisian gneiss with occasional layers of quartz and consists of two main masses: the North Castle Plateau and the Southern mass rising to a maximum of 123ft where the N.L.B (Northern Lighthouse Board) constructed a lighthouse in 1997. Both are separated by a sloping uneven rocky waist where at one point an amazing sea tunnel bisects the island from West to East over which is formed a natural "rock-bridge". According to *The Sailing Directions for the West Coast of Scotland* (Admiralty 1874) the tunnel is 140 ft long and 34 ft broad.

The flat and fertile North Castle Plateau is fortified by a nasty overhanging rock where it drops to the waist leaving the only safe access from the seaward side at the entrance to the East

Liamp geo. There is also another spectacular sea arch at the north end of the island, as well as a collapsed sea cavern and a raised storm beach some 110 ft above the sea. The Southern section has two rounded hills sloping gently eastwards and several flat areas used as "wallows" by grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) in their breeding season.

There is no grazing or pasture on Haskeir but both Scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*) and Sea Arrow-grass (*Triglochin maritima*) are abundant. Vast beds of sea-plantain (*Plantago maritima*) are interspersed with clumps of sea-pink or thrift (*Armeria maritima*) on dark rich peat.

Haskeir is surrounded by amazingly clear ultramarine water and the submerged wall on the North Loch is considered to be one of the best dive sites in the United Kingdom.

Logistics

The party of six successfully landed on the island on the 26th June 2005. It had been planned to stay for a minimum of three nights but this had to be curtailed to two due to the onset of bad whether.

It was a rough crossing and once out of the shelter of Griminish harbour a large swell was running with a fresh south-westerly breeze. The idea of surveying the five Haskeir Eagach rocks en-route had to be abandoned.

A landing was effected at the entrance of the East Liamp Geo, the narrow neck which separates the North Castle Plateau from the rest of the southern end of the island. Once ashore the whole North End is difficult to access from the landward side as the only route up is by negotiating the nasty overhanging rock followed by scrambling up some grassy ledges which were so concentrated in nesting Northern Fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*) any access this way was out of the question. The only option was to swim across the geo in dry suits and scramble up the wet rocks. This was an easier and safer option to gain access to this part of the island.

This obstacle has prevented many naturalists and visitors over the years from reaching the plateau. Even J.A. Harvie-Brown in his well documented visit of 1881 fails to record the presence of a "flat green plateau" with bothy and freshwater spring as he could obviously not access this area sending up instead his friend "U" for a very brief look (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1889). Robert Atkinson also describes in detail how he avoided climbing this rock by landing directly from a boat during his second visit in 1953 (Atkinson 1980).

We decided the best place to camp was a flat area on the grassy slopes leading up to the lighthouse. The sea plantain here was incredibly dense but we were well isolated from any nesting Northern Fulmars. It was a struggle to carry our heavy equipment over the rocky waist of Haskeir and across the "rock-bridge". A landing nearer the Southern End would have been a more sensible option and a lesson for any future expeditions.

Survey of breeding birds- Trends over the last century

The biggest decline appears to have been in the Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) population Harvie-Brown reported in 1881: "the tops of the higher portions E. and W. are clothed with dense hummocks of seapink, sea-campion, and other rock-plants, forming admirable ground for the innumerable Puffins which burrow in every conceivable direction beneath" (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1889). Entirely absent in 1939 (Freeman 1940) 50 pairs max in 1952 (Atkinson & Roberts 1955). In 2005 we could only find 3 occupied burrows (all in rocks) (Table 1) although 27 birds were rafting offshore. Harris (1984) relying on D.M. Bryant as a source states that a few hundred birds occupy most of the available habitat but there is no mention of when.

Northern Fulmars have increased from 4 pairs (Orde 1919), 62 pairs in 1939 (Freeman 1940), 259 occupied nests in 1949 plus another 49 on the central of the five stacks (Fisher 1952), 500 pairs in 1952 (Atkinson & Robert 1955) to a maximum of 1621 pairs in 2005. Most are nesting on the grassy interior of the island in high concentrations and have had no or negligible human interference over the years.

Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea)* had a large colony in 1868 and 1952 (Elwes 1869; Atkinson & Roberts 1955), were absent 1881 and 1939 (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1889; Freeman 1940). 70 individuals were present in 2005 nesting on the South-west point near the lighthouse. Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*) were recorded breeding in 1939 (Freeman 1940) and a Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) in 1952 (Atkinson 1955)

Common Guillemots (*Urea aalge*) appear to have declined from < 2000 in 1939 (Freeman 1940) to 1176 in 1987 (S.C.R.) to 760 in 2005. Most other species seem to have been fairly constant though a high number (130) of non-breeding European Shags (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) were present on the island. Other birds recorded were Raven (*Corvus corax*), Rock Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*), Eider (*Somateria mollissima*), Rock Dove (*Columba livia*).

Search for Leach's Petrel *(Oceanodroma Leucorhoa)*

Haskeir has long been suspected as a breeding station for Leach's Petrel (Atkinson 1948). A single bird was put out from a hole at the base of the dun of the North Plateau in 1939 (Freeman 1940). Atkinson was one of the very few night visitors spending six hours on the North Castle in 1952. Other night visits have mainly been limited to kayakers en-route to St Kilda (Mitchell 1990; www.stornowaycanoes.org.uk).

Night 1 (26th June 2005)

Weather conditions: *foggy with poor visibility and drizzle.*

Our first aim was to establish the presence of any birds. The whole southern section of the island was covered and it soon became apparent that birds were present. Most of the activity was in a small "sheltered valley" directly behind the lighthouse. First calls were heard at 11:45 pm. Birds were present giving many flight "chatter calls" and responses were coming from **within** the ground. Most responses were from deep within boulders strewn over this area where many fulmars were also nesting, most still on eggs, making further investigation difficult.

The playing of a male chatter-call tape had a negative effect in luring more birds sometimes to the extent of frenzy. Single birds were also recorded calling from within the main areas of plantain around the campsite and from the outcrop on the higher knoll. Most activity has ceased by 02:55 am.

Night 2 (27th June 2005)

Weather conditions: *foggy with poor visibility.*

Two members returned to observe the same area again and at no stage was any tape played. Activity started around 11:55 pm. Birds were homing giving flight "chatter calls" and responses were coming again from within the ground. Another two members tried to access the North Castle Plateau to assess any possible activity there. A large swell was running cutting up the geo and it was not possible to swim across, so it was decided to abandon this for the next night. All activity ceased by 2:45 am.

Day 2 and 3 (27th & 28th June 2005)

Weather conditions: *warm and sunny good visibility*

A full survey of the whole island (both Southern End and North Castle Plateau) was undertaken during day light hours over two consecutives days. This involved following closely the prescribed method of playing both male and female "chatter call" tapes (Gilbert *et al*. 1998). The results from this were very disappointing and no responses were recorded at any time during the three days.

Conclusions

It is quite possible that a number of birds present on both nights were wandering non-breeders possibly attracted by the light. Also on night one some birds were undoubtedly lured by playing the tape. The fact that calls were coming from within the ground would strongly suggest that birds are breeding. However further investigation was restricted by the constraints of the licence. A figure of 25+ pairs would be a speculative estimate of the current population.

Party: Barbara Brodie, George Brown, Alan Hardwick, Barbara Jones, Neil Maclnnes, Nigel Winn.

Acknowledgments

The Seabird Group (Funding), George MacDonald and North Uist Estates (Permissions), Niall Johnson (Rib charter), SNH (Licensing and Consultation), Matt Parsons JNCC (SCR Figures and tapes), John Randall, Mike Carrier, John Skilling.

Future

An expedition is already planned for July 2006 and any interested parties should contact the writer for further details at Biggins Forge, High Biggins, Kirkby Lonsdale, Carnforth, Cumbria, LA6 2NP, Tel: 015242 72881.
Any relevant information on the history of Haskeir, particularly past visits, would also be of interest as a detailed booklet on Haskeir is to be published by the Islands Book Trust.

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Table 1. Haskeir Recent Seabird Counts

Species		Year 1987 (Tasker)	2002 (Parsons& Mavor)	2005 (Winn et al)
Razorbill *(Alca torda)*	Ind	61	140	151
Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*)	Ind	17	25	3 AON
Northern Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis)*	AON	830*	950*	1621
Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus)*	AON	15	1	5
Great black-backed Gull(*Larus marinus*)	AON	17	6	4
European Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)	AON	78	27	33
Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*)	AON	306	283	305
Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*)	Prs	-	1	2
Common Guillemot (*Uria aalge*)	Ind	1176	691	760
Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)	Ind	-	-	70
Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)	Ind	-	22	-
Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*)	Prs	-	-	3
Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)	Prs	-	-	1

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

COUNTS OF GREAT NORTHERN DIVERS WITHIN THEIR EUROPEAN RANGE

Surveys over the past few winters have indicated a substantial decrease in the number of Great Northern Divers *Gavia immer* wintering in Shetland. A population estimate of c.430 birds was derived from extensive coverage of the coastline in the winter of 2001/02, plus data gathered in the 1990s from coasts not surveyed in 2001/02. Reduced numbers became apparent in 2003/04 and surveys this past winter have confirmed this, with an overall 50% decrease in numbers in the key wintering areas. These areas held almost 75% of divers counted in 2001/02, and we are as confident as is possible that the birds are simply missing, rather than being overlooked or having moved to winter along other coastlines within Shetland.

There is no obvious local explanation for this reduction in numbers. Before publishing a review of 30 years of monitoring wintering numbers of Great Northern Divers in Shetland, **we are keen to hear from anybody who has been making counts in other parts of their European wintering range**. Perhaps you have counts for particular areas from earlier surveys, which could usefully be revisited. In Shetland at least, adult Great Northern Divers are believed to be faithful to their wintering locations and while a shift to wintering quarters elsewhere cannot easily be ruled out, this is thought unlikely. Similarly, if anyone has knowledge of recent changes in numbers on the likely breeding grounds of Scottish wintering birds, in Iceland, Greenland or arctic Canada we would be keen to receive information.

Martin Heubeck, Paul Harvey, Mick Mellor, Roger Riddington, Pete Ellis.

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PIPEFISH RECORDS

In the northeast Atlantic most seabirds rely heavily on small energy-rich shoaling fish such as sandeels spp, Herring, Sprat and Capelin when rearing young. However, in the last two years there have been reports from places as far apart as the North Sea, Lofoten Islands and Iceland of birds bringing large numbers of pipefish to chicks.

Superficially these fish would seem to be pretty desperate items for young seabirds to swallow and indeed many of the reports refer to large

numbers of these fish being found uneaten in the colonies alongside starving chicks. It is unclear whether there has been a change in the numbers and distribution of pipefish or the birds are bringing them back because there is nothing better.

I am searching the literature for records of seabirds eating pipefish but know that many records will still be in observers' notebooks. I would welcome any such records, and also published references that you think that we might have overlooked

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ARCTIC SKUA COLOUR RING SIGHTINGS

As many of you may be aware Arctic Skuas in Britain are in decline, with a 37% decrease in breeding numbers between 1985-88 and 2001 (from seabird 2000 counts; Furness and Ratcliffe 2004). If we are to help stop this decline we need to know more about the birds and the reasons for the decline.

A colour ringing program has been running on Foula for the past 15 years, with this recently having been extended to Fair Isle (from 2003). Last year the RSPB, as part of an ongoing study into the decline of Arctic Skuas, also started colour ringing Arctic Skuas throughout Shetland and Orkney. Adult birds and chicks that are about to fledge are fitted with unique combinations of four colour rings. Also over the last 15 years chicks from Foula have been fitted with one colour ring to code for the year they hatched.

These schemes are providing us with valuable information on adult survival rates and recruitment of chicks to different colonies. The colour ring combinations are read as right leg first, top ring / bottom ring, then left leg, e.g. Red/Green, Green/Orange. If there is just one colour ring present then which leg the ring is on would be very useful as well as that could identify the year in which the chick hatched. **If anybody sees Arctic Skuas with colour rings on them we would be very grateful to hear about it,** along with what colour phase the bird is.

Please contact either Norman Ratcliffe (Norman.Ratcliffe@rspb.org.uk) or Sarah Davis (Sarah.Davis@bto.org).

RARITIES RECORDS

Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* Admitted to Category A of the British List

The British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee has admitted Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* to Category A of the British List following the acceptance of an individual seen *c*. 60 miles south-west of the Isles of Scilly on 12 August 2001 (sight record, photographed). It was observed by over 300 birders taking part on the MV Scillonian III pelagic for an hour and twenty minutes.

Identification of the 'soft-plumaged petrel' group is problematic, and separation of Fea's Petrel from the extremely similar Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira* represents one of the most difficult identification challenges for British birders. Minute but diagnostic differences in bill structure, not normally discernible in field conditions, can however be determined from high quality photographs. Bill measurements of the two species do not overlap, but there is as little as 1 mm difference between the bills of largest Zino's and the smallest Fea's.

This record was supported by excellent still photographs (by Gary Bellingham and others) which enabled both BBRC and BOURC to examine in detail the diagnostic bill structure and positive identification as Fea's Petrel and unanimous acceptance as the first British record of this species.

Eric Meek, Chairman of BOURC commented "The supporting photographic evidence was

crucial in the assessment of this record, and these left members of BOURC certain of the identification. *Pterodroma* petrels have been occurring with increasing frequency in British waters and a definite identification was probably only a matter of time. However, inevitably, the great majority of records will have to remain as 'either/ors'"

NOTE - a record of one observed on 8 July 2001 seven miles south of the Isles of Scilly is still under consideration.

The British List now stands at 570 species (Category A = 549; Category B = 12; Category C = 9).

For further information, you can contact:

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BOOK REVIEW

Ott, E. 2005. Sound Truth and Corporate Myths: The Legacy of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Dragonfly Sisters Press, Cordova, Alaska. ISBN 0-9645-2266-7. Pp. 561.

While there is a large literature about oilspills, there are few thorough reviews of all their long-term consequences. This is a monumental study of the social and environmental impact of some 11 (Exxon) to 30 (State of Alaska) million gallons of crude oil spilt by the Exxon Valdez tanker in Prince William Sound, southern Alaska, on 24 March 1989 (which is ca 3500-10,000 tonnes, compared to 112,000 tonnes spilt by the Torrey Canyon). There is far too much in it to summarise here, about how a massive cosmetic cleanup with hot water and toxic detergents left oil on the bottom of the sound and sick people previously paid to give up their right to compensation, about hazards of oil (especially polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons) and detergents and the inadequacy of legal limits on toxic chemicals, conflicts between "Public Trust" and oil company studies, the suppression of information for legal reasons, long-term environmental impacts, and the need for better public education and legislation. There is a summary of ornithological information- John Piatt not unexpectedly comes out well, and some others financed by oil companies less well. The situation turned out to be complicated by a preceding decline of some seabirds and marine fluctuations in the Sound. Some index organisms such as Pigeon Guillemots, Harlequin Ducks, Sea Otters and Killer Whales failed to recover locally during the period of study. There are many recommendations. Anyone interested in oil should study this book.

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CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

"SEABIRD POPULATIONS UNDER PRESSURE"
THE SEABIRD GROUP 9TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
KINGS COLLEGE, ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY, 1-3 SEPTEMBER 2006

Conference update

Plans are well underway for this year's Conference in Aberdeen. We have managed to raise substantial sponsorship to subsidise the Conference Fee and many thanks for this to: BP Exploration Ltd., The Crown Estate, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and Shetland Bird Club. A booking form is included with this Newsletter, and please note the reduced fee for payments by cheque (£95 instead of £100 by

credit card). Please use this option if at all possible, and not just to save yourself some money. Processing credit card payments causes our Treasurer considerable inconvenience and incurs charges to the Seabird Group of 5%!

Mark Tasker and Jim Reid are busy putting together the programme, and have extended the deadline for submissions of abstracts for talks and posters to 31st March. Please send all submissions to Mark Tasker at mark.tasker@jncc.gov.uk or JNCC, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1UZ.

On a lighter note, The Flying Piemen are ready and waiting to test your stamina at the ceilidh that follows the Conference Dinner, and for those wanting to stay on the extra day, the coach is booked for a birding tour of Aberdeenshire on Monday 4th, with a whisky distillery visit(s) thrown in for good measure.

2nd INTERNATIONAL MANX SHEARWATER WORKSHOP BELFAST, 2-4 AUGUST 2005

The 2nd International Manx Shearwater Workshop took place at the Ulster Museum, Belfast. Expertly organised by Copeland Bird Observatory, delegates were also given the opportunity to spend a night on the island for some hands-on shearwater action.

The Workshop followed on from the Manx Shearwater Workshop held in Madeira in 2000, and covered two main groups of Procellariiformes: The Manx Shearwater and the related small-medium-sized shearwaters of the genus *Puffinus*, and; other breeding petrel species of the North Atlantic region with a similar breeding range and ecology to the Manx Shearwater.

The conference was very well-attended, with 83 delegates from all over the UK, Australia, Canada, France, Iceland, Ireland, Madeira, Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain and the USA.

The opening presentation was a moving tribute to Dr Irynej Skira, who died in February 2005, and to whom the Workshop was dedicated. His widow Suzanne described a life-long passion, which included studies of Short-tailed Shearwaters in Tasmania.

Steve Newton kicked-off the first session, 'Populations and Censusing', with an overview of the status of Manx Shearwaters breeding in the north-east Atlantic – the species being wholly confined to offshore islands, most of which are devoid of mammalian predators (Rum being an exception, where they appear to avoid rats by nesting at the top of mountains). The challenges of census, and development of tape playback, became running themes of the day.

Greg Robertson then gave an update of the situation on the other side of 'the pond', where, in addition to the (albeit small) main colony on Middle Lawn Island, a new colony was discovered in 2005 on another small Newfoundland island. Recaptures of birds ringed on Skokholm and Rum suggest a European origin of colonists.

Whilst the number of Manxies breeding on the western side of the Atlantic is only a tiny proportion of the world population, the converse is true for Leach's Petrels, with Baccaleiu Island (Newfoundland, Canada) alone supporting over three million pairs! Predation by Great Black-backed and Herring Gulls is probably causing decline at two smaller colonies, while increasing mercury levels may also be cause for concern.

Back on this side of the pond, Steve Newton illustrated the proximity of 'our' Leach's Petrel colonies to deep water. The more globally-significant populations of European Storm Petrel are less reliant on deep oceanic water due to a more eclectic diet (the species even foraging inter-tidally at night, as Rob Thomas demonstrated later in the workshop).

In between, Aevar Peterson gave an overview of Iceland's important Procellariiform colonies.

After lunch, in a brief respite from population census, Elena Gómez-Díaz looked at the taxonomy and evolutionary relationships within the *Calonectris* shearwater complex, using both molecular and biometric data.

Storm Petrel census techniques were then explored, with results from Priest Island and Eilean Hoan (Mike Hounsome) and Skomer

(Juan Brown) illustrating there is still some way to go in refining the modern tape playback method, and that there are discrepancies between the results from this technique and capture-mark-recapture.

The final lecture of the day was by Darren Scott, who demonstrated the need for calibration to account for error when using 'burrowscopes' in the convoluted subterranean systems of Sooty Shearwaters in southern New Zealand.

A lively discussion, chaired by Mike Hounsome, then ensued, where the difficulties in censusing nocturnal underground-nesting tubenose seabirds were highlighted, and ideas exchanged. This built on the morning discussion, chaired by Matt Parsons.

Dinner in the Great Hall

The day was rounded off with dinner in Queens University's Great Hall, followed by a musical montage of a year on Copeland.

Day 2, entitled 'Conservation', began with gusto, with Steve Votier presenting evidence for night-time foraging for petrels by Great Skuas on St Kilda.

The successful rat eradication of Lundy was then described by David Appleton and Helen Booker. It is hoped that Manx Shearwaters and Puffins will now flourish on the island, and the lessons learnt there will no doubt benefit the current attempts to rid Canna and Sanday of rats, the background to which was described by Abbie Patterson.

The Workshop then took a Latino twist, with Juan Martínez-Gómez describing the last refuge for Townsend's Shearwater on the Mexican island of Socorro. The familiar story of introduced mammals was lamented, the eradication of feral cats the most important conservation measure needed to prevent the extinction of this member of the *Puffinus* clan. On a lighter note, Juan later presented a powerful advert for the National American Ornithology Conference, to be held in northern Mexico in 2006.

After coffee, Pierre Yésou described the Critically Endangered Balearic Shearwater, a species which we were to hear more about from Maite Louzao on the third day. Predators and changing fishing practice are having a negative impact on the species, which is curiously becoming a more frequent visitor to British waters.

Coffee break

Ian Enlander then brought us back home, with the recent designation of the Copeland Islands as an Area of Special Scientific Interest. The EU Birds Directive SPA designations were then discussed, with news of the current work by JNCC in looking at areas of sea used by birds with a view to extending SPA boundaries seawards.

This theme was expanded, with news from Pedro Geraldes of a major survey of seabirds in Portuguese waters, and the identification of areas in need of protection.

Bernie Zonfrillo chaired the discussion before lunch. A general consensus seems to have been

reached that rats are bad news for burrow-nesting seabirds (though even the eradication of them attracted 500 letters of protest to Lundy), but what about gulls, skuas, owls, and even the humble Rabbit?

After lunch, and another opportunity for delegates to peruse over a dozen posters on display, the subject turned to climate change.

Posters

On Rum – one of the world's headquarters of the Manx Shearwater (with the Pembrokeshire islands) – the presence of Brown Rats confines the species to mountain top refugia. Kate Thompson described two possible negative effects of climate change on the Rum Manx Shearwater population:
i) an increase in heavy summer rainfall, lowering breeding success, and
ii) milder winter temperatures, allowing rats to survive in colony areas.

Away from the colony, the effects of global warming and sea surface temperatures (SST) on birds were explored. Darren Peck demonstrated a negative correlation between SST and foraging success/chick growth in Wedge-tailed Shearwaters in Australia. This occurred on a day-to-day level – a much smaller timescale than previously thought.

Converse to this was the effect of SST on Storm Petrel body mass off south-west Portugal, when the limiting SST appears to be two-seven months prior to the petrels passage through Portuguese waters in June. Rob Thomas explained this by primary and secondary productivity in Atlantic waters off Iberia reaching their peak during this period, thus having a knock-on effect later in the season. The relationship between SST and body mass is actually a negative one, and it is postulated that when food is in shorter supply (high SST) petrels carry greater fat reserves to see them through hard times.

Rob Thomas also provided evidence for nocturnal inter-tidal foraging by Storm Petrels, with the discovery of a littoral isopod in their regurgitates. He even captured moving images of a petrel apparently foraging on a beach at night. More data are needed, so get collecting that Storm Petrel vomit!

Sticking with the subject of SST, Russell Wynn suggested that the increase in Balearic Shearwater sightings off Britain and Ireland (contrary to their breeding population dynamics) could be linked with SST, phytoplankton concentrations, and fish abundance.

The conference then split into two groups, with discussions on 'Environmental Change' (chaired by Rob Thomas) and 'Studies on southern European petrels' (chaired by Jacob Gonzáles-Solís) taking place concurrently. By coincidence, both discussions ended up debating offshore wind-farms!

The Workshop then took a serendipitous turn (…the old ones are the best), with the announcement that the Sooty Tern currently roaming the Irish Sea had dropped in at nearby Groomsport. Excellent views were afforded to those that wanted them, before delegates converged on Castle Espie Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust centre, for an evening buffet and birds of a more sedentary nature.

The first session of the final day was entitled 'At the colony and at sea'. Chris Perrins showed that survival rates of Manx Shearwaters were slightly lower on Skomer than Copeland, a shortfall that could be explained by birds being 'lost' if they translocate to an area of the island away from the study plot – a phenomenon demonstrated by John Stewart on Copeland (where around 25% of breeding age shearwaters will move from one sub-colony to another at some time in their lives).

Neville McKee showed-off the fleet of lawnmowers and 'runway' system on Copeland, aimed at easing landing and take-off of shearwaters. Since the Rabbit population took a nose-dive due to myxomatosis in the mid 1950s, the managers of Copeland have deemed it necessary to intervene in the vegetation management there. It was clear there were both strong 'pro' and 'anti' Rabbit camps in the room!

Richard Cuthbert then took us to the mountains of New Zealand, where he demonstrated the effects of snow cover on breeding Hutton's Shearwaters.

Back in the warmer climes of the Mediterranean, we heard about the relationship between fisheries and Balearic Shearwaters from Maite Louzao, and nest cavity selection of sympatric Yelkouan and Cory's Shearwaters from Karen Bourgeois.

A discussion of current and future Manx Shearwater research was then chaired by Chris Perrins, and a number of collaborations have since formed as a direct result of the Workshop.

The final session, entitled 'Away from the colony – at sea distribution and censusing', began with Russell Wynn describing the apparent recent increase in Manx Shearwaters in the eastern English Channel.

Bernie Zonfrillo then threw the cat amongst the pigeons with a suggestion that many 'Mediterranean Shearwaters' claimed in British and Irish waters are, in fact, brown Manx Shearwaters, before Oscar Merne described movements of Storm Petrels from Irish ringing programmes.

Jacob Gonzáles-Solís presented results from the tracking of three populations of Cory's Shearwaters using light level geolocators, illustrating that birds were wintering in discrete areas of major coastal upwelling regions, and that dominant winds play a large part in migration. Jacob also touched on the use of stable isotope analysis of feathers to identify where different birds are wintering – a technique which also requires an intimate knowledge of timing of moult.

Peter Hodum delivered the final lecture, on the satellite-tracking of Pink-footed Shearwaters, a species which is known only to breed on the Juan Fernández Islands and Isla Mocha, Chile.
The ensuing discussion, chaired by John Stewart, considered developing technologies which will enable us to find out more about where birds go when at sea, and Tim Guilford briefed delegates on developments with data-loggers on Manx Shearwaters on Skomer. Satellite transmitters are still too large to fit on birds the size of a Manxie, and we will have to wait for the advancement of technology before we can track our shearwaters to their South American wintering grounds.

We are indebted to our hosts for such a splendid workshop, in particular to Kerry Leonard, John Stewart, Fiona Maitland and their colleagues at Copeland, Environment and Heritage Service Northern Ireland, JNCC, Ulster Museum and its staff, and Queens University. The Proceedings are to be published in a special edition of *Atlantic Seabirds*.

Finally we look forward to the 3rd International Manx Shearwater Workshop, to be held possibly in Pembrokeshire. Watch this space…

Juan Brown
j.brown@welshwildlife.org

NEWS FROM OTHER GROUPS

NEW SEABIRD-NEWS DISCUSSION GROUP

Launched at the end of December 2006, ***Seabird-News*** is a brand new discussion group hosted by Google.com, that celebrates the wonderful world of pelagic birds, marine mammals and the folks who study them.

http://groups.google.com/group/Seabird-News/about/

Like so many oceanic species, the group will operate on a global rather than national or region scale, bringing together a diverse mix of both professional and amateur enthusiasts. The aim is simply to freely exchange information about pelagic wildlife, the conservation of marine

ecosystems and new opportunities for viewing these animals in the wild.

Recent topics have included attempts to discover the nest grounds of the recently rediscovered New Zealand Storm-Petrel using radiotracking, at sea identification of prions and early reports of the Northern Bottlenose Whale in central London. A wide variety of topics are appropriate for postings and include:

- Announcements of upcoming pelagic excursions or the results of such trips.
- Observations from longer ship-based trips, ferry rides and sightings from merchant or naval ships.
- Seawatching results from land-based watchpoints.
- Hot issues in seabird and marine mammal conservation and taxonomy.
- Results of satellite or other tagging studies using pelagic species (birds, mammals and large fish).
- Identification issues relating to marine birds and mammals.
- Issues and topics of general interest to seabird and cetacean watchers.

How the group works: There will be three moderators of the list (John Brodie-Good [UK], Paul Guris [USA] and myself) to deal with subscription issues and ensure that inappropriate posting is kept to the minimum. We don't bite and will be happy to answer any questions you might have. The archive of posted messages can be read by anyone via the web page but to post you need to enroll as a member. This is absolutely free and only takes a few moments to set up.

I hope you join us and welcome feedback as the forum gets going.

Owner: Seabirds-News
<http://groups.google.com/group/Seabird-News>
Owner: Ocean Wanderers
<http://oceanwanderers.com>

Angus Wilson, New York City, USA
gadflypetrel@hotmail.com

SEABIRD GROUP NEWS

Change in Newsletter Editor

The newsletter of June 2005 was Chris Wernham's last one in her role as Editor. The Seabird Group would especially like to thank Chris for all her hard work and enthusiasm over the last five years. We are indebted to her for all of her efforts. Liz Humphreys has now taken over the role.

New Seabird Group Logo

The more observant readers amongst you might have spotted that we have a new logo. We would like to thank Jane Matthews for recreating the image and are extremely pleased with the final result.

Annual General Meeting of the Seabird Group

The Seabird Group met last in November at the Duke of Gordon's Hotel, Kingussie on 19th November. The minutes are shown on the page 31:

CORRECTIONS

WINTER SEABIRDS IN THE CANARIAN COASTAL WATERS, June 2006 Newsletter 100

Larus Fuscus has been a breeding bird in the Canaries since 2001 (see Waterbirds (2002) 25:388-389) and is not just a winter visitor as reported. Thanks to John Coulson for reporting this.

Minutes of the 40th Annual General Meeting of the Seabird group held at the Duke of Gordon's Hotel, Kingussie on 19th November 2005

Mark Tasker was in the chair with Alan Leitch as secretary. Twenty-six members were present. Apologies were received from Ian Darling, Adrian Blackburn, Chris Waltho and John Davies.

Minutes of the 39th Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the 39th AGM were circulated and read by Mark Tasker. They were proposed by Mike Harris and seconded by Rab Morton.

Matters arising

Chris Wernham commented on seawatching in place of Chris Waltho. There had been plenty of responses, some cautionary, but not enough to set up a full seawatching community. A report will be prepared for the next AGM.

40th Annual Report of the Seabird Group

The report was circulated and commented on by Alan Leitch. Bob Swann asked about the journal which was difficult to answere in the absence of Jim Reid. There were further comments from the floor on the small number which had been produced. **AP.** Mark Tasker to take back a message regarding the concerns about the small issue rate to Jim Reid. **AP** Papers for the journal are to be promoted at the conference. The report was proposed by Mike Harris and seconded by Chris Wernham.

Accounts and Treasurers Report

The accounts and report were circulated to all present. In the absence of the treasurer there was no discussion. The accounts were proposed by Andrew Ramsay and seconded by Sarah Wanless. The report was proposed by Mike Harris and seconded by Linda Wilson.

Election of Officers

An apology was made to the members about the lack of notice given about changes to the committee. Martin Heubeck was due to stand down and Chris Wernham wished to retire, but proposed Liz Humphreys in her place as newsletter editor. The floor were informed that the executive committee had decided to co-opt Martin Heubeck, largely because of his invaluable expertise in arranging the conference, for a further year and to accept Liz Humphreys in place of Chris Wernham. There were no objections to these decisions. The chair thanked Chris Wernham for all her work on the newsletter.

Any Other Business

An update was given on the next conference arrangements. In response to a question about the timing by Mike Harris, the floor was informed that it was only possible to hold the Conference in early September because of changes to the University of Aberdeen academic year affecting the availability of affordable accommodation. Papers were to be called for in a few weeks, and insurance arrangements were being checked on before costs were finalised.

the Seabird Group

Registered Charity No. 260907

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EDITOR
Liz Humphreys (BTO Scotland)

JOURNAL REVIEWER
Mark Tasker

The Newsletter is published three times a year. The editor welcomes articles from members and others on issues relating to seabird research and conservation. These should be received by 1st May (for June edition), 1st September (for October edition) or 1st January (for February edition).

The Seabird Group promotes and helps co-ordinate the study and conservation of seabirds. Members also receive the journal *Atlantic Seabirds*, containing papers on current research. The Group organises regular conferences and also provides small grants towards seabird research. Current 2005 membership rates are:-

Ordinary £10.00
Standing Order £9.00
Concession £5.00
Institution £15.00

Sheila Russell
Membership Secretary
Clober Farm
Milngavie
Glasgow G62 7HW

CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

Current retiral dates (at AGM) are shown in bold after the name of each member. Nominations (which should be submitted to the Secretary) from Group members for replacements on the committee are always very welcome.

Chairman
Mark Tasker **(2007)**
c/o JNCC, Dunnet House,
7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen. AB10 1UZ
(mark.tasker@jncc.gov.uk)

Secretary
Alan Leitch **(2008)**
2 Burgess Terrace,
Edinburgh. EH9 2BD
(alan.leitch@snh'gov.uk))

Treasurer
John Davies **(2005)**
31, Easter Warriston, Edinburgh. EH7 4QX
(johncdavies@blueyonder.co.uk)

Editor, *Atlantic Seabirds*
Jim Reid **(2005)**
JNCC, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen. Ab10 1UZ
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Editor, *Newsletter*
Liz Humphreys **(2006)**
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2004 Conference Organiser
Martin Heubeck **(2005)**
(martinheubeck@btinternet.com)

Other Members:
Jez Blackburn **(2007)**
Linda Wilson **(2006)**
Juan Brown **(2008)**

SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS

The next deadline is 31 March 2006 but do please submit any proposals as soon as possible, so that the Committee can make the earliest possible decision.

Application forms are available from the Secretary, or can be downloaded from the website:

'www.seabirdgroup.org.uk'

EDITORIAL

Many thanks to our readers who have patiently awaited the next instalment of the Seabird Group Newsletter. To make up for the lack of a newsletter in October 2005, I have produced a bumper October 2005 and February 2006 edition.

I would like to thank all contributors who have made this newsletter possible. I am also extremely keen to encourage more people to write articles and feel that there are many potential authors out there who would be able to make a valuable contribution.

Every effort is made to check the content of the material that we publish. It is not, however, always possible to check comprehensively every piece of information back to its original source, as well as keeping news timely. Please will readers make further checks, at their own discretion, if they have concerns about any of the information or contacts provided, and contact me to allow feedback to other readers if necessary.

We also try to provide a forum for readers' views, so that those provided in the *Newsletter* are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Seabird Group.