



NEWSLETTER 102

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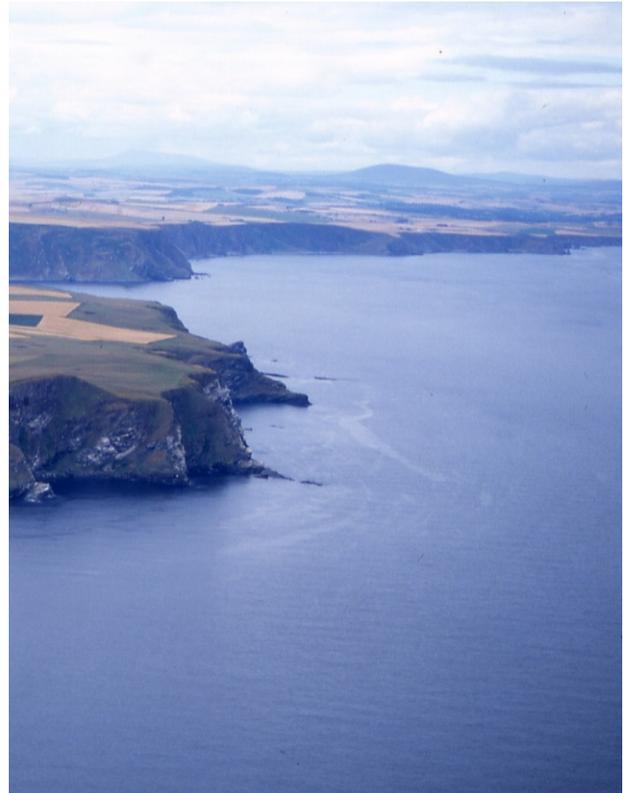
CONSERVATION NEWS

TROUP HEAD: A NEW RSPB RESERVE IN NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

In December 2005 the RSPB acquired Troup Head in Aberdeenshire as a new nature reserve in the East Scotland region. Comprising a coastal strip approximately 4km in length, Troup Head provides a truly impressive spectacle containing one of only two mainland gannet colonies in the UK and featuring dramatic, expansive panoramic views along the Moray Firth and beyond. The cliffs also support significant breeding populations of guillemots, razorbills, puffins and other seabird species. The site is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Area (SPA).

Located between Fraserburgh and Macduff on the north coast of Aberdeenshire, Troup Head is perhaps the least well known of the Scotland's spectacular seabird colonies. A tricky place to find, Troup Head lies almost hidden between the picturesque villages of Pennan and Gardenstown. It isn't currently signposted and

visitors have to negotiate a single-track road passing through two working farmyards before ending up in a rudimentary car park doubling as a farm machinery store adjacent to the farm dump! A short walk around the surrounding arable fields still doesn't give much clue to the seabird spectacular that waits but soon the telltale noise and aroma of a seabird colony in full swing becomes apparent.



Troup Head (Ian Francis)

CONTENTS

Page

| | |
|--|-----------|
| CONSERVATION NEWS..... | 1 |
| RESEARCH NEWS..... | 5 |
| SEABIRD GROUP GRANT REPORT..... | 8 |
| JOURNAL REVIEWS..... | 10 |
| PAPER REVIEWS..... | 13 |
| REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION..... | 15 |
| CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS..... | 16 |
| NEWS FROM OTHER GROUPS..... | 17 |
| SEABIRD GROUP NEWS..... | 19 |

The RSPB are aiming to establish and develop visitor facilities in keeping with its intrinsic wildness while sensitively raising the profile of Troup Head as an important visitor attraction in the region and providing access to a spectacular mainland gannet colony - all adding up to an informative, inspirational and unforgettable wildlife experience.

The development of the gannetry at Troup Head is a fascinating story. The first documented breeding record was in 1988 with four nests on the cliffs although birds were reportedly present on the cliffs in previous years. The early years of the colony saw numbers increase dramatically then slowing down and levelling off in recent years but with suitable areas on the cliffs available for gannets to colonise numbers can be expected to increase in the future. Numbers have increased steadily to 1547 apparently occupied nests in 2004, an increase of 26% on the 2001 figure, the last year a colony count was carried out. Breeding success at Troup Head has been slightly below the national average (0.69 fledged chicks per pair) at 0.63 fledged chicks per pair (Mavor, 2005).

Monitoring of seabird numbers and breeding success has taken place at the Troup, Pennan and Lion's Heads SPA by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee since 1992 as part of the UK Seabird Monitoring Programme. Whole colony counts of shags, kittiwakes and gannets have been carried out on a triennial basis along with sample-plot counts of fulmars, guillemots and razorbills. Changes made in 2004 resulted in counts being expanded to include herring gull in the monitored species in response to the national decline of this species.

Although gannets take centre stage at Troup Head, other species of breeding seabirds are present in significant numbers with numbers of shag, herring gull and kittiwake exceeding 1% of the Great British total. On the RSPB reserve itself, shag numbers have shown an increase of 12% since 2001 with 83 AON's with the area as a whole seemingly unaffected by the population crashes of the early to mid 1990's. The effects of the recent shag wreck in late winter of 2004/5 remain to be seen. Numbers of herring gulls, kittiwakes and fulmars have all shown decreases from 2001 figures. Kittiwake numbers have declined significantly on the entire SPA from

26,745 AON in 1992 to 15,570 AON's in 2004 although the rate of decrease has slowed in recent years. Auks have fared no better with guillemots and razorbills showing significant decreases since 2001.

Monitoring at Troup Head will continue and expand, with the RSPB including the site within its seabird monitoring programme in conjunction with JNCC. This data will contribute to and inform the debate on fisheries issues and climate change - the two biggest crises facing British and international populations of seabirds. In tandem with the regions, other mainland seabird reserve at Fowlsheugh on the East coast the reserve will serve as a focus for marine policy and advocacy on a local and national scale.

As with many seabird colonies Troup Head is best viewed from the sea and two local boat trip operators, Puffin Cruises (www.puffincruises.com & www.north58.co.uk) offer daily tours from Macduff and Banff. Troup Head nature reserve is open at all times and is best reached from the B9031, 2.4km east of Gardenstown. Readers of the Seabird group newsletter won't need reminded to take care when visiting this open cliff-top site! For further information contact Scott Paterson on 01346 532017 or email troup@rspb.org.uk.

Mavor, R. 2005. Counts of breeding seabirds on the Grampian coasts in 2004: Buchan Ness to Collieston SPA and the Troup, Pennan and Lion's Heads SPA. JNCC report.

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BEACH WATCH REPORT 2005

Each year the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) publishes the results of the UK's largest annual beach clean and litter survey in the *Beachwatch Report*. Beachwatch 2005, which took place around the UK coastline in September last year and involved a record number of volunteers and beaches. The survey recorded an increase in the amount of litter on UK beaches, and on average one piece of litter was recorded for every 51 cm of beach surveyed. Over 3,890 volunteers helped to clean and survey a total of 332 beaches covering 171 km of UK coastline, recording and removing

over 330,000 individual items of litter. Litter levels increased by 4% from 1,897 items per kilometre surveyed in 2004 to 1,981 items per kilometre in 2005, but since 1994, beach litter levels have increased by 90%. The MCS Beachwatch survey highlights four key causes of beach litter: beach visitors (34.5%), fishing debris (14.6%), sanitary waste (7.2%), and shipping litter (2.2%).



Fulmar stomach contents (Gill Bell)

Fishing nets, monofilament line, plastic bags and strapping bands for cargo are the most common cause of entanglement which can reduce movement, and potentially result in injury, death by starvation, or drowning. 51 species of seabirds around the world have been reported entangled in marine debris (Laist, 1997). Plastics are also used in nesting material. Over 90% of the 30,000 gannet nests on Grassholm Island (in the Bristol Channel) have been observed to contain plastic (Bullock, pers. comm). 111 species of seabird are known to accidentally eat plastic (Laist, 1997). Ever-increasing quantities of plastic pieces and tiny pellets are collecting in our oceans, and can be ingested by seabirds which mistake the plastics for fish eggs, or other food items. Ingested plastic can accumulate in the guts of animals, causing impaired foraging,

infections, blockages, and starvation. The birds most susceptible to ingesting of plastic pieces are surface feeders such as albatrosses, shearwaters and petrels, and plankton feeders such as puffins. Studies of plastic materials in Laysan albatross chicks in Hawaii recorded an increase from 74% in the 1960s to 98% in the mid 1990s (Vilestra and Parga, 2002). Research into the stomach contents of fulmars in the Netherlands between 1982-2001 found a staggering 96% of the birds had plastic fragments in their stomachs (Van Franeker and Meijboom, 2003).

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MARINE BILL: CONSULTATION PROCESS

The UK Government and devolved administrations are currently working together to provide a framework for managing the marine area around the UK. To stimulate ideas to facilitate this, a Marine Bill consultation document was published in March 2006, and is open for consultation until 23 June. Consultees include Birdlife International, RSPB, Friends of

the Earth, Greenpeace, JNCC and the Countryside Agencies.

The purpose of the Marine Bill will be to 'improve the delivery of policies relating to marine activities operating in coastal and offshore waters and to marine natural resource protection, in particular by providing an integrated approach to sustainable management, enhancement and use of the marine natural environment for the benefit of current and future generations.'

The Government is developing policy for the Bill in five significant areas, although none of these stand alone.

1. Managing marine fisheries
2. Planning in the marine area
3. Licensing marine activities
4. Improving marine nature conservation
5. The potential for a new marine management organisation

The consultation document is available from www.defra.gov.uk/environment/water/marine/uk/policy/marine-bill/index.htm

Linda Wilson

SCOTLAND'S FIRST COASTAL AND MARINE NATIONAL PARK: CONSULTATION PROCESS

In June last year Scottish Ministers commissioned Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to report on the potential for Scotland's first Coastal and Marine National Park. SNH submitted their advice to Ministers on 30 March 2006. SNH were asked to work closely with stakeholder interests and the advice covers a range of issues, including possible options for the functional remit and the governance structure of a Coastal and Marine National Park. The report also suggests a number of possible candidates for designation - Solway Firth; Argyll Islands and Coast; Ardnamurchan, Small Isles and the South of Skye Coast; North Skye and Wester Ross; North Uist, Sound of Harris and South Lewis.

On 18 April, Ross Finnie, Minister for Environment and Rural Development announced

plans to launch a public consultation on proposals for a Coastal and Marine National Park in summer 2006. The consultation will be run by the Scottish Executive and seek views on a marine national park, including the scope of the Park Authority's powers and responsibilities and on the candidate areas for designation. That will follow the Executive's consideration of SNH's advice, which is underway at present. In the meantime, Ministers have asked SNH to engage with stakeholders and local communities to explain their advice.

Ministers will be listening to all views and will take them into account before any decision about the designation of a Park is made. A copy of SNH's report and background papers are available on SNH's website at www.snh.org.uk Enquiries relating to Coastal and Marine National Parks can be directed to either David Mallon or Nikki Tonge, Scottish Executive, Marine Management Division, Area GH93, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ.

CONFIRMED CLOSURE OF CEH RESEARCH STATIONS

Following a period of consultation NERC (Natural Environment Research Council) have announced that they will close four of the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology research stations: Banchory, Dorset, Monks Wood and Oxford. Over 1,327 responses were made (<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/consult/ceh/responses-all.asp>), the vast majority (99%) of which were critical of the councils statement of intent and only three supported NERC's restructuring of CEH. The Seabird Group wrote to NERC as part of the consultation process to outline their criticisms (as published in Newsletter 101) and were very disappointed by NERC's final decision. The Seabird Group would like to send their commiserations to the Coastal Seas Ecology Group, based at Banchory, who have carried out outstanding research on the Isle of May since the 1970s.

AVIAN INFLUENZA IN THE UK: CURRENT SITUATION

Following confirmation that a dead whooper swan found in Cellardyke, Fife was carrying the

highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of avian flu, the Scottish Executive (SE) imposed a 3km Protection Zone and a wider Surveillance Zone of 10 km on April the 5th 2006. The SE, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), as well as a range of local authority and voluntary organisations then carefully monitored the deaths of wild birds such as swans, geese and ducks in the surrounding area. Restrictions on activities were then lifted on May 1st 2006 and previously suspended activities, such as bird ringing, are therefore no longer under restriction in this area. More recently, H7N3, a low pathogenic strain, has been confirmed in three poultry farms near Dereham, Norfolk. The H7 strain of the virus is thought to have minimal implications for human health however and is thought to be unrelated to the incidence in Fife. Updates on all reported cases can be found on DEFRA's web pages along with guidance on how to report dead birds (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/> or call the Defra Helpline (08459 33 55 77). Bird ringers can also obtain advice on handling procedures from the British Trust for Ornithology web pages (http://www.bto.org/notices/flu_statement.htm)

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ISLE OF MAY AND AI

The Isle of May fell just within the 10km surveillance zone, following the identification of an infected bird in Cellardyke. Staff were informed late on Wednesday 5th April and there was an immediate precautionary ban on staff handling birds or ringing birds, living or dead until more information was available and the scale of the outbreak was known.

SNH liaised closely with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) on advice for ringers and with members of the Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust to ensure that all active members were aware of the temporary restrictions and were being kept informed of any developments. SNH produced guidance for members of the public visiting the island and contractors and researchers working there. However, because it was very early in the season, it had a very limited impact on operations or monitoring programmes on the island.

Members of the public responded very positively, as did the boat operators and the island remained open for business. SNH staff based on the island were actively involved in monitoring the health of birds returning to the island and reported dead birds to DEFRA (all sixteen birds reported were tested negative).

Liason continued throughout the period and following BTO advice the ringing ban was lifted with the lifting of the Surveillance Zone status. SNH were also involved in monitoring other key sites along the east coast throughout the period, and in co-ordinating the monitoring work done by other organisations.

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RESEARCH NEWS

IMPACT OF GREAT SKUA PREDATION ON LEACH'S STORM-PETREL ON ST KILDA

Glasgow University and the National Trust for Scotland have been awarded a PhD studentship to study the impact of great skua predation on Leach's storm-petrels. A candidate has been selected and the student will work for three years, starting in January 2007. Numbers of great skuas breeding on St Kilda have increased very rapidly from 10 pairs in 1971 to 240 pairs in 2000, making this the fastest-growing large great skua colony in Scotland. Great skuas can feed on sandeels or on fishery discards, but when these are in short supply may switch to killing seabirds in large numbers. However, on St Kilda, great skuas feed predominantly on seabirds, killing large numbers of kittiwakes, auks and storm-petrels, as sandeels or fishery discards are much less available there than in Orkney and Shetland. Leach's storm-petrels are a particularly large component of great skua diet at St Kilda. In 2000, St Kilda was estimated to hold 45,433 pairs, representing 94% of the entire EU population of this species. St Kilda is designated an SPA for Leach's storm-petrel. In 2003, a JNCC survey reported a 48% decline in Leach's storm-petrel breeding numbers since 1999, at the largest colony on St Kilda, a figure

that is entirely consistent with the increasing and very high predation rate on this species by great skuas. It was estimated that great skuas killed 14,850 Leach's storm-petrels in 1996 alone. In 2004, a short investigation by radio tracking and direct observation of great skuas at St Kilda by night-vision equipment demonstrated that these birds kill Leach's storm-petrels at night at the petrel colonies. Further study of pellets in skua territories indicated that some great skuas feed predominantly on storm-petrels while others do not kill any. A repeat survey of the Leach's storm-petrel colony is planned in 2006.



Great Skuas

For any management to be developed to conserve Leach's storm-petrel as a European breeding species, an improved understanding of skua-storm-petrel relationships is essential. The aims of this project are: to quantify the predation by great skuas on Leach's storm-petrels; to investigate factors that influence the rate of predation on storm petrels by individual great skuas; to determine when and how great skuas catch storm petrels; to determine how predation rate by skuas varies between different Leach's storm-petrel colonies on St Kilda; and to develop a scientific basis for management

The studentship is funded by a NERC CASE studentship and the National Trust for Scotland. Project supervisors are Professor Bob Furness and Dr Richard Luxmore.

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SPANISH SEABIRD MONITORING NETWORK (RAM)

What is RAM?

RAM (Red de Aves Marinas) is a Spanish Seabird Monitoring Network based on the north and northwest Spanish coast. The Project coordinates the efforts of several studies of seabirds on the Iberian Peninsula to improve the knowledge and conservation of seabird species distributed along the south European Atlantic coast. Participation is free for anybody interested in seabirds and the project is run in a non profit way.

During the VI Galician Congress of Ornithology and the V Cantabrian Symposium of Ornithology (29 to 31 October 2005 at Viveiro (Lugo – Spain), a seabird meeting took place. A team of seabird observers decided to set up a network to monitor seabirds along Spanish coasts. From November 2005, 87 observers have participated in the RAM project and during the last 6 months, volunteers have dedicated 3 hours per month to standardized seawatching from 23 sites along the coast.

Data compiled by RAM will ultimately provide a long term data set which can be used to assess the real situation of abundance and movements of seabirds off the north Spanish coast. The censuses of seabirds from the seashore are a limited method, in terms of their accuracy, but they can be used to provide an index of the abundance and distribution of birds near the coast. An important point of the counts carried out during RAM monitoring is the use of a standard methodology to record the information. Data are recorded following common protocols used by all observers and simultaneously in the same day. Therefore, those data will give systematic and rigorous information to obtain results on presence of species by geographic area and by month.

Other similar projects at other geographic areas such as Britain, the Netherlands and Scandanavia manage similar databases from the 1970's. These programs monitor long-term seabird trends, with the participation of hundreds of seawatchers. The volunteers monitor the migrations, movements related to weather,

feeding movements, roost activities and wrecks of seabirds. Several other Spanish organizations support RAM through their member's participation and have helped promote the project.

The project includes the north and northwestern coasts of Spain, but in the future it will expand to whole coast of the Iberian Peninsula. Close contacts with similar projects in France, Netherlands, Great Britain, Ireland and Morocco are planned.



Volunteer at Cabo Mayor Cape, Santander

Objectives:

The main aim of RAM is to coordinate all ornithologists interested on seabirds of the Iberian Peninsula. The running of a coordinated network will focus the observer's work on following objectives:

1. To obtain information on abundance and distribution of seabird species along the coasts off Cantabrian Sea and Galician Atlantic coast.

2. To build a database with data on movements, relative abundances and behaviour of seabirds.

3. To standardized the methodology.

4. To improve the co-operation between ornithologists.

5. To involve volunteers in studies and conservation of marine fauna.

Projects: Seabird Monitoring Days

The first activity of RAM has been to carry out the "seabird observation days". The project organised the observers at different capes and coastal points along the area (during the same day and hours) to record the presence and movements of seabird species. The data collected includes the species, numbers, flight direction direction, age of bird, etc.

Participants of RAM are contacted by email and the Internet. The Project based on sector coordinators (by region) to organise the census and exchange information. The project has a web site (see below) where information, activities and periodical reports are available. A digital newsletter is published every three months which includes the results of seawatching days and other related information.

The announcement of seawatching days is communicated by email to volunteers and to the Internet discussion forums of Spain: "Galiciaves", "Coaciosforu", "SEO-Cantabria", "SEO-Castro", "Hegan" and "GIAM".

At the beginning of the project, a seawatching protocol, field data sheets and database were designed. The development of methodologies was carried out by experienced seabird ornithologists. Several versions were finally adapted to the objectives of the coordinated censuses, trying to design protocols that were easy to use and understand by all observers.

Several days before the "RAM day", the interested observers contact the local coordinators to obtain the protocols and field data sheets and instructions. After seawatching the observers fill a basic database (Excel format) and send the data to coordinators. All data are entered into a database of the project.

SEABIRD SPECIES:

From November 2006, a total of 54,929 birds (32 seabird species) were recorded. Also 1503 wader and terrestrial birds (36 species) were recorded along the sea coast. Finally, marine mammal records included 4 cetacean species and 136 individuals.

More information, results and newsletters are available to download at the web:

<http://www.telefonica.net/web2/redavesmarinas>

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SEABIRD GROUP GRANT REPORT

UNCERTAINTY OF THE RAZORBILL *ALCA TORDA* IN ATLANTIC CANADA

Seabirds worldwide are threatened by human related mortality factors including oil pollution, hunting, entanglement in fishing gear, and global warming. In Newfoundland and Labrador, many seabird species are depleted to a fraction of former abundance by human activities, and one, the Great Auk, was slaughtered unmercifully until none remained. The Razorbill (*Alca torda*), the Great Auk's closest living relative, has experienced significant population declines due to human activities and has been slow to recover. Compared to other seabirds, such as the Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*), which are increasing throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, the status of the Razorbill is much less clear and of great conservation concern. Given that Razorbills lay only one egg per year, and delay breeding until 5 or more years of age, the species has a much lower potential for recovery built in to their breeding biology. The Razorbill's vulnerability is further exacerbated by the fact that their North American population (most breeding in Newfoundland and Labrador) is very small, being only 38,000 breeding pairs. Additionally, Razorbills are the most geographically restricted of all auk species

breeding in Atlantic Canada, making them vulnerable to local catastrophes such as oil spills.

Productivity

Razorbill productivity varied greatly between study sites and within years. At the Gannet Islands in southern Labrador productivity values in 2004 and 2005 (Table 1) were significantly lower than those reported by Birkhead and Nettleship (1983) and Hipfner and Bryant (1999). In 2004 Machias Seal Island hatching success (0.87) was the highest recorded in 10 years while in 2005 hatching success (0.71) was the lowest recorded. It is unclear at this time what may have caused such low and variable productivity, however at the Gannet Islands abnormally high sea surface temperatures may be to blame. Depleted fish stocks may also play an important role in the low productivity observed at the Gannet Islands. As evidence of this, in 2005 Razorbills were recorded carrying extremely small bill loads (1-2 fish) of larval capelin, something that has never been observed at the Gannet Islands.

Survival

Annual survival for Razorbills banded as adults and chicks at the Gannet Islands from 1996 to 2005 was found to be 88.4% (SE = 0.02) and 83.5% (SE = 0.03) respectively (Table 2). At MSI, annual survival for Razorbills banded as adults and chicks from 1995-2005 was 86.0% (SE = 0.04) and 83.9% (SE = 0.10). For both study sites, the annual adult survival estimates reported are slightly lower than other areas of Canada and Europe (Table 3) and are much lower than for other closely related species in Canada such as the Guillemot and Atlantic Puffin. In Newfoundland and Labrador, Razorbills experience significant mortality during the annual Guillemot hunt in which several hundred to several thousand are shot illegally each year (Chapdelaine et al. 2001, Elliot 1991). This level of mortality can clearly not be sustained by a population of only 38,000 breeding pairs and the persistence of these populations may be due to other factors such as dispersal (see below).

Conclusions

The majority of Razorbill colonies in North America appear to be increasing, however we must be careful when making conclusions about the status of these populations given that they are significantly depleted from historical numbers. Furthermore, although the populations are increasing, they are doing so relatively slowly and exhibit significant variation in survival and productivity. Recently it has been observed that Razorbills may be dispersing between breeding colonies much more frequently and over longer distances than previously thought (see the Seabird Group Newsletter 99, February 2005). It is suggested that this dispersal behavior may be in response to instability in the populations caused by hunting mortality and climate change.



Injured Razorbill likely to have been caught in a gillnet (Jennifer Lavers)

This year I will be developing a comprehensive population model for this species which will examine the impacts of hunting by-catch, mortality in fishing gear, oil pollution, and climate change on Razorbill populations in Atlantic Canada. This project is one of the first to examine the cumulative effect of multiple mortality factors on seabird populations through the use of advanced population modeling. In natural environments, mortality factors do not occur in isolation of one another; therefore, this model will more accurately represent the fluctuations in the Atlantic Canadian Razorbill population that occur as a result of a combination of different factors.

Through the quantification of Razorbill demographic parameters and development of a

flexible, predictive population model, this project will contribute significantly to the conservation of the species by providing valuable information on the current status of the population and as well as the ability to predict the future status of the population through modification of the model. It is imperative that we work to ensure the Razorbill does not suffer a similar fate to that of the Great Auk.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Ian L. Jones for his continuous input and encouragement and to Dr. Tony Diamond and Dr. Greg Robertson for agreeing to collaborate on this project.

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JOURNAL REVIEWS

By Mark Tasker

From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol. 27(2)

BirdLife International has published a review of the performance of the world's intergovernmental Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, specifically looking at their work to reduce albatross bycatch but also at their wider environmental performance. Only one such body emerges with creditable results – the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Living Marine Resources (CCAMLR). Three other key fisheries organisations are doing little or nothing, with their priorities being set by extracting maximum numbers of tuna from the oceans. BirdLife's analysis indicates that nearly all RFMOs are not meeting their international legal obligations. The full report can be downloaded at:

www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/seabirds/rfmo_report.pdf

BirdLife also review on an annual basis the state of the World's birds. The good news for seabirds is that Abbott's booby moves from Critically Endangered to Endangered. This is due to efforts to control yellow crazy ant, an introduced species at the booby's only colony on Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, Pitt Island shag has moved from Vulnerable to Endangered due to significant population declines. It is uncertain what has caused these declines.

From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol. 27(3)

The removal of introduced rats by the application of 55 tonnes of poisoned bait on Little Barrier Island off New Zealand has been the fledging success of Cook's petrel rise from around 5% to 70%.

Another rodent, introduced European house mice are killing up to a million petrel, shearwater and albatross chicks on Gough Island, part of the UK Overseas Territory of Tristan da Cunha. These mice have grown larger than their ancestors in this environment with no competition (or predation). The RSPB is investigating methods to deal with this problem with funding from the UK government (we hope to have a talk on this issue at the forthcoming Seabird Group conference).

The 2005 breeding season off western North America was disastrous for many species of seabird. It appears that this was due to a collapse in the local supply of plankton, probably due to sea temperatures being at a 50 year high, some 2-5°C above normal. Last year though was not an El Niño year, leading many to speculate that the raised temperatures were a result of global warming.

Southern giant petrels in the Antarctic now qualify as being critically endangered, following a decrease in population size of 90% over three generations. Once again, longline fishing is to blame for many losses, but introduced predators and disturbance at breeding sites are likely also to be important factors.

From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol. 27(4)

Cahows on Bermuda have nested on low lying parts of four islets. These areas are at risk from

storms, such as Hurricane Fabian that devastated a colony in 2003 – luckily while the birds were away at sea. Two strategies are being employed to move the breeding sites to safer areas – on the original islets playback of courtship calls and even physical movement of “lost” cahows to a burrow complex built on higher ground is beginning to work. On a more ambitious scale, chicks are being translocated to another much higher island during the later stages of rearing where artificial feeding is maintained until the chicks leave. Elsewhere, such techniques work with *Pterodroma* petrels as the adults return to the site from which they fledged.

BirdLife has launched Operation Ocean Task Force as an initiative to place trainers on longline fishing vessels to demonstrate to crews simple and practical techniques to prevent seabird deaths. Funds to support this initiative are sought through www.savethealbatross.net. The Volvo Ocean Race, a round the world sailing event, is also supporting the campaign.

From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol. 28(1)

The ongoing scandalous disaster that has befallen Greenland’s seabirds further documents the decimation of this former seabird stronghold. A survey was carried out in the Uummanaq area in western Greenland. Brunnich’s guillemot used to number 500,000 pairs in eight colonies in this area – now none breed; Black-legged kittiwake, razorbill and common eider have also all suffered severe losses. Although the Greenland home rule government has introduced legislation meant to protect these species, a lack of enforcement has meant that the laws are not observed.

A satellite tracking study of Christmas Island frigatebirds revealed that one female undertook a non-stop 26-day 4000 km return flight from Christmas Island via Sumatra and Borneo including an overland crossing of Java’s mountains and volcanoes. The bird is unlikely to have landed during this flight and probably slept and fed entirely on the wing.

The recently rediscovered New Zealand storm-petrel has been caught at sea and photographed in the hand. A sample was also taken to allow DNA analysis to determine which genus the species belongs in. Small transmitters have been

fitted to three birds in an attempt to determine where the species breeds.

From *SEEVÖGEL* Vol. 26 (2), 26(3) and 27 (1)

Nils Guse and co-workers analysed the stomachs of 92 beached fulmars from 2002-2004. Nearly all stomachs contained plastic, with an average weight of 0.36g. Shipping and fishing were the primary source of most of the plastics. A review of similar results from elsewhere in the North Sea shows the German North Sea to be the most polluted on the basis of stomach contents of fulmars. (A talk on this topic will be presented at the forthcoming Seabird Group conference).

Kees Camphuysen and Arie Spaans review sightings of colour-ringed herring gull chicks that were marked in 14 colonies in the Netherlands between 1986 and 1988. The programme to respond to sightings of these colour-ringed birds was discontinued in 1996 and no doubt many sightings have now been ‘lost’. The results indicate that there is a strong movement of birds in winter from the Wadden Sea colonies into north and west Germany, with many sightings on rubbish tips. However, the authors point out that these results are likely to be strongly biased by the keen interest of only a few observers, and the relative ease of seeing colour ringed birds on rubbish tips and in harbours, compared to more ‘natural’ habitats.

Volker Dierschke reviews the growth of the lesser black-backed colony on Helgoland from its founding in 1997, to 265 pairs in 2005. The species displaced herring gulls from the centre of a colony. Ringing recoveries of birds from the colony indicate that some are travelling as far south as Morocco and are entering the Mediterranean.

Erika Vauk-Hentzelt reviews seabird monitoring on Helgoland – most species have grown in abundance during the period over which they have been monitored.

From *PACIFIC SEABIRDS* Vol. 32 (1)

Who-Seung Lee and co-authors examine inter-annual variations in quality of a black-tailed gull colony in Korea by measuring mean inter-nest distance and clutch size.

Hiroshi Hasegawa reports on the continued successful efforts to enlarge the short-tailed albatross population nesting on Torishima and to start a new colony in the Mukojima group in the Ogasawara Islands.

A proposal has been made to turn a vast area of the north-western Hawaiian islands into a highly-protected marine refuge. This area encompasses albatross colonies among other features. The regional fisheries management body is objecting to ideas of capping fishing at current levels or it being phased out entirely.

The US approach to seabird “restoration” following oil spills goes some way beyond that that ever seems to occur in Europe. Following a spill in February 1999 of 70,000 gallons of fuel in coastal Oregon, part of the restoration plan includes the purchase of 1290 acres of marbled murrelet breeding habitat in Oregon’s coastal forest.

Greenpeace were convicted of violating an Alaska law that requires operators of large non-tanker vessels entering state waters to have an oil spill contingency plan and documents showing proof of ability to pay for spill response.

Leech Lake in Minnesota is no longer an ideal place for cormorants. Their population apparently grew from 150 birds just seven years ago to more than 10,000 in 2004. Following this, local resort owners and fishing guides have persuaded the authorities to licence the killing of 4000 or more birds.

From *PACIFIC SEABIRDS* Vol. 32 (2)

Dan Roby and co-workers describe work in 2005 on Caspian terns and double-crested cormorants on the Lower Columbia River, where there has been long-term controversy over the number of salmon smolt consumed by piscivores. Despite poor offshore oceanographic conditions, both species breed successfully, albeit at lower numbers and with a lower overall chick output than in earlier years. Efforts to relocate colonies of both species were partially successful.

Jesse Irwin describes the installation of new boardwalk on the Farallon Islands that will help reduce the incidence of collapsed burrows caused by the passage of researchers. The plastic planks used were also laid so as to leave a gap after every three planks, in order the Cassin’s auklets have areas to dig their burrows. This species likes to dig its burrows beside existing structures. After installation in 2001, numbers of burrows beside and under the boardwalk rose every year until 2005, when the general breeding failure on the west coast of North America was reflected in a fall in burrow numbers to less than half that recorded in 2004.

In Washington, the US Endangered species Act is being reviewed. Needless to say in the current political climate, this is not a review with a view to tightening the legislation, more a response to landowner and industry discontent that the Act is inhibiting them from doing what they want to do. Meantime the US Fish and Wildlife Service is also examining whether to delist the marbled murrelet – a species that has probably done more to prevent logging of old growth forests on the west coast than any other, with the possible exception of spotted owls. The agency is also spending much of its endangered species recovery fund on reviewing whether or not 71 species should be on the list of endangered species.

In an interesting twist, a paper in *Science* indicates that the major pathway of persistent organic pollutants to the arctic may not be by the atmosphere but through seabirds such as fulmars. Fulmars breeding in the high Arctic travel up to 1000 km to feed. The study found that lakes enriched with guano had up to 60 times more DDT in them than those that did not have nesting fulmars.

From *WATERBIRDS* Vol. 28 (2)

Storm-petrels are not typically regarded as diving seabirds, however when Joel Bried attached depth gauges to 29 Madeiran storm-petrels, he found that the average maximum dive depth was 85 cm, with a maximum of 1.75m. All individuals studied dived, indicating that diving is a regular part of foraging behaviour. It was not clear whether the birds had plunge-dived or surface-dived.

From WATERBIRDS Vol. 28 (4)

In a nine-year study of the asynchronously-breeding white-tailed tropicbird on Aride Island in the Seychelles, Jaime Ramos and co-workers found that productivity ranged between 0.21 and 0.37 chicks per breeding pair, and was significantly and inversely correlated with the (Pacific Ocean) El Niño index. There were no years with a total breeding failure, possibly reflecting very dispersed feeding behaviour and the asynchronous pattern of breeding.

From WATERBIRDS Vol. 29 (1)

José Granadeiro and co-authors counted Cory's shearwaters nesting on Selvagem Grande in the Madeiran archipelago. Historically this colony was thought to contain in excess of 100,000 pairs; a figure that was greatly reduced by massacres by fishermen in 1975 and 1976. Since then protection has been established and the population has now climbed again to nearly 30,000 pairs. This colony is now the largest in the world. The island's shearwater population does not appear to be suffering from unsustainable bycatch mortality in fisheries.

From SEA SWALLOW Vol. 54

An RNBWS survey of Diego Garcia along with a detailed Annex of all sightings and some excellent photographs make up about half of this issue, in particular a seabird census of Barton Point where 4370 pairs of red-footed booby, more than 158 pairs of brown noddy and 20-40 pairs of white tern were found. A fascinating article on observations made by WAJ Cunningham while with the Royal Navy during world war 2 makes up the rest of the seabird interest in this issue.

From DINGLE PENINSULA BIRD REPORT 2002-2004

This reviewer has not been sent Bird Reports to review previously, but as a seabirder, I read this with interest. The volume is made up of the standard systematic list covering three years, but also has notes from earlier years. The Dingle is a good place to see Procellariiform seabirds, with 12 species featuring on this report. The report is

profusely illustrated with high quality colour photographs – including one of roseate tern nest boxes, whose construction and installation was supported by the Seabird Group. It is available at £10 including p&p from ldhankey@indigo.ie.

MEDITERRANEAN SEABIRDS AND THEIR CONSERVATION

A whole issue of Scientia Marina (Vol 67, supplement) is devoted to papers deriving from the 6th Mediterranean Symposium on Seabirds held in Benidorm in 2000. The papers are all dated 2003, though I have only recently received the volume. Papers describe the main characteristics of the Mediterranean seabird community, identify conservation problems and suggest solutions. Two papers stretch the definition of 'the Mediterranean' a little and describe seabirds in the Bay of Biscay. The issue has twenty papers covering Mediterranean birds and is an important volume for anyone interested in the area – including some review papers and a number with useful new information – for instance on seabird bycatch. It is not clear how much this issue costs, but enquiries should be directed to scimar@icm.csis.es

Mark Tasker
Mark.Tasker@jncc.gov.uk

PAPER REVIEWS

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Kitaysky AS, Kitaiskaia EV, Piatt JF, Wingfield JC (2006). A mechanistic link between chick diet and decline in seabirds? Proc. R. Soc. B 273: 445–450.

A decrease in food availability due to climate change is often cited as evidence of the detrimental effect of climate change on seabirds. Food availability can correlate very strongly with population growth and decline, despite having a weaker correlation with indicators of breeding success such as fledgling weight/number of fledglings. Thus a study on red-legged kittiwakes (*Rissa brevirostris*) was conducted to ascertain how food availability can cause a decrease in population size despite

breeding success being seemingly sufficient to maintain colony size. This decrease in population size may indicate unusually low survival of immature birds, post fledging. Why would this low survival occur?

Recently there has been concern regarding not just the quantity but also the quality of food being brought to chicks during rearing. Kitaysky and colleagues used aviary reared kittiwakes to determine whether food conditions during chick rearing affects long-term survival prospects in seabirds. The team exposed three groups of kittiwakes to a period of nutritional stress, while keeping another group on normal food conditions. In the groups nutritional stress was ensured by restricting the quality of fish given (low lipid fish) and/or the quantity of food. Kittiwakes under a restricted diet (all three treatments) had higher levels of the 'stress' hormone corticosterone. However, at time of fledgling there was no significant difference between corticosterone levels or mass between treatment and control kittiwakes.

Kittiwakes, as they leave the nest without parental assistance, have a steep learning curve in acquiring an ability to catch their motile prey. Once fledged these aviary kittiwakes were tested in their learning ability. In this further experiment, two closed dishes of different colours (black and white) were exposed to the kittiwakes on a number of occasions. The fish was always in the black dish and the white dish was empty. Individuals that were not exposed to nutritional stress learnt to associate cues (shape and colour) with food significantly faster than individuals which had been exposed to stress. Thus the individuals that had been exposed to nutritional stress would probably be more likely to starve and die in the natural environment.

This laboratory study shows that periods of nutritional stress during the nestling stage can have long term negative consequences for these individuals. Thus even if climate mediated changes in food availability do not appear to affect species' breeding success (using common measures); it may still have a drastic effect on the population through lower immature survival.

POPULATION SIZE: EFFECTS ON INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR AND CONDITION

Lewis S, Grémillet D, Daunt F, Ryan PG, Crawford RJM, Wanless S (2006). Using behavioural and state variables to identify proximate causes of population change in a seabird. *Oecologia* 147: 606–614.

Our climate is changing and fishing has become more intensive. Consequently, many seabird studies are concentrating on how such extrinsic factors can influence seabird population dynamics. Recent studies show that these extrinsic factors are often found to effect population dynamics in conjunction with intrinsic factors, such as population density. Determining the effects of extrinsic factors on seabirds is often labour intensive and costly. This is because most studies use a 'demographic paradigm' approach where birth, deaths, immigration and emigration rates are investigated to ascertain the reasons behind population change, with such an approach requiring long term data sets.

Lewis *et al.* used the Cape gannet (*Morus capensis*) and a 'mechanistic paradigm' approach to examine the correlations between climate change, seabird behaviour/condition and population change. In other words, they used measures of climate, and individual behaviour and condition to examine how climate is influencing population changes in the Cape gannet. Such an approach has the advantage that it allows the environmental reasons for population growth to be determined directly without having to first obtain information on demographic data. The Cape gannet is a good model species for this study as it has undergone a distributional shift in its African population and thus there has been an effect of climate on this species already.

This study used many potential indicators of food availability, such as; trip duration, foraging work, quality of food delivered and adult body condition. Results showed that the behavioural/state indicators of food availability correlated well with population health. Furthermore, a positive relationship was found between colony density and colony growth in

Cape gannets, suggesting that extrinsic factors (food availability) rather than intrinsic factors are important for population growth in this species.

This study illustrated the benefits of the mechanistic approach, as behaviour and condition seem to be good indicators of population health. The study also highlighted the potential benefits of using both the mechanistic and demographic approach together to ascertain what environmental factors are influencing seabird populations and in what way this is reducing population size, for example, through lower breeding success, survival or emigration.

REQUESTS FOR HELP AND INFORMATION

THE NON-ESTUARINE COASTAL WATER FOWL SURVEY: VOLUNTEERS WANTED

The United Kingdom is internationally important for its numbers of wintering waterbirds, and many of these are monitored annually by the Wetland Bird Survey counts (WeBS). However, the WeBS counts are mostly made on estuaries and inland waterbodies, therefore leaving the majority of our coastline uncounted. Important populations of several species occur around our shores outwith estuaries, and consequently their numbers are not monitored annually by the WeBS counts. In a bid to bolster our knowledge of waterbird populations around our coastline, the 1984-85 Winter Shorebird Count (WSC) was organised by the BTO, and found that the non-estuarine coast held particularly important numbers of Ringed Plover, Sanderling, Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone. Building on the success of the WSC, a repeat survey, the Non-estuarine Coastal Waterbird Survey (NEWS), was carried out over the 1997-98 winter. Comparing the results from NEWS to those of the WSC revealed declines in the numbers of Ringed Plover (-15%), Sanderling (-20%), Purple Sandpiper (-21%), Bar-tailed Godwit (-44%) and Turnstone (-

16%). NEWS also suggested changes in the winter distribution of species such as Ringed Plover and Purple Sandpiper, with the greatest densities of birds recorded on the Western Isles. These changes could be linked to our changing climate, with milder winters allowing birds to winter further north.

It is nearly a decade since the 1997-98 NEWS, and we are planning to run it again over next winter (2006-07). There is plenty of anecdotal information to suggest that the populations of Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone at least have further declined since the previous survey.

Overall, we achieved very good coverage for the last survey, but inevitably, some regions are likely to receive better coverage than others. Much of Highland Scotland, along with the islands are such examples, so if you think that you would like to contribute to a worthwhile survey over the festive period, then please contact Steve Holloway at the BTO.

Steve Holloway
Steve.Holloway@bto.org

THE SEABIRD OSTEOLOGY WEB PAGES: MATERIAL WANTED

In spite of the many skulls and bones that are presented in the Seabird Osteology Pages (see also the article on page 18) I could still use more material. I have a special interest in ringed birds for known age specimens in order to establish age related characteristics. But many of the species, that are less common in western Europe, are represented by only one skull or skeleton. For comparative studies, I would like to get in touch with seabird researchers or seabirders who are willing to help me complete my reference collection. I'm licenced to hold this collection and to import specimens for this purpose.

Edward Soldaat
edward@shearwater.nl

Margrietstraat 5
9491 BE Zeijen
The Netherlands

BEACH WATCH SURVEY 2006: VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Following on from the publication of the Beach Watch Report 2005 (see page 2), if you would like to take part in this year's Beachwatch event or would like more information on the impacts of marine litter on our environment, please visit www.adoptabeach.org.uk, or contact the Marine Conservation Society on 01989 567807.

Marine Conservation Society
Unit 3, Wolf Business Park
Alton Road
Ross-on-Wye
Herefordshire HR9 5NB

CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

“SEABIRD POPULATIONS UNDER PRESSURE”

THE SEABIRD GROUP 9TH
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
KINGS COLLEGE, ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY



The programme for the Seabird Group conference, to be held in Aberdeen from Friday 1st September to Sunday 3rd September is coming together well. The overall theme of the Conference is 'Seabird populations under pressure' and papers were sought to address this. A number of top-class speakers have been selected to address each of the following topical sessions:

- Perception of a pressure
- Fisheries interactions
- Mammalian predation

- Climate change
- Wind farm interactions
- Disturbance and other effects
- Contaminants

Further speakers will update us on other aspects of current seabird research and conservation. In addition to the 33 speakers, another 40 papers in the form of posters are expected.

Social activities, apart from the opportunity to meet many others with an interest in seabirds, include a dinner, ceilidh, raffle and a silent auction. An excursion on Monday 4th September taking in local bird-watching sites and a distillery visit is planned as an add-on to the Conference.

The venue, as for the Seabird Group's 2004 conference, will be King's College Conference Centre, which lies at the heart of the campus of the University of Aberdeen. A variety of accommodation is available on campus, just a few minutes walk from King's Conference Centre and Elphinstone Hall. Single rooms with shared toilet/shower (£22.50 per night) or en-suite rooms (£30.50 per night) are available in Crombie-Johnston Hall, or in King's Hall (singles £45.50 per night, doubles £68.50 per night). Prices include full Scottish breakfast. An allocation of rooms has also been reserved for the nights of 3rd and 4th September.

The cost of registration is £100 (£95 if paid by cheque). This includes a wine and buffet reception on the Friday evening, lunch on Saturday and Sunday, and the Conference Dinner in the historic Elphinstone Hall on Saturday evening, which will be followed by a traditional Scottish ceilidh.

Booking forms are available from www.seabirdgroup.org.uk. Participation is limited to 175 people, allocated on a first-come first-served basis. The deadline for booking is 1st August 2006. For further details or any queries contact Martin Heubeck martinheubeck@btinternet.com

Please book early to avoid disappointment!

NEWS FROM OTHER GROUPS



THE ROYAL NAVAL BIRDWATCHING SOCIETY

Background

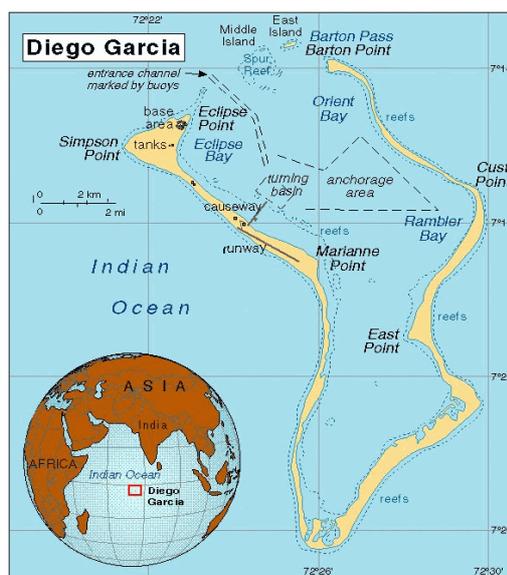
The RNBWS was established in 1946 to help and encourage members serving in the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Women's Royal Naval Service, in the observation and study of Seabirds and Landbirds at sea. His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, KG, KT, OM is the Society's Patron. Early members were Captain Gerald Tuck Royal Navy who was one of the first Ornithologists to document birds on Ocean passages¹; these books being very much the forerunner of Harrison's Seabirds. One of our first Vice Presidents was Lieutenant Commander Peter M Scott MBE DSC RNVR (a name familiar to most). Early Honorary advisors were W (Bill) B Alexander, E M (Max) Nicholson and G (Guy) Mountford. When the first Sea Swallow – the journal of the RNBWS was published in 1947, the Royal Navy had Shore Stations in many parts of the World, many Warships and thousands of personnel. In the 21st Century the Royal Navy is much reduced and the RNBWS has evolved. Whilst maintaining the priority for Seabird observation and maintaining a world wide Database, and the status of Sea swallow as a significant Ornithological Journal it has widened its membership to include all those interested in Birdwatching, both on Sea and Land. Membership averages 250, including many from overseas, the offshore oil industry, passengers on cruise liners and yachtsmen. Reports received cover most sea areas of the world.

¹ A Guide to Seabirds on the Ocean Routes – 1980 (ISBN 0 00 219203 9) and A Field Guide to Seabirds of Britain and the World – 1978 (ISBN 0 00 219718 9).

About seven tenths of the world's surface is covered with salt water, which provides the environment for nearly 300 species of seabirds, and across which many more species of landbird travel during their annual migrations. Especially during adverse weather, these frequently take refuge on board ships. The problems of their identification and deduction of their seasonal distribution and migration routes, etc., are challenges providing a fascinating hobby for the seafarer, and such observations can be of unique importance to the serious ornithologist and conservationist.

Aims and activities

The primary aim of RNBWS is to provide a forum for the exchange of information and observations of seabirds, and of landbirds at sea, by members for whom Birdwatching is first and foremost a hobby, and to provide advice and support to make best use of such opportunities at sea. The secondary aim is to co-ordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods, so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist ashore. RNBWS collaborates with Birdlife International, BTO, BOC, RSPB and maintains links with many other organisations, exchanging Journals with some 35 other societies. A résumé of these journals is included in the Society Bulletin which is published on the RNBWS website every 6 months. Journals are available for loan to members.



Diego Garcia

The RNBWS has built up a reporting system using standardised recording forms - passage reports covering seabirds and landbirds, seabirds census sheets, and for birds examined in the hand. The database holds over 36,000 observations. The society has established a number of local representatives, both in home ports and in ports overseas, to provide a focus for Birdwatching activities when in harbour, or ashore. The Society also produces a yearly UK activities programme and tries to visit Gibraltar at least once a year to witness Raptor Migration.

Current scientific activity is concentrated on the survey of the birds of Diego Garcia (British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT)) particularly the breeding activities of the Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*. This is part of our interest in Birds of British Overseas Territories as part of the Overseas Territories Environmental Programme (OTEP). The 2005 survey was supported by OTEP and the International Division of the RSPB.

Members are always welcome and details can be found on the RNBWS Website at www.rnbws.org.uk or by contacting the Hon Sec – Frank Ward on 01329 665931 or 07717 368300.

francisward@btopenworld.com

THE SEABIRD OSTEOLOGY PAGES: AN ONLINE BONE COLLECTION

www.seabird-osteology.info
<http://www.shearwater.nl/seabird-osteology/index.htm>

It has been about four years from when this website was first published on the internet. Since then it has been visited several thousand times and a good number of visitors have given their comments. It would seem that the site is quite unique and has become well known now amongst seabirders and researchers.

Why was it started?

It is simply the outcome of the interest of a 'born collector' with a passion for birds, seabirds in particular. During my childhood, I spent many

hours at the local Natural History Museum and used to collect almost anything of natural origin: bones, shells and plants. As a result, I hold a large collection of seabird skulls and skeletons. I have a deep interest in form and function, the ecological meaning of the amazing range of adaptations in seabirds and the admiration of the beauty, for example tubenose bills.



Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

The purpose of it?

In the beginning, the collection was for nothing more than my own pleasure. When trying to understand seabird skeletal anatomy, it is absolutely necessary to have the bones in the hand. That's why a simple skull collection developed to a larger reference collection. Putting the pictures of skulls on the internet in the Seabird Skull Gallery as the site was called earlier, just to show the diversity of seabird skulls, resulted in numerous emails that asked: Why is the whole skeleton not shown? Can you write a book on the identification of seabird bones? My daughter found a skull on the beach, can you tell us what it is? Can you help me identify this prion? It was these kind of questions that stimulated me to expand my collection, knowledge and website. Now I think I have one of the larger osteological reference collections on seabirds in Holland and most of which still to be put on the web.

The relevance

It became clear to me that museum collections normally contain a lot of skins but skeleton collections are much less developed and are much harder to access. The Internet makes the material available to anyone who wants to compare their own finds and to explain a broader public about the anatomical matters of seabirds. But as the saying goes : the more you learn, the more questions you have. Studying the skeletons, the variation between or even within species raised new topics to study such as: age

related characteristics in alcid that might be helpful to establish the age of bird killed in oil spills, the relation between the shape of the bones and flight and foraging habits and the ecological position of a species. The collection has also important applications for archaeological studies: a vast collection of seabird bones that were dug up from Miocene and Pliocene layers in Holland were partly identified using reference specimens. A more recent archaeological find of an albatross bill in the city of Amsterdam was also identified using the collection. Therefore, the Seabird Osteology Pages appear to be a valuable source of information for a very diverse group of interested people, professionals and amateurs, and in my opinion worth further development.

Edward Soldaat
edward@shearwater.nl

SEABIRD GROUP NEWS



SEABIRD GROUP GRANT: MARCH 2006 ROUND

The Seabird Group awards small grants each year towards seabird research projects or censuses. Priority is given to Seabird Group members working on Atlantic seabirds and the merits of each application are assessed by the committee. The following projects have been awarded grants in the March round of grants, and we look forward to hearing how they get on. The next grant round is 31 October 2006. Grant application forms are available from our website or from alan.leitch1@virgin.net.

Declan Clarke, North Down Ringing Group, Northern Ireland (£200). To ring, monitor and census populations of Storm Petrels and Leach's Petrels on, and passing by, Inishmurray, Co. Sligo and Duvillaunmore, Co. Mayo on the West coast of Ireland.

David Grieve (£200), To assess breeding seabird numbers and to ring all available young birds on Lady Isle, Troon, Ayrshire, as well as carrying out some limited land management and improve their accommodation base.

Andrew Ramsay, Trevor Jones & Claire Smith, Handa Island Skua Monitoring Programme (£250). To investigate the distribution and conservation status of breeding Great and Arctic skuas on the west and northern coasts of Scotland.

Nigel R Winn (£350). To undertake an expedition to Dun/Hirta, St. Kilda, to carry out a survey of the current breeding population of Leach's petrel on the island of Dun, as well as ringing birds on Dun and at Carn Mor.

SEABIRD PHOTO REQUEST

The Seabird Group are keen to build up a collection of high quality photos for use in the newsletter, website and other group publications. If you have any seabird photos (including seabird portraits, colony shots, people working on seabirds, conservation issues etc) and are happy for them to be used by the group, please send them (preferably as jpegs) to linda.wilson@jncc.gov.uk, or send them to Linda Wilson, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1UZ. All original photos will be returned once scanned, and all photos will be credited, so please provide your name and a way to contact you.

SEABIRD GROUP WEBSITE

The Seabird Group committee recognise that our website is in real need of a revamp, both in design and content. Over the last several months, I have been working with our website designer, Jeff Stratford to create a more user-friendly site, with improved and up-to-date content. We hope to launch our new-look website in July. In the meantime, if you have any ideas or comments about what should be included in the website, please contact me at linda.wilson@jncc.gov.uk



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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 15th May (for June edition), 15th September (for October edition) or 15th 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 2006 membership rates are:-

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

Sheila Russell
Membership Secretary
Clober Farm
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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.

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Other Members:

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

EDITORIAL

I would like to thank all the contributors who have made this newsletter possible. Many of the articles submitted were from new authors which is very encouraging. I would also like to thank Chris Pendlebury who proof read the final version. I am still very keen to encourage more people to get involved with the production of this newsletter. If you have any ideas for articles then please get in touch.

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.

Ed.