



# NEWSLETTER 112

October 2009

## CONSERVATION NEWS

### INCREASED PROTECTION FOR SCOTLAND'S SEABIRDS

Scotland's seabirds are to benefit from strengthened protection, after Scottish Government announced that 31 of Scotland's seabird breeding colony Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are to be extended to protect their adjacent marine habitats. The extensions which came into force on 25 September 2009, will go out to 1, 2 or 4km, depending on which species are protected within the existing terrestrial SPA. These are the first marine SPAs in Scotland, and there is currently only one other wholly marine SPA in the UK (Carmarthen Bay in Wales, designated for its internationally important numbers of common scoter).

The announcement follows a consultation on the SPA extensions, carried out on behalf of Scottish Government by SNH in summer 2008, which recommended the extensions based on work carried out by JNCC's Marine SPA team. The seabirds for which the SPAs are classified, will benefit from protection against activities that would cause significant disturbance and will safeguard their marine habitat.

The 31 sites are: Canna and Sanday; Marwick Head; North Colonsay and Western Cliffs; Rum; St Abbs to Fast Castle; Ailsa Craig; Buchan Ness to Collieston; Calf of Eday; Cape Wrath; Copinsay; East Caithness Cliffs; Fair Isle; Fetlar; Forth Islands; Flannan Isles; Foula; Fowlsheugh; Handa; Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field; Hoy; Mingulay and Berneray; North Caithness Cliffs; North Rona and Sula Sgeir; Noss; Rousay; Shiant Isles; St Kilda; Sule Skerry and Sule Stack; Sumburgh Head; Troup, Pennan and Lion's Heads; and West Westray.



Common guillemot- one of the seabirds which will benefit from increased protection at sea  
by Ben Dean

For more information, see <http://www.snh.org.uk/about/directives/ab-dir15j.asp>

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## MARINE BILL PROGRESS

The Marine and Coastal Access Bill has completed its progress through the House of Lords. It was introduced to the House of Commons on 9 June and had its Second Reading on 23 June. The remaining stages, working towards Royal Assent, will be completed in the Autumn 2009 but no dates have been announced yet. The Bill covers a number of key areas of interest, which are as follows:

- Marine Management Organisation
- Marine Planning
- Marine Licensing
- Marine Nature Conservation
- Fisheries Management and Marine Enforcement
- Environmental Data and Information
- Migratory and Freshwater Fisheries
- Coastal Access
- Coastal and Estuary Management

A series of maps have been created to help explain how the Bill will apply to different regions of the seas around the UK.

Adapted from

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/legislation/index.htm>

## MARINE IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

BirdLife has taken a major step towards the identification of Marine Important Bird Areas (mIBAs) for seabirds around the world. Guidelines have been now agreed which can be used to track seabirds and analyse the data to identify Marine IBAs for any seabird species. BirdLife recently organised a series of workshops, which were attended by 50 seabird tracking experts from around the world. Workshop delegates compared the merits of different methods used to study the movements of seabirds, and tested the best ways of analysing the datasets gained from such studies.

The world's oceans are seriously under-protected. Just 0.65% of the global ocean is within protected area systems, and most of that is within the first miles of the shore. Moreover seabirds have deteriorated in IUCN Red List status faster than any other group of bird species

As a result, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development set a target to establish a globally representative network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) by 2012. However, the IUCN estimates that unless progress is accelerated, this goal will not be met until 2060 - half a century late.

Adapted from

[http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/07/marine\\_iba\\_guidelines.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/07/marine_iba_guidelines.html)

## FIJI PETREL LOCATED AT SEA

An expedition to find the Critically Endangered Fiji Petrel *Pseudobulweria macgillivrayi* at sea has been successful. Up to eight individuals were seen over eleven days in an area around 25 nautical miles south of Gau. The species' flight, behaviour and detailed comparison to other species are also described for the first time.

Known from just one specimen collected in 1855 on Gau Island, Fiji, the Fiji Petrel was lost for the next 130 years. Since 1984 there have been a handful of reports of "grounded" birds that had crashed onto village roofs on Gau. Until now there had been no confirmed sightings of the seabird at sea.

Finding Fiji Petrel at sea was no accident, combining meticulous planning over the timing of the survey and luring the seabirds with frozen chum. Frozen chum blocks persist for up to one-and-a-half hours, creating a pungent and constant oil slick, which attracts petrels from some miles away.

The expedition also gathered valuable distributional information on many other seabird species, including the Endangered Phoenix Petrel (*Pterodroma alba*) and the Vulnerable Gould's (*Pterodroma leucoptera*) and Parkinson's Petrels (*Procellaria parkinsoni*.) More surveys to locate the breeding area of Fiji Petrel are planned for 2010, which will be critical in ensuring the conservation of this species.

Adapted from:

[http://www.birdlife.org/news/pr/2009/09/fiji\\_petrel\\_discovery.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/pr/2009/09/fiji_petrel_discovery.html)

## RESEARCH NEWS

### RENEWABLES AND NEW METHODOLOGIES FOR SEABIRD MONITORING AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

COWRIE (Collaborative Offshore Wind Research Into The Environment) is pleased to announce the release of two reports prepared by BTO (British Trust for Ornithology).

The first report commissioned by COWRIE produced a set of protocols for the use of High definition imagery for surveying sea birds and marine mammals (Thaxter and Burton 2009). Previously, visual techniques used for surveying seabirds and marine mammals were ship-based, conventional aerial surveys, and to a lesser extent shore-based counts of birds. The aim of this report was to review trials of high definition imagery technology in the monitoring and assessment of the numbers of sea birds and marine mammals at offshore sites, and produce recommendations and protocols on its use alongside existing survey methodology, notably in light of its possible use in surveying round 3 wind farm development zones. To this end, a workshop was organized to bring together key users, developers and regulators of the industry

The second report reviewed assessment methodologies and provided further recommendations for carrying out ornithological impact assessments (Maclean et al. 2009). COWRIE had already previously published guidelines for ship and aerial survey of marine birds for offshore windfarm assessments. The purposes of this review were fourfold: (1). to assess the extent to which these recommendations have been followed; (2). to identify any differences in interpretation of the guidance between sites; (3). to test the practicalities of using high definition cameras during aerial surveys; (4). to provide more rigorous guidelines for the type of analytical techniques that should be used.

Copies of both reports can be downloaded from:  
[http://www.offshorewindfarms.co.uk/Pages/Publications/Latest\\_Reports/Birds/](http://www.offshorewindfarms.co.uk/Pages/Publications/Latest_Reports/Birds/)

### OLDEST PUFFIN IN THE UK FOUND

The Shiant Auk Ringing Group's expedition to the Shiant Isles this summer first broke the British longevity record for Puffin on 5 July 2009 when they caught EH37060 in the Puffin colony on the north-slope of Rough Island (Garbh Eilean). Ian Buxton, a member of this year's team, originally ringed it in this colony on 27 June 1977 so he was reunited with the same bird 32 years later (see photo!). It is now carrying a new ring, EX08155.

But this record was topped just five days later on 10 July, when the team caught EB73152, originally ringed in the same colony on 28 June 1975 and therefore making it over 34 years old (older than three of this year's expedition members). This is now the oldest recorded Puffin in the UK. Not only did it still have its original metal ring, but also its blue/black/blue plastic colour ring, allowing it to be identified as a Shiant's bird 'in the field'. Both these birds had been ringed as adults so their real ages would be at least two to three years older.



Ian Buxton and Puffin EB73152 together again!  
by David Stevenson

At the time it was thought that this 34 year old had set a new European longevity record, beating an Icelandic bird, ring number Iceland 419571 controlled at 33 years and 10 months after ringing and published on the EURING web site under the list of longevity records ([www.euring.org/data\\_and\\_codes/longevity-voous.htm](http://www.euring.org/data_and_codes/longevity-voous.htm)). The Icelanders disputed our claim to have the new European record, now claiming a 38 year old (not listed on the EURING site), but the Norwegians have trumped them. The Norwegians have a published record of a bird at almost 41 years old, ringed as a fledgling with ring number Norway 56705 on 8 August 1976 and found very recently killed by a Raven or large falcon on 9 May 2008 just a few metres from its natal site on Rost off the west coast of Norway ([www.seapop.no/no/files/short-reports/SEAPOP\\_Short\\_Report\\_5-2009\\_optimized.pdf](http://www.seapop.no/no/files/short-reports/SEAPOP_Short_Report_5-2009_optimized.pdf)).

David Steventon, founder of the Shiant Auk Ringing Group, and a member of the original expeditions in the 1970s commented: "These longevity records were almost inevitable, as ringing data shows that adult survival rates are about 92%. Therefore, we would expect that about 25 of the 441 birds ringed in 1975 will still be alive and could be re-caught in 2009. There could even be a handful remaining alive from those ringed back to 1970, so there is the potential to break the record again in the next few years. Compared to recent years, the Puffins are having a good breeding season this year, bringing in good sized sand eels for their young."

The Puffin colony being studied on the north of Rough Island is a grassy slope approximately 100 metres from top to bottom and approximately 80 metres at its widest on the grass section. The colony merges into a scree of large boulders of hexagonal columnar basalt to the west, that also contains Puffin burrows but that is much less practical to study. Mike Harris marked out a transect on the grassy slope in 1973 for the purposes of counting occupied and unoccupied burrows. This transect was counted almost annually up to and including 1989 but the markers have long since disappeared. Best estimate of the number of breeding pairs based on extrapolating the occupied burrow count from the transect area to the total area is of the order of 6,000 pairs. The Shiant Auk Ringing

Group started the ringing program in 1970, when counting the Shiant Auk for Operation Seafarer, and have since accumulated a total of over 11,000 adult Puffins ringed in this colony.

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Further information on ringing can also be found on <http://www.bto.org/ringing/>

## 2009 UK BREEDING SEASON NEWS

### ISLE OF MAY

After a series of very poor breeding seasons for seabirds on the Isle of May NNR, it was especially pleasing to see species doing markedly better in 2009, and overall the season was the most successful in recent years.

Return rates of colour-ringed adults were markedly high compared to the last two years with only kittiwake remaining below the long term average. **Razorbills** had their highest ever return rate at 97%, while values for **puffin** (85%) and **shag** (90%) were the highest recorded since 2003. A partial census of puffin burrows suggested that there had been no further decrease in the population, following the dramatic decline from 69,000 to 41,000 occupied burrows that occurred between 2003 and 2008.



Shags had a record year for productivity on the May in 2009

by Mark Newall

The only species to have below average breeding success was **razorbill** at 0.61 chicks fledged per pair (long term mean 0.66). **Fulmars** were slightly above average with a productivity of 0.44. **Puffins** laid early and had a successful season with 0.72 chicks fledging per pair, the highest since 2003. Kittiwakes were slightly later than last year, but with breeding success at 0.7 chicks per completed nest they too had the most successful season since 2003. **Guillemots** were early compared to recent years and had the highest breeding success since 1997 (0.75 chicks fledged per pair). **Shags** had their most successful season on record with a productivity of 2.0 chicks per pair, eclipsing the previous record set last year.

In terms of diet, the most striking aspect of 2009 was the size of sandeels brought into the colony. **Puffin** chick diet comprised 91% sandeels, with the mean load weight the second highest on record and the length of fish substantially longer than during the last decade. **Razorbill** chick diet was almost entirely sandeels. Whilst guillemot chicks were fed mainly on sprats (67%), the proportion of sandeels (28%) was the highest for nine years. **Kittiwake** chicks were predominantly fed sandeels while rockling were much less in evidence in their diet compared to recent years. Shags chicks were fed a variety of prey items, while extremely few snake pipefish were eaten by any of the species studied.

For more information on the Isle of May study look up the website:  
[www.ceh.ac.uk/sci\\_programmes/IsleofMayLong-TermStudy](http://www.ceh.ac.uk/sci_programmes/IsleofMayLong-TermStudy).

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## AILSA CRAIG

Ailsa Craig is an instantly recognisable and iconic island in the firth of Clyde. For many years it was plagued by rats, until in 1991, after intensive baiting and monitoring, the island was declared free from these rodents, which had such a devastating impact on ground and burrow nesting birds and other wildlife. After almost a 70-year absence, puffins returned to nest

successfully on the island in 2002 and have continued to grow in numbers. However, they are still a long way off the huge numbers once seen there in the late 19th century, who Robert Gray once described as, “so great as to cause a bewildering darkness”.

During the rat ‘occupation’ of Ailsa, other species of bird such as Wheatear, Shelduck, Black guillemot, Manx shearwater and Storm Petrel also disappeared from the island. Thankfully, wheatear, black guillemot and shelduck have returned to breed on the island since the rats’ demise. However, the question over whether manx shearwater and storm petrel are once again breeding on Ailsa Craig is still unanswered. The breeding status of these two species was one of the main goals of two, three-four day trips, which took place in June and July this year. Ailsa Craig has been a RSPB reserve for the last five years, and this year was visited on four separate occasions to undertake seabird survey and monitoring.



Surveyors Yvonne Boles, Chris Rodger and Gus Keys taking a well deserved break in between surveying

## Gannet

No counts undertaken this year but by all accounts the colony is likely to still be expanding beyond the 32,000 AOS Seabird 2000 figure. The last aerial survey (2004) was undertaken quite early in the season (June) and recorded just over 27,000 AOS. The colony continues to slowly reach above the cliffs onto the slopes, most notably in the southwest of the island. It is hoped to undertake aerial counts of the whole colony next year.

## **Puffin**

Poor weather in May hampered a dedicated puffin count, but a brief count of birds on shore during a quick sail past the colony on a boat from Arran was possible later on. One of the main overnight trips in early June recorded at least 30 AOB in use, with a further 25 likely AOB. The colony seems to be slowly spreading south along the cliff slopes and to the north, close to the north foghorn. A rough estimate of colony size is c.55 AOB.

## **Black guillemot**

Perfect conditions in late April on a beautiful, but early, sail from Girvan counted 132 individuals, the majority of which were on shore. This was a surprisingly high figure, considering the re-colonising Tystie breeding population was thought to be around 30 pairs. After speaking to Bernie Zonfrillo, he pointed out that many black guillemots from the mainland journey to Ailsa to feed on the rich supply of butterfish around the island. Whatever the explanation, it seems likely that Tysties are doing well once more on the Craig.

## **Kittiwake**

Since Seabird 2000 kittiwake numbers have notably decreased, mirroring what is happening elsewhere in the country. In 2000, there was a total of 1675 AON recorded. This year only 428 AON were counted, a huge decrease in the last nine years. Later in July, most nests looked to have good-sized chicks, so hopefully they have had a reasonable breeding season.



Gannets are still thought to be increasing in numbers on Ailsa Craig  
by Gus Keys

## **Guillemot**

Logistically it was just not possible to undertake 3-5 counts of the whole colony in June to give an accurate figure of individuals. Therefore, one-day trip was undertaken with counters, scribes and photographers to count auks on 1st July. A total of 11,668 individual guillemots were on the cliffs. However, with just one count in early July, this figure may well be an overestimate of the breeding population.

## **Razorbill**

As above, just a single count. This revealed a total of 1030 individual razorbills on the cliffs. Many razorbills were found nesting under rocks below the main cliffs close to the shore. These tended to be in amongst shag nests and close to puffin burrows.

## **Fulmar**

Very low numbers of fulmar this year, most nests found thinly spread around the island, making it hard work to pick them out amongst other species. Only 174 AOS were found.

## **Shag**

Most nests were found on the west and southwest of the island, the vast majority of which were found low down amongst rocks and boulders. A total of 96 AON were found.

## **Herring gull**

The herring gull population has fallen dramatically in recent years. Seabird 2000 survey found 1450 pairs. These proved hard birds to survey, with many simply hanging around and not seeming to be nesting. The only real way to get any real idea of numbers was to count individual birds in early June on the first of the 3-4 day 'expeditions'. Only 345-450 individual herring gulls were counted this year, showing how much their numbers have fallen in the nine years since Seabird 2000.

## **Lesser black-backed gull**

Again, this species was counted in the same way, revealing between 324-400 individual birds.

## Great black-backed gull

A total of 65-80 individuals were recorded. With so few rabbits around these three gull species may be struggling to find enough food for themselves and their young, which might go some way to explaining their current low numbers.

## Manx shearwater

Despite much searching and playback around suitable looking burrows around the island, no confirmed evidence of breeding was found. Each night we stayed on the island, in early June and mid July, we were treated to the arrival of calling male and female manx shearwaters between 11pm –1am. These were most concentrated to the northeast of the island, with birds clearly seen flying through our torch beams right at the cliff slopes above us. It seems highly likely that for a number of years now (as B. Zonfrillo has been witnessing exactly the same scene) manx shearwaters have been breeding in small numbers on Ailsa Craig. There are many places on the island, which are virtually inaccessible to search, and other places where they could be easily missed. There is always next year...!

## Storm petrel

After much searching & tape playback, no contacts were made and as manx shearwater, they could be breeding. An even more difficult species to find on such a big island, especially if they are only a small number breeding.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to the following for all their help on the Craig this year: Sarah Davis, Andy Schofield, Dave Beaumont, Yvonne Boles, Andy Robinson, Chris Rodger, Zoe Clelland, Neil O'Donnell, Paul Tarling, Paul Coultard, Alison Phillip, Ian Darling, Paul Collin & Catherine Markey. Also, many thanks also go to Bernie Zonfrillo.

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## NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

The NE Scottish hill **Common Gulls** have had another bad season and have declined further. On 9 May there were only about half the number at Corsemaul that there were three years ago, and they were spreading out from the original nucleus, which is now grassy, into the surviving surrounding heather- where there were formerly 40 nests I only found seven. There were also 4 old and 17 newer dead birds with no obvious cause of death- apparently botulism is about the only thing not excluded yet. On 28 June there were only a few hundred birds which were beginning to flock, and neither live nor dead chicks could be found. Ian Francis reports that there were also only a few hundred birds at the other big colonies at Tom Mor and Boultenstone, though some from the latter may have moved to what seems to be a new colony at Gallows Hill. The huge colonies of thousands of birds that formed in NE Scotland in the 1980s appear to have collapsed when faced with a run of bad breeding seasons. Birds breeding on low ground in a gas pipeline inspection enclosure and on distillery warehouse roofs had chicks. David Jenkins reports that **Black-headed gulls** have disappeared from mid Deeside, where there were formerly thousands, and they are reduced elsewhere.

On 14 May there appeared to be fewer auks at Troup Head, but this was not followed up. A very rough estimate showed 1650 sites and 350 club **Gannets** there on 31 July, when there appeared to be a fair number of young **Kittiwakes**.

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## NORTH RONA

The main aim of the visit to North Rona was to resurvey the entire island for Leach's and European Storm-petrel, following the methods used in 2001, and any other work had to be incidental to this, since it is time and labour intensive. The most disturbing result was the significant decline in Leach's Storm-petrel, of 37.1% since 2001. There is some evidence, based on a partial survey of the main colony in the village ruins, made by SNH in 2005, that these losses have occurred since then. European Storm-petrel numbers are unchanged.

There have also been major losses of Black legged Kittiwake and the slow decline of Great Black-backed Gulls continues. However, it seems to have been a productive season for shags, auks and kittiwakes, with notable brood sizes and early fledging. Fish loads seen throughout our stay were noticeably healthy, predominately Rockling and small sand eels being brought in, with no sign of pipefish.

**European Storm-petrel.** Repeat of the 2001 survey, no change in distribution or numbers between years (intact desiccated corpse found, ringed Yell, Shetland 1984)

**Leach's Storm-petrel.** Repeat of the 2001 survey. Decline of 37.1% overall, down from 1133 AOS in 2001 to 713 AOS in 2009 (tail and one leg with ring found, ringed Rona village 2005)



Kittiwake- one of the species to have done well in terms of breeding success in 2009 despite declining numbers over recent years  
by Claire Lauder

**Arctic Tern.** Breeding north, east and south coasts, c20 pairs at each site.

**Herring Gull.** Very few, not proven to breed.

**Lesser Black backed Gull.** 3 pairs, at least 2 broods of small young.

**Great Black backed Gull.** Total breeding failure, also numbers have declined since the 2005 count of 551 pairs. Although a proper count was't done our estimate is of 3-400 pairs. Population probably closer to the min figure.

**Black legged Kittiwake.** 852 well built nests found in a whole island count. This is the lowest total ever made since the first counts in the 1970s, and there has been a 54% decline since the 1837 AON counted in 2005. Productivity was very good though. A sample of 70 nests checked found 9 empty, 36 with B/1 and 25 with B/2. Most young were about 28 days old but 11 broods were small and downy.

**Great Skua.** 18 AOT, no change since 2005 (or from 1986 when 14 AOT were found).

**Shag.** Most nests held 2-3 almost fledged young, many had fledged just as we arrived. A few nests with week to 2 week old chicks. All the usual sites held nests, no attempt to count them, but obviously thriving, by contrast with the last check in 2005.

**Puffin.** No decline in AOB in 5 transects, increase in one. No losses of small sub-colonies away from main one on the east cliffs of Toa Rona. Essentially no change since the 2001 count of 7000 AOB (leg with ring found, ringed Sule Skerry 1996)

**Razorbill.** Good numbers, particularly at the main site above Geo Leis. Young being fed rockling.

**Guillemot.** Not looked at in detail, suspect early fledging. Ledges thinned out by 7/8 July.

**Black Guillemot** Nests with young found at usual west coast sites, at least 9 pairs, with others along the east coast.

Stuart Murray

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## SHETLAND (EXCLUDING FAIR ISLE)

We are so used to poor breeding seasons in Shetland that when a good or reasonable one comes along it can become a bit over-hyped. Certainly, it was a better season than 2008, some species at some locations experienced their highest productivity for years, and it was a delight to see young tirkicks (Arctic Terns) and skooti alins (Arctic Skuas) on the wing. The downside is that numbers of certain species are low, and that productivity from one reasonable breeding season can only make a small contribution towards reversing some long-term population declines.

**Red-throated Divers** had a patchy year, with August chicks apparently starving to death in some parts of Shetland, and the dry summer causing problems at some locations. On Hermaness, four pairs hatched five young; two starved, one was predated and two fledged, with a similar story elsewhere on Unst. Success from the 20 pairs that nested on Fetlar was 0.50, and 0.83 from the 12 pairs at Lumbister RSPB reserve on Yell. On Foula, 11 pairs fledged between six and nine chicks, the best season for some time despite low water levels in some pools.

The number of **Fulmar** apparently occupied sites increased since 2008 by 6-20% at monitored colonies, bringing the population index for the species back to that of 2003. Breeding success at seven colonies ranged from 0.28 (Hermaness) to 0.49 (Troswick Ness), with a mean of 0.43 (s.e. 0.03), relatively high for recent years.

**Gannet** productivity at Hermaness was 0.65, higher than in 2008 (0.56) and similar to the long-term average.

Southwesterly gales on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> May washed out many **Shag** nests on west-facing coasts, although most pairs probably rebuilt and relaid. Surveys in June located 1,762 nests, 18% more than most recent counts for the same stretches of coast, and it was noticed that most nests on east coasts held large young and most on west coasts held either eggs or small young. Breeding success at Sumburgh Head was 1.56 young fledged from 185 egg-laying pairs (24% of

which fledged broods of three), the highest since 2002, and was 1.36 on Mousa, while casual observations suggested a similarly good season at other colonies. More nested on Foula than in recent years (although still many fewer than before the 2004 crash in numbers there), and success was c.1.3 fledged per incubated nest.



Gales which devastated areas of cliff nesting birds  
by Martin Heubeck

**Great Skuas** were notably late appearing in Shetland this spring. On Foula, 65 young fledged from 63 monitored territories (success of 1.44), although there was severe predation (cannibalism) of chicks and fledged young in parts of the island in early August. Breeding success on Mousa was 0.44 from 41 AOTs (the highest number recorded on the island), 0.51 from 109 AOTs on Noss, 1.02 from 98 AOTs on Fetlar, and 0.96 from 28 AOTs on Hermaness.

On Foula, 22 juvenile **Arctic Skuas** fledged from 63 monitored territories (although three were subsequently predated), the highest success (0.35) for many years. It was a similar story elsewhere, with success of 0.88 on Mousa (eight AOTs), 1.50 on Noss (two AOTs), 0.29 on Fetlar (seven AOTs in three plots), and 1.00 on Hermaness (two AOTs). For those of us with even moderately long memories, the number of pairs on these reserves remains desperately low.

Surveys of 34 **Kittiwake** breeding stations recorded a total of 2,327 nests, remarkably similar to the previous most recent total of 2,335, but there was much variation in changes in numbers, with some colonies having doubled in size in two years and others finally being

abandoned. A survey of Foula on 24<sup>th</sup> June located 509 AONs, half that recorded in 2007 (997) but a marked improvement on 2008 (4 AONs) when the population there simply didn't breed. These counts suggest a Shetland breeding population in 2009 (including Fair Isle) of c.6,200 pairs compared to c.20,400 in 1999, and c.47,800 in 1999. Breeding success at 10 monitored colonies was highly variable, ranging from 0.16-1.27 (mean 0.54, s.e. 0.12), reflecting predation pressure (largely by Great Skuas) as much as local food availability. On Foula success was only 0.33 yet a pair in one plot fledged a brood of three, while success at two colonies on West Burra only 3 km apart was 0.18 (Kettla Ness) and 1.27 (Ramna Geo).

**Arctic Terns** had a much better season than in recent years, although (as ever) this varied between locations. On Mousa, a minimum of 925 pairs (probably as high as 1,200) raised an absolute minimum of 495 young, while in south Mainland, the Grutness colony held 600 adults and 345 fledged young on 15<sup>th</sup> July. Modest numbers of chicks were ringed (and fledged) from other south Mainland colonies although some were also found dead. There was a similar story throughout Shetland, e.g. c.150 birds bred on Foula and 'a few' managed to fledge young.



Mike Mellor surveying on Hols Hellier, Saxavord,  
Unst  
by Martin Heubeck

**Common Guillemot** numbers in monitoring plots were, generally, only slightly higher than in 2008, while both plot counts, and whole colony counts at Sumburgh Head (7,931 in 2009, c.f. 7,325 in 2008 but 15,327 in 2001), Noss (22,065 in 2009, c.f. 24,138 in 2005 but

45,777 in 2001), and Hermaness (6,896 in 2009, c.f. 5,869 in 2004 but 10,439 in 2000) indicate that numbers attending major colonies have roughly halved over the past decade. The situation at the many smaller colonies is less clear, but that at Esha Ness is dire. All birds have been counted there since 1976, numbers peaked at a mean of 744 in 1981 and were as high as 469 in 2000, but the five 2009 counts ranged from just 18-70 birds. At Sumburgh Head, Guillemot chick diet was 45% sandeels, 29% Whiting and 22% Saithe, and breeding success (0.63) was markedly higher than in 2008 (0.28), but chick weights near fledging age, although c.8% higher than in 2007, remained 15-20% less than in the late 1990s.

Whole colony counts of **Razorbills** were 192 at Sumburgh Head (c.f. 197 in 2008, but 626 in 2001) and 558 on Noss (c.f. 1,022 in 2005), and while there was little change since 2008 in counts in study plots, numbers remain low at all monitored colonies compared to 1999-2001. Nobody monitors breeding success, but on Foula a poor season was thought to have been exacerbated by the 7<sup>th</sup> May storm.

Pre-breeding numbers of **Black Guillemots** were higher than most recent 2007/08 counts at 12 of 14 monitored stretches of coast (total of 2,079 adults in 2009, 1,885 in 2007/08, +10.3%), and while breeding success is not monitored reasonable numbers of juveniles were noted on the sea during surveys in August.

**Puffin** breeding success at Sumburgh Head was estimated at 0.46 fledged per occupied burrow, with the last chicks seen on 20<sup>th</sup> July. On Foula, birds were noted bringing in small sandeels and other small fish in early July and, perhaps a sign of a better season, no dead chicks were found at burrow entrances.

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## ALDERNEY/BURHOU, CHANNEL ISLANDS

On Alderney, newly arrived **Gannets** circling the Les Etacs colony site but not landing totalled 60 on 18/1 and c. 1,500 on 31/1. Gannets were at their nest sites on the gannetry by 9/2.

A maximum of 45 **Common Terns** was at one Alderney site, feeding chicks until the end of June. A second smaller colony was still active on 15/7. Neither colony was inspected at close quarters in order to avoid disturbance, so breeding success unknown.

A maximum of 114 **Guillemots** was counted off Alderney's south coast on 7/5, these being 67 on the sea and 57 on breeding ledges. This total is above average of recent years.

Alderney's once substantial **Puffin** population, now confined to one small inshore islet, comprised just two individuals from 17/4, increasing to a maximum of five on 24/6. Last seen on 14/7, five individuals. One bird was seen to enter a burrow on several occasions in early June. Situated 235 km south-west of the more widely known Lundy Island Puffins and conservation project, this similar remnant colony has also had problems with rats. Rodent bait stations have been maintained on the islet and close by it. However, **Great Black-backed** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** again nested a few metres from the Puffin burrow area.

At Burhou, which has the most southerly Puffin colony of any size in the eastern Atlantic, apart from Les Sept Isles in Brittany, a maximum of 228 rafting Puffins was counted close to the main sub-colony on 15/7. This is about average for the past few years. As in previous years, the Puffin burrow area was also a Lesser Blacked-back and Herring Gull club area.

On a trial basis, Lesser-black Backed Gulls were followed by boat at high speed from the substantial Burhou colony to their feeding area in the nearby up-Channel shipping lane. Hopefully, a comprehensive study of this may be carried out next year.

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## ORKNEY

### Red-throated Diver

2009 was a good year for this species. On Hoy, Jim & Stuart Williams located 62 aos that reared 56 chicks giving a productivity of 0.90. The improvement in occupancy on this island means that the number of pairs there is approaching previous levels after the downturn in the early 2000s and the proportion of b/2s continues to increase. On Rousay, six pairs reared eight young giving a productivity of 1.33 while on West Mainland RSPB Reserves, 18 pairs reared 17 chicks, a productivity of 0.94. Overall productivity from all monitored sites was therefore 0.94.

### Fulmar

Monitoring by JNCC of plots in five Mainland colonies indicated that the declines noted between 2000 and 2006 have levelled off. Changes between 2006 and 2009 varied between +13% and -9% but none were significant. At the three sites monitored for breeding success, however, productivity was rather poor at just 0.36 (n = 727).

At the famous colony on Eynhallow, monitored by Aberdeen University since the mid 1950s, there were 89 aos on 1st June plus five other recently failed sites. This was the highest occupancy rate since 2003. However, productivity was low at just 0.24, some predation of large chicks by Hooded Crows being suspected.

On the North Hill RSPB reserve on Papa Westray, there were 132 aos (only 75 in 2008) and 66 young were reared, a productivity of 0.50 while on Rousay 66 aos in monitoring plots on the west coast produced 52 fledged chicks, productivity 0.79.

On Hoy, productivity was especially poor, 86 aos at the Old Man producing only 25 chicks (0.17) and 82 aos at the Bay of Creekland rearing only 15 young (0.18).

North Ronaldsay and Swona, however, had good seasons for this species although exact productivity figures could not be calculated.

There was thus a very mixed picture for Fulmars from around Orkney with no apparent easy explanation for this variation.

### **Gannet**

The long-standing colony on Sule Stack was not counted but the two new colonies established in 2003 go from strength to strength.

On nearby Sule Skerry, there were 1000 aon, the Sule Skerry Ringing Group ringing over 300 chicks and colour-ringing 100 adults. 14 of the adults handled had already been ringed on Sule Stack in 2003 and 2007, confirming the origins of birds in the colony. At Noup Head, Westray, the colony increased to 499 aon and at least 166 chicks reached near-fledging.

### **Cormorant**

On Boray Holm, 90 aon were counted and the colony had an apparently productive season.

The Hen of Gairsay colony was deserted this year, the birds perhaps having moved to Boray Holm or, perhaps more likely, to Little Linga, where 60 adults were counted from the ferry on 1st July. It is the first time that this island is known to have been used by this species. On the Little Green Holm there were 39 aon and it seemed to be a very late season there, 32 of 39 nests still having eggs or naked chicks on 2nd August.

### **Shag**

On Sule Skerry, 200 chicks were ringed, a marked improvement on 2007 when only four pairs were present. This was, however, still well down on the 800-1200 chicks ringed in the late '80s/early '90s. Elsewhere, the only good productivity data came from Papa Westray where five aon produced 11 young, 2.2 young per pair. Anecdotally, other sites such as Shapinsay, South Walls, Muckle Skerry and Swona all had good numbers of young.

### **Arctic Skua**

This species had a much more successful season than of late but there were few really good productivity data. The North Hill of Papa Westray held 66 aot (only 40 in 2008) and

produced 30 chicks to fledging, productivity 0.45. Seven monitored aot on Hoy produced 11 chicks, productivity 1.57. Fledged or almost-fledged chicks were seen in almost all known breeding areas and anecdotal evidence suggested at least a moderately good breeding season throughout the isles, albeit from a much reduced base.

### **Great Skua**

The most closely monitored (sub) colony is at Stourdale on Hoy. Chris Booth located 50 aot, only 44 having been found in 2008. However, breeding success was poor, only 12 aot remaining occupied by 20th July and only six single chicks being located, there being no sign of young in the other six territories. Even if all these chicks fledged, the maximum productivity could only be 0.12.

Elsewhere on Hoy, Andrew Upton monitored 32 aot in the Shell Hill and Mill Burn area; 17 chicks fledged, a productivity of 0.53. On Papay, there were 28 aot (20 in 2008) and they fledged 30 young, a productivity of 1.07.

It is unclear what is happening to our Bonxie population as it is some time since the colony on Hoy, with over 2000 pairs the second largest in Britain after Foula, has been censused. There is a pressing need for such a count to be undertaken.

### **Black-headed Gull**

The colony at Mill Dam, Shapinsay, often the largest in Orkney, continued to decline with only 130 adults present and all nests eventually failing. Elsewhere, however, the species did well with considerable numbers of young being fledged although there were few hard data. On Egilsay, 34 pairs reared 33 chicks (0.97) per pair, the best year for some time at this site. The largest colony this summer was at the delightfully named Mires of Whip on Sanday where 600 adults were counted but there was no productivity data.

### **Common Gull**

This species experienced a good season with lots of young being reared in many colonies

although detailed breeding success monitoring is not usually carried out on this species.

Success was not universal, however, with a colony of 160 adults at Stines Moss in the Stenness hills failing totally, perhaps as a result of predation by larger gulls species from a nearby colony. Similarly, two colonies on Hoy fared badly with that at Whaness fledging only three chicks and that at Sandy Loch failing altogether.

### **Lesser Black-backed Gull**

There was no productivity information for this species.

### **Herring Gull**

The only productivity data came from Burray Ness where, on 16th June, Bob Adam located 54 nests and ringed 46 chicks.

### **Great Black-backed Gull**

The once enormous colony at the Burn of Forse on Hoy, that used to have over 1000 pairs, held only about 40 adults in July. Similarly, the Stourdale colony, once 600 pairs-strong, had only 16 aon. These latter birds did, however, produce 10 chicks, productivity 0.63.

The biggest colony was on Copinsay where there were an estimated 250 pairs. At the Mull Head, Deerness, there appeared to be little change from 2008 with 39 chicks being ringed on 24th June.

### **Kittiwake**

The decline of this species continues almost unabated although this year at least some young were reared and, indeed, some colonies had reasonable success.

Monitored plots at five Mainland colonies showed the continuing downward trend that has been apparent since 1988 with declines since 2006 ranging from 31% to 86%. Whole colony counts were also carried out at these sites and at Row Head, Costa Head, Mull Head and Gultak numbers fell in line with the plots. However, at Marwick Head, the whole colony decline was only 7.6% compared to 31.3% on the plot.

These five colonies are now holding only 30% of the nests that they held in 1986 or 22% of those that they held in the peak year of 1991.

Breeding success at Mull Head was zero but at the other four sites varied from 0.57 to 0.66. In total, 335 monitored nests produced 212 young, productivity 0.63.

On Papa Westray, only 10 pairs nested in the Fowl Craig monitoring plots and no young were reared.

On Rousay, a boat-based survey of the SSSI cliffs gave a total of 882 aon compared to the 4900 pairs counted in the 1990s. 12 monitoring plots have been followed on these cliffs and this year only one of the 12 was occupied; 11 nests there reared six chicks, productivity 0.55. As recently as 2007, there were 73 aon that reared 35 chicks.

On Sule Skerry, a better year was experienced than on the last visit in 2007 but numbers ringed were 75% down on the heyday years.

### **Common Tern**

The main colony on the old wooden pier at Lyness held up to 160 adults (11th June) and fledged a minimum of 14 chicks (15th July).

### **Arctic Tern**

It was a much better year for this species but it was far from being a total success.

On North Ronaldsay, 373 pairs nested but the majority failed. A late colony of 30-40 pairs at Nouster did, however, rear young.

On Papa Westray, 667 pairs on the North Hill Reserve reared 227 chicks (productivity 0.34), the first to fledge here since 2002. Elsewhere on the island and the neighbouring Holm there were 992 adults but no breeding success figures could be obtained.

On neighbouring Westray, there were at least 1000 adults; no productivity data were obtained but young were certainly reared in some colonies.

On Sanday, the colony at the Start held up to 400 adults in two sub-colonies; at least 100 pairs nested and produced c.150 young. However, a colony of at least 50 pairs found by Bill Badger at Overbister failed perhaps as a result of disturbance.

On Auskerry, there were two sub-colonies. One in the north of the island comprised early-arriving birds and fledged 'lots' of chicks while the other, near the lighthouse, established itself much later but still fledged young.

On Egilsay, 48 pairs bred. However, one colony was trampled by sheep at the egg stage and the other was heavily predated; only six chicks fledged.

On Gairsay, there were colonies of 460 and 220 adults with chicks fledging from both.

In the West Mainland, a colony at the traditional Yesnaby site held 80 adults but deserted, possibly as a result of disturbance from a motor-cross event. It was thought that it was these birds that moved a short distance north to Hyval where there were 65 on 4th July. However, this colony failed too. The well-known and very viewable colony on the rock stacks at Skiba Geo, Birsay held 120 adults on 8th July by which time some young had already fledged; 72 fledglings and chicks were counted here on 16th July.

In the East Mainland, a colony at Stembister held 450 adults on 7th June but a visit at the beginning of July revealed only one fledged chick, the rest of the colony having apparently failed. On nearby Copinsay, there was much smaller colony (62 aon) than in 2008 but this year at least some young are known to have fledged.

On Glims Holm, the main colony held 300 adults on 8th June and 26 chicks were ringed on 26th June but the colony was deserted by 10th July. This colony was in a very open site and very vulnerable to predation.

On Burray, at the Hass, there were 500 adults on 18th June and some chicks were three-quarters grown; 103 chicks were ringed. Fledged young were seen on 3rd July and many more were near fledging, a further 103 chicks being ringed. On

Hunda, there was a similarly productive picture with 350 adults on 18th June; 57 chicks were ringed on 28th June and a further 85 on 3rd July; many fledged and near-fledged chicks were seen.

On Flotta on 23rd June, there were colonies of 80, 150 and 120 adults with some chicks and lots of eggs. Swona was visited by the Orkney Ringing Group on 5th July when 600 adults were present in three sub-colonies; 76 chicks were ringed and the colony was still ongoing on 31st July. On the Muckle Skerry, visited on the same day, there were 400 adults and 31 chicks were ringed. On Hoy, a colony in the south of the island held 163 adults on 15th July and 40 fledged chicks were seen; other colonies on the island fledged small numbers of young while others failed.

### **Little Tern**

Although up to 13 adults were present at the regular south isles site, only four pairs are believed to have bred and no young are thought to have been reared.

### **Guillemot**

Numbers in the five JNCC monitored plots on the Mainland have been declining since 2000. The 2006-2009 declines varied between 13% and 20% and were all statistically significant. Numbers at all the colonies (except Mull Head) are now at their lowest since monitoring began.

However, breeding success was better this year than for some time. At Marwick Head, 116 aon produced 46 young (productivity 0.45) and at Mull Head, 94 aon reared 48 young (0.51). Interesting observations by Roddy Mavor indicated that Marwick was one-two weeks behind Mull in fledging even though chicks appeared to be at the same stage, this perhaps being the result of poorer feeding at the former site.

On Papa Westray, 281 aos were counted in the monitored plots and 152 chicks fledged, a productivity of 0.54.

On Sule Skerry, breeding success was noted as being much better than in 2007, there being much less predation as the increased number of

## 2009 IRISH BREEDING SEASON NEWS

adults present gave more cohesion to the colony and greater protection from predators. However, the numbers ringed were still only half the average July totals of the 1990s.

### Razorbill

At the five monitored colonies on the Mainland, numbers fell in all plots. Marwick had been declining since 2000, Row and Gultak since 2003 but at Costa and Mull Head, numbers had actually been increasing until this year. The 2006-2009 declines varied from -5% to -34% but only at Costa (-34%) and at Gultak (-30%) were they significant.

On Papa Westray there were 59 aos in monitored lots from which 11 young fledged, a productivity of only 0.19. Elsewhere, anecdotal evidence also suggested that breeding success had not been as good as for Guillemot.

### Black Guillemot

The April count around North Ronaldsay gave a total of 549 birds. Good breeding success was noted in the south-western part of the island but it was much poorer elsewhere.

A count around the North Hill, Papa Westray was undertaken on 13th May and revealed 234 adults compared to 205 in 2008.

### Puffin

On Sule Skerry, possibly the biggest colony in Britain at present, there was no complete census but the impression was gained that there were perhaps fewer birds than in the mid-1990s. Over 1000 fledging chicks were ringed and they appeared to be fully grown and well fed compared to the early fledging of chicks in poor condition that was noted in 2007. More than 8000 adults were ringed and c.3000 recaptured.

Elsewhere, the species seemed to have a good season, and many more birds than usual were noted, for example, at the well-visited Castle o' Burrian site on Westray and at Fowl Craig on Papa Westray.

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The season started disappointingly with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) failing to award a contract for the establishment of a national seabird surveillance programme. Thus, there was no balanced and comprehensive coverage of species and geographical representativeness but the usual band of BWI (Bird Watch Ireland) & NPWS 'diehards' still got out there and coverage of Dublin and Wicklow was excellent.

Cliff-nesting species colony counts were completed at the following sites: Rockabill, St. Patrick's Island, Lambay, Ireland's Eye (Dublin, partial for latter site), Bray Head, Wicklow Head (both Wicklow), Great Skellig (Kerry, diurnal species only), Downpatrick Head (Mayo, Kittiwake only). A full census of all species is undertaken every 5 years on Lambay – 2009 was one such year.



Census time at Lambay  
By H. Boland

Wardening and monitoring of terns was more or less as usual with comprehensive coverage at Rockabill, Dublin Port, Dalkey Island, Kilcoole and Lady's Island Lake. The Louth Nature Trust also managed the Baltray Little Tern colony (Co. Louth) and reported that a successful season (numbers and productivity) was had (S. McKeever pers. comm.).

### **Red-throated Diver**

Red-throats only nest in northwest Ireland in Co. Donegal. In 2009, birds were present at 8 of 12 historical breeding lakes. Nests were monitored at 6 of 7 active sites and three of these fledged 4 young giving a productivity of 0.67. This is considered a good season for these birds at the extreme south end of their range.

### **Northern Fulmar**

All nesting areas in Dublin were covered with the exception of Ireland's Eye. The main colony is on Lambay and here there has been a worrying 47% decline over 5 years from 727 to 385 AOS. In Wicklow, Fulmars were stable at Bray Head (84 AOS) but there has been a 66% decline over 10 years at Wicklow Head, now a mere 21 AOS). Elsewhere, numbers relatively stable at Great Skellig with 579 AOS this year.

### **Northern Gannet**

The only colony with a full count was the 'new' one at Lambay. Here 187 AOS (up from 68 when the colony established in 2007) were thought to have eggs or chicks.

### **Great Cormorant**

A total of 1706 AON at the three Dublin colonies, slight declines at all colonies but least at the largest, St. Patrick's Island (922 AON). Mean clutch/brood sizes were: St. P 2.7 (n=793), Lambay 3.1 (n=315), Irl Eye 2.7 (n=182). Good news came from Bray Head, where summering birds have looked like doing something for a long time – this year at least 27 AON were present with eggs or chicks.

### **European Shag**

43 AON at St. Patrick's and 80 AON at Ireland's Eye indicate stability but Lambay has declined to 1081 AON from 1670 in 2007 (35%), with some sub-colonies were more or less deserted. On the other hand, clutch/brood sizes appeared normal especially on Lambay at 2.6 (n=150), 1.7 (n=33) at St. P and 2.2 (n=50) at Irl Eye. Small numbers nest at Bray and Wicklow Heads; both have recorded slight increases to 27 and 17 AON respectively.

### **Common Gull**

Not a species normally associated with east coast colonies but a few have become established on the low lying west shores of Lambay where 4 pairs now seem to be nesting or holding territory.

### **Lesser Black-backed Gull**

An increase from 4 (2008) to 11 AOT/N on Ireland's Eye but a decrease on Lambay from 321 (2007) to 244 AOT/N. At Skellig 57 AOT/N recorded compared to 69 in 2007.

### **Herring Gull**

An Irish red-listed species but only two sizeable colonies were counted in 2009: the Lambay population having increased from 311 AOT/N in 2004 to 492 in 2007 has slumped back to 308. Ireland's Eye has been more stable with 245 AOT/N in 2009.

### **Great Black-backed Gull**

The Lambay population has been stable since 2004 and presently sits at 154 AOT/N; there were also 68 AOT/N on St. Patrick's.

### **Black-legged Kittiwake**

Always the best monitored cliff-nesting species! A modest increase (6%) was recorded at Lambay since 2004, with 4216 AON in 2009; the population at Bray Head has more than doubled since 2004, with 1247 AON recorded in 2009. A 22% decline on the Seabird 2000 (1999) count was recorded at Wicklow Head (only 743 AON on 3 June 2009 – possibly the count was a little early). In the west the Great Skellig count of 501 was 41 less than the 2007 survey, while at Downpatrick Head 908 AON were counted with a productivity of 0.42. Although the latter was low it was better than expected earlier in the season, and it was uneven across the colony with the subcolony on the detached stack faring worst. Perhaps this is more vulnerable to marauding gulls and skuas? Productivity was assessed at two east coast colonies: Rockabill fledged 0.87 per egg-laying pair (0.46 in 2008, the worst year on record) and Lambay 0.84 (much improved on 0.65 in 2007)

## **Guillemot**

An upward trend at all monitored east coast colonies: Lambay saw a 16% increase since 2004 to 67314 (IND), Bray Head doubled since 2004 to 1184 and Wicklow Head rose to 699 (from 420 in 1999). Productivity was assessed on Lambay where 0.77 chicks fledged per pair compared to 0.74 in 2007. In the west, the Great Skellig colony was down a little 899 (IND) compared to 998 in 2007.



Guillemots which are thriving at Lambay  
by Steve Newton

## **Razorbill**

Modest increases at all smaller monitored colonies (Skellig, Bray & Wicklow Heads); on Lambay the population has increased by 12% over 5 years to 6399 (IND). Productivity at the latter was similar to previous estimates 0.76 chicks fledged per pair (0.69 in 2007).

## **Black Guillemot**

Comprehensive monitoring is only undertaken at Rockabill where 71 nests were located with a productivity of 1.13.

## **Atlantic Puffin**

No systematic evening counts were done at any colony including Lambay (85 IND seen on daytime auk counts) and wet/windy/foggy conditions on Skellig prevented a count.

## **Sandwich Tern**

At Lady's Island Lake the colony continues to flourish with 1958 AON recorded in late May – early June. It looks like we are still hosting a

large contingent from Anglesey or elsewhere in the Irish Sea? The pair that nested on Rockabill in 2006 and 2008 was not present this year!

## **Roseate Tern**

An incredible year: the population topped 'the GRAND' on Rockabill where 1052 AON were counted; despite a miserable (wet & windy) season clutch sizes were high and productivity was calculated at 1.62 fledged per pair – a record high following hot on the heels of last year's record low! This meant that in excess of 1500 young were fledged from the island. At Lady's Island Lake 123 AON were recorded (at or about the previous maxima for this colony); unfortunately productivity was severely dented by a late season rat 'infestation' and the unwanted attention of a Short-eared Owl. A single pair laid at Dalkey but unfortunately the colony was wiped out by a combination of high seas and Herring Gull depredation of eggs.

## **Common Tern**

Continued growth at the two key Dublin colonies: Rockabill (1796 AON) and Port (391 AON on 10 June), though the small Dalkey colony failed (see above). Productivity on Rockabill appeared good at 1.68 young fledged per pair based on a relatively sheltered study area sample of 44 nests, though averaged over the whole colony it was probably somewhat lower especially in the more exposed areas.

## **Arctic Tern**

A very high nest count of 345 AON on Rockabill produced virtually no fledglings – mostly attributable to weather and the attentions of large gulls. This is the second year of failure at this site. About 36 pairs nested at Dublin Port and again productivity was likely to be low .

## **Little Tern**

The 'elements' and a couple of Hedgehogs were the bane of the 2009 season at Kilcoole in County Wicklow. The breeding population was at least 41 pairs, laying 91 clutches and hatching 95 chicks. A Kestrel picked off quite a few well-grown young and we estimated 1.44 were fledged per pair.

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## SEABIRDING TRIPS

### COMPANY OF WHALES

Green 724 – not a colour ringed guillemot but the first raffle ticket out of the hat at the Seabird Group Conference in Bruges last March - and the ticket I held in my hand! There were some excellent prizes – books, Belgian beverages, and cuddly toys but first choice was a no-brainer, it had to be the trip across the Bay of Biscay with the specialist tour operator The Company of Whales.



Common Dolphins  
by Glen Overington

After much deliberation I decided on a date in late August when the chances of seeing a wide selection of seabirds and cetaceans seemed high and weather conditions were likely to be good. As the departure date approached I followed the Shipping Forecast with some trepidation as it seemed as though our three days at sea were going to coincide with the tail end of tropical storm Bill. However, as the group plus our two Company of Whales guides assembled at Portsmouth Ferry Terminal, the main concern wasn’t the weather, but the fact the ferry hadn’t arrived due to a medical emergency as it left Bilbao. The knock-on effect of this 3 hour delay in our sailing time was that on the outward part of the trip we would only get to the deep waters in the northern part of the Bay of Biscay (where the chances of seeing the large whales are best), late the following day. Our first morning at sea dawned grey with a brisk westerly wind - not ideal viewing conditions for cetaceans but not a problem for seeing Northern Gannets of which there were large numbers. After breakfast there was a briefing about the wildlife we hoped to see and access to the viewing area above the bridge which is one of the perks enjoyed by groups travelling with the Company of Whales. The advantage of this location was soon apparent providing us with an uninterrupted 360o view of the sea, although adjusting to being over 30 metres above the waves took a bit of doing – that ‘small white bird’ turned out to be a Gannet!! Sightings of cetaceans in the English Channel and the waters off the Brittany coast are generally fairly scarce and sea conditions weren’t in our favour either. However, some excellent views of Sabine’s Gulls and Bonxies, and glimpses of Grey Phalaropes kept spirits up. Then as evening approached and we neared the Bay of Biscay, expectations heightened and patient watching through the day was rewarded by a quick succession of pods of Common Dolphins that homed in on our bow wave, criss-crossing in front of the ship, plus excellent views of small groups of Long-finned Pilot Whales.

We docked on time in Bilbao early the next morning and went ashore for a walk up into the hills above the port. The weather had improved – hot, sunny and little wind so we were impatient to get back to sea to take advantage of these conditions but soaring Griffin Vultures and Booted Eagles distracted the ornithologists and

there were lizards, butterflies or spiders for those with more general interests. The ferry left on the return leg just after midday and the harbour walls of Bilbao were densely packed with Yellow-legged Gulls with a solitary European Shag at the end of one of the jetties. Just off Bilbao are deep water canyons where the Company of Whales brochure says the chances of encounters with beaked whales are 'better than 50-50'!! The first 'sighting' turned out to be fishing net drifting below the surface – not what one wants to see in an area so rich in marine life and indeed the large amount of rubbish and patches of oil that we saw on the water at various points of the trip was deeply depressing. However, soon after this false alarm the first beaked whales were sighted and over the next few hours we saw 10 definite Cuvier's Beaked Whales plus another 6 beaked whales of undetermined species but which might have included the rare Sowerby's Beaked Whale. In addition there were big pods of Common and Striped Dolphins, a small group of Bottle-nosed Dolphins, a couple more Long-finned Pilot Whales, some big shoals of tuna (probably Yellow-fin) and then as evening approached the sight that everyone had hoped for - a blow from a big whale! In the end we saw 3 definite Fin Whales plus a couple more large rorquals which couldn't be identified to species. Undoubtedly the cetaceans were the highlight of the day but there were some memorable seabirds too with good numbers of Cory's Shearwaters, and small numbers of Great, Sooty and Manx Shearwaters.

By next morning we were back into shallow waters off the Brittany coast heading towards the English Channel. Sea conditions were pretty good but sightings were limited to a couple of pods of Long-finned Pilot whales and a splash which turned out to be the fin of an Ocean Sunfish!! Seabirds were also surprisingly scarce but we did see Sooty and Balearic Shearwater, European Storm-petrel, Northern Fulmar and numerous Gannets including some recently fledged juveniles that couldn't fly – one narrowly escaped being mown down by the ship and we were greatly relieved to see it pop up in our wake! For me the most bizarre sighting of the entire trip was undoubtedly a European Shag that we encountered almost 50 km off the north Brittany coast, flying determinedly along and showing no sign of heading to land. Although things were relatively quiet at sea there was still

plenty to keep us interested with a variety of migrants perched on the railing and circling around the ship including Wheatear, House Martin, Chiffchaff, and 'alba' wagtail.



Curvier's Beaked Whale  
by Glen Overington

Looking at species lists from other Company of Whales trips ([www.companyofwhales.co.uk](http://www.companyofwhales.co.uk)) it is clear that our sightings were by no means exceptional – indeed we were unlucky not to see Sperm Whale and if conditions on the outward leg had been better, we should have had better views of Minke Whale than the brief glimpse I alone had, and also seen Harbour Porpoise. The trip following ours recorded bigger numbers and more species of shearwater and skua but that's part of the attraction – you don't know what you're going to see and where you'll see it. That's why the hardest part of the trip is judging when to take 15 minutes off for a 'comfort break'!! So my overall assessment would be an excellent way to spend three days. Our guides were knowledgeable and pitched their comments at the appropriate level for each member of the group which resulted in a really nice atmosphere. The range of marine habitats covered is hugely impressive and although bad weather can potentially scupper things, that's no different to any other cruise I've been on. The big difference is that this is a commercial ferry which isn't normally going to change course if you see something interesting – I did ponder whether that 'medical emergency' was an excuse to spend more time in those productive waters off Bilbao – but as it was someone who'd just gone into labour they probably weren't that interested in whales!

Sarah Wanless  
e-mail: [swanl@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:swanl@ceh.ac.uk)

## **SPECIAL OFFER TO SEABIRD GROUP MEMBERS**

The Company of Whales will once again be running over 20 dedicated whale, dolphin and seabird-watching holidays across the Bay of Biscay between June and October 2010.

Members of the Seabird Group are offered a 10% discount off the price of the standard trip (not including single supplements or cabin upgrades). For further information visit [www.companyofwhales.co.uk](http://www.companyofwhales.co.uk) or email [info@companyofwhales.co.uk](mailto:info@companyofwhales.co.uk) or call 01950 422483.

## **SEABIRD GROUP GRANT REPORT**

### **ST KILDA**

Between 24th June and 3rd July 2009 I led, along with 8 volunteers, a JNCC expedition to study Leach's petrels and puffins on St Kilda, Scotland. Forming one of the UK's largest seabird colonies the St Kilda archipelago supports around 680,000 breeding seabirds, including the World's largest Northern gannet colony and, as far as we know, Europe's largest colony of Leach's petrels. It is also the UK's most remote inhabited island, lying some 40 miles NW of Benbecula in the Western Isles.

The expedition had two key purposes: to continue a mark-recapture study of Leach's petrels that started in 2004 and to obtain diet information from puffins provisioning their chicks.

We mist netted petrels at a huge boulder-field called Carn Mor, on the western edge of Hirta, the largest island in the St Kilda archipelago, using a mark-recapture method based on catching and ringing adults (presumably breeders) flying in the colony and recording the proportion of ringed birds in samples made at the same net rides in subsequent days and years. The information obtained will hopefully provide estimates of population size and adult survival rates.

During the Seabird 2000 census tape playback estimated 3,600 Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS) in Carn Mor, while the largest colony, on the island of Dun, held nearly 27,700 AOS. However, by 2003 the number on Dun had fallen dramatically, to 14,400 AOS; a 2006 survey estimated 12,800 AOS. Therefore, there is good evidence for a substantial population decline on Dun, but we do not know if this has also occurred elsewhere on St Kilda, including on Carn Mor.

Teams led by JNCC undertook initial mark-recapture studies in 2004 and 2005, but in 2009 a large team was assembled to revisit previously netted sites and increase the pool of ringed birds for subsequent recapture. A total of 347 Leach's petrels was ringed in 2009, although the total would probably have been much greater had the conditions been less windy; in addition 30 previously ringed birds were captured. The analysis of the data so far collected is not yet complete but its success will ultimately hinge on the number of recaptures obtained, a function of the number of birds ringed.



Fleyg netting  
by Matt Parsons

Relatively little is known about the diet in recent years of seabirds that breed on St Kilda, yet diet is of crucial importance in determining breeding success, itself a key demographic parameter. Notable exceptions include the observation in 2005 of inedible pipefish being brought back to puffin chicks, leading to their starvation in some cases (Sarah Money, pers. comm.).

We sampled puffin chick diet using mist netting and fleyg netting to intercept provisioning adults

## JOB VACANCIES

and collect the fish they drop. As relatively few samples are collected there is unlikely to be any effect on breeding success. Our results were interesting; of the 51 samples obtained the vast majority comprised a mixture of small rockling (Family: Lotidae) and small sandeels (Family: Ammodytidae), with a few samples containing one or two juvenile mackerel. Notably, the loads were small, with a mean mass of apparently complete loads a little over 4g.



Ringed Puffins!  
by Matt Parsons

As in the previous few years, no pipefish were found. Whether such small food loads represented sufficient nutrition for puffin chicks is unknown, though the long term dataset collected on the Isle of May in eastern Scotland by Centre for Ecology and Hydrology suggests that the St Kilda puffin loads were unusually small. Unfortunately, no measure of breeding success was possible on St Kilda this year.

Thanks to the Seabird Group for financial assistance and to National Trust for Scotland for logistical support.

Matt Parsons, JNCC.  
[matt.parsons@jncc.gov.uk](mailto:matt.parsons@jncc.gov.uk)

The Norwegian Polar Institute is seeking a person that will be responsible for performing field-based research programmes in the Arctic and the Antarctic. The successful applicant will be responsible for the monitoring and management of the institutes' seabird monitoring programs at Spitsbergen. The job includes: planning research programmes; writing grant applications to help support the work financially; conducting the research in the field; analyzing the resulting data; reporting the results to the Institute's seabird data-bases; and doing basic reporting and administration of the research programme(s). The job also includes providing input and advice in environmental management processes. Research activities are expected to result in an active publication record in journals of high international quality

Potential candidates must have a PhD with a background in seabird population biology and ecology. Expertise in statistical analyses, the ability to publish in high-quality international scientific journals and the ability to secure research grants must be documented. An ability and willingness to work in multidisciplinary research groups and practical experience from field-related research programmes are important qualifications.

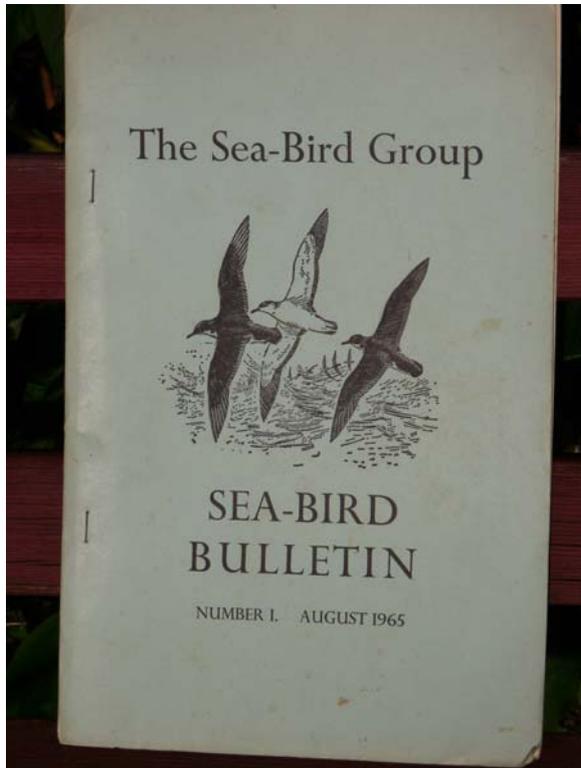
The salary will commensurate with the qualifications of the successful candidate, according to the Norwegian State salary code 1109 - 1183, scale 57 – 68 (NOK 435.500 – 533.300). The work place is the Norwegian Polar Institute in Tromsø, Norway, with the possibility for extended periods of placement at the NPI office in Longyearbyen on Svalbard. The position is open, and the successful candidate should be able to start as soon as possible.

Further inquiries about the position may be directed to Research Director Kim Holmén, e-mail: [kim.holmen@npolar.no](mailto:kim.holmen@npolar.no), phone: +47 77 75 05 30, of Head of Biodiversity Section, Kit Kovacs, e-mail: [kit.kovacs@npolar.no](mailto:kit.kovacs@npolar.no), phone: +47 77 75 05 26.

**The application deadline is 31 October 2009.**

## FOR SALE

### SEABIRD GROUP BULLETINS 1 - 7



Historically interesting publications up for grabs!

These foolscap-size Bulletins were produced by the Group from 1965 to 1969. Each is around 50 - 70 pages, and had a cover price of 10 shillings! For sale for £25 (including postage), to raise money for the North Wales Breeding Bird Atlas.

For further information, contact [geoffkate.gibbs@care4free.net](mailto:geoffkate.gibbs@care4free.net)

## CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENTS

### FIRST WORLD SEABIRD CONFERENCE

*Seabirds: Linking the Global Oceans*  
September 7 - 11, 2010 Victoria  
Conference Centre Victoria, Canada



1st WORLD SEABIRD CONFERENCE  
*Seabirds: Linking the Global Oceans*

Are you interested in seabird management and conservation? Then join us for the 1st World Seabird conference! The Pacific Seabird Group, with partnering support from over 25 professional seabird and research organisations, from around the world is hosting the first world conference to focus specifically on seabirds. Through a strong conference program, the goal of this Conference is to put seabird management and conservation into a worldwide perspective. By bringing 500 - 600 participants from over 30 countries together, we will be able to comprehensively address the global issues and data needs for these species, most of which inhabit multiple countries and waters within their own ranges.

#### Conference Information

- Call for Papers – October, 2009
- Registration Opens – January, 2010
- Sponsorship Opportunities Available!

For more information, or to subscribe to our growing conference community, please visit: [www.WorldSeabirdConference.com](http://www.WorldSeabirdConference.com).

## CORRECTION

In The Seabird Group Newsletter, No. 98, of October 2004', page 9 and 10, I wrote a short article, titled 'Note on Wing Measurements and Weights of Magellanic Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides magellani*)'. This article related to the finding of 29 Diving Petrels, originally identified as Magellanic Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides magellani*), on board the M.V. Marco Polo cruise ship, in the Chilean Fjords in January 2004. At that time I identified these birds as Magellanic Diving Petrels and wing and weight measurements were taken prior to their release. A comment was made that due to the time of the year these birds were probably all first year non-breeding birds. These birds had been identified using the guidelines published in 'Seabirds an Identification Guide', Harrison, P. (1983). A number of other references were also used.



Common Diving Petrel  
by Chris Wilson

Very recently I was in communication with Christian Savigny (working on Birds of the SW Atlantic Ocean & Antarctica) and who had appealed by way of a Seabird Group Circular for photographs of Magellanic Diving Petrel – I therefore sent him photographs. To cut a long story short and with help from Mark Pearman (author of Birds of Argentina, checklist, etc), Alvaro Jaramillo (Author of Birds of Chile) and Ricardo Matus, who lives in Punta Arenas and has extensive experience of these species, Christian confirmed that the birds mentioned in The Seabird Group Newsletter, No. 98, of October 2004 were in fact Common Diving Petrel - *Pelecanoides urinatrix berard*. Christian went on to say that he had “checked also the

'Handbook of the Birds of the World' (HBW) (lynx) website, finding that the Magellanic are Common Diving Petrels.. so the confusion maybe somehow generalised”.

I would therefore like to formally correct my article in The Seabird Group Newsletter, No. 98, of October 2004', page 9 and 10, to 'Note on Wing Measurements and Weights of Common Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix berard*). An interesting anecdote from this is that according to the Chilean sources *Pelecanoides urinatrix berard* had not been previously recorded in Southern Chile – so there is still plenty more work yet to be completed.

Christopher J Wilson  
Environmental Consultant, Wexford, Ireland  
e-mail: [cjwilson@eircom.net](mailto:cjwilson@eircom.net)

## SEABIRD GROUP NEWS

### ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE NEXT SEABIRD GROUP AGM

SCOTTISH RINGERS CONFERENCE  
FIFE ARMS HOTEL, BRAEMAR  
14 NOVEMBER 3PM

#### DRAFT AGENDA

1. Minutes of the 43rd AGM
2. Matters arising from the minutes
3. The 44th Annual and Treasurers report
4. Update on Seabird
5. The next Seabird Group conference
6. Update on World Seabird Conference
7. Membership and subscriptions
8. AOB



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Seabird Group Forum :

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/seabirdgroupforum/>

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 15<sup>th</sup> January (for February edition).

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

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

## CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

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

### Chairman

**Norman Ratcliffe (2011)**  
c/o British Antarctic Survey, High Cross, Madingley Road  
Cambridge, CB3 0ET  
[notc@bas.ac.uk](mailto:notc@bas.ac.uk)

### Secretary

**Linda Wilson (2012)**  
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[Linda.Wilson@jncc.gov.uk](mailto:Linda.Wilson@jncc.gov.uk)

### Treasurer

**Andrew Ramsay (2010)**  
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### Seabird Editor

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### Seabird Publishing Editor

**Andy Webb (2012)**

### Seabird Group Newsletter Editor

**Liz Humphreys (2010)**  
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### Seabird Group Newsletter Assistant Editor

**Claire Smith (2010)**  
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### Membership Secretary (2012)

[seabirdgroup.membership@gmail.com](mailto:seabirdgroup.membership@gmail.com)

Ilka Win  
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### Other Members:

**Simon Foster (2010)**

## EDITORIAL

We are always looking for new contributors for the newsletter. If you have any ideas for articles then please get in touch with either Liz or Claire (for contact details see under the Current Seabird Committee). We aim to cover as wide a range of topics as possible so we would urge our members not to be shy!

Submissions for the newsletter must be in electronic format, preferably in word and should be no more than 1500 words wherever possible.

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.