



NEWSLETTER 115

October 2010

CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

Rafts of seabird researchers descend upon Victoria for the 1st World Seabird Conference

September 7-11, 2010. Victoria, Canada



*'Nesting' by Ram Papish.
A piece from the art exhibition 'Birds at Sea'.*

Victoria – the capital of British Columbia seems an eminently suitable venue to have held the 1st World Seabird Conference (WSC). Nestled at the south-eastern tip of Vancouver Island, separated from mainland Canada by the Strait of Georgia to the east, and from the USA by the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the south and southeast – many of the conference delegates arrived by sea. Ferry crossings from Vancouver and Seattle allowing the fortunate sightings of orca, hump-backed, and grey whale and of course a very healthy showcase of pacific seabirds.

The 1st World Seabird Conference has been in planning for 4 years, masterminded by the International Steering Committee. The Committee chaired by David Irons of the Pacific Seabird Group, includes representatives of 26 professional seabird and research organisations, including The Seabird Group (Norman Ratcliffe), Birdlife International & Global Seabird Program (John Croxall), Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrel, ACAP (Mark Tasker) and European Seabirds at Sea Group (Kees Camphysen) . The conference theme, 'Linking the World's Oceans' reflects both the international nature of the conservation problems facing seabirds, and the goal of the conference to put seabird management and conservation into a worldwide perspective.

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The conference was opened by His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales who delivered a pre-recorded welcoming address. "As some of you may know, the plight of seabirds has long been close to my heart", he said. "They are, without doubt, some of the world's most charismatic and iconic species". We were reminded of the urgent need for action in the light of statistics such as 97 (28%) of the world's 346 species of seabird - and over 75% of albatross species - are under global threat of extinction. "That they face such challenges to their continued survival is, frankly, terrifying", said The Prince.

"It is of enormous importance to disseminate more widely the knowledge that there are very simple techniques which could make the most profound difference to seabirds", he concluded.

Over 850 participants from 40 countries, representing most of the world's seabird scientists attended this inaugural conference. Spread over four days the packed scientific program included over 700 presentations - fairly evenly split between oral presentations and poster presentations. The abstracts for all of these presentations are available as a download from the conference website (www.worldseabirdconference.com). The programme entailed 13 Invited Sessions; 4 Primary Symposia focusing on pressing conservation and research challenges around the globe: climate change, seabird-fishery interaction, protection of marine habitats and seabird colony restoration, and 9 Special Paper Sessions focusing on a series of topics relevant to seabirds worldwide such as marine debris, forage fisheries, conservation genetics and research innovations. A further 14 Contributed Sessions (representing over 120 oral presentations), covered the full spectrum of

seabird research interests – from hands-on conservation and threats (marine protected areas, climate change, fisheries and by-catch), to aspects of life history (foraging and diet, breeding, migration and dispersal, ageing), and research and analytical tools (population modelling, colony monitoring). The poster sessions comprised a further 300 plus presentations – spilt into 2 sessions and 20 topics - complimenting the themes identified in the invited and contributed sessions. Evening poster receptions were held for the two sessions, and were a great (but hectic!) opportunity to get to talk to the authors and other delegates, whilst munching on some tasty food, and sipping a glass of wine.



Black-footed Albatross - Ron LeValley.

A number of student awards for both oral and poster presentations were awarded at the closing banquet. I was one of the judges, and it was a hard task choosing between the presentations, which were of an incredibly high standard. The final deserving winners were Vincent Lecomte for his talk on ageing in the Wandering Albatross (Emu Graduate Student Oral Paper Award), Bethany Hawkins for her poster on body condition, oceanographic change and the decline of the black-legged kittiwake (Birdlife Graduate Student Poster Award) and Kyle Morrison for his paper on the demographic consequences of extreme climate events for three North Pacific

seabirds (Andrew Isles Undergraduate Student Award).

A key aim of the conference was to provide a forum for fostering a new global collaboration and for developing initiatives to help address the problems confronting the world's oceans. To achieve this, a series of legacy workshops were convened, seeking to facilitate, establish and improve access and utilisation of seabird data at a regional and global scale. The workshops were preceded by an introductory session; David Irons outlined the objectives for the workshops - to facilitate improved interaction between existing seabird groups and to establish better opportunities and systems for assembling and linking data.

Scott Hatch (USGS Alaska Science Centre) introduced seabirds.net – a seabird web portal, a site designed as a one-stop gateway for information on the world's seabirds. It was a productive session which contained presentations of John Croxall and Scott Hatch's ideas for what could be included on the site, along with a number of great suggestions from the floor. This seemed to indicate that there was considerable enthusiasm and ownership for this site. This session was followed by a technical discussion about one aspect of Seabirds.net; that it could be a portal for accessing comprehensive seabird databases. This session proved invaluable for understanding how 'interoperable' databases can be accessed across the internet, and how this could be made more efficient with the development of a seabird research mark-up language.

The Seabird Tracking Database workshop (chaired by Scott Shaffer, San Jose University; Autumn-Lynn Harrison, UC Santa Cruz; Cleo Small, RSPB and Phil Taylor, Birdlife International) entailed

fascinating presentations from various database providers – The Global Procellariiform Tracking Database (www.seabirdtracking.org), The OBIS-Seamap database (seamap.env.duke.edu) and the Movebank database (www.movebank.org). The discussion that followed was positive and centred around how such databases could be made inter-compatible, and how intellectual property rights could be maintained.

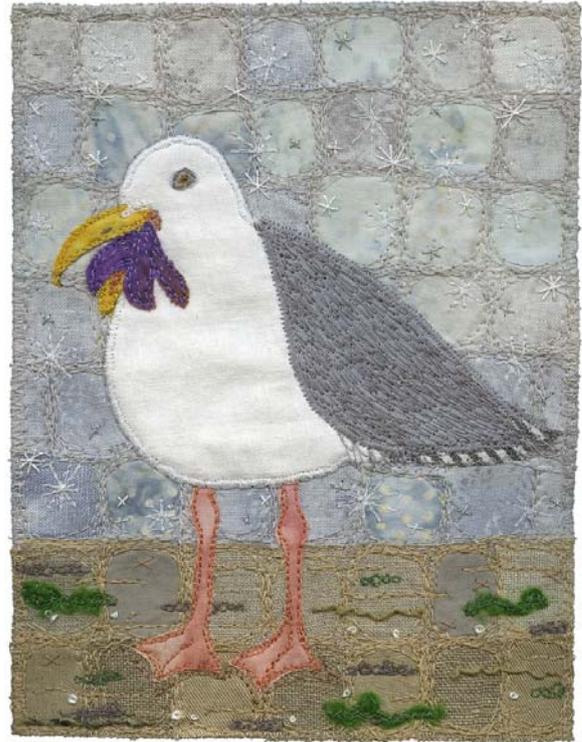
Andy Webb (JNCC) and Kathy Kuletz (US Fish & Wildlife Service) chaired the legacy workshop on establishing a 'Seabirds at Sea Database Workshop'. The discussion centred not on whether to join databases, but how best to do this. It became clear during presentations and discussions that there is considerable heterogeneity in survey methods in use, and that some degree of standardisation of methods is required; an issue that was largely overcome in European waters when new projects were established. There was considerable enthusiasm for tackling the big task of assembling different datasets, and a core group of willing volunteers to begin this task.

Andy Webb (JNCC) also co-chaired the workshop on intercommunication between at-sea and tracking databases. This session highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of these two different approaches to determining the distribution of seabirds at sea. It wasn't felt to be a useful task to attempt to combine these different types of data into a single database, but the workshop was invaluable in highlighting the sorts of issues faced when attempting to analyse the two data types alongside each other and comprehend the different outputs.

The world seabird monitoring database co-chaired by Ian Mitchell (JNCC) and Scott Hatch (USGS Alaska Science Center) discussed proposals for a World Seabird Monitoring Database, which would have many benefits, primarily the ability to combine datasets on trends in seabird abundance and demographic parameters in order to make more powerful analyses spanning ocean systems. For example, for seabirds breeding in the UK but migrating to distant oceans for the non-breeding season, such analyses could enable a better understanding of this lesser-known part of their life-cycle. The challenge is formidable, but technical solutions exist to make this a reality. Based on the workshop participants' enthusiastic engagement, a World Seabird Monitoring Database could indeed become a reality

A joint spatial ecology workshop/ protected areas symposium (co-chaired by Jim Reid, JNCC) was very positive. The proceedings from this, along with selected other papers that were presented at the conference will be published in a special issue of Biological Conservation.

A key workshop examined the benefits of establishing a permanent World Seabird Governing Committee. It was decided that such a structure would be useful and should represent all seabird groups with a core group featuring different geographical regions. An interim committee will be recruited from the organisations represented on the current Conference International Steering Group which will recruit new members from other seabird groups.



Seagull Eating Starfish - Kirsten Chursinoff.

Pleasing and novel diversions from the packed scientific program were the concurrent exhibitions. An art exhibition 'Birds at Sea', (curated by Robe Smith www.blue-lantern.ca/studio) featured photographs, painting and textiles by 6 accomplished artists from the west coast of Canada and the US (see images for details) and a film festival- 'Ocean of Wings' showcasing a series of amateur and professional seabird films.

All those involved agreed that the 1st WSC was a splendid success and that the Committee should start planning for the organisation of the next World Seabird Conference...watch this space!

Birds at Sea images

Ron LeValley: www.levalleyphoto.com

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SEABIRD MONITORING PROGRAMME NEWS

The Seabird Monitoring Programme: 21 years old and better than ever!

As the UK Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) celebrates its 21st anniversary several important new developments have been made. To help communicate these the first edition of an e-Newsletter has just been distributed; if you'd like to be added to the list please contact the SMP co-ordinator (details below).

Seabird Population Trends and Causes of Change: 2010 Report

This new report, detailing the latest analysed results from the SMP is now available online at www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3201.

Trends in abundance and productivity of breeding seabirds in the UK, Ireland, Channels Islands and Isle of Man, up to and including data from 2009 are presented, along with information on adult survival, diet and timing of breeding. Interpretation of what the data show is provided, with a summary of the likely causes of change, where these are known. The report forms part of a package of products available on the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) website, which include a summary of the pressures facing seabird populations, downloads of datasets and guidance on monitoring methods.

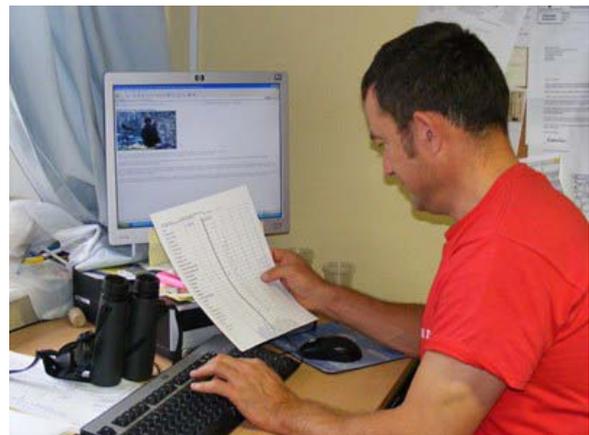
The report replaces 'Seabird numbers and breeding success in Britain and Ireland', last published in 2008. The leaflet UK Seabirds will be published every five years (next in 2013).

New online recording pages

Online recording has proved to be an efficient and secure method by which we encourage recorders to submit their seabird data to the SMP. Users can now benefit from a number of key changes to the site (www.jncc.gov.uk/smp):

- Enter and edit breeding success records (in addition to whole colony counts)
- Download datasets of counts and breeding success data 1986-2009.
- Print high quality Ordnance Survey maps of count sites.
- View our Data Access/Use Policy, so users are clear about their rights and responsibilities.

So, if you have seabird records you'd like to submit to the SMP, or wish to view or download existing records please log on now!



*Entering records onto www.jncc.gov.uk/smp.
(Hugh Thurgate/National Trust).*



*Partners to the SMP Statement of Intent.
(Catherine Gardner/JNCC).*

Strengthening the SMP Partnership

On 3rd November 2009, representatives of the 19 organisations comprising the Seabird Monitoring Programme Partnership gathered at Edinburgh Zoo to sign a Statement of Intent. This document sets out principles for co-operative working and data sharing to maximise the effectiveness of the Partnership in achieving its goals:

Sharing data and information - the Partnership collects a vast amount of information on seabird abundance and demographic parameters, but the challenge is to effectively collate, store and share data so they can be put to best use.

Ensuring best practice - in order for information on seabirds to be scientifically robust and effective, high and consistent standards of field methods, data storage, use and analysis need to be established and promulgated.

Exchanging skills - the depth and breadth of experience and skills within the Partnership will be focused on common goals and will help to deliver these most efficiently.

Matt Parsons, SMP Co-ordinator, JNCC;
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RESEARCH NEWS

Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment Project



European Union

European Regional Development Fund

The Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment (FAME) project kicked off this summer: an ambitious and hugely exciting seabird research programme with international scope, aimed at significantly increasing our knowledge of foraging behaviour and pushing at-sea conservation measures for seabirds up the agenda.

The central premise of the project is to monitor and track seabirds across the western seaboard of Europe through a variety of methodologies – from the more standard colony monitoring, beached bird surveys and boat and plane surveys, to recently developed GPS trackers and dive loggers. The work has been funded to the tune of €2.2 million by INTERREG (two-thirds of total project costs), and has seven partners across five countries – RSPB in the UK, Birdwatch Ireland, LPO in France, SEO in Spain and SPEA, the University of Minho and WavEC in Portugal.

In the UK, work began in earnest this summer, with RSPB staff putting high-

resolution GPS tags on shag, guillemot, razorbill, kittiwake and fulmar. This saw fieldworkers venture out to Samson, Annet, Great and Little Gannick in the Scilly Isles, Colonsay, Copinsay, Swona, the Pentland Skerries and Fair Isle to monitor the movements of these species for the first time in such detail. Downloads from the tags provide an accurate picture of where birds go when they leave the colony, offering finer-grained detail than has been previously available for work of this type.

This year's work is very much the tip of the iceberg – over the next two years, it is hoped that by relating the distribution data from the seabird tracking work to oceanographic features, we will be able to see not only where birds are foraging, but why birds are foraging in these areas. The data from this year are currently being analysed, and while there have already been some fascinating insights into the journeys of individual birds, some of the most important information should start to emerge after next season's fieldwork.

Given that site-based conservation measures for seabirds – and marine wildlife more broadly – famously lag behind terrestrial measures, knowing the where and why of seabird foraging, as well as the location of underlying oceanographic features, will be crucial in informing the designation of Marine Protected Areas across the north east Atlantic. This information will also be vital in shaping marine management decisions, as the interactions between seabirds and marine industries become clearer. For example, the data derived from the GPS tags and depth loggers (attached to razorbills this year with the addition of guillemots and shags next year), will provide key information on how diving seabirds might interact with new marine renewable devices – particularly

wave and tidal technologies, which are currently being tested around Orkney and the Pentland Firth.

Clearly, this is an exciting time for seabird research: along with GPS-tracking across Europe as part of the FAME project, there are a number of other UK tracking projects on-going (including gannets at Flamborough Head and Ailsa Craig, and Manx shearwaters on Rum). This work couldn't come at a better time, with new marine planning and nature conservation provisions available under the recently enacted UK & Scottish Marine Acts, it will be critical that we ensure this work is put to good use in the implementation of these new laws.

Rory Crawford
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Keep an eye out for colour-dyed Manx Shearwaters!

On Friday July 10, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) colour-dyed 31 Manx Shearwaters at the Copeland Bird Observatory off the coast of Northern Ireland. The BTO are encouraging anyone who sees these birds to record and report their observations.

Understanding the movements of migrating seabirds is important for delivering effective conservation, but such information is still lacking or poorly understood for many species. The BTO has recently joined forces with Russell Wynn (SeaWatch SW co-ordinator) and Tim Guilford (University of Oxford) in an exciting new project investigating foraging areas and migration flyways of Manx Shearwaters from two UK colonies – Copeland Island, (Copeland Bird Observatory, County Down in Northern

Ireland), and Skomer Island (Pembrokeshire), using colour-marking techniques.

To obtain information on foraging areas and migration distribution following breeding, the BTO has recently colour-dyed 31 Manx Shearwaters on July 10 at Copeland. This work is being conducted by Chris Thaxter, Shane Wolsey, and Adrian Blackburn of BTO, Kerry Leonard of Sterna Environmental, and colleagues from the University of Oxford and Copeland Bird Observatory. It is hoped that subsequent observations of colour-dyed birds will build on recent GPS information collected through tagging projects conducted by the University of Oxford, revealing new information of post-breeding movements. If this first phase of the trial is successful, the program may be extended next year to investigate movements of breeding Manx Shearwaters at Copeland in more detail.

Migration flyways may also be similar between birds breeding at different colonies, and at Skomer, Tim and colleagues colour-dyed up to 30 non-breeding Manx Shearwaters in early July. Comparing sightings for both Copeland and Skomer birds during the same year will be useful in developing a wider picture of migration behaviour. Encouragingly, there have already been sightings of colour-dyed Manx Shearwaters from coastal watch points in early July.

Recent work has also been conducted by Russell, Tim and colleagues tagging another closely-related species, the Balearic Shearwater, at their Mediterranean breeding grounds to uncover migratory routes. The Balearic Shearwater is a critically endangered species that is being recorded in increasing numbers in southwest UK during non-breeding

periods; if the current colour-dyeing project is successful the same methods could potentially be used to further understand movements of this species.

We are therefore appealing to anyone that sees one of these colour-dyed birds to report them to **SeaWatch SW via the Contact Us** page of the project website. Different colour dyes are being used for Skomer and Copeland to avoid confusion; both dyes are harmless to the birds. We request that observers note the following details:

- *Date, time and location*
- *Direction of flight and distance from watch point*
- *Colour and extent of marking (as accurate as possible)*
- *General weather/viewing conditions*
- *Number of Manx Shearwaters in group*
- *Observer name and email/phone number*

All reports will be fully acknowledged, and results will be communicated via SeaWatch SW web/email updates. Specific enquiries about the Copeland project should go to Chris Thaxter of BTO (chris.thaxter@bto.org) and enquiries about the Skomer project should be submitted to Russell Wynn via the SeaWatch SW website: www.seawatchsw.org

Adapted from www.bto.org

UK's oldest Arctic tern discovered

An Arctic tern discovered off the coast of Northumberland is believed to be more than 30 years-old, making it the oldest known in the UK.

Originally ringed on the Farne Islands on 28 June 1980, it was re-trapped on Inner Farne this summer. The bird would have been ringed when a few days old making it more than 30 years of age today.

The tern was trapped in 1980 by a team of wardens that included John Walton who is now the National Trust's property manager for the islands.

Previous British record

The previous British record for the oldest Arctic Tern was 29 years, 10 months and 11 days which was also discovered on the Farne Islands.

An estimated 2,199 pairs of Arctic tern spent the summer months on the Farne Islands this year compared to around 3,129 pairs that made up the population in 1980. The decrease in numbers counted is largely down to a colony shift.

The Arctic tern was recently discovered to have the longest migration route of any animal, flying an estimated 44,000 miles between breeding grounds in Greenland to Antarctica in an 'S' shape to take advantage of prevailing global wind systems in order to preserve energy.

The oldest known Arctic tern is a 34 year-old American so it would be nice to see this bird, one day, claim the record – watch this space.'

Adapted from www.nationaltrust.org.uk

SEABIRD GROUP GRANT REPORT

Arctic Skua colour ringing

Introduction

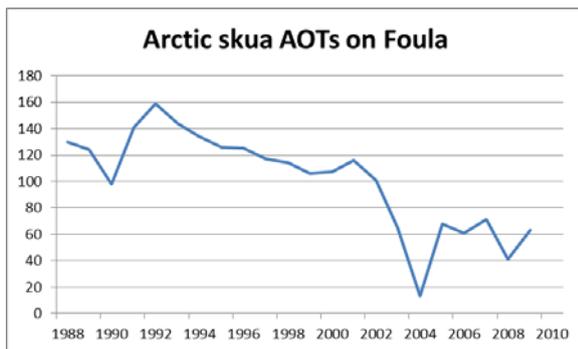
Colour ringing of Arctic Skuas on Foula was started in 1992 by Richard Phillips, with intensive effort 1992-94, followed by a period of very little colour ringing until I began my PhD in 2001. During 2001 and 2002, 112 birds were added to the colour ringed population and approximately 80% of the Foula population had colour rings. In total there have been 346 adult Arctic Skuas colour ringed on Foula during the period of 1992-2002. Since 2002 no colour ringing had been done on Foula and by 2008 the proportion of breeding birds that were identifiable by their colour rings had dropped below 50%. Long term colour ringing projects such as these are very important as they allow the analysis of survival rates, in which any variation would have a significant effect on the population dynamics of a long lived seabird such as Arctic Skuas.

In June 2009 I visited Shetland to carry out some follow up work to my PhD on Arctic Skuas. This consisted of colour ringing on Foula to maintain the colour ringed population there and resighting birds on Fair Isle that had been colour ringed in 2003.

Foula

Unfortunately having arrived in Shetland on the 17th of June raring to go I was unable to get over to Foula straight away due to very low cloud and rain. Thankfully, though the next day the clouds cleared and

the plane was able to fly to Foula. I was going with a certain sense of trepidation due to the terrible seabird seasons of the past few years. I first went to Foula in 2001 to carry out fieldwork for my PhD and that season I had arrived to hundreds of terns nesting right next to the airstrip with Arctic Skuas chasing them. In fact, that season there were approximately 800 pairs of Arctic Terns and 116 pairs of Arctic Skuas nesting on Foula (Mavor et al. 2002). Since then the number of Arctic Skua apparently occupied territories (AOTs) declined to a low of 13 in 2004 followed by a slight recovery in numbers although many pairs just holding territories without actually breeding.



Changes in Arctic skua population on Foula.

However, I was in for a pleasant surprise. Whilst there are not the numbers that there used to be on Foula, there were 63 AOTs and 49 of those with eggs, which was a relief as adult Arctic Skuas are caught on the nest during incubation. So, within an hour or so of arriving, islander and Arctic Skua enthusiast, Sheila Gear and I went out to start trapping. We have used various methods of trapping adult Skuas in the past, with the most successful being a remote controlled clap trap at the nest, but as that was being used out on St Kilda to trap Great Skuas, we reverted to our back up though still quite successful walk-in trap.

It seemed that having given the birds a few years off being caught worked in our favour as initially our success rate was pretty high (we caught 6 out of the 10 birds we tried for on the first day). However, there are always some birds that just will not go into a walk-in trap so we also tried out a new trap that was being used to catch Great Skuas on the island which was a remote controlled noose trap designed to catch the birds around their legs whilst at the nest. Unfortunately, we were unable to use the remote control with the noose trap very much as it was being used to trap Great Skuas most of the time but if fieldwork on a remote island teaches you anything, it is how to be resourceful and innovative! That is how we came to be 'fishing' for Arctic Skuas.... I can imagine we looked quite strange striding around the island carrying a fishing rod, only to be seen to crouch down in a ditch or behind a crub, having laid out our line inland along the ground without a hint of water! Despite this, the 'fishing' technique seemed to be quite an effective way to set off the trap and seven birds were caught this way.

In total we caught 24 birds over five days on Foula, which included nine birds that had been colour ringed previously but had lost some or all of their colour rings. This highlights the need to maintain the colour ringing effort to replace rings as well as to colour ring new recruits to the population. Interestingly 11 of the birds trapped did not even have BTO rings. Many of these birds are unlikely to be chicks from Foula as, for nearly 20 years, there has been a high chick ringing effort and the vast majority of chicks on the island have been BTO ringed. It is unlikely that these birds are from Fair Isle either, which is one of the nearest large colonies, as chicks are also BTO ringed there. Arctic Skuas are very site faithful with chicks usually returning to their natal

colony to breed, although we are aware of some dispersal from Foula to other colonies in Shetland (Fair Isle) and Orkney (Papa Westray). In addition, once they have started breeding at a colony they very rarely leave that colony to breed elsewhere. It is frustrating that we will never know where these birds come from, but this is a plea for people to ring more Arctic Skua chicks whenever possible to allow a greater insight into their movements, which may be greater during times of food shortage and high breeding failure.



Arctic skua with colour rings. Sarah Davis.

Fair Isle

During 2003, I caught and colour ringed 34 adult Arctic Skuas on Fair Isle as part of my PhD. I decided to return to Fair Isle to see how many of those 34 birds I was able to resight. The day trip onto Fair Isle allowed me about five hours on the island during which I covered the majority of the north end of the island where most of the Arctic Skuas breed. I saw seven birds with colour rings on them, which comprised approximately 11% of birds that I saw well enough to ascertain whether they had colour rings on or not. Of these seven birds only three had complete four ring combinations on them and so could be identified with absolute confidence. Two birds still had three of their colour rings and were on the same territory as the most

likely match due to colour ring combination and colour phase, so I can be fairly confident of their identity. The remaining two birds only had two colour rings left, but as these were red over blue on the right leg, which I used as the year and colony identifier, I can be confident that these are two of the 34 birds colour ringed on Fair Isle in 2003, if not of their exact identity.

The sample size is not large enough to carry out proper survival analysis but an approximate minimum survival rate can be calculated by assuming a re-sighting rate of 100%. The re-sighting rate will have been much lower than 100% as I did not have time to survey the whole breeding area on the island, birds may have been away foraging, and the birds do not always breed every year so may not be attending the colony at all that year. However, with that assumption, that would mean a minimum annual survival rate of approximately 77%, but is likely to be at least 80% given the relatively low re-sighting effort. Furness (1987) quotes a survival rate of 88.6% for Fair Isle 1973-75, which is significantly higher than the estimate of 77-80%, however considering the low re-sighting effort and very poor food availability since 2003 it is perhaps to be expected.

Thankfully, 2009 turned out to be a better breeding season for Arctic Skuas than they have had for several years, with productivity of 0.35 on Foula and 0.22 on Fair Isle. Let's hope it continues...

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Seabird Group for providing a grant to help towards the cost of this trip to Shetland. I would also like to thank Sheila and Jim Gear for their assistance with the fieldwork and Bob Furness and Eliza Leat for allowing me to

stay in their fieldwork accommodation on Foula.

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BREEDING SEASON NEWS

2010 UK Breeding Season

This year's seabird breeding season across the UK served up a mixed bag of the good, the bad and the all-time low. While some colonies have seen their best seasons for years, the far north experienced an abysmal summer, with sensitive species like kittiwakes and terns abandoning chicks, failing to nest and, in some cases, not returning to nesting sites at all.

On the Shetland island of Mousa, the 700 Arctic terns present at the start of the breeding season failed to produce a single chick. On Orkney, the situation was similarly miserable for this species; on RSPB's North Hill reserve, only 356 Arctic tern pairs returned to a site that held over 3,000 pairs in the early 90s. Just two kittiwakes returned to North Hill to breed, and not a single chick fledged there. A comprehensive survey of great skuas on Orkney shows that nearly a quarter of the pairs present at the beginning of the decade have disappeared – a decline on Orkney that represents 3% of the global population of this species.

Yet this is not the whole story. Some species continue to do well – gannets, which have a huge foraging range and can tackle a wide variety of fish species, had another good season across the UK, with the colony at Bempton Cliffs expanding to more than 8,000 pairs. Some of RSPB's Welsh reserves had their highest numbers of Arctic and common tern for several years.

Research carried out by RSPB indicates the value of seabirds goes beyond the ecological. The report "The Local Value of Seabirds", indicates that seabirds have significant and directly attributable monetary worth in rural areas. At RSPB's Bempton Cliffs reserve in Yorkshire, this figure was estimated to be over £750,000 in 2009, and at the Mull of Galloway RSPB reserve in Dumfries and Galloway, the figure was over £125,000 in 2008.

Adapted from www.rspb.org.uk

The Guildhall Kittiwake nesting site, River Tyne, northeast England

I have monitored Kittiwake nesting along the River Tyne for many years and the Guildhall at Newcastle upon Tyne riverside holds one of the smaller nesting groups. The Guildhall is just one of the buildings to comprise the main Newcastle and Gateshead colony which stretches along 640 m of riverbank from the Baltic arts centre, on the south side of the river, to the Guildhall on the north bank. The first successful breeding on the Guildhall was in summer 2007 after it developed as an overspill site from the large and expanding colony on the north tower of the nearby Tyne Bridge, and is currently the furthest inland nesting site on the river.

Year	AON, 5th – 8th June	Minimum nestlings, 8th – 14th July
2006	1	0
2007	12	10
2008	15	9
2009	26	30
2010	26	32

Table 1. Counts of Kittiwake apparently occupied nests (AON) and chicks at the Newcastle Guildhall.

I was concerned to see, in early 2010, that Newcastle City Council had fixed long thin metal spikes on all eastern Guildhall nesting ledges as well as along the top of the curving east elevation. I expected a very poor breeding season at this site as a consequence, but the birds persevered and fared surprisingly well. Had there been no spikes the number of AON would probably have exceeded the 2009 figure. Those birds nesting in 2010 had quite a task coping with the density and length of the spikes, but some managed to build nests through them and almost to their tops (counteracting their effect so they posed less discomfort) while at other nests, pierced by spikes, the chicks had to position themselves carefully between these lethal metal obstructions.



*Kittiwakes nesting on the Guildhall, Newcastle.
Daniel Turner.*

Northumberland and Tyneside Bird Club conservation officer Lindsay McDougall

and I wrote to Newcastle City Council (NCC) and received the following reply:

‘The Guildhall is a historic Grade 1 Listed Building and is also commercially occupied by tenants. It’s status as a Grade 1 listed structure places the city council under a statutory duty to protect the fabric of the building and earlier nesting of the birds had resulted in significant amounts of bird waste on the stone ledges. This has proved difficult and expensive to remove, particularly as the listed status brings with it constraints in terms of the type of cleaning material we are permitted to use. There are concerns that long-term damage is being caused to the stonework and the white staining is visually detrimental to what I hope you would agree is an imposing east elevation of the building fronting the quayside.

The presence of the birds also causes significant problems for the internal occupiers and during the last nesting season, concerns were expressed to us by our tenants in relation to their ability to work effectively in the rooms on the east elevation due to the noise generated by the birds. A number of health issues were also reported by staff during the period and raised with the city council as landlords. We do owe a legal duty of care to our occupiers in relation to this building.

Complaints have also been received from our Visitor Information Centre within the building about problems experienced by pedestrians passing along the curved section of adopted highway which runs around the east elevation.

It is for these reasons that this year we have taken a view that we need to implement measures to prevent as many birds as possible settling on the building. We shall

continue to monitor and observe the behaviour of the birds and review the position once they have moved on at the end of the season.'

We have received support for the Kittiwakes from the Durham Bird Club, Dr John Coulson and the Seabird Group. **If any reader has further thoughts on this matter can you please get in touch?** We shall contact NCC again to see if a joint forward plan can be developed.

Daniel M. Turner
dan.m.turner@btinternet.com

SHETLAND (EXCLUDING FAIR ISLE)

The 19 proven breeding pairs of **Red-throated Divers** on Fetlar fledged 11 young (success 0.57), while 11 pairs on the RSPB Lumbister/Black Park, Yell, fledged six (0.56). On Foula, ten diver pools were occupied, nine pairs bred and fledged four young (0.44); some traditional pools on Foula are now becoming overgrown with emergent vegetation. Shetland Ringing Group (SRG) ringed slightly fewer chicks than in 2009 and virtually all broods of one – “another poor year in a long run of poor years”.

For the second successive year there was a general increase in the number of **Fulmar** AOS at four colonies monitored by SOTEAG, reversing a downward trend that began in 2001, and breeding success was also relatively high (mean of 0.47, chicks in August per June AOS count). Breeding success was also relatively high on Foula (mean of 0.61 fledged per regularly attended AOS, four plots), but considerably lower at Hermaness (mean of 0.21, three plots).

European Storm-petrels on Mousa had a very late season – many adults were still incubating when SRG ringed just 36 chicks in early September.

Gannet success remained high, with a mean of 0.63 fledged per AON in three plots at Hermaness.

Counts of **Shags** were limited to southeast Mainland, where 877 nests were recorded in June, 12% more than in 2009 (781) and 55% more than in 2005 (564). There may have been more non-breeding in 2005, but immigration must have contributed to this increase, possibly of established breeders from Fair Isle. It was a relatively early season at Sumburgh Head, with the first chicks seen on 9th May, but in late June and into early July chicks began dying in or disappearing from nests, while heavy swell on 7th July washed out many nests with well-grown young; success (1.23 fledged per incubated nest) was close to the 1988-2009 average (1.21). On Mousa, sheltered from the July swell, success was a remarkable 2.16 (25 nests). While numbers on Foula remain low, most that bred had clutches of 3-4 by early May and mean productivity (42 AON in seven plots) was 0.94-1.01 (sum 1.14-1.28).

There were 48 **Great Skua** AOT in the monitored area on Foula, with a mean clutch size of 1.87 (1.04 in 2009), and while 40 chicks were counted and ringed on 21 and 26 July, 16 were subsequently found predated and only 11 probably survived to fledge (0.23/AOT), although predation of fledglings continued through August. In contrast, 22 fledged from 39 AOT at Hermaness (0.56/AOT), 92 from 116 AOT (in three plots, 0.79/AOT) on Fetlar, while on Mousa, 36 AOT fledged an island record of 23 chicks (0.64/AOT). SRG ringed just 11 chicks on the Bard of Bressay c.f. 59 in 2009.

On Foula, 50 pairs of **Arctic Skuas** established AOT but only 39 pairs laid (mean clutch 1.73). These pairs defended territories well, suggesting they were in good condition, and at least 26 chicks hatched, but only one survived to fledge and it disappeared a few days later, presumably predated. On Fetlar, six AOT fledged no young, on Mousa seven AOT fledged three young (0.43/AOT), while elsewhere "a few pairs did get the odd chick off".

There has been a recent, slight increase in **Kittiwake** breeding numbers at colonies in southeast Mainland (844 nests in 2005, 881 in 2009, 941 in 2010), while a count on Foula on 30 June recorded only 582 well-built attended nests (c.f. 509 in 2009, 997 in 2007). Laying was up to two weeks earlier than in 2009, but incubation became sporadic and no chicks hatched at Kettle Ness, Burra, and Clett Head, Whalsay, no chicks survived to fledge at Compass Head or No Ness (both Mainland), or on Noss, but 18 fledged at Sumburgh Head (success of 0.12 fledged per incubated nest), one at Ramna Geo (Burra; 0.01), 52 at Burravoe (Yell; 0.49), 14 at Hermaness (0.10) and three on Foula (0.03), mean success being 0.08 at these ten colonies. Chick loss was due to a combination of starvation (chicks dead in nests) and predation.

A whole-island count of **Arctic Terns** on Fetlar located 51 pairs, but none fledged young. Up to 700 were present on Mousa during June/July but only 42 incubating birds were recorded, all of which had failed or deserted by late June. Up to 150 were present on Foula but none bred. Elsewhere, a few young fledged from small, scattered colonies in central and north Mainland.

There was little change since 2009 in **Guillemot** numbers at monitored colonies,

apart from significant decreases of 6% and 17% at Hermaness and Troswick Ness, respectively. In the breeding success plot at Sumburgh Head, the number of regularly attended sites and timing of laying was identical to 2009, but a higher proportion of pairs laid (91% c.f. 85%). Hatching success (68% of first eggs) was also fairly high, but colony attendance by non-brooding adults was low, and a relatively high number of chicks disappeared before fledging or were predated, particularly when heavy swell in early July delayed fledging. Success was estimated at 0.51/egg-laying pair. Chick diet was 53% gadoids and 46% sandeels, but a high proportion of the latter were very small (0-group); chick weights near fledging were similar to 2009 but still c. 16% lighter than in 1999.

There was little change since 2009 in numbers of **Razorbills** at five monitored colonies, but numbers are now too low at three of these colonies (mean count of 10 birds or less) for any meaningful year-to-year interpretation. At Sumburgh Head, the mean count of 68 birds in plots in 2010 was 74% lower than the most recent peak, of 264 in 2000. At Compass Head, all the 'usual' sites had failed by the late June ringing visit.

Pre-breeding counts of **Black Guillemots** along nine stretches of coast recorded 1,532 adults, 8.3% more than in 2009. There was no change ($\pm < 8\%$) at five stretches, and increases of 12% at Foula, 36% at Ronas Voe, 12% at Aithsetter, and 23% at Mousa. At this last site, numbers had fallen from 195 in 2000 to 99 in 2007, for reasons unknown, but have since increased dramatically to 194 in 2010. Overall the population is currently at a relatively high level.

Puffins had a poor season on Foula, with few sandeels seen brought to burrows and dead chicks found at burrow entrances. At Sumburgh Head adults were carrying 0-group sandeels in late July but birds were probably struggling during chick-rearing. Fledging was late, the web-cam chick disappeared (fledged?) at 56 days (!) and the last chick known to have fledged was on 16/17th August, but (presumably starving) chicks were coming to burrow entrances prematurely and being taken by skuas and gulls.

Martin Heubeck & Mick Mellor (SOTEAG), Rob Fray, Martha Devine & Malcie Smith (RSPB), Glen Tyler (SNH), Sheila Gear (Foula Ranger Service), Dave Okill (Shetland Ringing Group).

SEAWATCHING NEWS

SeaWatch SW Annual Report 2009

Ed – Due to space constraints this has been edited, please see website for full report

Executive summary

SeaWatch SW is a **volunteer-based project** that started in 2007 and is scheduled to run until 2011 at least. The main aim is to better understand the distribution and behaviour of migratory marine mega fauna, both for scientific and conservation purposes. The priority is the **Critically Endangered Balearic Shearwater**, but other migratory seabirds as well as **Basking Sharks, Ocean Sunfish and cetaceans** are the focus of intensive monitoring off southwest England.

Part 1: Balearic Shearwater monitoring in UK and Irish waters

A total of **983 Balearic Shearwater records** were received from the UK and Ireland in

2009, relating to a maximum of **4824** birds. Numbers reported over the three years 2007-09 have therefore remained stable, with the number of records averaging about **900 (± 100) per year** and the maximum number of birds seen averaging about **5100 (± 300) per year**. It should be noted that these maximum totals will include significant duplication, as some birds may remain in an area for several days or are recorded passing multiple watch points.

The temporal distribution of Balearic Shearwater sightings in 2009 was comparable to 2007 and 2008. The now expected **mid-winter influx** into southwest England was noted in January, but very few were then seen until birds began returning to southern England in May. The June total was lower than expected, but numbers rapidly increased to a **peak between July and October**. Regular records came from southwest England up to mid-December, but few were seen elsewhere in the late winter.

As with previous years, **about two-thirds of records came from southwest England**, particularly Cornwall, Devon and Dorset. About 9% of records came from Ireland and 7% from Wales, with less than 2% from Scotland. Sightings away from southwest England peaked in August and September. The highest day total was a **record Devon count of 145 off Berry Head on 2 Sept**. Overall, the **spatio-temporal distribution of Balearic Shearwater sightings in 2007-09 has been remarkably consistent**.

Part 2: Land-based monitoring from Gwennap Head (Cornwall)

Effort-based monitoring of all seabirds, cetaceans and other target species was undertaken at Gwennap Head (Cornwall) between **15 July and 15 Oct 2009**. About 40 volunteer observers helped man the watch

point for **93 consecutive days**, with 'dawn-to-dusk' observations totalling almost **1000 hours** for the third year in succession. It was **another unsettled summer** in Cornwall, with a dominance of strong winds veering between southwest and northwest in July and August, but more settled and variable conditions in September and October.

Balearic Shearwaters were seen on 90 out of 93 survey dates (same as 2008), with a maximum total of **1422** birds recorded. Totals over the three years 2007-09 have therefore averaged about **1200 (±225)**. It is likely that some birds are recorded on multiple dates, but these results indicate that overall passage rates over the three years have remained consistent. The pattern of movement was also very similar to previous years, with **most birds (96%) flying west** and **61% seen during morning sessions**. The peak day counts were **78 on 4 Oct** and **91 on 12 Oct**.

It was a bumper year for rare seabirds during the Gwennap Head survey, with the highlight being a first- or second-year **Black-browed Albatross** moving west close inshore on 26 July (the first in Cornwall for over 20 years). Two **Wilson's Storm Petrels** were then seen foraging offshore with European Storm Petrels on 1 Aug, during an unprecedented influx into the region. Three sightings of **Fea's-type petrels** were made between 30 Aug and 2 Sep, with at least two different birds thought to be involved. Finally, there were three sightings of **Yelkouan-type shearwaters** during August, and the SeaWatch SW team is currently leading efforts to establish the specific identification and origin of these birds (see below).

Totals of other shearwater and petrel species seen during the Gwennap Head survey included **27,508 Manx Shearwaters**,

527 Sooty Shearwaters, **509 European Storm Petrels**, **31 Cory's Shearwaters** and **seven Great Shearwaters**. Numbers of Manx Shearwaters, Sooty Shearwaters and European Storm Petrels were very similar to 2008, but there was no repeat of the Cory's Shearwater influx of that year. The peak movement of Sooty Shearwaters was 109 on 2 Sep, coinciding with record numbers seen further east.

Numbers of Arctic Skuas, Kittiwakes, Sandwich Terns and Common/Arctic Terns were **markedly lower** than in previous years, although Great Skua numbers remained stable. **The main passage of Arctic Skuas and Kittiwakes in early October was again synchronised**, but was significantly lighter and later than in 2007 and 2008. Numbers of **Guillemots and Puffins have increase progressively** over the three years, whereas Razorbill numbers have remained stable.

Records of scarce seabirds included single Goosander, Red-necked Grebe, Leach's Storm Petrel, two Sabine's Gulls, two Yellow-legged Gulls, three Black Terns, five Little Gulls, seven Grey Phalaropes and 16 Pomarine Skuas. The total of **84 Mediterranean Gulls is a further increase**, and is presumably related to increased dispersal of birds from the rapidly-growing breeding population in northwest Europe.

Visual monitoring data are providing increasing evidence that the Runnelstone Reef, offshore of the Gwennap Head watch point, is **an important foraging area** for a range of species. The **visible tide race around the reef margin** regularly attracts feeding seabirds (e.g. Manx Shearwaters, European Storm Petrels, Gannets, Herring Gulls and Puffins), cetaceans (especially Harbour Porpoises), Grey Seals and Basking Sharks, with occasional Balearic

Shearwaters and Minke Whales also utilising this habitat.

Part 3: Land-based observations from sister sites

Timed observations were carried out at **five sister sites**, totalling over **1200 hours** of observations. Data from four sites in southwest UK (Berry Head in south Devon, Pendeen and Trevoze Head in northwest Cornwall and Strumble Head in Pembrokeshire), help to put the Gwennap Head sightings into a regional context. Whitburn in northeast England is contributing data that may help link seabird migratory movements between the North Sea and western English Channel.

Passage rates in birds per hour

The above tables reveal some interesting patterns, although variable effort between sites means direct comparisons should be treated with caution. Only the data from Gwennap Head are effort-based, i.e. fixed hours every day during the survey period. Despite these limitations it is clear that **Balearic Shearwater passage rates were fairly consistent across southwest England** (1.3-2.8 birds per hour), with lower rates off Strumble Head and very few off Whitburn.

Passage rates of wildfowl, e.g. Common Scoter, and terns are **much higher** off Whitburn than off southwest UK, although numbers of skuas are comparable between regions. **Manx Shearwaters** and **Guillemots/Razorbills** are most abundant off Strumble Head and northwest Cornwall, which are in close proximity to major colonies. The **high passage rate of Common Scoters** off Strumble Head, compared to sites off northwest Cornwall, is due to birds moving to wintering grounds in Carmarthen Bay (south Wales) where 40,000 were counted in February 2010.

Looking at **year-to-year variations** at those sites with sufficient data (Gwennap Head, Berry Head, Trevoze Head and Strumble Head), it is clear that **passage rates of Arctic Skua, Kittiwake, Sandwich Tern and Common/Arctic Tern were lower in 2009 than in 2008**, but **Puffins were seen in higher numbers** at all sites. The other regularly occurring seabirds showed no overall change.

The highlight off Berry Head was probably a **Devon record count of 145 Balearic and 582 Sooty Shearwaters** on 2 Sep, with **two Yelkouan-type shearwaters** seen the same day. **Wilson's Storm Petrels** were seen off Pendeen, Trevoze Head and Strumble Head, while a **Madeiran Storm Petrel was seen passing both Pendeen and Trevoze Head** on 2 Sep. As with Yelkouan Shearwater, this species is yet to be officially admitted to the British List, partly due to a combination of identification and taxonomic issues.

The **heaviest seabird passage** off Whitburn in the North Sea occurred from 13-16 Sep, with **four-figure counts** of Manx Shearwaters, Gannets, Wigeon, Kittiwakes and Guillemots, and **three-figure counts** of Red-throated Divers, Fulmars, Sooty Shearwaters, Common Scoters, Arctic Skuas, Great Skuas and Puffins. Initial comparison with sites off southwest UK shows little obvious correlation in the timing of peak movements between the two regions.

Part 4: *Marinelife* boat-based surveys in the western English Channel

Marinelife surveys in the western English Channel **increased in range and intensity** in 2009, largely due to additional funding from Natural England and the EU Charm III project, and a new eco-tourism initiative. These effort-based and opportunistic

surveys utilised a range of platforms, including **ferries** and **angling charter boats**.

Most **at-sea Balearic Shearwater sightings** involved records of **one or two birds**, concentrated in coastal areas such as Portland Bill, Lyme Bay and northern France. Many records involved birds **scavenging around angling and fishing boats** in coastal waters. Again, there is no evidence that land-based monitoring is missing significant offshore movements or aggregations of this species off southern England. An interesting development has been the discovery of **very large numbers of Balearic Shearwaters** in moulting and foraging aggregations off northern Brittany, involving at least 2000 birds. Further survey work in 2010 and 2011 will better constrain the numbers involved in these aggregations.

Large numbers of auks were noted in Lyme Bay in February 2009, estimated at **16,000 Guillemots** and **4000 Razorbills**. An **unseasonal Great Shearwater** was also seen in Lyme Bay in February. Large foraging aggregations involving hundreds of Gannets and Manx Shearwaters were seen in western Lyme Bay in August. Other notable records in the English Channel included single **Fea's-type petrel** and **Wilson's Storm Petrel** (within UK waters) in Aug-Sep, and a **Black-browed Albatross** reported by a fisherman off Salcombe (south Devon) on 23 July (presumably the same as the Gwennap Head bird).

Part 5: SeaWatch SW project news

SeaWatch SW and SAHOFS hosted the **third annual South West Marine Ecosystems (SWME) meeting**, held in Plymouth on 14 Dec 2009. About 40 invited representatives of various science and conservation organisations were in attendance, and provided an overview of environmental conditions and marine

wildlife sightings in 2009. The **unsettled summer weather** again dominated the discussions, in particular its impact on marine mega vertebrate occurrence and Portuguese Man-o-War strandings.

SeaWatch SW and *Marinelife* data continue to contribute to a number of **conservation initiatives**. Project data have contributed to recent **Biodiversity Action Plan and Species Action Plan updates for Basking Shark and Balearic Shearwater**, respectively. Project data have also contributed to consultations on offshore renewable energy installations, and a seabird foraging fact sheet on Balearic Shearwater (produced by RSPB).

The SeaWatch SW website accumulated over **30,000 individual hits** in the period 2007-09, and news items on sightings during the Gwennap Head survey appeared in **local and regional media**. A PhD student and several Masters-level project students at University of Southampton are working on SeaWatch SW data, investigating the spatio-temporal controls on marine mega vertebrate distribution off southwest UK. **Two new PhD students** (Sophia Butler-Cowdry and Lavinia Suberg) will be joining the project team this autumn to further these research activities.

If you feel inspired after reading this report, and would like to contribute to SeaWatch SW 2010, please visit the project website and/or contact the project co-ordinator for details of **how to get involved**.

<http://www.seawatch-sw.org>
rbw1@noc.soton.ac.uk

To get involved in boat-based survey work in with *Marinelife*, contact Kate Lewis at: kate.lewis@marine-life.org.uk

Finally, we would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that contributed to SeaWatch SW 2009. Vital financial support was received from **Total Foundation, RSPB, BTO, SAHFOS, RNBWS, Birdguides, The Seabird Group and Marine Information Ltd.**

Editors

Russell B Wynn and Alice R Jones (NOCS and SeaWatch SW)

Tom M Brereton and Kate M Lewis (Marinelife)

BOOK REVIEWS

Attending Alaska's Birds: A Wildlife Pilot's Story

By James.G.King. Hancock House Pub Ltd. 2010. ISBN 978-0888396563. 474 pages.Paperback.

The development of work on seabirds in the Pacific

There is a long history of United States collecting in the Pacific, but few observations were made on bird distribution at sea there except by the Japanese and Russians until the Smithsonian Institution was commissioned to survey bird distribution in connection with proposals to experiment with possible vectors of biological warfare in the mid-1960s. I remember being informed by Pierre Devillers that there was growing interest in seabirds in California at the time, but little seems to have come from this until as reported in chapter nine of Jim King's splendid account of a lifetime spent conserving Alaskan wildlife, much of it at a low level from light aircraft, *Attending Alaska's Birds* (see *British Birds* 103: 365), describes the foundation of the Pacific Seabird Group. It starts with the author's discovery of a major unknown seabird

colony at Cape Newenham in Bristol Bay. After accompanying Karl Kenyon on an aerial survey of the marine mammals of the Aleutians to count the birds he was inspired to propose Cape Newenham be made a reserve. This provided information for an expression of concern about petroleum development in the area by Interior Secretary Stewart Udall to the Western Oil and Gas Association, and the designation of Cape Newenham as a reserve by Lyndon Johnson in the closing hours of his US Presidency in 1969. It is now premier part of a much larger Togiak National Wildlife Refuge created by President Carter in 1980. Jim wonders if his original memo was the most important thing he has ever written (and that is a lot). So it is not always a waste of time writing memos.

Following the revelation of the consequences of the wreck of the *Torrey Canyon* on international television in 1967 Jim was asked to help produce overnight in May 1968 a proposal for seabird studies in Alaska. They first suggested 18 staff, and then doubled it. He then tried to present the Bristol Bay case to the American Ornithologists' Union, but was refused Departmental approval, so Professor Brina Kessel got his friend the late Cal Lensink to read a draft to them, and they passed a resolution of concern. Jim was then asked to address the National Audubon Society, and ended proposing an Institute of Arctic Bird Study. Early in 1970 there was oiling with an estimated 10,000 birdkill in southern Alaska, when it emerged that the only person to have studied the number of birds at sea there was the Russian V.P. Shuntov. In 1971 Jim came and discussed seabird problems and the growing number of seabird groups with us in Scotland, and the following spring he and Jim Bartonec formed a Pacific Seabird Group with a

charter membership of two in Fairbanks, Alaska.

It was formally set up at a seabird workshop in California in the autumn. Bartonec's assistant George Divoky has always done most of the work, and their bulletin, now *Pacific Seabirds*, initially listed 145 members. They started to develop seabird surveys, despite the loss of an aircraft with four observers in 1974, and in that year Jim King accompanied an aerial survey of Bristol Bay with three oil company executives, since when there has been no development there. At the end of the year a conference was convened to discuss a major ornithological investigation of the outer continental shelf, followed by a high-powered international symposium on North American seabird conservation in Seattle the next year (to which Philip Ashmole and I were invited), where Jim and Gerry Sanger discussed seabird vulnerability. Numerous younger people have since produced volumes of excellent reports on Alaskan seabirds, while Jim returned to counting ducks single-handed from the air. This is just what he did in his spare time.

W.R.P. Bourne

A History of British Birds

By D.W. Yalden and U. Albarella.

Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0199217519. 288 pages. Hardback.

The significance of past evidence for seabird distribution

A monumental compilation of information about avian history and archaeology *A History of British Birds* by D.W. Yalden and U. Albarella (Oxford University Press, 2009) represents a major contribution. Unfortunately in common with many such works it requires some caution in

interpretation. It is not always up to date, for example with regard to the *Archives of Natural History*, or seabirds, as with the presence of Great Auk remains on the Isle of May and Ailsa Craig. Some conclusions are questionable, such as that the presence of old and young bones imply Fulmars formerly nested widely around Britain; birds such as auks may fledge and travel long distance while still small, and in the past fishermen were often also fowlers, while people must often have scavenged bodies on beaches or birds blown inland, where auk and petrel remains are not uncommon in caves. It needs to be remembered that the numbers of birds such as gadfly petrels, now turning up in archaeological deposits as well as offshore around NW Europe, are much reduced since man reached their southern breeding islands. The presence of such birds at breeding colonies is also by no means evidence that they once bred there, since immatures of such species as storm-petrels and maybe in the past Great Auks may tour many possible sites before settling down. But with caution this is a valuable contribution.

W.R.P. Bourne

OBITUARY

John Warham 1919-2010

John Warham has been one of our greatest marine ornithologists. He started with a couple of decades studying and photographing birds in Sherwood Forest. He then spent ten years travelling round Australia with his wife and visiting its offshore island, including Macquaries Island, by which time he was a superlative photographer and practised author. He then

abandoned this and at the age of 46 in 1965 resumed his education at Durham University, then going on to join the staff of Canterbury University, where he began to study the crested penguins and petrels on New Zealand and its sub-antarctic islands. This eventually led to two large volumes covering most that had ever been said about the petrels, and a huge bibliography. A monumental achievement.

W.R.P. Bourne

NEWSLETTERS

Launch of Taiko Trust newsletter



September saw the launch of 'Taiko Chat' the newsletter of the Chatham Islands Taiko Trust. The trust plan to produce two issues of this newsletter each year, one each Spring and Autumn, which will enable you to keep up to date with what the Taiko Trust is doing, conservation gains, and future plans and ambitions. The September edition includes updates on translocation of Chatham Island petrels and genetic studies indicating that an undiscovered Taiko population exists as well as non-seabird work.

The Taiko Trusts web site is www.taiko.org.nz

The September Newsletter can be downloaded at:

www.taiko.org.nz/taiko_chat_sept%202010.pdf

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sooty Terns on Ascension

Dear Editor

In Seabird Group Newsletter 114: 3-5 Norman Ratcliffe says I argued in the previous newsle4tter (113: 8-9) that a resurgence of Rats was foreseeable following the removal of Cats from Ascension, and that he "was compelled to respond to inform readers that the Ascension project has resulted in conservation gains, rather than being an inevitable disaster as Bill would have them believe".

I cannot see where I said this. In fact I merely reported the only direct observations available to me on the state of Sooty Terns on Ascension following the removal of Cats, including that no chicks had survived at all in seven out of ten sub-colonies. I then suggested that there were a number of possible reasons for this, and suggested "that a proper watch should kept on the situation and means found to control the consequent resurgence of Rats". It is nice to know that the RSPB are pleased with their performance on Ascension, but can Mr Ratcliffe say what is being done about this?

W.R.P. Bourne

Dear Editor

The RSPB is continuing to work with the Ascension Island Government Departments of Conservation and Environmental Health, and the Army Ornithological Society, to monitor rat numbers and their impacts on seabirds. If rats are shown to be

consistently limiting seabird breeding success then appropriate measures will be taken to ensure that rats do not overturn the conservation gains resulting from the earlier cat eradication.

Dr Mark Bolton
Principal Conservation Scientist (Marine Research),
Mark.bolton@rspb.org.uk

SEABIRD GROUP NEWS



THE 45TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SEABIRD GROUP

The 45th Annual General Meeting of The Seabird Group will be held at 15.00 hours on Saturday 13th November 2010 during the Scottish Ringers Conference at Carrbridge Hotel, Carrbridge. We would like to encourage as many members as possible to attend.

Agenda:

1. Minutes of the 44th AGM
2. Matters arising from the minutes
3. The 45th Annual and Treasurers report
4. Nominations to the Executive Committee
5. Update on Seabird
6. Report on the Seabird Group's involvement in WSC
7. The next Seabird Group conference
8. AOB

Linda Wilson
Seabird Group Secretary

SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE POSTS UP FOR RE-ELECTION IN 2010

If you fancy getting involved with the Seabird group committee, then this is the chance that you have been waiting for!

Several positions within the committee will be up for re-election at the AGM:

- Treasurer
- Seabird Group Newsletter Editor
- Seabird Group Newsletter Assistant
- Ordinary Member

If you are interested in any of the positions, then please speak to the relevant committee member (contact details on the last page) and they will be delighted to fill you in on the responsibilities of the role. We are always delighted to hear from new faces (and even old!) so please don't be shy



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<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 15th 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 £20.00
Concession £15.00
Institution £35.00
International: £21
Life: £300

CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

Current retiral dates (at AGM) are shown after the name of each member.

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Other Members:

Simon Foster (2010)

EDITORIAL

Submissions for the newsletter must be in electronic format, preferably in word and should be no more than 1500 words wherever possible. If you would like to see any more new themes, which are not currently covered by the newsletter, then please get in touch with your ideas.

seabirdgroupnewsletter@gmail.com

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