



## NEWSLETTER 117

JUNE 2011

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## BREEDING SEASON NEWS

### EARLY SEABIRD BREEDING SEASON

The 2011 seabird breeding season is on course for one of the earliest ever at several colonies around the UK. On the Isle of May the first Guillemot laid on 15<sup>th</sup> April the second earliest date on record. This was hardly an outlier as the mean laying date for over 700 eggs was 25<sup>th</sup> April; earlier than the first egg in some years. Early laying was not restricted to Guillemots, with Kittiwake having the earliest first egg and Razorbill having the second earliest first egg on record. The first puffin seen carrying fish, indicating a hatched chick, was on 13<sup>th</sup> May which is only bettered in one previous year.

News of the early breeding on the Isle of May prompted the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) wardens at St Abbs Head in the Scottish Borders to check the colony on 21<sup>st</sup> April and discovered a number of Guillemots incubating. This is four days earlier than the previous earliest first egg at the sight.



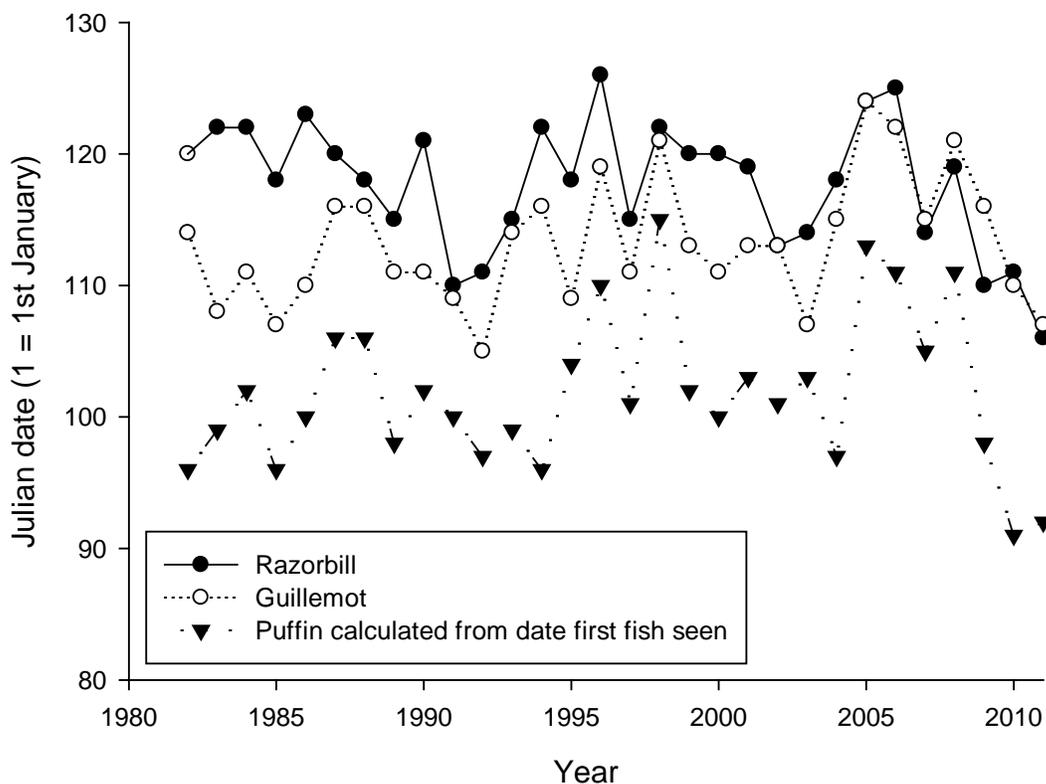
*Guillemot on egg on the Isle of May (Mike Harris)*

See [www.bbc.co.uk+uk-scotland-south-scotland-13265542](http://www.bbc.co.uk+uk-scotland-south-scotland-13265542)

A similar story has emerged on the south coast of England With reports from Berry Head, Devon experiencing its earliest season for almost a decade. The first egg was recorded on 25<sup>th</sup> April amongst the colony of approximately 500 pairs. Full story at [www.berryhead.org.uk+news\\_detail.cfm?item=1282](http://www.berryhead.org.uk+news_detail.cfm?item=1282)

With return rates of individually marked adults on the Isle of May appearing high the birds clearly experienced a good winter allowing them to return to the colonies in peak condition and begin laying early. It remains to be seen whether the hatching of chicks coincides with a good food supply.

First egg dates of auks on the Isle of May



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Mike Harris

## RESEARCH NEWS

### RAMSEY AND GRASSHOLM ISLANDS

Ramsey and Grassholm lie off the coast of Pembrokeshire in west Wales and are owned and managed by the RSPB. Ramsey has long been an important stronghold for Red-legged Chough, *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*. However from a seabird view point it has a somewhat chequered history, blighted by rats and feral cats until recently. In contrast Grassholm has gone from strength to strength as the Northern Gannet, *Morus bassanus*, colony has expanded to become the third largest in the world.



*Ramsey Island from the air (RSPB Images)*

Ramsey is dwarfed in burrow nesting seabird terms by its island neighbours of Skomer and Skokholm. Both owned by Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales they have experienced a very different history to Ramsey and one which has seen them rise to become the seabird giants of Wales.

Just eight miles of Irish Sea separates the three islands but in the 1800's brown rats, *Rattus norvegicus*, made it to Ramsey via shipwrecks, the turbulent waters of Ramsey Sound claiming many victims. Skomer and Skokholm were fortunate and no major ground predators have ever established themselves there (although Skokholm has House Mice, *Mus musculus*).

In the winter of 1999/2000 the RSPB, together with Wildlife Management International from New Zealand, undertook an ambitious and ultimately successful project to rid Ramsey of its brown rats using poison bait. The feral cats (themselves brought on by previous owners to catch the rats....) were cage trapped and deported. Since then no further signs of rats have been detected and Ramsey's burrow nesting seabird population has responded accordingly.

A survey of Manx shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus*, the year prior to eradication estimated 897 AOB. By the next full census in 2007 this had risen to 2,387 AOB. Given the breeding biology of this species, this large increase cannot be attributed solely to improved productivity on Ramsey. There must have been a degree of immigration. A similar pattern emerged on Lundy Island, in the Bristol Channel, following rat eradication and it is thought that the large shearwater populations on Skomer and Skokholm (120,000 and 45,000 pairs respectively) might be contributing 'overspill' birds to these expanding populations now free from the pressure of ground predators.

These fascinating birds have long attracted the attention of researchers starting back in the 1920's when R.M Lockley pioneered some of the first studies of Manx shearwaters on Skokholm. Today the OxNav Group from Oxford University, principally supported by Microsoft Research, Cambridge, headed by Prof Tim Guilford are involved in a long running study on Skomer using GPS and geolocator technology to track foraging and migratory behaviours of this species. The rapidly increasing population on Ramsey is an excellent case study for post- rat eradication recovery and it is encouraging to see the island's shearwaters now included in the OxNav project.

Another success of the rat eradication on Ramsey was the discovery in 2008 of European storm petrel, *Hydrobates pelagicus*, breeding on the island for the first time. It is possible that birds bred prior to rat occupation but given the difficulty in detecting this species it is understandable that it was not recorded in the 1800's. From the time the RSPB purchased Ramsey in 1992 wardens carried out regular checks using tape play back techniques covering all likely areas. Nothing was detected until 2008 when five responses were obtained in a small area on the west coast of the island, rising to six in 2010. It is likely there are more pairs in inaccessible areas and with 8km of rebuilt dry stone and traditional Pembrokeshire 'clawdd' walls there is clearly scope for this species to increase on Ramsey in the coming years.

Lying two miles off the NW coast of Ramsey is the Bishops and Clerks archipelago, a small string of islets also owned and managed by the RSPB. The two largest islets, themselves only 2ha each, have held breeding storm petrels since records began. The latest survey in 2010 yielded 147 AOB. The new Ramsey colony is in an area directly opposite the Bishops and Clerks. Studies will be carried out over the coming years to try and ascertain if birds from the Bishops and Clerks, are 'reseeding' Ramsey, as seems likely.

The gap in the armoury on Ramsey is the Atlantic Puffin, *Fratercula arctica*. Last recorded breeding there in 1894 the bird soon became extinct after the arrival of rats. A small colony numbering around 50 individuals exists on the Bishops and Clerks but despite 10 rat free years, none have made it back to the main island. In response to an increased number of sightings of birds on the water around Ramsey, the RSPB have for the past two seasons, deployed 200 plastic decoys on strategic headlands in an attempt to lure the real thing back, so far without success.

Skomer and Skokholm by contrast are rich in Atlantic Puffins with around 12,500 and 4,500 individuals respectively. Unlike other areas of the UK, Pembrokeshire has so far avoided the food shortages that have blighted northern seabird colonies. Productivity of auks on all three islands has been average or good over recent years with Puffins achieving 0.8 per pair in 2010 on Skomer.

Ramsey does play host to other auk species, with Common guillemot numbering 3,438 individuals and razorbill 1,467 individuals at the last full census in 2007 (next due 2012). Both these figures have increased over the past 30 years but the geology of Ramsey's coastline prohibits the formation of the vast auk colonies found on Skomer and it is likely that the Ramsey population will not grow much beyond its current numbers.

Fulmars and kittiwakes are monitored annually on Ramsey. In 2010 there were 250 fulmar AOS with a productivity of 0.49. Kittiwake fared less well. The small population numbered 191 AON (it had been as high as 489 in the 1990's) with a poor productivity of 0.26. Kittiwake productivity fluctuates wildly on Ramsey. In 2009 it was 0.66 while in 2007 it was zero. Local factors play a big part given the relatively small size of the population. In some years corvids and gulls can wipe out the entire breeding attempt; in other years one bad week of weather at the wrong time can have a similar effect.



*Grassholm Island from the air (S Murray)*

Grassholm lies 7 miles SW of Ramsey and is managed by RSPB staff from that island. Bought by the RSPB in 1948 for £550 it held 7,000 AON at the time. At the last aerial survey in 2009 that figure stood at 39,292 AON (9.5% of the world population and smaller only than St Kilda and Bass Rock). Public landings were permitted up to 1997 when it became apparent that such activity was causing undue disturbance to the gannets which had now expanded their breeding range into the public viewing areas. Regular boat trips still take people around the island for what must be one of the greatest wildlife experiences in Wales.

Occasional research parties visit the island. The University of Plymouth, led by Dr Stephen Votier, in collaboration with Dr Stuart Bearhop (University of Exeter), has been carrying out data logging research on gannets since 2006. This work has included foraging studies of adult birds using GPS devices and long term migration monitoring using British Antarctic Survey GLS data loggers. The team has also deployed satellite tracking devices on non-breeding birds, the first time this work had been carried out on sub-adult gannets.



GPS device fitted to gannet (G Morgan). Dead adult gannet caught in netting on Grassholm (G Morgan)

The spectrum of marine litter is graphically illustrated on Grassholm. The birds build their nests largely out of seaweed but collect brightly coloured mono-filament fishing line and rope found floating on the surface of the ocean to further line their domes. The result can be a garishly coloured death trap for growing chicks. A recent study estimates there is around 18 tonnes of plastic contained in total within nests on the island. Removing the rubbish is not an option due to the scale of the task and the wholesale destruction of nests that would occur. Instead, each autumn, once the majority of birds have left the island, RSPB Ramsey staff visit to cut free entangled young. Most are fit and healthy; some are still being fed by adults. The total number of birds affected is not vast and failure to carry out this exercise would not affect the Grassholm gannet population as a whole. However, left unaided these birds would die slowly so the task is carried out on animal welfare grounds and as an effort to highlight the ever growing problem of marine litter.

Ramsey is open to the public from April 1<sup>st</sup> to the end of October, 7 days a week. Grassholm can be reached via offshore boat trips running throughout the summer months. For information on landing on Ramsey or going around Grassholm contact Thousand Island Expeditions on 01437 721721 or [www.thousandislands.co.uk](http://www.thousandislands.co.uk)

**Greg Morgan – RSPB Reserve Warden for Ramsey and Grassholm**

### **References**

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## **MOUSA STORM PETRELS**

The population of Europe's smallest seabird, the storm petrel has doubled at Mousa in just 12 years, according to new figures.

A survey conducted in 2008 by RSPB Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage recorded an estimated 11,800 pairs – a huge increase on the 5,400 found in 1996.

As well as nesting in drystone walls and boulder beaches in Mousa, storm petrels famously nest in cavities in the Iron Age broch to which they return to under the cover of darkness. This nocturnal behaviour means that they are notoriously difficult to count.

To monitor the population, researchers used a technique that involved playing a tape recording of a storm petrel call into the potential nest sites. Every return call was counted, which demonstrated a substantial increase in the storm petrel population between 1996 and 2008.

Mousa has nearly 40 per cent of the UK population of storm petrels, making it the largest colony of the tiny seabirds in the country.

The increase of the population in Mousa is particularly noteworthy against the background of widespread declines of other seabird species in the UK.

**Adapted from [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)**

## CONSERVATION NEWS

### BE PREPARED! DRIFT BLOCKS AT THE READY!



*Drift Block (Mick Mellor)*

In the early stages of the January 1993 *Braer* oil spill, Mark Tasker of JNCC phoned Shetland to ask if we could do a drift experiment to assess seabird carcass recovery rates. Unfortunately we couldn't (and didn't) as the seabird corpses we had collected by then were of rather scientifically valuable Great Northern Divers, Long-tailed Ducks and Black Guillemots, and like other parts of the UK, hadn't thought to maintain a stock of birds for the purpose. Since then, 100 or so Common Guillemots, marked with plastic tag through the patagial flaps of each wing, have lain in a freezer which over the years has suffered numerous power cuts and accidental switch offs. Assessing what state these creatures are in now would probably require a special H & S Risk Assessment, and instead SOTEAG's Wildlife Response Co-ordinating Committee decided to store something more durable.

Copying Wiese & Jones' (2001) W-design drift block, which was developed in field experiments to best mimic the at-sea drift of a freshly dead Common Guillemot, 200 wooden blocks were cut, each weighted with a thin steel plate on one side and with a printed, numbered plastic label stapled to the opposite side. The blocks were spray-painted red to distinguish them from the mass of 'bruck' that litters Shetland beaches in winter. They will be stored at the Sella Ness Pollution Response base at the Port of Sullom Voe and, in theory, could be driven to any location in the UK if needed (so long as they're replaced!).



*Drift blocks being boxed at Sumburgh Head. In the far background is Garths Ness and Fitful Head, where the tanker Braer sank and released 84,000 tonnes of oil in January 1993. (Mick Mellor)*

**Martin Heubeck, SOTEAG**

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### **Acknowledgements**

Ian Jones very kindly mailed an original W-design block from Canada. The Sullom Voe Association Limited paid for materials, Theo Smith (BP, Sullom Voe Terminal) cut the wood and screwed the plates on, and Mick Mellor (SOTEAG) did the painting and stapling.

### **Reference**

Wiese, F. K. & Jones, I. L. 2001. Experimental Support for a New Drift Block Design to Assess Seabird Mortality from Oil Pollution. *Auk* 118: 1062-1068.

## **THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE BERMUDA PETREL (PTERODROMA CAHOW)**

The Cahow is a medium-sized petrel that once bred in vast numbers on Bermuda in the centre of the western North Atlantic until first the Spaniards introduced hogs in the sixteenth century and then the British rats. It was then thought to have been exterminated until rediscovered on an outlying islet in 1862, though it took many decades to be recognised. David Wingate then spent a lifetime fitting its nests with baffles to exclude usurping tropicbirds, building more nests, and restoring the native flora of neighbouring Nonsuch Island to provide a safer refuge. Subsequent progress is reported in [www.royalgazette.com/article/20110310/ISLAND/703109999](http://www.royalgazette.com/article/20110310/ISLAND/703109999). Following damage to the breeding sites by Hurricane Fabian in 2003 the Bermuda Conservation Officer Jeremy Madeiros consulted petrel expert Nicholas Carlile from New South Wales, and transferred 102 chicks to Nonsuch Island before fledging in the hope they would return there, with the result that they now have eight occupied nests and five prospecting males and recently fledged their first chick there. In 2009 Nicholas returned and they

attached data-loggers to twelve birds and now have results from nine. They turn out to travel all round the North Atlantic, going north to the Canadian ice to collect krill to feed their new chicks in midwinter, later spending one third of their time catching squid and fish between Bermuda and North America in one direction and two thirds between Bermuda and the Azores in the other, with individuals approaching Ireland, Spain, Portugal and the Canaries. It seems possible they make these journeys by riding the weather-systems. It may also be remarked that there seems to be a rich feeding area west of the Azores where there is upwelling as the Gulf Stream splits into the Canary Current and North Atlantic Drift. There is a need for exploration there.

**W.R.P. Bourne.**

## SEAWATCH NEWS

### SEATRACK - IRELAND

We would like to extend our thanks & appreciation to those of you who took part in or supported the 2010 Seatrack pilot season. For those of you who were unable to participate last year or have only just recently become aware of the project then now's the perfect time to get involved!

Last year, over 35 volunteer seawatchers logged almost 600 hours of survey time from 18 coastal headlands & islands around Ireland. Bird news information services & BirdWatch Ireland local branch websites also provided additional sightings, helping to clarify the status & distribution of Ireland's migratory seabirds. It was a record year for Balearic Shearwater, the focal species of the survey, with 124 reports of 294 birds received. Both Sooty Shearwater & Wilson's Petrel were well represented throughout the autumn whereas Great & Cory's Shearwaters were quite scarce, with just 46 & 10 birds recorded respectively.

Following on from last year's success, the 2011 Seatrack season will kick-off at the end of this month. As such we are again looking to enlist the help of volunteer seawatchers observing from coastal headlands across the Republic of Ireland this year from late summer through to early winter.

We've made some changes to the methodology this year, making it even easier to record & submit your sightings to the Seatrack scheme. Furthermore, we are hoping to establish a small number of sites across the country this season that will receive full coverage across each of the 8 Seatrack Target Weekends scheduled from late July to early November. What we envisage is that some of you guys out there will sign up individually or as a team to cover a particular headland for a few hours on each Target Weekend, allowing for more continuous data to be gathered which will lead to more robust analysis. However, records received from opportunistic seawatches outside of Target Weekend survey dates or from other headlands at any time of the year will also be much appreciated.

So, if you or a group of local birders would like to sign up to cover a headland from late July to early

November this year then e-mail [seatrack@birdwatchireland.ie](mailto:seatrack@birdwatchireland.ie) (Please note new e-mail address) and we'll send you out details of the new recording protocol & submission forms.

Seatrack Target Weekend Survey Dates for 2011:

**23rd/24th July**  
**6th/7th August**  
**20th/21st August**  
**3rd/4th Sept**  
**17th/18th Sept**  
**1st/2nd Oct**  
**15th/16th Oct**  
**5th/6th Nov**

**Niall Keogh, Alan Lauder & Steve Newton**  
**BirdWatch Ireland**

## MARINE POLICY

### ACTION PLAN LAUNCHED FOR IRISH SEABIRDS



Urgent actions that are required for the protection of Irish seabirds and the marine environment were highlighted by Minister Jimmy Deenihan as he launched a multi-stakeholder plan led by Ireland's largest wildlife charity, BirdWatch Ireland. The Minister drew particular attention to the value of marine biodiversity and a healthy marine environment for the economy of coastal communities and the nation as a whole.

Fishing interests, recreational interests and expert ornithologists were amongst the stakeholders attending the event in the National Sea Life Centre in Bray along with staff and local Branch members of BirdWatch Ireland and local Councillors. The event is one of several which were held on World Oceans Day and during European Fish Week in June.

The plan is one of ten Action Plans for birds being led by BirdWatch Ireland and aims to identify measures needed to protect Irish birds the marine environment. The *Action Planning for Irish Birds* project aims to address a number of issues raised by a European Court of Justice ruling (European Court of Justice ruling case: C-418/04) against Ireland in 2007. This ruling found against Ireland for failing to properly implement the Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC) and Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC). The primary aim of the project is to identify and implement measures that will provide protection for priority birds in the wider countryside and to do this through wide stakeholder consultation. The project is partly supported by the Environment Fund of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

For more information on the project and to download the action plan visit:

<http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/Ourwork/PolicyAdvocacy/ActionPlanningforIrelandsBirds/tabid/946/Default.aspx>

A new article just published in the journal *Endangered Species Research* entitled 'Global seabird bycatch in long-line fisheries' highlights the enormous impact long-line fisheries are having on seabirds including 50,000 birds killed off the southwest coast of Ireland every year by Spanish long-liners.

Visit <http://www.birdlife.org/community/2011/06/longline-fisheries-continue-to-drive-albatross-declines/> for more information.

BirdWatch Ireland is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland and its focus is on the conservation and protection of Ireland's birds and their habitats. It is a registered charity with over 14,000 members and 25 regional branches. For more information, please visit [www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie). BirdWatch Ireland is the Irish partner of BirdLife International, a global partnership of bird conservation organisations.

For more information contact:

**Peadar O'Connell - Species Policy Officer** [poconnell@birdwatchireland.ie](mailto:poconnell@birdwatchireland.ie)

**Steve Newton - Senior Conservation Officer - Seabirds** [snewton@birdwatchireland.ie](mailto:snewton@birdwatchireland.ie)

## UK MARINE POLICY STATEMENT

The UK Marine Policy Statement has been jointly published today by all UK Administrations as part of a new system of marine planning being introduced across UK seas.

Adopted by the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, the Marine Policy Statement will help achieve the shared UK vision for clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.

The Marine Policy Statement will enable an appropriate and consistent approach to marine planning across UK waters, and ensure the sustainable use of marine resources and strategic management of marine activities from renewable energy to nature conservation, fishing, recreation and tourism.

The UK Marine Policy Statement can be viewed at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/>.

The UK Marine Policy Statement was revised following formal consultation between July–October 2010. Alongside the UK Marine Policy Statement published today are slightly revised versions of the Appraisal of Sustainability report; Impact Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment and an Equalities Impact Assessment Screening report. We have also published a Post Adoption Statement and a document summarising the differences between the draft consultation version of the UK Marine Policy Statement and the final adopted MPS. These documents can be found here <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/>.

All public authorities taking authorisation or enforcement decisions that affect or might affect the UK marine area must do so in accordance with the UK Marine Policy Statement unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise. The Marine Policy Statement will also guide the development of Marine Plans across the UK.

In England marine planning is being administered by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). The MMO will begin planning in the Eastern areas of England in April. Details on the Marine Management Organisation can be found at <http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/>

The UK Marine Policy Statement draws from the UK High Level Marine Objectives which can be found at <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/documents/ourseas-2009update.pdf>

In Wales, marine planning is being taken forward by the Welsh Assembly Government. For further information, including the consultation ‘Sustainable Development for Welsh seas: Our Approach to Marine Planning in Wales’, please visit <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/marinefisheries/?lang=en>

In Scotland, a pre-consultation version of a national marine plan has been issued for comment <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/seamanagement/national>

In Northern Ireland, the Department of the Environment is bringing forward a Northern Ireland Marine Bill, which will enable the Department to carry out marine planning in the Northern Ireland inshore region, in addition to carrying out marine planning in the offshore region (under the Marine & Coastal Access Act). Further information is available at [www.doeni.gov.uk/marine\\_planning](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/marine_planning)

**Adapted from [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)**

## SCOTLAND MARINE ATLAS

An atlas of Scotland's seas has been compiled for the first time, highlighting the diversity and richness of the seas around Scotland and their importance at both national and international levels. Scotland's Marine Atlas - Information for the National Marine Plan is an assessment of the condition of Scotland's seas, based on scientific evidence from data and analysis, supported by expert judgement.

Data and expertise on marine benthic habitat maps have been contributed by JNCC, along with data on important Scottish seabird populations. JNCC also supported the project with photographs from offshore surveys.

The Atlas is supported by a number of other documents including:

- Background material from a report by ABPmer, dated November 2010, called Review of Economic and Environmental Data for Coastal and Marine Cultural Heritage. The information from this report has been provided for the Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage pages.
- The Charting Progress 2 feeder reports. Charting Progress 2 is a comprehensive report on the state of the UK seas more generally and was published last year by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).
- A more detailed paper on the Economic analysis of Scotland's Core Marine Sector prepared by the Marine Scotland Marine Analytical Unit. This paper supports the information on pages 142 and 143.

You can download the atlas at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/16182005/0>

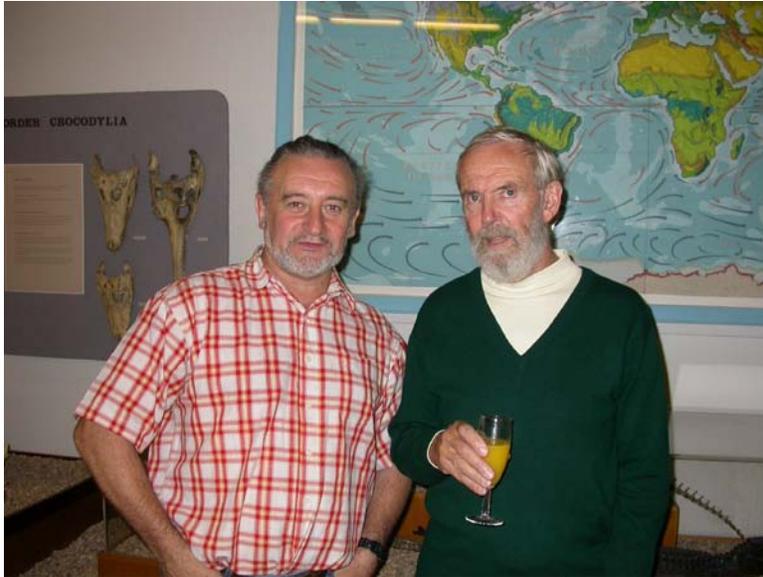
Hard copies of the Atlas can be obtained by e-mailing:

[marinescotland@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:marinescotland@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

**Adapted from [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk) and [www.jncc.defra.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.defra.gov.uk)**

## OBITUARIES

### MICHAEL JOHN IMBER DSc. (1940 – 2011)



*Bernie Zonfrillo and Mike Imber (right) at Glasgow University (Veronica Costa Neves)*

Few people world-wide with an interest in petrels will have not heard of, or read the papers by, New Zealand ornithologist, Mike Imber. Born in Banbury, England during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, where his father lived, his maternal "roots" were claimed in north-east Scotland, in Banffshire, an area to where his mother and children returned after the War when Mike was around 10 years old. There they stayed until his mother and family emigrated to New Zealand and where Mike started at Massey University studying Agricultural Science, which involved introduced Canada Geese.

In 1965 he met and married Miriel his wife and eventually had three children, Hamish, Jane and Cameron. In that year he also was about to start his employment with the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research working on Rooks in orchards but his car broke down and the interview was subsequently cancelled. This proved very serendipitous since a year later he began work with the N Z Wildlife Department that in 1986 became the Department of Conservation. This enabled Mike to study the seabirds he loved best, the petrels, of which New Zealand has a plethora. As most of us know, seabirds can rarely be studied in isolation and the diets of petrels included squid and crustaceans as well as fish. He became expert in identification of these creatures, often from small digested fragments that remained in the gut. Such forensic examinations resulted in Mike writing papers such as *the squid families Cranchidae and Gonatidae in the New Zealand region (NZ Journal of Zoology, 1978)*, where the beaks of specimens illustrated, aided identification. What petrels eat is vital to understanding their ecology. I first met Mike in Cape Town in 1981 where he gave a talk on the diet of White-faced Storm-petrels. When I told him I had a large collection of material regurgitated by Fulmars and European Storm-petrels we agreed to later meet up in Scotland and go through the identification process. In Glasgow he opened my eyes to what the birds were eating and the origins of their prey. I was amazed by his knowledge of

North Atlantic species of squid and other organisms and it showed, embarrassingly, how much I didn't know. As friendship grew I was pleased to show Mike islands such as Ailsa Craig, where he saw how we used tape recordings to lure Storm-petrels and Isle of May, where I had ringed all the Fulmar chicks annually. In Wales he also got acquainted with the Manx Shearwaters on Skomer Island thanks to Adrian Plant. He was always good company and good humoured. Elsewhere, he visited Madeira where Frank Zino was able to show him the local *Pterodroma* in the hand. Mike had written a detailed study on Grey-faced Petrel biology, but it was in 1985 he wrote his paper on the *Origins, phylogeny and taxonomy of the gadfly petrels Pterodroma spp (Ibis, 1985)*. In this he drew together his vast knowledge of the Genus and proffered some new taxonomic hypotheses. These included shifting the Kerguelan Petrel out of *Pterodroma* into the Fulmarine petrels by, among other things, using markers such as its unique feather louse. He also examined the helicoidal twisting of the upper digestive tracts and found it useful in placing *Pterodroma* subgenera. The rare tropical *Pterodromas* were placed closer to *Bulweria* (not a gadfly petrel) and given the old name *Pseudobulweria*. This was all before molecular techniques were commonplace but most if not all DNA studies since then have proved him to be largely correct. Mike's conservation work on petrels on Little Barrier Island, Codfish Island, Whale Island and the Chatham Islands brought him into contact with some species at dangerously low population levels. Rats, cats, Wekas and other introductions were removed and the recovery of species such as Black Petrel, Cooks Petrel and Taiko owe much to his endeavour and organisation. On the Chatham Islands he also found, in the wrong hemisphere, northern Leach's Storm-petrels occupying burrows.

In the past few years in his retirement Mike had been helping catch New Zealand Storm-petrels at sea using a net gun. He had visited Fiji where he saw a few Fiji Petrels off Gau Island but didn't find the breeding place; he also saw some Tahiti Petrels and Polynesian Storm-petrels and sent on photos of these rarities. He gave me much useful advice during the period when I was eradicating the rats from Ailsa Craig in 1991, and a few years ago had been discussing with me the photographs of what appeared to be a Kermadec Petrel off the Azores. The fact that I had found the lice from this species on some of the extinct Jamaica Petrel skins I had examined from various museums brought us to the conclusion that an undiscovered but small colony probably exists somewhere in the South Atlantic or Caribbean. Alas he will never know. Mike died of a respiratory illness on 28 April 2011 aged 71. A great loss to the world of petrels but, more importantly, to his family and friends. He will be sadly missed.

My condolences to Miriel Imber and thanks for her help in producing this obituary.

**Bernie Zonfrillo** June 2011

## SAM ALEXANDER 1932-2010

Sam was a pleasant, sociable, able character with a variety of interests discussed by Nick Picozzi and Alan Knox in *Scottish Birds* 31: 28-29. He first contributed to work on seabirds when warden of troopships in the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean on National Service in 1955 before starting a career in the oil industry. When we organised the seabird breeding census Operation Seafarer in 1969-70 he made an important contribution by visiting islands off the west coast of Ireland by boat. In 1975 he moved to Aberdeen, where he became involved with safety training in the oil industry and local ornithological activities. He played an important part in the North Sea Bird Club from its foundation in 1979, and edited a valuable tenth anniversary review of its results in 1990. Latterly he continued to travel and take splendid photographs despite heart disease until it proved too much for him.

## W.R.P. Bourne

### PAPER REVIEWS

The preliminary analysis from data loggers fitted to Zino's Petrels has now been published in *Birding World* (Zino *et al* 2011. Zino's Petrel movements at sea. *Birding World* 24:216-219)

Two maps show the distribution of breeding birds, during both the breeding and non-breeding seasons. With the former, birds ranged widely through the northeast Atlantic, most to the north and northwest of Madeira, with surprises including results off southwest Ireland and as far north as (close to) the latitude 60°N (i.e. the latitude of the Shetland Islands and southern Norway). Some birds travelled south and southeast to the West African Upwelling. During the non-breeding season only one bird travelled north, others to Mauritania and Senegal. Interesting that birds also went across to northeast Brazil and to the tropical waters of the South Atlantic ridge, Saint Helena and the Gulf of Guinea, and as far south as between Saint Helena and the Tristan group.

The paper suggests that the best places to see the species, outside Madeira, are the Azores, Canary Islands (where there appear to be no records so far) during the breeding season, and the Cape Verde Islands, maybe Brazil, and along from Ascension to Saint Helena during October to March (no records also?) Fea's Petrels overlap, of course, in many of these localities. Of interest to US birders was that no birds were tracked to the eastern seaboard during either the breeding or non-breeding seasons.

Ten more dataloggers have been fitted this 2011 season. Note that dataloggers are considered reliable, though the margin for errors can be considerable (for example one map shows some birds foraged over inland Africa!) and after filtering the mean error is less than 200km.

Copies of *Birding World* are available from here:

<http://www.birdingworld.co.uk/BirdingWorldBackIssues1.ht>

**Tony Pym**



The Seabird Group 11th International Conference.

2-4 September, 2011, University of Plymouth, UK



For registration, accommodation and details of field trips please see:

[www.seabirdgroup2011.org](http://www.seabirdgroup2011.org)

There will be themed sessions on the subjects of:

- Marine renewable energy and seabirds
- Seabird migration
- Individual specialisation in seabirds
- General session on seabird research, monitoring or conservation

The programme has now been published and is available to download as a pdf

## SEABIRD GROUP NEWS

### SEABIRD UPDATE

Apologies for the late delivery of *SEABIRD* 23 (2010), which was due to a combination of some heavy editing last November, the Christmas/New Year commercial break, and some delays at the graphic design stage. Progress is well in hand with a number of manuscripts for *SEABIRD* 24, and to ensure publication in this calendar year, we are setting a deadline of early September for final, revised and corrected drafts. If you have any papers or notes nearing completion, or ready for submission for *SEABIRD* 24, please send them in as soon as possible so that we can start the referee process. Any manuscript that is not completely finalised by early September 2011 will have to await publication in *SEABIRD* 25. Many thanks.

Martin Heubeck, *SEABIRD* Editor [martinheubeck@btinternet.com](mailto:martinheubeck@btinternet.com)

Andy Webb, *SEABIRD* Publishing Editor [andy@andywebb.org.uk](mailto:andy@andywebb.org.uk)



### **46<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SEABIRD GROUP**

**19:00, Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> September**

Seabird Conference at Conference Venue in Plymouth University

Please contact the secretary Linda Wilson if you have any items for the agenda.

Minutes from the 45<sup>th</sup> AGM can be found in SGN 116.

### SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS – MARCH 2011

Two projects were awarded grants in the March 2011 funding round:

- Shiant Isles seabird study, covering Shiant Isles and Fladda-chuain archipelagos
- Mark recapture of sandwich terns in their African wintering grounds

Deadline for the next round of grants is 31<sup>st</sup> October, see [www.seabirdgroup.org.uk](http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk) for details



Website: [www.seabirdgroup.org.uk](http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk)

Seabird Group Forum:

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

**Registered charity No. 260907**

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 research.

**CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE**

Current retiral dates (at AGM) are shown in brackets:

Chairman	Norman Ratcliffe (2011)	<a href="mailto:notc@bas.ac.uk">notc@bas.ac.uk</a>
Secretary	Linda Wilson (2014)	<a href="mailto:Linda.wilson@jncc.gov.uk">Linda.wilson@jncc.gov.uk</a>
Treasurer	Kerry Leonard (2014)	<a href="mailto:kerryleonard@hotmail.com">kerryleonard@hotmail.com</a>
Membership Secretary	Ilka Win (2012)	<a href="mailto:seabirdgroup.membership@gmail.com">seabirdgroup.membership@gmail.com</a>
Seabird Editor	Martin Heubeck (2011)	<a href="mailto:martinheubeck@btinternet.com">martinheubeck@btinternet.com</a>
Seabird Publishing Editor	Andy Webb (2012)	<a href="mailto:andy@andywebb.org.uk">andy@andywebb.org.uk</a>
Newsletter Editor	Claire Smith (2014)	<a href="mailto:seabirdgroup.newsletter@gmail.com">seabirdgroup.newsletter@gmail.com</a>
Newsletter Assistant Editor	Mark Newell (2014)	<a href="mailto:manew@ceh.ac.uk">manew@ceh.ac.uk</a>
Ordinary members	Chris Thaxter (2014)	<a href="mailto:chris.thaxter@bto.org">chris.thaxter@bto.org</a>

<b>Current membership rates</b>	
Standing Order	£20.00
Concession	£15.00
Institution	£35.00
International:	£21
Life	£300

The Newsletter is published three times a year. The editor welcomes articles from members and others on issues relating to Seabird research and conservation. Deadlines are: 15<sup>th</sup> May (June edition); 15<sup>th</sup> September (October edition) and 15<sup>th</sup> January (February edition).

Submissions for the newsletter must be in electronic format, preferably in word and should be no more than 1500 words. Please email photographs/figures as separate files and with full credits.

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 any 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 Seabird Group.**