



NEWSLETTER 122

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Contents

Breeding Season News	1
Obituary	5
Grant report	6
Paper Reviews	7
Research News	11
Beached Bird Survey	12
Mystery Shearwater	15
Letter to Editor	15
Conferences	16
Seabird Group AGM & Accounts	18
Gift Aid Declaration	24

BREEDING SEASON NEWS

SEABIRDS IN ORKNEY – 2012

Black Guillemot

The largest colony of this species was once again on North Ronaldsay where 565 adults were counted on 22nd April. However, not a single chick is known to have fledged from the island and there was much evidence of egg predation in the main part of the colony.

Around the North Hill of Papa Westray, 304 adults were counted in April while on the nearby Holm of Papa, there were 198; there were no data on breeding success from these localities.

On Grass Holm, where a special study is being made of this species using artificial burrows, 37 active nests were located, 25 of them in the artificial nests.

Productivity was a very heartening 1.14 (1.55 per successful nest) and brood sizes involved 8 x b/1 and 19 x b/2. On Copinsay, 13 monitored nests reared 12 chicks, a productivity of 0.92.



Tysties at Grassholm (Paul Hollinrake)



Alan Leitch and Paul Hollinrake monitoring Tysties using artificial burrows (Paul Hollinrake)

Red-throated Diver

Good breeding success data were available from RSPB reserves on Hoy and the Mainland and from Rousay and Fara: 44 occupied sites fledged 27 chicks, productivity 0.61. Sadly, for the second successive year, commercial considerations prevented data from southern Hoy becoming available but it was stated that, in that area, site occupation was similar to recent years but the numbers of b/2s declined from recent record levels towards a more 'normal' situation.

Fulmar

At Marwick Head, the numbers of AOSs increased from 455 in 2011 to 620 but this was still down on the 1999 figure of 707. A count on Copinsay gave 1094 AOSs compared to 1150 in 2000.

On Eynhallow data from the Aberdeen University long-term study indicated a productivity of 0.30 from 99 AOSs, decidedly better than the 2011 figure of 0.16. Elsewhere, productivity was very variable: Mainland 0.42; n=359: Copinsay 0.60; n=107: Swona 0.55; n=31: Muckle Skerry 0.20; n = 20: Rousay 0.27; n=49: Westray 0.39; n=80: Papa Westray 0.09; n=179; Holm of Papay 0.57; n=138: Hoy 0.45; n=89.

Gannet

The Noup Cliffs colony, established in 2003, increased slightly from 600 AONs in 2011 to 623 AONs this year. 473 chicks are thought to have been reared, a productivity of 0.76. No information was gathered from either Sule Stack or Sule Skerry in 2012.

Cormorant

Numbers of AONs at Orkney colonies (all counted post-breeding season) were: Calf of Eday – 181; Boray Holm – 95; Little Green Holm – 18; Little Linga – 15. The old colony at the Brough, Stronsay was not occupied. A worrying development was that Boray Holm showed strong signs of now being occupied by Rats.

Shag

A total of 65 nests on Westray (13), Papa Westray (9), Copinsay (22), Swona (9) and the Muckle Skerry (12) were monitored in detail and gave a mean productivity of 0.90.

Arctic Skua

It was another very poor year for this species although some young were fledged. On the North Hill reserve, Papa Westray, there were only 22 AOTs and only four chicks were reared, productivity 0.18. Things were a little better on Fara where there were 13 AOTs that fledged five chicks, productivity 0.38. Five fledged young were seen on the West Hill, Flotta on 22nd August. Elsewhere, it was a picture of declining numbers with, for example, the

Rothiesholm peninsula on Stronsay that once had over 40 AOTs holding only five on 11th July and the East Hill on Shapinsay holding only two on 30th May.

Great Skua

On Papa Westray, 24 AOTs reared 16 chicks, productivity 0.67 but on Fara only four young fledged from 17 AOTs, productivity 0.24. Two AOTs on North Ronaldsay fledged a single chick but it was later found dead.

Black-headed Gull

As usual, breeding success was very variable around the archipelago. At Hooking Loch, North Ronaldsay, there was a colony of 150 pairs and 94 fledglings were counted in a nearby field on 25th June. In contrast, on Egilsay, 11 pairs failed to fledge any young and nor did 10 pairs at the Mill Dam, Shapinsay. At Coldomo, Stenness, a colony of 40 adults on 8th May had several fledged young by 9th July.

Common Gull

As with the previous species, breeding success was very variable around the islands. A colony of 150 adults on Fara fledged at least 35 young while on Lamb Holm, 13 pairs raised 17 young. At Lamb Head, Stronsay, 50 adults had five fledged and five unfledged chicks on 11th July and, on Hoy, 80 adults at Saltness reared 'quite a few' young as did the Witter Quarry colony which, on 7th July, held 70 adults and 25 chicks, many of them fledged.

However, other colonies were not so successful, 80 pairs on North Ronaldsay, for example, producing very few fledged chicks with a similar picture apparently pertaining on Shapinsay. In the northern part of Hoy, colonies at Whaness and Sandy Loch both held 10-15 pairs early in the season but all nests had failed by early June.

Lesser Black-backed Gull

The only breeding success data came from Papa Westray (3 AONs on the North Hill Reserve but no chicks reared); Fara (3 AONs but no fledged young seen) and Stronsay where the colony near Cleat held 30 adults on 11th July and there were 'several' fledged and unfledged young.

Herring Gull

The best productivity was recorded from the tiny island of Grass Holm where an estimated 25 AONs reared 38 young, 1.52 per pair. On Stronsay, a colony of 18 adults on Rothiesholm, had three broods each on three chicks on 11th July and, on the same date, the colony near Cleat held 50 adults and there were 'lots' of fledged and unfledged chicks. Elsewhere, data were submitted from North Ronaldsay (one pair hatched two chicks but they were believed not to have survived to fledging); Papa Westray (3 AONs on the North Hill Reserve reared three chicks, productivity 1.0); and Fara (15 AONs reared 11 young, productivity 0.73).

Great Black-backed Gull

The decline of this once abundant species continues with the colonies at Rothiesholm, Stronsay and Stourdale, Hoy, both of which once held 600-700 pairs, in 2011 holding 16 AOTs and 11 AOTs respectively.

A single pair on North Ronaldsay fledged a single chick; 14 AONs on the North Hill, Papa Westray reared 11 chicks (productivity 0.79); and on Fara, 35 AONs reared 16 (productivity 0.46).

Kittiwake

A species that is apparently in almost terminal decline. At Marwick Head, a whole-colony count gave a figure of just 1134 AONs compared to 5407 in 1999, a 79% decline in 13 years. The situation was mirrored at other Mainland colonies, that at the Mull Head, Deerness holding no birds at all.

In terms of breeding success, it was a somewhat better season than in some recent years. Overall, 709 nests were monitored throughout Orkney and from these 218 chicks were reared, a productivity of 0.31.

Kittiwake is the 'indicator species' used in Orkney Islands Council's Single Outcome Agreement as a means of measuring the health of the marine environment. The target figure for productivity is 1.0 chicks per pair; our Kittiwakes are currently barely reaching one-third of that.

Sandwich Tern

The only proved nesting by this species this year was on Papa Westray where 14 pairs nested at Well Park and successfully reared at least seven chicks.

Common Tern

Although a few pairs were found nesting on Stronsay and in the West Mainland, the major colony was once again that on the old wooden pier at Lyness where 120 adults reared some 45 chicks.

Arctic Tern

Once again, this species had a very poor season with most colonies having zero or very poor breeding success. However, the picture was patchy, as is often the case, with a few colonies managing to rear reasonable numbers of young.

The colony on Eynhallow seemed to do best of all, a visit on 17th July revealing c.1000 birds in the air, including 'lots' of fledged young. In contrast, North Ronaldsay held an estimated 520 pairs which probably reared no more than 15 chicks, a productivity of just 0.03. Similarly, on Papa Westray and its neighbouring Holm, 365 pairs attempted to breed but reared only two chicks, a productivity of less than 0.01. Similarly only two fledged young were seen on Westray where there were 15 colonies with a total of 763 adults in attendance. Only small numbers of fledged young were seen on Sanday, Stronsay and Egilsay. Things were somewhat better on Shapinsay where, c.170 pairs reared 55 young, productivity 0.32. Nearby Grass Holm held 200 adults during June and on 15th July, 30 fledged and 19 unfledged chicks were present.

Colonies on the Mainland and in the South Isles also had very poor breeding success, one exception being that at Saltness, Hoy where there were some 30 AONs that reared at least 20 young.

Little Tern

During July, up to 25 birds were present at the usual site at No.4 Barrier but, although two young had been seen being fed away from their nest on 17th June, it is uncertain how many young fledged.

Guillemot

A whole-colony count at Marwick Head gave a figure of 16,562 individual adults compared to 12,421 in 2011 and 33,709 in 1999. Averaging the 2011 and 2012 counts, a decline of 57% has taken place in 12-13 years.

628 nests were monitored at plots on Westray, Papa Westray, the Mainland, Copinsay and Swona and productivity was 0.32, very similar to the figures for most recent years since productivity virtually halved in 2003.

Razorbill

As with Guillemot, a whole-colony count at Marwick Head indicated an increase since 2011 (769 compared to 626 individual adults) but that was still well down on the 1999 figure of 1315. Averaging the 2011 and 2012 counts, a 47% decline since 1999 is indicated.

82 breeding attempts were monitored in detail across the archipelago and productivity was 0.51, decidedly better than for Guillemot. The tracking of adults from Swona and the Muckle Skerry suggested that foraging adults were staying closer to the colonies than in previous years and also diving to shallower depths. These data suggest that feeding conditions for this species were better than in 2010 and 2011.

Puffin

No data of note were collected for this species in 2012.

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OBITUARY

OSCAR JAMES MERNE (1943 – 2013)

Oscar Merne passed away on 17 January 2013 after a brave and prolonged battle with cancer over the last few years. His 69th birthday was celebrated in a party at BirdWatch Ireland's HQ last November when it became clear that the 'fight' was nearing an end. The cake, of course, was topped by an image of his favorite seabird, the Gannet!

No-one in Ireland has counted more, or ringed more seabirds, nor amassed more nights (or breeding seasons) on the countries' most famous and spectacular seabird islands – Great Saltee and Rockabill were clearly closest to his heart but then (Great) Skellig Michael and Lambay were probably not far behind.

Oscar spent his working career with the Irish National Parks & Wildlife Service where he was a great champion of European Union wildlife conservation policy and his determination ensured that the best sites for seabirds and wintering waterbirds were designated as Special Protection Areas at the earliest opportunity. On top of his statutory duties, he also found time in the late 1960s to ensure that the Irish Ornithologists' Club, the Irish Society for the Protection of Birds and the Irish Wildfowl Conservancy merged to form one organisation, the Irish Wildbird Conservancy, now known as Bird Watch Ireland. I do not know the precise details of how the Seabird Group formed but I am fairly sure Oscar had a role in that and he 'did time' on the Census Committee that oversaw Operation Seafarer and thereby made sure that the joint Anglo-Irish coordination of major seabird surveys was firmly cemented in Seabird Group policy.

He took early retirement on his 60th birthday but that merely released him from his Dublin-based office duties and created more time for fieldwork, supporting just about every bird survey (plus butterflies and cetaceans etc.) on the go and carefully timed international travel in between summer seabird seasons and midwinter waterfowl counts at home. His latest big trips were to Central and South America and while at the south end of the latter, he had to take in Antarctica! Given he had also spent a fair amount of time in both New Zealand and South Africa he had a considerable Southern Ocean seabird life list. Oscar was an incredible contributor to the most recent British-Irish Bird Atlas (2007-2011), probably covering more timed tetrads and 10 km squares than any other volunteer, particularly in Counties Dublin, Louth, Wicklow and Wexford. As his energy for fieldwork waned, he really got stuck in to the 'validation' of the enormous dataset. It is a great shame that he did not live to see the final book.

Oscar was a charming man with a keen sense of humour and was a great raconteur. He will be missed by many for this as much as for the great deeds he performed for Irish ornithology.

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SEABIRD GROUP GRANT REPORT



Sandwich tern fitted with alpha numeric colour-ring (Jez Blackburn)

During visits to Kartong (southern Gambia bordered with Senegal) in 2010 and early 2011, senior members of the Kartong Bird Observatory saw many Sandwich Terns with metal rings and realised that it was an important area for wintering and/or staging.

Catching these terns would reveal where they had been ringed and potentially their breeding colony. This would enable the group to provide evidence to the Gambian authorities and the seabird community on the use of Kartong for a wintering and/or staging location for these European birds; one element to the survival and conservation of the species.

In December 2011, the Kartong Bird Observatory received a grant from the Seabird Group to fund this research.

On the December 2011 expedition, the group caught ten birds by mist netting at night and this produced some fantastic results; of these ten birds, two were recoveries. One was ringed as a nestling on Coquet Island, Northumberland, and another as a nestling in Germany, both earlier in that same year.

All birds were alpha numeric colour-ringed, encouraged by the article in Seabird Group Newsletter 116 by the Grampian RG, to increase the chances of recoveries through sightings. As a result, one of the eight other birds was subsequently sighted in Holland in June and July 2012, and this same bird has been re-sighted in January 2013 in The Gambia near to where it was captured.

In January 2012 the group cannon netted and colour-ringed a further three Sandwich Tern. Future expeditions to The Gambia will build on the knowledge of tides, changing beach profiles and tern roosting behaviour, and will hopefully result in further catches and more exciting returns.

Jez Blackburn

Kartong Bird Observatory, The Gambia

CHANGES TO GRANT DEADLINES

The deadlines for Seabird Group grant applications will change to **28th February and 31st October**. To apply please contact seabirdgroup.secretary@gmail.com or download an application form from the website:
<http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk/>

Meade, J., Hatchwell, B. J., Blanchard, J. L. and Birkhead, T. R. (2013), The population increase of common guillemots *uria aalge* on Skomer Island is explained by intrinsic demographic properties. *Journal of Avian Biology*, 44: 055–061.

The British and Irish common guillemot population has been shown to increase at most colonies during the Seabird 2000 counts (Mitchell, P.I., et al, 2004. Seabird Populations of Britain & Ireland). However, numbers were down at several substantial colonies compared to previous censuses particularly in the north west of the recording area whereas southern colonies were increasing at a more rapid rate. The common Guillemot population on Skomer Island, Wales is one such population that has been increasing at a constant rate but previous attempts to model the population has failed to explain the population increase suggesting that immigration is involved.

This recent analysis, using a dataset of over 30 years, has shown that juvenile survival was previously underestimated with other studies supporting a higher survival rate to breeding age. The results of the model were supported by field observations and concluded that immigration is not necessary to generate the observed population growth. The work emphasizes the need to study seabird populations over long periods rather than base analyses on only a few years' data as had been previously attempted on Skomer.

Hervias, S., et al (2013), Studying the effects of multiple invasive mammals on Cory's shearwater nest survival. *Journal of Biological Invasions*, 15: 143-155.

A great deal of work has been carried out in recent years eradicating introduced mammalian predators from islands where they have had a huge negative impact on the native biodiversity. Mice, rats and cats are the most common invasive mammals and their removal has been demonstrated to greatly improve the breeding success of many species of seabird. However, due to factors such as on-going human habitation, it may not be possible to remove all types of predators and so it is vital to evaluate the possible effects of such targeted eradication programmes.

This study was carried out in the Azores on the small island of Corvo where cats, rats and mice are all prevalent and a human population has existed for over 500 years. By assessing the impact of these predators on nest survival of Cory's Shearwaters at six colonies over three years the authors were able to quantify the level of predator activity, predation and type of predator at failed nests. Cats were identified as the major predator of chicks with the lowest survival probabilities occurring soon after hatching. A small positive influence of rats on nest survival was found which may indicate that the presence of small rodents as alternative prey may reduce cat predation of chicks. This suggests that the eradication of rodents alone may exacerbate the adverse effects of cats on shearwater nest survival.

This paper highlights the need to fully evaluate predator eradication projects as the removal of one threat may worsen rather than improve the breeding performance of seabirds where various predators are involved. In some cases larger seabirds may be less prone to predation from small rodents and these rodents are an important food source to higher introduced predators with their removal exacerbating the problem.

Mark Newell

ISLES OF SCILLY SEABIRD RECOVERY PROJECT GETS GREEN LIGHT

A new 25 year partnership project to provide a safe future for internationally important seabird populations on the Isles of Scilly has been given the green light with major funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the EU LIFE programme.

The islands are home to 14 breeding species and around 20,000 birds, such as the storm petrel and Manx shearwater. The population of European storm petrel in Scilly is the only colony in England. It is of international importance (there were 1,398 pairs in 2006). The islands are one of only two locations in England where Manx shearwater breed. Geographically the islands lie at the southern edge of both of these species' ranges.

The overall population of seabirds declined by 24% between 1983 and 2006. The greatest threat on land to seabird colonies is from rat predation. It limits the distribution of bird species and threatens existing colonies. The partnership is working together to safeguard the seabird colonies on the islands and reduce predator disturbance. It has involved rat control work on islands uninhabited by humans for more than 15 years.

In autumn 2010 the partnership commissioned a feasibility study to review the current work and consider future work to control brown rats that threaten the internationally important seabird colonies in Scilly. The study began in October 2010 and was completed in February 2011. Currently only brown rats are known to occur on the islands. But the feasibility study will be double-checking to see if other species are present.

The study looked at improving current rat control on uninhabited islands, briefly assessed the feasibility of rat removal across the entire Isles of Scilly archipelago and made a detailed assessment of the feasibility of rat removal from the inhabited islands of St Agnes and Gugh.

The study estimated the population of brown rats on the Isles of Scilly was 34,500;

St Agnes and Gugh: 3,100 (9%); Bryher: 2,500 (7%); Tresco: 7,450 (22%); St Martin's: 5,100 (15%) and St Mary's 16,350 (47%)

This is a density of between 20 and 25 brown rats per hectare depending on the habitat type. Most inhabited islands around the world have rat densities that range between 15 and 50 rats per hectare (depending on habitat).

It will be feasible to remove rats from the inhabited islands of St Agnes and Gugh and there was 100% support for this work to be undertaken on these islands by the residents there. The removal of rats from St Agnes and Gugh will provide secure breeding conditions for existing Manx shearwater, release suitable habitat for storm petrel and protect Annet (the most important island in the Special Protected Area for seabirds) from further rat incursions.

It is not currently feasible to remove rats from the other inhabited islands of St Mary's, St Martin's, Tresco and Bryher.

A number of additional socio-economic and wildlife benefits were identified if rats were completely removed.

The project has several aims, including the protection and restoration of seabird islands, increasing the number of people actively involved in seabird conservation, and enabling the islands to provide better access and enjoyment for people, which gives income to the islanders to help secure the future of these birds.

The project will be managed by a coalition of groups including RSPB, Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Duchy of Cornwall the Isles of Scilly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) partnership and a representative from the islands, with support from the Isles of Scilly Bird Group.

Members of the HLF and the LIFE Nature Unit also commented on the importance of this project and how it gives us an opportunity to learn more about seabirds and their role within the Isle of Scilly's biodiversity and how they are part of providing a better quality of life for people on the neighbouring islands.

The project will start in early 2013. More information, an FAQ and the feasibility report can be found at:

http://www.ios-wildlifetrust.org.uk/our_work/seabird_conservation/seabird_recovery_project

Adapted from www.ios-wildlifetrust.org.uk

BIRDS WASHED UP ON SOUTH COAST OF ENGLAND

Hundreds of seabirds continue to be washed up along the south coast of England, covered in an unidentified sticky, waxy substance. The birds are mostly guillemots (around 90%), and have been discovered on beaches from Hampshire to Cornwall. The other ten per cent is made up of razorbills and there has been one report of a dead puffin and one dead cormorant. Many birds have been found distressed but fortunately alive.

The Environment Agency is currently testing a sample of the substance at its forensic lab in Nottingham, results show the pollutant is a refined mineral based oil mixture, but not from an animal or vegetable origin. This definitely rules out palm oil. There is no firm information on cause, source or location at sea of the substance and there have been no reports of any shipping incidents. Given reports of affected seabirds are from a long stretch of coastline, it's not unreasonable to think the source could be a long way out to sea. Many of the birds have been found in clusters.

On Thursday 100 birds were found on Chesil Beach, 60 at Brixham, 12 at Teignmouth, and many individuals have been reported from Sussex to Cornwall. We have also received many reports of distressed birds at sea. This afternoon (Friday 1st February) we have had reports that ten guillemots have been found dead on a beach in Bournemouth. Two live guillemots, one razorbill and one cormorant were also found at the same time. We have also received many reports of distressed birds at sea.

As of 5pm on Friday, the RSPCA had 169 in care birds at its centre. In some cases, margarine is being used to remove the sticky substance from the birds. Some birds have reportedly been rescued with pebbles stuck to them or their wings stuck down.

Some rescued guillemots are in breeding plumage, which suggests they are resident birds to the south west. Others are in winter plumage, meaning they are from further north, probably Scotland and Norway.

Lyme Bay near Weymouth, Dorset, is internationally important for seabirds. The area is used by 25,000 guillemots, but it's unknown how many will be affected. The area is also used by scoter, divers and grebes. Impacts on these species could have higher conservation significance.

Information is correct at time of writing – 5 February 2013

Adapted from www.rspb.org.uk

ATLANTIC SOOTY TERN DISTRIBUTION.

Volume 61 for 2012 of the Royal Naval Bird-watching Society journal *Sea Swallow*, which had been languishing, has now been brightened up under the editorship of (Vice Admiral Sir) David Dobson. It includes a note by Dr S James Reynolds of the first results of attaching geolocators to Sooty Terns on Ascension. A rather murky chart shows that while a bird seems to have fed mainly to the south while at Ascension, when it left it spent most of its time along the equatorial currents, with an excursion into the central tropical North Atlantic roughly equivalent to the area it had exploited in the South Atlantic, where there are no breeding sites. These studies are adding a new dimension to our knowledge of seabirds.

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ASCENSION ISLAND FRIGATEBIRD EGG HATCHES

On the 16 January 2013 the first Ascension island frigatebird egg hatched on the mainland for 180 years. This is a testament to the time and effort that many people have put into the project across the years, before, during and after the cat eradication programme.

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/community/ourwork/b/biodiversity/archive/2013/01/17/ascension-breakout-time.aspx>



NEW METHOD DEVELOPED TO STUDY PARASITE NUMBERS IN WILD SEABIRDS

Scientists have developed a new method for studying parasite numbers in the stomachs of individual seabirds in the wild. The technique enables the recording of video footage of worms inside seabird stomachs and is an important step forward in understanding the impact of parasites on seabird populations.

The research, published in the scientific journal *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, was led by the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH) and is part of ongoing work into how different factors such as gut parasites might affect the breeding success or survival of seabirds. The research team trialled the use of endoscopy, often used in human and veterinary medicine but rarely in field situations, to measure natural parasite loads, or burdens, of European shags, a member of the cormorant family. Shags have nematode worms in their stomachs, obtained from their fish diet. These worms feed directly on food obtained by the birds, reducing the food available to both parent and chicks.

The team was led by Dr Sarah Burthe of CEH and, as well as colleagues from CEH, involved scientists from the University of Edinburgh, Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland, Aarhus University in Denmark and the Natural History Museum, London. The study was carried out on the Isle of May NNR, an important seabird colony off the east coast of Scotland which has been intensively studied since the 1970s.

The study found that all birds had parasites ranging from low burdens of several worms through to high burdens of more than 40 worms. Burdens were significantly higher in males and in late breeders. There was a slight seasonal decline in worm counts within individuals. One way to get an understanding of the impact of parasites on breeding success and survival is to treat birds with an anti-parasite drug to reduce or remove worm burdens and then compare to untreated birds. However, until now, the lack of a method to measure parasite numbers effectively has made it difficult to know whether such treatments have worked. The use of the endoscope enabled the researchers to conclude that, at a suitable dose, the anti-parasite drug completely removed nematode worms from the stomach of treated shags. Endoscopy opens up some interesting research questions, enabling us to more fully explore the role parasites play in impacting the breeding success and survival of seabirds, particularly how impacts may vary with changes in prey availability. "Parasites are an important part of ecosystems, occurring in all wild animal species and playing an important part in the evolutionary process. Relatively few studies have focused on gut parasites in wild animals, in part because it is very difficult to measure parasite levels in hosts without resorting to examining animal carcasses or counting eggs in faeces, both of which can be unreliable measures. The endoscopy method is rapid and well suited to species that routinely swallow large prey items or where chicks feed by inserting their heads into the parent's throat. Observations from this study confirmed that shags went straight back to their broods and their breeding success was as high as pairs that did not undergo an endoscopy.

Endoscopy is a licensed procedure and was undertaken under a Home Office Project Licence and conducted by trained personnel.

***Methods in Ecology and Evolution*. The full paper reference is Sarah Burthe ⁽¹⁾, Mark A. Newell ⁽¹⁾, Gidona Goodman ⁽²⁾, Adam Butler ⁽³⁾, Thomas Bregnballe ⁽⁴⁾, Eileen Harris ⁽⁵⁾, Sarah Wanless ⁽¹⁾, Emma J.A. Cunningham ⁽²⁾ and Francis Daunt ⁽¹⁾ Endoscopy as a novel method for assessing endoparasite burdens in free-ranging European shags (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*). doi: [10.1111/2041-210x.12015](https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210x.12015)**

⁽¹⁾NERC Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, UK ⁽²⁾ University of Edinburgh, UK, ⁽³⁾ Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland, UK, ⁽⁴⁾ Aarhus University, Denmark, ⁽⁵⁾ Natural History Museum, UK

This work was funded by the CEH project QUIP (QUantifying the Impact of Parasites on seabirds). The Natural Environment Research Council and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee support CEH's long-term seabird studies. Scottish Natural Heritage allow CEH scientists to carry out research on the Isle of May NNR.

THE UK BEACHED BIRD SURVEY 2012

During the weekend of 25-26th February 2012, around 570 volunteers walked just over 1,900 km along the UK's beaches, recording 639 dead seabirds, including seaducks, divers and grebes (this total excludes corpses found as 'wings only'.) A further 96 other birds were found dead: almost half of these were waders.

This equates to an overall density of 0.34 seabirds per km walked. Although this is around twice the low densities that were recorded during the previous three annual surveys, it is still the seventh lowest density since 1991 (range: 0.14 to 3.80).

Auks made up 40% of all the dead seabirds found, but all seabird species were recorded at or below the long-term average densities (Table 1). Two Gannets and a female Eider were found dead entangled in netting, and plastic debris; debris from the fishing industry and other rubbish was reported from many beaches.

Fortunately, no oiling incidents were reported and only nine beaches in the North-West, South-East, Wales and Northern Ireland showed some slight oiling.

The highest densities of dead seabirds were found in Shetland, Orkney and the North-East (Table 2). This may be attributable to a very cold spell and predominantly easterly winds during the first half of February.

Species Group	Number found		Density (no./km)		% Oiled	
	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011
Auks	253	54	0.13	0.02	9.1	14.8
Gulls	154	138	0.08	0.06	1.3	0.0
Cormorant & Shag	84	81	0.04	0.04	0.0	1.2
Fulmar	76	18	0.04	<0.01	3.9	16.7
Gannet	13	13	<0.01	<0.01	0.0	15.4
Kittiwake	28	9	0.01	<0.01	7.1	0.0
Seaducks	25	13	0.01	<0.01	0.0	7.7
Divers	4	2	<0.01	<0.01	0.0	50.0
Grebes	2	1	<0.01	<0.01	0.0	0.0
Terns	0	1	0	<0.01	N/A	0.0
Skuas	0	1	0	<0.01	N/A	0.0
Petrels	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A

Auks: guillemot, black guillemot, razorbill, puffin, little auk, auk sp. Gulls: great black-backed, lesser black-backed, herring, glaucous, Iceland, common, black-headed, gull sp. Seaducks: eider, long-tailed duck, red-breasted merganser, velvet scoter, seaduck sp. Divers: great northern, red throated. Grebes: great crested, Slavonian. Terns: tern sp. Skuas: pomarine.

Table 1: Numbers, density and % oiled for different groups of seabird species found during the 2012 National Beached Bird Survey, with 2011 results for comparison

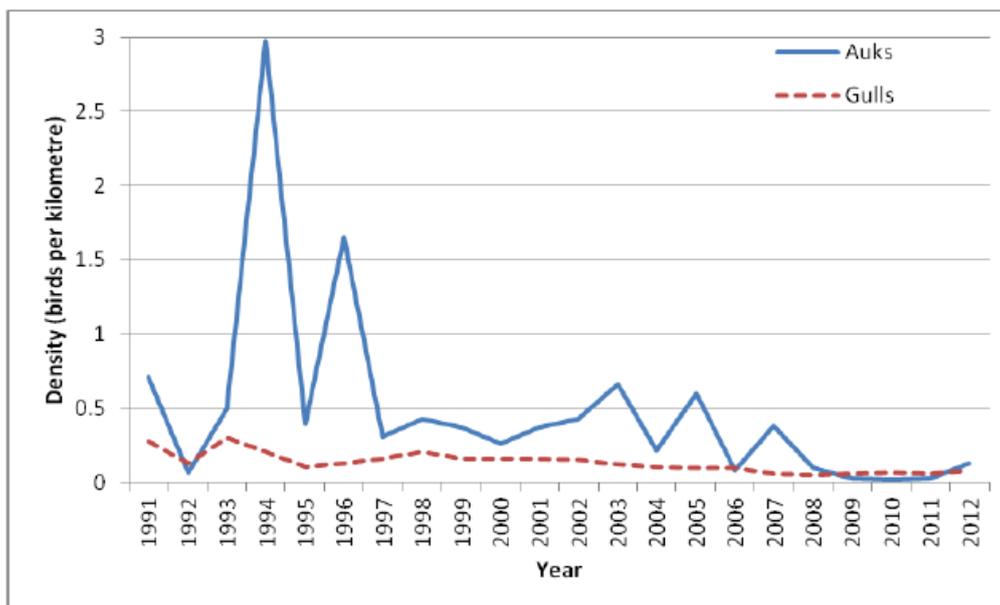


Figure 1: Trends in overall density on auk and gull corpses, 1991-2012

Figure 1 shows how trends in auk and gull density have fluctuated markedly since 1991, with auk mortality in the 'wreck' year of 1994 dwarfing that in any other year. Although densities of dead birds were higher in 2012 than recent years, general trend to lower densities can be seen in both species groups.

Oiled birds and regional results

Only 4.7% of all seabirds were found oiled: the third lowest oiling rate since 1991 (range: 3.4% - 26.8%). Similarly low oiling rates were recorded in the previous three years.

As in most years since 1991, the oiling rate was highest in the South, where the busiest shipping lanes are located. Again no oiled birds were found in Orkney, the South-West, Wales and Northern Ireland (Table 2).

Region	Distance walked (km)		Number of dead seabirds		Density (no. dead birds/km)		% Oiled	
	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011
Shetland	48.4	48.4	24	22	0.50	0.45	4.2	18.2
Orkney	49.6	48.1	36	17	0.73	0.35	0.0	0.0
North-East	474.2	522.3	272	112	0.57	0.21	3.7	1.8
South-East	227.9	261	70	32	0.31	0.12	2.8	12.5
South	270.6	305.1	30	21	0.11	0.07	43.3	14.3
South-West	23.8	44.4	0	1	0.00	0.02	0.0	0.0
Wales	163.6	227.2	22	12	0.13	0.05	0.0	0.0
North-West	505.8	616.8	183	108	0.36	0.18	2.2	2.8
N. Ireland	143.6	129.4	2	6	0.01	0.05	0.0	0.0

N.B.: South region includes Channel Islands

Table 2: Numbers, density and % oiled for all seabirds in each region found during the 2012 National Beached Bird Survey, with 2011 results for comparison. For details of the regions, see figure 2.

Results presented here are those from surveys carried out between 18th February and 4th March 2012 (a week either side of 25-26th February). No data were available for Lancashire or Cheshire (South-West region).

A big thank you

We are very grateful to all the dedicated volunteers who took part in the 2012 Beached Bird Survey. Many thanks go also to Martin Heubeck of the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group (SOTEAG) for making data

from Shetland available, to the regional RSPB staff for co-ordinating the survey in their respective regions and to William George from the RSPB's Conservation Data Management Team for helping managing the database.

Survey developments

The RSPB's Conservation Science department has been conducting analyses on Beach Bird Survey data stretching back to 1971, in order to inform potential future developments of the scheme. This work is looking at how well the current scheme works for monitoring trends in mortality and oiling in seabirds, as well as assessing geographical patterns, and how this relates to our current and potential future needs for monitoring the health of our seabird populations and the wider marine environment. We hope it will also lead to changes in how we report the scheme's results in the future. So far the results have been promising, and reinforce the value of the effort contributed by the scheme's hundreds of volunteers. We look forward to sharing the results at a later date.

The next National Beached Bird Survey will be held on
23-24 February 2013.



Survey regions

- 1 North East: the tip of Cape Wrath (NC256750) to the border between N Yorkshire and Humberside (TA168750).
- 2 South East: the border between N Yorkshire and Humberside (TA168750) to the border between Kent and East Sussex (TR007177).
- 3 South: the border between Kent and East Sussex (TR007177) to Land's End (SW342254). This region includes the Scilly Isles and the Channel Islands.
- 4 South West: Land's End (SW342254) to the border between Lancashire and Cumbria (SD454757). This region does not include Wales.
- 5 Wales.
- 6 North West: the border between Lancashire and Cumbria (SD454757) to the tip of Cape Wrath (NC256750). This region includes the Outer Hebrides.
- 7 Orkney.
- 8 Shetland.
- 9 Northern Ireland: Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland border (Lough Foyle C474245) to Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland border (Carlingford Lough I133185)

MYSTERY SHEARWATER

A report in <http://birdingbytrain.wordpress.com/2012/12/17/interesting-shearwater/> of trial observations from ferries between the Canaries includes a string of photos of a black-and-white shearwater which requires identification. I have seen all the Atlantic species, and it matches none of them, which raises the question whether it can be the lost Lava Shearwater of the eastern Canaries supposedly exterminated following human colonisation (McMinn, M., Jaume, D. & Alcover, J.A. 1990. *PUFFINUS OLSONI* n.sp.: nova especie de baldritja recentment extinguida provinente de deposits espeleologics de Fuerteventura i Lanzarote (Iles Canaries, Atlantic Oriental). *Endins* 16: 63-71).

The sighting was reported in December, it is described as showing ‘... a Barolo’s-like structure, maybe a little bit more long-tailed and thick-billed. These features match both Audubon’s and Cape Verde Little shearwater, as well as the coloration. The dark leading edge in the underwing is larger than in Barolo’s, the face is black and the upperwing lacks the pale panel in the GCs.’

Please see <http://birdingbytrain.wordpress.com/2012/12/17/interesting-shearwater/> for photos

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SEABIRDS' DIET

Sir,

Stephen Lockwood (letter, August 27) is not entirely correct about seabirds. Gannets actually colonised the Bempton cliffs in Yorkshire in 1932, not the 1960s, and have since founded an equally successful mainland colony on Troup Head in Aberdeenshire in the 1980s. They are presumably doing well because they eat large fish. After increasing in number in the last century following a reduction in persecution most of our smaller seabirds, such as kittiwakes, that feed almost entirely on smaller fish, are no longer doing well.

There could be many reasons, notably climate change or bad weather in the breeding season, but one important factor may be that the increasing numbers of large fish, rather than birds, may be eating the smaller fish. As Mr Lockwood remarks, ecology is not simple: it might be helpful for the birds if the fishermen were to hurry up and catch all the large fish again.

W.R.P. Bourne
(Founder, The Seabird Group)
Dufftown, Moray.

Letter published in The Times on 30 August 2012 and submitted to the Seabird Group Newsletter.

SEABIRD WEBLINKS

Members may find the following weblinks useful:

<http://www.seabirds.net/>

Dedicated to the facilitation of communication and data sharing between seabird scientists around the globe

<https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/Seabird-News>



September 2013
WILHELMSHAVEN
Germany

The Waterbird Society will hold its 37th annual meeting **from 24-29 September 2013** in Germany for the first time. The Institute of Avian Research “Vogelwarte Helgoland”, one of the oldest ornithological research institutes in the world, will be the host. The meeting venue is the Stadthalle, located in the centre of Wilhelmshaven on the German North Sea coast.

Main topics of the three day program will be life history, migration and flyways, contamination and conservation of waterbirds.

Plenaries will be presented by Emmanuelle Cam, Tim Dodman, Jennifer Gill, Jacob Gonzalez-Solis, Ian Nisbet and Hans-Ulrich Peter.

Symposia will address: population ecology of terns; chemical contamination of waterbirds; gull population changes in two worlds; migratory connectivity in Arctic geese; Seabirds as bioindicators; Industrialising of the marine environment.

For more information and booking see www.waterbirds.org



**The next Seabird Group Conference will be held in Spring 2014
at a venue in Southern England. The website will be updated
with further details:**

www.seabirdgroup.org.uk



**9TH CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN ORNITHOLOGISTS UNION
2013**

27-31 AUGUST 2013, UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA NORWICH, UK

The conference will cover the full range of ornithological research, including both basic and applied aspects. The programme will be composed of [plenaries](#), [symposia](#), contributed oral and poster sessions, as well as, Round Table discussions. The programme will be prepared by the [Scientific Programme Committee](#). There will be three full conference days plus one day of excursions to coastal habitats in eastern England.

Key dates

28 February: Abstract submission closes

25 March: Poster and contributed oral presentations agreed

30 April: Early Bird registration bookings close

16 August: Registration bookings close

For more information: <http://www.norwich.eounion.org/index.php>.

SEABIRD GROUP NEWS

GIFT AID

Please can all members who are UK tax payers complete and return the Gift Aid declaration form on the back of the newsletter. This enables us to claim back up to a quarter of your annual membership rate.

Minutes of the forty-seventh AGM of the seabird group

Held at 1500 hours on Saturday 10 November 2012 during the Scottish Ringers Conference at Carrbridge Hotel.

Present, Apologies

Present: Russ Wynn (Chair), Linda Wilson (Secretary), Claire Smith (Mewsletter Edito), Ilka Win (Membership Secretary), Martin Heubeck (*Seabird* Editor), Mark Newell (Assistant Newsletter Editor), Ellie Owen, Mark Lewis, Bob Swann, Sarah Wanless, Mike Harris, Bob Furness, Phil May, Chris Redfern, Veronica Neves, Kirsty Lees, Rob Robinson, Claire Bailly, Adam Cross, Nina O'Hanon, Alex Robbins, Jeremy Greenwood.

Apologies: Chris Thaxter, Kerry Leonard, Andy Webb

Russell Wynn took the opportunity to give a brief overview of the Seabird Group for the benefit of non- or new members, and described its four broad aims, (1) to serve as a network/ community for like minded seabird enthusiasts, providing regular conferences for this community, showcasing research into seabird ecology and conservations; (2) to disseminate information via its newsletter and journal; (3) to provide grants for worthy seabird related projects which met the aims of the group; (4) to represent the seabird community at various fora, such as the Seabird Monitoring Programme and World Seabird Union.

Minutes of the 46th AGM

The minutes had previously been published in the Newsletter. These were proposed by Martin Heubeck, seconded by Mike Harris.

Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

The 47th Annual Report

Russell Wynn went through the annual report, which now covers the previous financial year instead of the calendar year, although it also includes a separate note any relevant matter since the end of the last financial year. The report was proposed by Bernie Zonfrillo and seconded by Claire Smith.

2011-12 Accounts and Treasurer's Report

Russell Wynn went through the accounts and Treasurer's Report in the absence of Kerry Leonard. There appeared to be some typos which will need to be corrected before the report could be accepted. It was confirmed that each issue of Seabird costed in the region of £3-4K.

AP. KL to circulate a corrected version of the 2011/12 accounts and report to Excom for consideration, and then for publication in the newsletter to be accepted by the membership.

Russell Wynn announced that the Seabird Group was now in receipt of its first legacy. This was gratefully received from Margaret Adams and amounted to £23K. Excom are currently deciding how best to use this in a manner appropriate to which it was intended. Initial thoughts are to use a large proportion of it to contribute to specific pieces of work for the next national census. Any members who have thoughts on how to spend the legacy can contact a member of Excom.

Nominations to the Executive Committee

Ellie Owen was nominated to replace Linda Wilson as Secretary. This was proposed by Sarah Wanless, and seconded by Linda Wilson

Mark Lewis was nominated to replace Andy Webb as Ordinary Member. This was proposed by Martin Heubeck, and seconded by Rob Robinson.

Excom proposed that Ilka Win should be co-opted as Membership Secretary for an additional year. This is to provide continuity to ensure that the incorporation of the Gift Aid facility runs as smoothly as possible. This was accepted by attendees.

Andy Webb has kindly agreed to continue in his role as Publishing Editor for *Seabird* in a voluntary capacity for which we are very grateful.

7. Membership

Ilka Win gave an update on the membership situation. The group currently has 316 members, with 35 new members being recruited at the last SG conference in Plymouth. The Gift Aid facility was made available from end of September which will potentially benefit the group in the region of £1K per year. IW was thanked for her hard work in promoting membership and particularly getting Gift Aid set up.

Update on *Seabird*

Martin Heubeck gave an update on the next issue of *Seabird* which is anticipated to be published before Christmas. As with the last issue, Ecotone has a full colour advert on the back page which has provided substantial financial support. Excom would like to continue this relationship with Ecotone and there was no dissent on this proposal. Russell Wynn thanked Martin Heubeck, Andy Webb and Harry Scott for continuing to produce such a high quality professional journal.

9. The next Seabird Group Conference

Russell Wynn has been liaising with Tim Guilford regarding hosting of the next conference by Oxford University. It is likely that this will be in the Autumn 2013. RW aims to confirm the venue and finalise exact dates in the next few weeks. It is anticipated that the following conference would be held in Scotland.

In addition to the traditional conferences, Ellie Owen had suggested to Excom that the group consider holding regular, less formal, student conferences/meetings which could cover topics such as analysis of seabird data, and invite specialist speakers. There was general support for this idea, with suggestions that some meetings could join up with other organisations such as MASTS, Wader Study Group, BOU if there was an overlapping theme. It was thought that using some of the legacy for grant purposes may free up some money to fund student meetings with no register fee, although the aim would be to make such meetings low-cost (e.g. using free venues). A possibility would be to co-opt a student member on to Excom for an annual term to help organise these meetings, possibly choosing a student from a prospective venue.

10. AOB

Next World Seabird Conference

The Seabird Group had already ruled itself out as a host for this as it was beyond our resources. South Africa is currently being discussed as the next potential host. Russell Wynn and Linda Wilson have been representing the Seabird Group at World Seabird Union Transition Team meetings.

Next national census

The Seabird Monitoring Programme Steering group are meeting in the third week of December and the next census will be high on the agenda. Mark Lewis and Martin Heubeck will be attending. A funding meeting had been held a few weeks ago but Excom had not yet received any feedback from this. The next census will be largely led by JNCC, but it is intended that the Seabird Group will be on the Steering Committee and provide support in terms of facilitating access to its network of members and encouraging their involvement. The group may also be able to provide some limited support in light of the recent legacy received.

Beached Bird Surveys

Bob Furness raised the question of whether BBS should be rolled out more widely and whether the Seabird Group should be involved in doing so. This was particularly in the context of providing evidence in relation to the effects of offshore renewable developments on seabirds – in which case this would need to be instigated soon to allow time for baseline data to be collected. The potential biases of BBS were recognised, in particular the difficulty of attributing cause of death to renewable developments. Any BBS intended to monitor marine renewables would need to be accompanied by post mortem analysis.

An internal RSPB meeting was due to be held on the 5th December to discuss how BBS might be organised to make them more useful (in general, not just in the context of renewable developments). Martin Heubeck noted that regional BBS around the North Sea had been proposed in the early 1990s but had not gone ahead in the UK, largely due to lack of RSPB support.

AP. RW to write to RSPB on behalf of the Seabird Group capturing this discussion, and to request feedback from their internal meeting

The meeting was closed at 1550.

Seabird Group Accounts 2011/12

Income

Item	2011/12	2010/11
Subscriptions	6665.64	5,484.30
Bank Interest	3.04	16.03
Seabird Conference Sponsorship	1,098.00	0.00
Journal Sponsorship	1,000.00	0.00
JNCC Grants	0.00	2,000.00
Other grants	0.00	0.00
Legacies	0.00	0.00
Book Royalties	0.00	418.33
	£8,766.68	£7918.66

Expenditure

Item	2011/12	2010/11
Grants Programme	750.00	500
SMP Grants	1,235.00	1300
Journal Printing Costs	8,151.00	0
Newsletter Printing	335.28	213.08
Conference costs	6,580.00	0
Membership Servicing	797.88	1051.15
Newsletter Servicing	147.08	227.43
Sundry costs	153.25	185.40
Auditing	67.00	145
	£18,216.49	£3622.06

Notes

In 2011/12 the costs for printing journals are for two editions, printing of which fell within the financial year.

Newsletter costs relate to three editions printed in the year.

Membership service are costs (principally postage) incurred by the Membership Secretary.

Newsletter servicing refers to costs (mainly postage) incurred by the Newsletter Editor.

Conference costs included a £6000 spend from central funds towards the costs of hosting the event, coach hire and prizes.

These accounts were audited by Voluntary Groups – East Sutherland. These accounts have been submitted to, and approved, by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator and the Charities Commission.



Website: 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	Russell Wyn (2015)	rbwl@noc.ac.uk
Secretary	Ellie Owen (2015)	ellie.owen@rspb.org.uk
Treasurer	Kerry Leonard (2014)	kerryleonard@hotmail.com
Membership Secretary	Ilka Win (2013)	seabirdgroup.membership@gmail.com
Seabird Editor	Martin Heubeck (2015)	martinheubeck@btinternet.com
Newsletter Editor	Claire Smith (2014)	seabirdgroup.newsletter@gmail.com
Newsletter Assistant Editor	Mark Newell (2014)	manew@ceh.ac.uk
Ordinary members	Chris Thaxter (2014)	chris.thaxter@bto.org
	Mark Lewis (2015)	lewis_sparky@yahoo.co.uk

Current membership rates	
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: 15th May (June edition); 15th September (October edition) and 15th 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.**

Gift Aid declaration form –

for past, present & future donations



giftaid it

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money made to the Seabird Group.

Please tick **all boxes** you wish to apply.

today in the past 4 years in the future

- ✓ I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year.
- ✓ I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify.
- ✓ I understand the charity will reclaim 28p of tax on every £1 that I gave up to 5 April 2008 and will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give on or after 6 April 2008.

Donor's details

First name Surname

Home Address.....

Town/City Postcode.....

Email.....

Signature..... Date

Please notify the Seabird Group if you:

- Want to cancel this declaration
- Change your name or home address
- No longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Please send this form to:

Seabird Group Membership Secretary, Ilka Win, 10 Broomfield Park, Portlethen AB12 4XT