



NEWSLETTER 123

JUNE 2013

Contents

Conservation News	1
Grant Reports	3
Paper Reviews	8
Book Announcement	9
Breeding Season News	9
Seabird Group Grants	16
Conferences	17
Seabird Group News	18

CONSERVATION NEWS

SEABIRDS AND PIB – A STICKY KILLER

In the early months of 2013, thousands of seabirds were washed ashore dead or dying along the south coast of England, covered in a sticky, man-made substance called polyisobutene (or PIB). (SGN 122: February 2013) The actual impact at sea is likely to be far greater. When coated in this substance, the birds are prevented from flying or feeding, leading to hyperthermia, exhaustion, starvation and eventually death.

The source of the pollution has not yet been identified.

However, under the international MARPOL Convention (which regulates marine pollution from ships), despite PIB being considered to present a hazard to the marine environment, it is legal to discharge it directly into the sea in certain quantities, with conditions. It is unknown how much PIB is released in small quantities every day as part of legal shipping operations. As such, RSPB believe the risk of PIB is seriously underestimated and are currently urging the Government to call on the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to review the hazard classification of PIB, and implement regulations and a systematic monitoring programme that prevent any further tragic and wholly avoidable incidents like the one just witnessed.



RSPB signed a joint statement with the UK Chamber of Shipping, supported by the ports and maritime business sectors, calling for an urgent review of PIB's legal discharge status, and for the UK Government to take a lead in taking this

Follow us on Facebook or twitter for regular links to seabird articles and papers:

[@TheSeabirdGroup](https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Seabird-Group/505575036157550?fref=ts)

review forward. A briefing on PIB and the joint statement can be found at the links below:

http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/PIB_and_seabirds_RSPB_Briefing_tcm9-344511.pdf

http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/NGO-UKCOS_joint_statement_on_PIB_tcm9-345773.pdf

TYNE KITTIWAKES PARTNERSHIP

A group has been set up in northeast England to help the interests of the Kittiwakes nesting along the river Tyne on its various buildings and structures. This is the *Tyne Kittiwakes Partnership*, whose web page is:

<http://www.nhsn.ncl.ac.uk/news/cms/tynekittiwakes/>

The group consists of wildlife organisations, local councils, researchers and individual ornithologists. One of the main aims of the Partnership is to investigate an alternative nesting location for those birds about which there is concern on the north abutment of the high Tyne Bridge which crosses the river between Newcastle and Gateshead. There have been complaints for many years, following first nesting there in 1996 (3 AON), increasing to 300 AON in 2012 from a total river population of 790 AON. Over the years the Kittiwakes have often suffered from man's intervention when sites have been demolished or otherwise made unsuitable with deterrents including netting, spikes and wires. They are very much part of the local scene from March to July displaying pair formation, site selection, nest building, egg laying and raising of youngsters, all of great interest to Tyneside residents and visitors alike.

The complaints at Newcastle emanate from certain local traders, businesses, residents and quayside visitors - generally about droppings (beneath the nests) and noise. Newcastle City Council wishes to seek a long-term solution at this location as well as care for the bridge structure and had already placed some netting there in past years. However concerns for the nesting birds, raised by interested people, ensured the City Council took only limited action in the past. The Partnership is now seeking an alternative nearby site for a new purpose-built artificial structure to hold 300 or more pairs, and has drafted proposals so nesting structure designs may be created by a team of Newcastle University students. This is a challenging project, which will greatly benefit the region with educational, environmental and study opportunities.

Another river nesting site, at the South Shields McNulty engineering workshop, steadily increased to 55 AON by 2012 and is now under threat. The McNulty Offshore yard has ceased operation on Tyneside and has now been purchased by the Port of Tyne Authority which plans to develop the site. This led to the boarding up of several nesting ledges – denying access to many birds this breeding season. Meetings rapidly took place with the Port of Tyne planning team – who have accepted the criticism and hope to help 'their' birds in the future.

At the Baltic arts centre (Gateshead) the nesting birds (52 AON in 2012) continue to attract visitor interest allowing excellent observation opportunities from the level 4 viewing terrace, while an indoor screen shows live pictures relayed from the main nesting ledge. A Tyne Kittiwake presentation was held here at the end of May. A lovely children's book *Kitty the Toon* (Langford Press 2012), written by John Miles and illustrated by Barry Robinson, follows a young Kittiwake family nesting on the Tyne in the Newcastle-Gateshead quayside area, and watches as the youngsters learn to fly, explore and blend in with the 'natives' (details on Partnership web page).

The nearby Kittiwake Tower (91 AON in 2012), constructed to re-locate birds from the Baltic during the art centre's development in 1998, has been designated by Gateshead Council as a Local Nature Reserve, and can be viewed at close quarters from Saltmeadows riverside in east Gateshead. The Partnership is planning a **Kittiwake seminar (Wed 24th July, 7 - 9 pm) at the Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle-upon-Tyne**. Check out the Partnership web page for more details.

Daniel M Turner (North Shields)

The initially drafted article / note has benefited from review and comments by: Martin Heubeck (SOTEAG, and editor of *Seabird* – the Journal of the Seabird Group), Helen Quayle (RSPB) and Peter Bell (Gateshead Council).

NORTH RONA AND SULA SGEIR IN 2012

We visited North Rona (73 km north-east of the Butt of Lewis in the Western Isles) between 2 and 19 June 2012, with the aim of making counts of all its breeding seabirds; except for the storm petrels, for which the recommended survey period is early to mid-July. We were successful in doing this and the full results are given in the March 2013 issue of *Scottish Birds*. (see postscript below)

As part of the work we hoped to make a short visit to Sula Sgeir, which lies c14 km west of Rona and is a major seabird station in its own right, important principally for its gannetry and very large guillemot colony. We had limited boat availability but planned for one landing on the island, on 13 June; fortunately the weather was excellent and we were able to do this. Knowing from past experience how difficult it is to work on the rock because of the high density of breeding birds, we limited our efforts to making good quality counts of guillemots and kittiwakes, but only from sites that would not cause disturbance to any of the breeding species.

The one-day charter allowed us 5 hours on Sula Sgeir before the boat had to return to Lewis (via Rona) and in the event that was exactly how long it took to complete our planned counts. We revisited, but did not land on 19 June, principally to complete counts of kittiwake AON.

Sula Sgeir - count history

Peter Evans made whole island counts of all the seabirds on 7 July 1972 and for ease and repeatability of counting, subdivided the rock into five sections (Figure 1) (Evans 1972).

There were no further counts until 1986, when Mark Tasker and SM counted the surface nesting species (except gannet) for the Seabird Colony Register (Lloyd *et al* 1991), using the 1972 sections as a guide.

In 1998, Mark Tasker, Sue O'Brien and Genevieve Leaper counted kittiwake, guillemot, razorbill, shag and herring gull for Seabird 2000 (Mitchell *et al* 2004), providing counts for the former three species summarized within the Evans sections (JNCC, unpublished data). The 2012 land counts were limited to counting Evans sections 2 and 3 on the east cliffs of the island for guillemot and sections 2, 3 and 5 for kittiwake. Sections 1 and 4 were counted later from the sea, for kittiwake only.

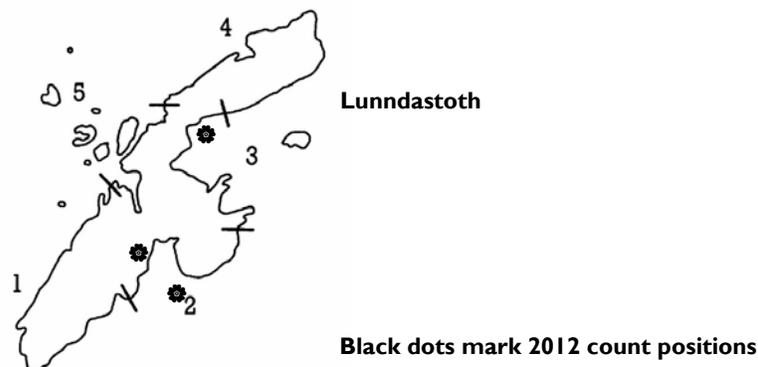


Figure 1. Sula Sgeir count sections 1 to (Evans 1972)

Sula Sgeir - Guillemot

The 1972 counts were made on the rather late date of 7 July and it is likely that, had they been made in the optimum period in June, the whole-island total for guillemot would have been considerably higher than the 9,263 found.

In 1986 counts were made on 16 June; 24,764 birds were *counted*, with additional *estimates* bringing the final figure to 25,382 birds. This count took two experienced counters a full eight hours to achieve, with counts done almost entirely from the land, with later checks from the sea of potentially hidden ground.

The 1998 whole island total of 20,877 birds is a combined estimate of counts from both land and sea; details of the exact proportions from each method are not available.

For the 2012 count on 13 June, the cliffs and geos that we considered could be counted with minimal disturbance to breeding birds are within Evan's Sections 2 and 3 on the east coast (Figure 1) In 1986 these sections held 64% of the guillemot population and counts here we felt, would give a good indicator of the present size of the colony. Section 3 was counted from Lunndastoth, the near birdless, northern half of the rock (Plate 1). This took 1.5 hours, with a precautionary count made later from the boat of the ledges most distant (170m) from the count site; there was little difference between them, so the land count was used. Section 2 held 42% of the population in 1986, but even in its reduced state in 2012 it still took three hours to count (Plate 2). Each section was divided into two sub sections for ease of counting and as an additional comparability check between SM and LW, with the mean of their counts given as the final section totals. Differences between totals for the sub sections were less than 5% for Section 3, but 9-11% for those in Section 2. There is no obvious explanation for this, except perhaps confusion over the sub section boundaries, as the section totals themselves are very close, within 4% (Table 1).

Sections 2&3	SM	LW	2012 / % diff.		1998	1986	1972
2 a	1336	1501	1418	10.9			
2 b	4063	3696	3880	9.0			
section 2 total	5399	5197	5298	3.8	10004	10649	5300
3 a	2604	2486	2545	4.5			
3 b	1080	1038	1059	3.8			
section 3 total	3684	3524	3604	4.3	5136	5500	1480
Combined total			8902		15140	16149	6780

Table 1. Counts of Guillemots in Sections 2 & 3 on Sula Sgeir, 13 June 2012, compared with counts in 1998 (JNCC unpublished data), 1986 (Lloyd et al 1991) and 1972 (Evans 1972). Sections after Evans (1972)

Between 1986 and 2012 guillemots clearly declined on Sula Sgeir, at an average rate of about 2% per annum, with by far the largest decline occurring from 1998 – 2012, at least in Sections 2 and 3. However, if the remainder of the island has suffered proportionate losses to these sections, then the guillemot whole island total could be as low as 12,000 individuals; but this figure should not be treated as in anyway definitive until further counts can be made.



Figure 1. Sula Sgeir Section 3 as seen from the count site on Lunnastoth (Stuart Murray)

On nearby Rona, beginning in 1969, there have been regular whole island counts made of the guillemots. The peak count of 17,104 individuals was reached in 1986, declining to 10,497 in 1998, then 6,113 in 2005, to only 4,961 in 2012 (Murray & Wilson 2013). There is no doubt that here the population has been in steady decline, at a rate of 5% per annum since 1986. Unfortunately there is nothing to suggest that the situation on Sula Sgeir is any healthier than Rona, despite the apparently smaller, 2% per annum rate of decline over the same period. On Rona in 2012 guillemots suffered near total breeding failure (pers obs). This, sadly, suggests we are not at the end of this downward spiral for the guillemot populations of both islands.

Sula Sgeir - Kittiwake

In 2012, land counts of kittiwake AON were made in Sections 2, 3 & 5 (Figure 1) after completing guillemot counts on the 13 June. Sections 1 and 4 were checked and counted later, from the sea on 19 June. Altogether the five sections give a total of 330 AON, the lowest number on record, amounting to a 9% pa decline since 1998. The whole island total that year, of 1206 AON was the largest on record (Table 2).

On Rona whole-island counts peaked at 4,197 AON in 1993, declining to 1,837 AON in 2005 and since then the decline has been more pronounced, reaching 987 AON in 2009 and 923 AON in 2012, a loss rate of 8% pa over the period (Murray & Wilson 2013). There is no recent data on breeding success for the species, on either Rona or Sula Sgeir, but these similar, long term declines make it hard to be optimistic for the future of the birds on either island.

Section	1972	1986	1998	2012
1	190	275	317	41
2	319	260	535	74
3	140	138	110	21
4	22	4	8	0
5	367	354	236	194
Total	1038	1031	1206	330

Table 2. Counts of Kittiwake AON on Sula Sgeir. 1972 (Evans 1972), 1986 (Lloyd et al 1991), 1998 (JNCC, unpublished data) and 2012 (this study)



Figure 2. Sula Sgeir, part of Section 2 looking towards the first count site, left of cairn.

Postscript : Rona summary 2012

In 2012, whole-island counts were made of Fulmar, Guillemot, Razorbill, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Kittiwake and Shag; all of which appear to be in decline, with the lowest ever totals recorded for the most frequently counted species. A partial survey of Leach's Petrel suggests they could have declined further since the last survey in 2009. The status of Storm Petrel was not investigated, but earlier surveys in 2001 and 2009 suggest stable numbers. Puffins have maintained their numbers and Great Skuas have increased. Eider and Black Guillemot bred in small numbers and show little apparent change from subjective estimates made in earlier years. Arctic Tern continues to be an erratic breeder with no clear trend in breeding numbers. *Scottish Birds* March 2013 (33 (1): 3-15.

Acknowledgements

The seabird work on North Rona and Sula Sgeir was made possible by funding from the Seabird Group, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and Scottish Natural Heritage.

S Murray & L J Wilson

References

Evans, P.G.H. (ed.) 1972. North Rona and Sula Sgeir, June–July 1972. Report to Nature Conservancy Council, Edinburgh.

Lloyd, C., Tasker, M.L. & Partridge, K. 1991. The Status of Seabirds in Britain and Ireland Poyser, London.

Mitchell, P.I., Newton, S.F., Ratcliffe, N. & Dunn, T.E. (eds.) 2004. Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland. Poyser, London.

Murray S & Wilson L J 2013. The status of breeding seabirds on North Rona, Outer Hebrides in 2012. *Scottish Birds* **33** (1): 3-15.

A SURVEY OF LEACH'S STORM-PETRELS ON SHETLAND IN 2011

Following the discovery in 2010 of Leach's Storm-petrels in Shetland nesting on Gloop Holm (a new nesting island for the species in the UK), in June, July and August 2011, 19 sites on ten islands in Shetland were surveyed for occupied burrows using call-playback methods and endoscopy. This work was part-funded by the Seabird Group.



Leach's petrel (Will Miles)

The aims of the study were four-fold: 1) to carry out in one year a coordinated call-playback survey for the presence of occupied Leach's Storm-petrel burrows at all sites in Shetland with past records of breeding or nesting; 2) to prospectively survey Fair Isle and islands in the north of Shetland for new Leach's Storm-petrel breeding sites; 3) to examine all occupied burrows with an endoscope and determine the breeding status of adults, including any occupying burrows relatively late in the season, in early to mid-August; and 4) to revisit Gloop Holm to see whether breeding could be confirmed by observing eggs or chicks.

In total, 14 occupied burrows were found: 13 on Gruney and one on Gloup Holm and each was examined using a 1.5 m length endoscope. The majority proved too deep to check conclusively, but the breeding status of adults was determined in four burrows on Gruney: two held non-breeders, one (located on 3 August) held an adult and a tiny, entirely downy chick, and one (located on 3 August) held an adult and an egg.

More Leach's Petrels were heard responding to call-playback in August than in June and to find one adult with an egg and one adult with a very young chick in August was unexpected and evidence of relatively late breeding. Burrow occupancy by non-breeders was also unexpected and the occurrence of this behaviour, which has also been observed on St Kilda and North Rona, has potential implications for the interpretation of Leach's Petrel population estimates from call-playback.

The work on Shetland Leach's Storm-petrels in 2011 and 2010 has been published as 2 short papers:

Miles, W. T. S., Tallack, R. M., Harvey, P. V., Ellis, P. M., Riddington, R., Tyler, G., Gear, S. C., Okill, J. D., Brown, J. G. & Harper, N. 2012. A survey of Leach's Petrels on Shetland in 2011. *Scottish Birds* 32: 22-29.

Miles, W. T. S., Tallack, R. M., Thomason, B. H. & Okill, J. D. 2010. Leach's Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* nesting at a new site in Shetland. *Seabird* 23: 145-150.

Will Miles

Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Shetland

PAPER REVIEWS

Bicknell, A.W.J., Oro, D., Camphuysen, K.C.J. & Votier, S.C. 2013. Potential consequences of discard reform for seabird communities. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 50: 649-658.

DOI: 10.1111/1365-2664.12072

The *Journal of Applied Ecology* published a study commissioned by the RSPB from Plymouth University into the likely impacts on seabird populations of the forthcoming ban on discarding fish at sea under the current reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. While the loss of discards will not pose a crisis for seabirds generally, it could have a significant short-term impact on some species and the paper explores the conservation implications of these impacts.

Ramūnas Z., Small, C & French, G. 2013. The incidental catch of seabirds in gillnet fisheries: A global review. *Biological Conservation*. 162: 76-88.

Despite the problem of seabird bycatch in gillnet fisheries being well established, the global magnitude and impact on species remain largely unknown. This RSPB funded review of the impacts of gillnet fisheries on seabirds worldwide identifies 168 species susceptible to bycatch, information is summarized by FAO fishing area boundaries and data gaps identified. The factors that determine susceptibility to captures are discussed and the various mitigation measures available or in development are reviewed. Finally, areas where conservation actions and further research are most needed are identified.

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2013.04.002>.

BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT

Marine birds of the eastern United States and the Bay of Fundy: Distribution, numbers, trends, threats, and management by Ian C. T. Nisbet, Richard R. Veit, Sasha A. Auer and Timothy P. White, just published by the Nuttall Ornithological Club as Nuttall Ornithological Monographs, No. 29. This hardbound publication has 188 pages, 4 maps, 9 tables and a bibliography with more than 600 references. It covers 83 species of marine birds (31 breeding species) that occur regularly in eastern US waters, with a time frame of 1970-2010.

Copies can be obtained from Buteo Books and ABA Sales www.buteobooks.com the sole distributor, for US \$49.75.

Ian Nisbet and Dick Veit.

BREEDING SEASON NEWS

FAIR ISLE'S SEABIRDS IN 2012

Overview: 2012 was a mediocre year for Fair Isle's seabirds. Many species fared better than in the dire season of 2011, but still there were declines in population size recorded for Gannets, Arctic Skuas, Kittiwakes and Razorbills. Increases in population size, although often small, were recorded for Fulmars, Shags, Great Skuas, Arctic Terns, Common Terns (which bred for the first time since 2005), Black Guillemots and Puffins. In 2011, productivity was low or zero for most species, so it was encouraging in 2012 to see breeding success increase from the previous year, albeit often by little, for Gannets, Shags, Arctic Skuas, Great Skuas, Arctic Terns, Common Terns, Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins. Productivity declined slightly since 2011 for Fulmars, and was zero for the second year running for Kittiwakes, as measured from the monitoring plots. This species is in steep decline on Fair Isle and, along with Shag and Arctic Skua, could conceivably disappear as a breeding species on the isle within a decade.

Fulmar: An increase of 8.9% was recorded at the population monitoring plots in 2012 (329 AOS), in comparison with 2011 (303 AOS). The general long-term trend at the monitoring plots has been a gradual, fluctuating decline. Mean Fulmar breeding success on the monitoring plots declined slightly (-7.7%) between 2011 and 2012, from 0.52 to 0.48 chicks fledged per AOS. The long-term trend in breeding success is neither one of consistent increase or decrease, but rather is of relatively short-term fluctuations and high variability.

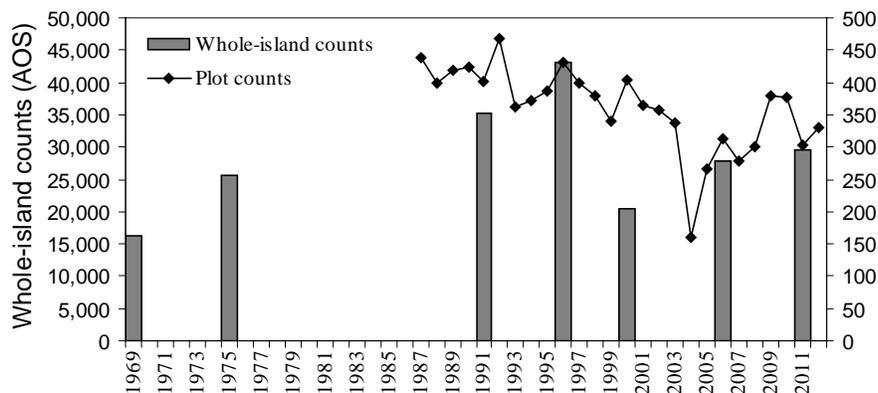


Figure 1. Population change of Fulmars on Fair Isle, 1969 - 2012 (whole-island and plot counts of AOS). Plot counts for each year are the sum of counts from five study plots.

Gannet: In comparison with 2011, the island population of Gannets decreased by 5.45% in 2012, from 4085 to 3862 AON. This was at odds to the long-term trend, which has been for numbers to steadily increase, with the exception of 2008 to 2010 when population expansion was relatively very rapid. Gannet productivity in 2012 was 0.85 chicks fledged per apparently AON, which is the highest value on record and represents an increase of 18.06% since 2011 (productivity 0.72). The 2012 figure is in line with the trend for productivity values to be relatively high during the last ten years (above 0.6 in all years with data from 2001 to 2012).

European Shag: The total count from the population plots in 2012 numbered 32 AON, an increase of 60% since 2011 (when 20 AON were found, the lowest number on record). Long-term, whole-island monitoring and plot counts have shown that, overall, the Fair Isle population of European Shags has declined considerably since 1969. Shag productivity was 763.6% higher in 2012 (0.95 chicks fledged per AON) than in 2011 (0.11). The long-term trend since 1986 has been a gradual decline in productivity, with particularly poor breeding success recorded in 2008, 2009 and 2011.

Arctic Skua: Numbers of Arctic Skuas in 2012 were down by 31% from 2011, to just 20 AOT, the lowest number on record since the species became established on Fair Isle in the 1950s. The long-term trend in the population has been a gradual decline with occasional fluctuations. One pair of Arctic Skuas fledged one chick in 2012, giving a productivity value for the year of 0.05 chicks fledged per AOT. This is an improvement on 2011, when no chicks fledged; however, with the exception of 2006 (productivity = 0.82), Arctic Skua breeding success has been consistently low during the last decade, never rising above 0.3.

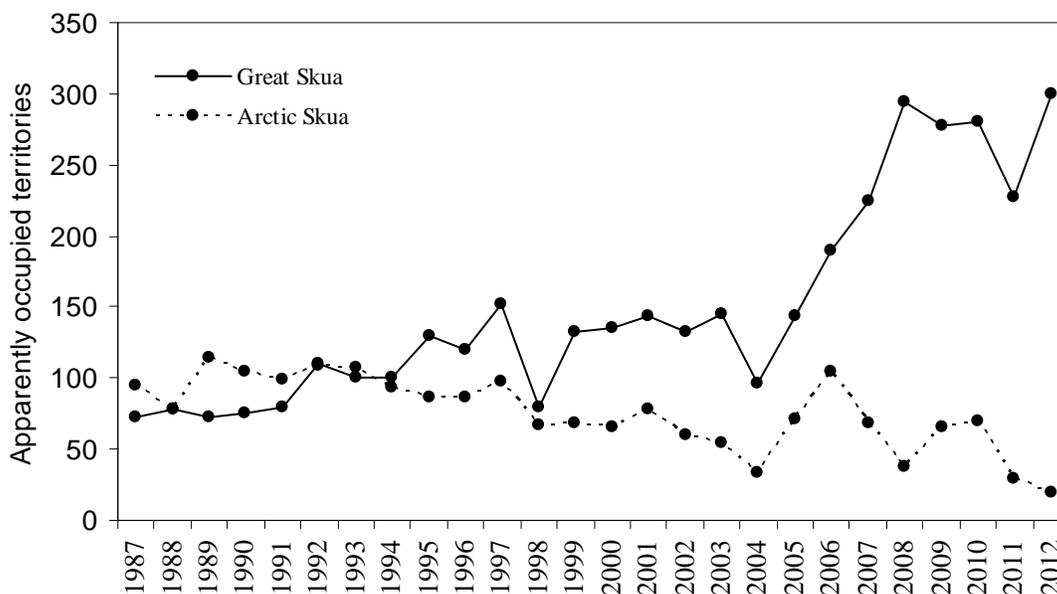


Figure 2. Population change of Great and Arctic Skuas on Fair Isle, 1987 - 2012 (whole-island AOT counts).

Great Skua: An increase of 32.2% in the number of Great Skua AOT was found in 2012 (300 AOT) in comparison with 2011 (227). The 2012 AOT count is the highest number of Great Skua pairs ever recorded breeding on the isle and continues the long-term pattern of population increase on Fair Isle, which was particularly rapid between 2004 and 2008. Breeding success was 112.0% higher in 2012 (0.53 chicks fledged per AOT) than in 2011 (0.25). The increase in the population of Great Skuas seen through the last decade on Fair Isle has not been mirrored by breeding success, which has fluctuated through the period with no obvious pattern of incline or decline.

Kittiwake: This species is severely declining on Fair Isle. Plot counts in 2012 (52 AON) revealed a decline of 35.8% compared with 2011 (81 AON). Similarly, the 2012 whole-island count of 1225 AON equated to a 14.8% decline since 2011 (1438 AON). The whole-island count and plot counts in 2012 were the lowest on record. In 2012, no Black-legged Kittiwake chicks fledged at the productivity monitoring plots. This has occurred five times previously since 1986: four times in the last decade (2003, 2004, 2008 and 2011) and in 1990. Since 2000, kittiwake productivity has been consistently low, never rising above 0.5.



Figure 3. Adult Razorbill and chick (Jenny Sturgeon)

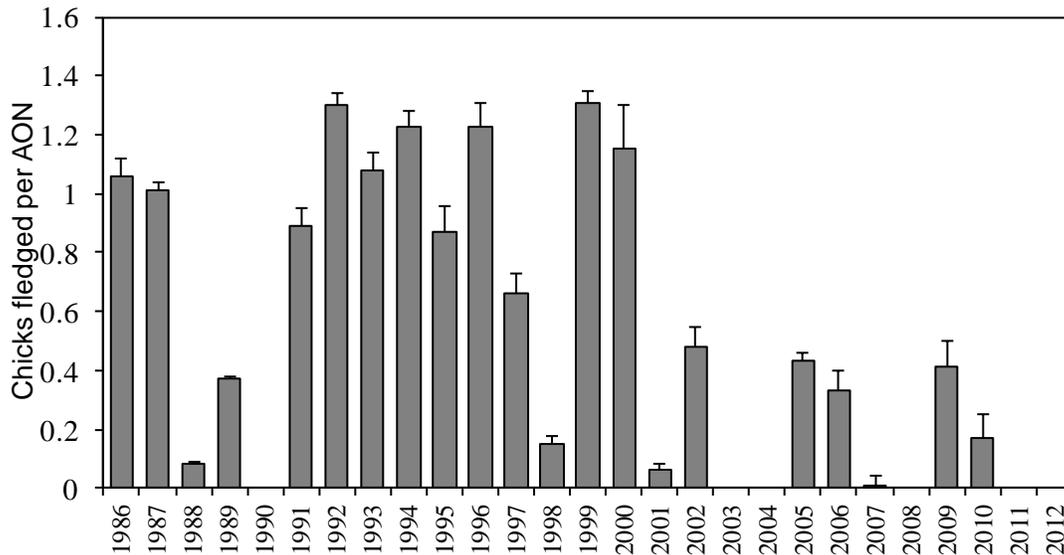


Figure 4. Breeding success of Kittiwakes on Fair Isle, 1986 - 2012. Data presented are means from ten plots (± Standard Errors).

Arctic Tern: The whole-island count numbered 227 AIA, in comparison with 9 AIA in 2011. Breeding numbers have fluctuated greatly since 1987, probably because Arctic Terns do not always nest at the same site every year. Arctic Tern productivity was 0.03 in 2012; some improvement on 2011, when productivity was zero (it has been zero in eight years of the last decade, including 2010).

Common Tern: For the first time since 2005 Common Terns nested on Fair Isle. The pair successfully reared one chick. The species last bred on the island in 2005, when three nests fledged three chicks.

Guillemot: Plot counts showed an increase of 32.7% in numbers of Guillemots in 2012 (1320 individuals) compared with 2011 (995 individuals). However, since 1999, the overall pattern of change has been one of decline, as recorded by plot counts and whole-island counts. Productivity was 0.14 chicks fledged per AIA, whereas in 2011 no chicks fledged from the monitoring plots. By comparison, in 2010, productivity was 0.31 chicks fledged per AIA. From 1988 to 2002, productivity remained relatively high, fluctuating between 0.67 and 0.85; however, since 2002 the general trend has been for productivity to be low (<0.5) or to be zero.

Razorbill: Razorbill numbers at the Lericum monitoring plot had declined by 19.1% in 2012 (17 individuals) compared with 2011 (21 individuals). The total number of breeding sites (sites where an egg was laid) at the Easter Lother beach productivity monitoring plot declined by 31.7% in 2012 (43 individuals) compared with 2011 (63 individuals). Whole-island counts since 1988 have shown a sustained, gradual decline in the island population. A decline in population since 1988 has also been seen from the Lericum plot counts; however, this has not been gradual and is mostly accounted for by a large drop in numbers observed between 2006 and 2007. Razorbill productivity in 2012 remained low (0.23 chicks fledged per egg laid), although was higher than in 2011 (0.02 chicks fledged per egg laid). From 1990 to 2002, productivity fluctuated but remained relatively high (between 0.47 and 0.8). Since 2003 however, productivity has consistently been low (<0.5) or, in four years, been zero.

Black Guillemot: The number of Black Guillemots counted on the east coast of Fair Isle (North Lighthouse to South Lighthouse) was 13% higher in 2012 (182 individuals in breeding plumage) than in 2011 (161 individuals in breeding plumage). This was a continuation of the recent trend of slightly increasing annual numbers, seen between 2004 and 2012.

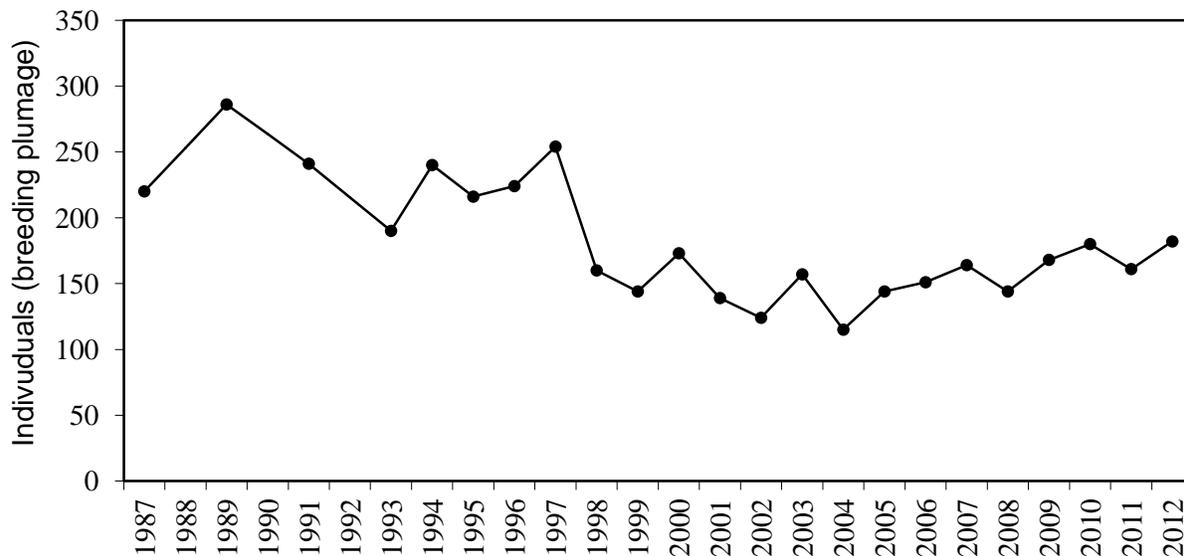


Figure 5. Population change of Black Guillemots on Fair Isle, 1987 - 2012 (maximum counts of individuals along east coast).

Puffin: The population of Puffins on Fair Isle was estimated by the highest day count of all individuals around the island (on land, at sea and in the air) from whole-island evening counts made in late April. This census method is prone to considerable inaccuracy but is the only one suitable for Fair Isle, where Puffins nest in inaccessible cliffs and slopes and in most areas burrow occupancy cannot be directly checked. The 2012 count was 47.1% higher (10,706 individuals) than at the last count, in 2009 (7,278 individuals). However, the long-term overall pattern since 1986 has been a gradual decline in numbers. Productivity was 53.8% higher in 2012 (0.60 chicks fledged per egg laid) than in 2011 (0.39). Breeding success tended to be higher and less variable between 1987 and 2000 (14-year mean = 0.72, S.E. = 0.03) than from 2001 to 2012 (11-year mean = 0.50, S.E. = 0.05). In comparison with Guillemots and Razorbills, Puffin breeding success in the last decade has remained relatively high, with no years of zero productivity.

Full details of the 2012 season can be found in the JNCC annual seabird report (Miles, W.T.S., Parnaby, D., Moss, J.W., Fraser, S., Hughes, R.D., Miguel, E.R. & Back, D. 2012. *Fair Isle Seabird Studies 2012*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Aberdeen).

Other seabird studies on Fair Isle in 2012: A third season of fieldwork was undertaken by RSPB staff to determine the foraging behaviour of Fulmars, Shags, Kittiwakes, Guillemots and Razorbills and identify important offshore feeding areas for these species, for consideration as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). The work involved fitting breeding adults with GPS trackers and TDR data loggers and integrates into the 'FAME' international seabird conservation study (Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment project, 2010-2012; www.FAMEproject.eu). Aside from this project, feather samples from adult Puffins that had been killed by Great Skuas were collected for DNA extraction and analysis, for an Icelandic research project (Matis Ltd. R&D) looking at the genetic structure of the Puffin throughout its breeding range.

Additionally, for the second year in a row, Puffin breeding activity was monitored at the Roskilie colony using a remote camera and time-lapse photography as part of a PhD study supervised by Glasgow University (2011 to 2013). The photographic data collected by staff at Fair Isle Bird Observatory will be analysed by Glasgow University, with the aim to assess Puffin numbers, breeding activity and potential impacts from Great Skuas and grazing sheep. Also in 2012, for the first time on Fair Isle, Shag chicks were fitted with darvic rings at a range of nests sites around the isle, as part of the dispersal and survival research on this species being carried out in NE Scotland, led by CEH and Aberdeen University.

Will Miles

Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland, ZE2 9JU

SHIANT ISLES 2012

The Shiants Auk Ringing Group returned to the Shiants from 24 June to 8 July 2012 to continue the seabird monitoring recommenced in 2008. This window allows us both to do counts in June, but also to catch the peak for pulli ringing, particular Razorbill, around the turn of the month. Also, we stick to this window so we can collect consistent data from the Puffin & Razorbill Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) study sites. See: <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/surveys/ras>. The group also visited Fladaigh-chuain and Eilean Trodday off Skye.

Storm Petrel

It's long been thought Stormies ought to be breeding on the Shiants, but predation by Black Rats would have a major impact on them. We sound lured 145 Storm Petrels, including a Norwegian ringed bird caught in August 2011. Several of the birds sound lured were heavy enough to be breeding females, and the odd bird was seen before the speakers were turned on. We did a playback survey on a suspected breeding site on Eilean an Tighe, which produced no responses. However, conditions were not ideal and the jury's still out on this one

Interestingly, the remains of a long dead Stormie was found next to a Common Gull nest on Fladaigh-chuain.

Shag

Monitoring continued at the study site on SW side of Eilean an Tighe, with 27 nests and 50 pulli ringed from 18 nests. The erratic damp weather hindered rock ringing in the Carnach Mhor seabird colony on Garbh Eilean, but generally we're ringing far fewer Shag pullus here than in the 70s & 80s and we hope to do a full colony count in 2013.

Great Skua

Eight or more AOTs on Garbh Eilean with seven pulli ringed. However, 39 individuals noted on 2 July and they appeared to be having poor breeding season again.

Kittiwake

At Eilean an Taighe sample colony 12 (Campar), there were 22 AONs in 2009, only 11 in 2010, 20 in 2011 and 20 again in 2102. In 2011, eight of the 20 AONs had young, at least three of which had two young. In 2012, 11 of the 20 AONs had young, with three having three chicks, three having two chicks and five having one chick – an improvement.

Arctic Tern

The main colony on Fladaigh-chuain had moved from where they were in 2011 to the north of the island in 2012. The only count was of 25 adults in the air at one time and not less than 22 nests at the new site. Six nests contained one egg, 15 nests contained two eggs and one nest contained three eggs. Total of eight pulli only ringed on this visit (cf. total of 250 pulli ringed on the two visits in 2011).

Guillemot

They continue to expand their nesting areas in the boulder field on Garbh Eilean, and not many of the pullus were big enough to ring while we were there. Counts over the last three years at Garbh Eilean section 6 (Stocanais) have been at the bottom end of the range of counts that were done there in the 1970s and 1980s.

1970s	1980s	2010	2011	2012
1441-2399	2188-2800	1743	1853	1668

Razorbill

Looked to be having good breeding season, but less synchronous than recent years with no peak in their fledging. The RAS site was run on Carnach Mhor for the second year, and 505 adults captured with an encouraging retrap rate of 23%. Counts over the last three years at Garbh Eilean section 6 (Stocanais) have been at the bottom end of the range of counts that were done there in the 1970s and 1980s.

1970s	1980s	2010	2011	2012
165-352	153-247	76	132	135

Puffin

A partially albinistic bird was seen in the Carnach Mhor colony. A similar bird was noted in the years 1972- 1976, and if the same individual it would be a British & Irish longevity record at 40 years. Nearly a 1,000 adult Puffins were processed at the RAS site at Airighean à Bhaigh, with a useful 1 in 3 already ringed. However, sub-adults were noted for the first time in numbers, which will have depressed the retrap rate. This could fit with there being more Sandeels since 2009 and perhaps more successful breeding and now recruitment. We're starting to use bill groove scores as an indication of recruitment to (high recruitment should be low mean score) and saturation of the colony (high mean score should mean lots of breeders with few young birds getting a look in). The oldest retrap was nearly 37 years old, and EB73553 set a new longevity for Puffins ringed in Britain & Ireland.



Summary

Our seabird monitoring was disrupted by the weather conditions. The persistent northerly swell in the bay made it difficult to use the dinghy and we could not visit the back of Eilean an Taighe and Eilean Mhuire as usual. A succession of rain fronts made the ringing in particular unpredictable with Carnach Mhor often wet making pullus ringing unsafe. Therefore, we spent more time than planned netting adults on the beaches.

We ponder what impact the Black Rats have on the Shiants land birds. There was noticeably more pipit sp and Wheatear present when we visited the rat free islands of Fladaigh-chuain and Eilean Trodday.

Acknowledgements

None of this happens without the significant contribution of knowledge, time and money of the expedition members. So many thanks to: Kate Atwell, Tara Challoner, Alister Clunas, Martin Cooper, David Dutton, Christine George, Ron Hodgson, Duncan Hooton, Karen McDiarmid, Karen Murray, Jim Lennon, Charlie Main, Bob Medland, Kathryn Ross, David Steventon and Ruth Walker. Thanks also go to the Nicolson family for allowing us to ring on the Shiants and for use of their house on Eilean an Tighe, and to the JNCC for providing free auk rings.

David Steventon & Jim Lennon

lennons@shearwater50.fsnet.co.uk

SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS

The following grants have been awarded so far from the February funding round:

- **Fair Isle Bird Observatory** - who carry out vital annual breeding seabird monitoring. The grant will go toward updating safety systems on the island, allowing for continued safe access on banks and cliffs and so that safe monitoring of the island's seabirds can continue.
- **Sarah Davis** – to maintain a long-term study colour-ringing study of Arctic skuas on Foula, Shetland.

The next deadline for submission of grant applications is **31st October**, more details and an application form can be downloaded at:

<http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk/?page=grants>



12th International Conference

We are pleased to announce that the next Seabird Group conference will be held at Merton College, University of Oxford, on **21-23 March 2014**. The lead convener will be Prof Tim Guilford. Further details will be circulated, but please put this date in your diaries for now.

World Seabird Conference II 2015

First Announcement of the World Seabird Conference II, in Capetown, South Africa 12-16 October 2015

The World Seabird Union had endorsed an Expression of Interest by the African Seabird Group to host World Seabird Conference II in Cape Town, South Africa, 12-16 October 2015. Although formal approval is awaiting provision of further details, all those interested in seabirds are advised to put these dates in their diaries and plan accordingly. It is expected that an official First Circular would be produced in late 2013.

For more information, about the World Seabird Union please visit
www.seabirds.net

SEABIRD GROUP NEWS

SEABIRD 26 & 27 PROGRESS AND PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

A few manuscripts have been completed for *SEABIRD 26*, and others have been offered but first drafts have yet to be received. It is still hoped to have *SEABIRD 26* published and distributed to members by late November 2013, but for this to be a reality then we really need people preparing drafts to submit them by early August at the latest, and those working on revisions to be aware of this time-frame. However, a change in the publishing schedule really is necessary. Most offers of papers have come in late winter and spring, which means that referees, authors and editors have to work on drafts and resubmissions during late spring, summer and early autumn, which is difficult given most people's fieldwork commitments. We would therefore really like to keep the flow of offers of papers and receipt of first drafts continuing through autumn 2013 and winter 2013/14, and set a new schedule by bringing out *SEABIRD 27* in early summer 2014 and continue this in the future. This would give the opportunity for results from the 2013 breeding season, which looks to be an unusual one (an understatement?), to be published fairly promptly but within the usual peer-reviewed process. If you have a story to tell, write it up and send it in!

Martin Heubeck (Editor, *SEABIRD*), martinheubeck@btinternet.com

Andy Webb (Publishing Editor, *SEABIRD*) andy@andywebb.org.uk

CORRECTIONS TO THE MINUTES OF THE 47TH AGM

Bernie Zonfrillo was accidentally omitted from the list of attendees at the AGM. Please see SGN 1223: February 2013 for full minutes.

The 2011/2012 accounts were published in the February newsletter without the balance sheet, thanks to John Davies for spotting this.

Accounts Summary 2011/12

Opening Balance	£18605.19	£19271.19 in account
		£666.00 uncleared
Income	£8,766.68	
Expenditure	£18,216.49	
Closing Balance	£9155.38	£9191.38 in account
		£36 uncleared



Website: www.seabirdgroup.org.uk

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

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/TheSeabirdGroup/505575036157550?fref=ts>

@TheSeabirdGroup

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.soton.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.**