



NEWSLETTER 127 OCTOBER 2014

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BREEDING SEASON NEWS

ISLE OF MAY BREEDING SEASON 2014

Following on from three mixed years, 2014 was a good breeding season on the Isle of May NNR, and was the most successful season on record for northern fulmars. There were signs throughout the breeding season that it was going to be a good year. Large numbers of birds were observed foraging in close proximity to the Isle of May on many days from mid April onwards and we had a magical day in June where the sea was as flat-calm as glass, with feeding frenzies of auks, gulls and gannets out on the Forth as far as the eye could see. Quite a sight! During guillemot ringing too, some of the chicks were so fat that it was a slight squeeze getting them (and our hands) through the openings of our holding-buckets. Certainly not a problem we have had in previous years.



This all made a welcome contrast to the late season in 2013, which followed on from poor weather over much of the winter and early spring in the region, and during which we lost around 50% of our breeding shag population. Breeding in 2014 commenced early for European shags and on typical dates for other species.

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<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Seabird-Group/505575036157550?ref=ts>

The season was especially good for northern fulmars, which had the most successful season on record (0.56 chicks per breeding pair), following on from another productive year in 2013. It was also good news for black-legged kittiwakes, which bounced back from a poor 2013 to record the most productive season (1.17) since 1987. European shags had an above average season (1.58) with only four higher years since the study began. Atlantic puffins (0.68) and common guillemots (0.72) had average seasons; however razorbills were the one disappointment with breeding success (0.53) only lower in three other years.

Return rates for colour marked birds of all study species were average this year with European shag at 78%, black-legged kittiwake 78%, common guillemot 89%, razorbill 92% and Atlantic puffin 83%.

In terms of diet sandeels dominated for most species occurring in 86% of samples from European shags, 94% of black-legged kittiwakes samples and 84% of fish collected from Atlantic puffins. Unusually for razorbills clupeids (65% of loads) were more prevalent in their diet than sandeels (32%), while common guillemots fed their chicks almost entirely on medium-sized sprats (94% by number).

For more information on the Isle of May study look up the website:

www.ceh.ac.uk/sci_programmes/IsleofMayLong-TermStudy

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SHETLAND (EXCLUDING FAIR ISLE)

For once, news from Shetland isn't a litany of gloom. **Red-throated Divers** had a better breeding season than in 2013, although this varied between different areas monitored. Pairs bred at all 12 sites occupied on Foula, with 13 young having fledged by the end of August and another two still to do so. **Fulmar** numbers were slightly up on 2013, and breeding success at six colonies averaged 0.46 ± 0.04 SE. Census counts of **Gannets** recorded further increases at Hermaness (27,033 AON c.f. 24,353 in 2008) and Noss (11,786 c.f. 9,767 in 2008); productivity was high at the former (0.70) and will be high at the latter.

After three years of extensive non-breeding in southeast Mainland, 96% of **Shags** starting nests at Sumburgh Head went on to lay (57% in 2013), but while a single count of nests along the coast from Sumburgh north to Mousa found more (422) than in 2013 (251), this was still less than half that recorded in 2010 (877). In contrast, off southwest Mainland a total of 148 nests at St Ninian's Isle, South Havra and Kettle Ness was only slightly lower than 154 in 2012 and 167 in 2010, while a long-overdue count at Papa Stour found 218 nests, c.f. 299 in 2006 and 360 in 2002. There has been no complete census of Foula since 2000, when 2,277 AON were counted/estimated (a partial count in 2007 found 77% fewer in the same recording sections); the number of nests in success plots on the east coast (35, 100% incubating) was up on 2013 (11, 36% incubating), but the former boulder field colonies on the west coast of the island remain largely deserted. Breeding success was reasonably high (1.24 at Sumburgh, 1.05 on Mousa, 1.89 on Foula, 1.56 at Burravoe).

Arctic Skuas on Foula continue to decline (24 AOT c.f. 35 in 2013), although the 21 pairs that laid enjoyed productivity of 0.86, with (for the first time since the 1970s) no sign of chick predation by Great Skuas. At least five of the seven territorial pairs on Mousa laid, but fledged only two young, one of two territorial pairs on Noss laid, fledging two young, but the single AOT at Hermaness failed by mid June. However, chicks were seen at various areas around Mainland and will have fledged. **Great Skuas** arrived late at Foula, where they had a surprisingly poor season. At 48 AOT monitored, 15 chicks survived to ringing age but seven of these were found cannibalised and just eight fledged (0.17/AOT). Breeding success had been pretty low in 2013 on Noss (0.15/AOT), but this year just six chicks were found at the 107 AOT in the study area (0.06). Success was higher at Hermaness (0.53), but while not monitored on Mousa (48 AOT) or Bressay, few chicks were thought to have fledged on either island.

Most of the **Black-headed Gulls** in central Mainland seem to have moved into the colony on the island in Tingwall Loch, which held 310 pairs in early May, as well as 20+ pairs of **Common Gulls**. Breeding success of the latter was thought to have been low in the nearby Wormadale area, possibly due to predation by feral ferrets; whatever impact these now ubiquitous animals may be having on ground-nesting birds requires investigation.

A count of nests at 13 **Kittiwake** breeding stations around south Mainland, and on Foula, was 10% higher than in 2012/13 (1,172 c.f. 1,061), reflecting a lower level of non-breeding this year, while 35 nests at Papa Stour was less than half the previous count of 82 in 2006. In total, these colonies held 14,400 AON in 1980-81. Although again a relatively late season, in general a high proportion of pairs laid, and a high proportion of clutches hatched. Breeding success was rather variable, averaging 0.73 ± 0.15 SE (range 0.00-1.20) at nine colonies, but this is high for Shetland, and the first year since 2009 that any fledged in the plots on Noss.

Arctic Terns had a patchy season, with some colonies fledging good numbers of young, e.g. 30 from 33 nests in three sub-colonies on Noss, but others faring much less well, e.g. 30 from 287 AON in six sub-colonies on Mousa. Success of 0.67 on Foula looked good on paper, but involved a pitiful total of three pairs fledging two chicks.

Guillemot numbers were uniformly up on last year's dire season. At Sumburgh Head, median laying date of 16th May was three days earlier than in 2013, incubation shifts were shorter, 66% of first eggs hatched (11% in 2013), parental attendance was high and an influx of non-breeders from mid June helped reduce gull predation of chicks; success was 0.54 per laying pair. Chick diet (n = 629 feeds) was 25.3% sandeel, 69.8% gadid (a wide variety but mainly small Saithe), 2.5% clupeid and 2.4% unidentified. Many gadids were clearly caught very close to the colony (still wet, a few still alive) and prey seemed especially abundant on 5-7th July, when some chicks refused feeds (one

was brought at least four Saithe within 55 minutes) and some brooding parents held undelivered fish in their beaks. At Burravoe (Yell), chicks were known to have hatched at 63% of 90 sites assumed to have laid, success was 0.61 per laying pair, and of 34 chick feeds noted, 16 were sandeel, 13 gadid (all Saithe), one clupeid and four unidentified.

Counts of **Razorbills** were also generally up on 2013, but numbers remain c.70% lower than at the turn of the century. Breeding success at 58 nest sites at Sumburgh Head was a reasonable 0.52. **Puffins** numbers were thought to have been low on Foula, before the usual influx of immatures in July, while at Sumburgh Head 946 and 1,316 birds were counted on 6th June and 3rd July, respectively, and success at 30 AOB was 0.47 based on observations of adults returning with fish in July; 'plenty' of fish were also brought to burrows on Noss. Pre-breeding counts of **Black Guillemots** in April were about 10% lower than in 2012/13 along different stretches of coast; 13 birds found dead on January-March beached bird surveys may not seem many, but was nine times the seasonal average for 2000-13 and persistent south-easterly gales in February may have reduced the breeding population slightly.

Martin Heubeck & Mick Mellor (University of Aberdeen/SOTEAG), Andrew Denton, Craig Nisbet, Esther Pawley, Afra Skene & Jonathan Swale (SNH), Sheila Gear (Foula Heritage), Newton Harper (RSPB), David Okill (Shetland Ringing Group).

FAIR ISLE SEABIRD SUMMARY 2014

Fair Isle's seabirds have suffered huge population declines in recent decades and more recently, several species have endured several years of zero productivity. Severe declines in Kittiwake and Arctic Skua have left them almost on the brink of extinction as breeding species on Fair Isle. However, 2014 appeared to be the season we've all been waiting for. On top of small increases in most species, our seabirds also experienced good breeding success.



Razorbill chick in Mavers Geo. (Ciaran Hatsell)

The food supply appeared excellent in 2014. Puffins were recorded bringing in good numbers of decent sized fish for their chicks, with the food samples collected dwarfing those of previous years. Some of the food samples collected in 2014 contained individual fish that were greater in weight than some of the entire samples in 2013. Both the 24hr feed watches for Guillemot and Puffin demonstrated the abundance of prey,

Fulmars remained stable, with an increase of +29.9% since 2013 to 395 AOS (Apparently Occupied Sites) on the study plots. The productivity showed a slight decrease of -8.4% to 0.54 chicks fledged per AOS.

Gannet showed a slight dip in the number of AON (Apparently Occupied Nests) since 2013 with the whole island count revealing a decrease of -8.5% since 2013 to 3591 AONs. The productivity was reasonable, with an increase of +4.4% to 0.71 chicks per AON.

Shags had a good year, with an increase of +14.3% since 2013 to 24 AON in the monitoring plots. The numbers in the monitoring plots have shown large declines in recent years but the productivity showed a huge increase on last year with a +189.1% increase to 1.85 chicks fledged per AON. This success appeared to echo around the island, with many nests found with two or three large chicks nearing fledging age.

Arctic Skua had 30 AOT (Apparently Occupied Territories) in 2014, an increase of 57.9% since 2013. The productivity was also the highest since 2006 at 0.47 chicks fledged per AOT. The chicks that fledged also managed to avoid predation from Great Skua, something that has been a major problem in the past. This hopefully bodes well for the future of this species which is just about maintaining a toe-hold as a breeding species on the island.

Although Great Skua were recorded in their highest ever number at 424 AOT, their breeding success was extremely poor, with just 0.21 chicks fledged per AOT. They appeared to be concentrating on hounding the Gannets for the majority of their food this summer, with little predation of other species such as Auk chicks recorded this year. The suggestion was that there weren't the number of larger fish around local to Fair Isle earlier in the summer (backed up by the lack of cetacean sightings during that period) which meant the Skuas were chasing the Gannets for little reward. As the stocks of bigger fish picked up later in the summer, allowing for the Gannets to provide for their chicks, the majority of the Skua nests had already failed. Another suggestion was that they had simply reached their capacity with regards to nesting density, with predation of chicks by adults noted throughout the season.

After several years of zero productivity, Kittiwake finally had a reasonable season. An increase in the monitoring plots of +61.1 % since 2013 to 58 AON was further bolstered by the highest productivity since 2000, with 0.62 chicks fledged per nest. This is however a very small success when measured against the massive decline on Fair Isle and Shetland in the last 20 years.

Although Arctic Tern numbers increased by +237.9% since 2013 to 98 AIA (Apparently Incubating Adults), the productivity of 0.06 chicks fledged per AIA (whilst an improvement on the zero productivity in 2013) was disappointing, with predation at the colonies (Great Skuas, gulls and cats were all implicated) apparently the main reason for such a low productivity figure . A pair of Common Terns nested this year, representing only the second nesting attempt since 2005. The single pair had at least three chicks hatch but unfortunately none survived, being apparently predated shortly before fledging.

One of the most notable successes of the year was auk productivity. The breeding success of Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin were all the highest in recent years. Guillemot productivity was the highest recorded since 2002 (0.56 chicks per AIA). Razorbill productivity was excellent – with monitoring plots showing a change of +1600% to 0.68 chicks fledged per egg laid; the highest recorded productivity since 1998. Puffins also had a great year, with a productivity of 0.78 chicks fledged per egg laid; the highest productivity since 1997. Black Guillemot also appeared to be present in good numbers, with 196 breeding plumage adults the highest recorded in the monitoring area since the population crashed between 1997 and 1998.

The successful season meant the wardening team were able to get out into the colonies and ring hundreds of seabird chicks, something that hasn't been done on the same scale for many years. Over 200 Guillemot chicks were ringed

in a day on 11 July and 88 Shags were fitted with colour rings this year as part of the project run by CEH. This is more than the last three years combined.

For those who have lived on the island for several years, seeing the seabirds thriving must be a throwback to a bygone era. The irony of being excited to see a handful of fledged Kittiwake chicks however pales in comparison to years in the past when 20,000 Kittiwake pairs greeted summer visitors to Fair Isle. Despite the overall doom and gloom, this year has brought some small but extremely important successes which hopefully represent the start of a change in fortune for the seabirds of Fair Isle.

David Parnaby, Warden, FIBO

Ciaran Hatsell, Seabird Officer, FIBO

RECORD BREAKING YEAR FOR CHESIL BEACH'S LITTLE TERN COLONY

Thirty three pairs of little terns occupied the colony on Chesil Beach this year and as many as 60 chicks made it to fledging: an all-time record for the colony and a testament to the perseverance and commitment of the team who watch over the terns.

The Chesil Beach little tern project is a partnership between the RSPB, Chesil and Fleet Nature Reserve, the Crown Estate, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Natural England, EU PANACHE Interreg Project and the Portland Court Leet. The project is now in its sixth year and rewards for the hard work are becoming evident.

The RSPB-led warden team relies heavily on volunteers to assist in protecting the terns from a variety of potential dangers, with over 1200 volunteering hours given this year.

Little terns are threatened by a number of factors such habitat loss, rising sea levels and predation. They are also very susceptible to changing weather conditions which can have a noted impact on breeding success.

As they are the only colony of little terns in the South West of England, helping guarantee the security of the Chesil breeding site through the project, which includes electric fencing, makes all the difference in fledging success for the little tern, one of the UK's rarest seabirds. The major factor in the terns' success has been the implementation of round the clock warden patrols. This is vital to minimize disturbance from predators and people who unwittingly might stray too close to these ground nesting birds.

Securing funding for forthcoming years will now be the next hurdle in order to ensure a continuing bright future for the only little tern colony in the South West.

Adapted from www.rspb.org.uk

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Seabird Group members, I would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to some important developments and opportunities coming up in the next few weeks and months. However, before I do that, I would like to briefly mention some recent activities.

The Seabird Group conference held in Oxford this spring was a great success, and we owe particular thanks to the local organising committee and all those on ExCom who helped to make it so. Planning is already underway for our next conference, due to be held **in Edinburgh from 6-9 September 2016**. Based on feedback from this year, it promises to be even bigger and better, especially as 2016 is our 50th anniversary!

Our Treasurer, Kerry Leonard, and Secretary, Ellie Owen, continue to ensure that travel grants for our conferences, and SG research grants for our enthusiastic fieldworkers, are paid and administered efficiently. These grants make a real difference, especially to our younger members and international partners that may not have easy access to travel funds. This year we also awarded our first 'Urgency Grant' to support an aerial survey of a remote Gannet colony that leveraged significant additional funding; more details of this new funding mechanism are in this newsletter.

Martin Heubeck (Journal Editor), supported by Andy Webb, continue to deliver our journal, Seabird, while Claire Smith (Newsletter Editor) and Mark Newell (Assistant Newsletter Editor) put together the newsletter. I hope you agree that these continue to be excellent and informative publications, but they need your input to thrive. So if you have some interesting data that you feel would be suitable for publication, or some topical news or views that will be of interest to the membership, please consider contributing.

I am particularly pleased at how our group membership and finances have remained healthy in recent years despite the challenging economic climate. We have a loyal membership base, and continue to attract new recruits. At the recent conference alone we recruited 12 new members and two Life Members; it would be great to get more Life Members, so please consider this method of supporting the SG. This recruitment is largely down to the efforts of our Membership Secretary, Lucy Quinn, and Ilka Win before her. Many new members find out about us via our website, which is run by our Website Manager, Jeff Stratford. And we now have a great community of Early Career 'seabirders' thanks to the work of our inaugural Early Career representative on ExCom, Jenny Sturgeon.

As you can see from the above, the running of the Seabird Group is very dependent upon the Executive Committee, who all undertake their roles on a voluntary basis. We do, however, aim to have representation from some of our key government and NGO partners, e.g. two of our current Ordinary Members on ExCom, Mark Lewis and Chris Thaxter, represent JNCC and BTO, respectively.

Several members of ExCom rotate out of their posts at the AGM in November, which is where the opportunities arise! We are looking to fill the posts of Membership Secretary, Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, Early Career representative, and two Ordinary Member posts (one of which we are keen to have as a social media and outreach role). In addition, Martin would ideally like someone to work alongside him as Assistant Editor on Seabird 28, with a view to that person then taking over when he stands down in late 2015 (this person will also initially support the Newsletter Editor) – **see page 14 for more details**.

What's in it for you? Well, firstly you make a real and tangible difference to seabird research and conservation by supporting the activities of the group as an ExCom member. Second, you get to work (and network) with fellow ExCom members, who represent a diverse range of organisations; this provides opportunities for collaboration and cross-fertilisation of ideas. Finally, for those of you developing new careers, it is a very useful CV tick and a good way of promoting yourself as an active part of the seabird community. For those of you in the later stages of your career, it is also a good way to retain strong links with that community. So if you would like to contribute in some way to

the ExCom, either in a recognised role or in some other way, please contact me asap. We need you, and the UK's seabirds need you!

On another note, ExCom have been represented in recent discussions between UK Seabird Monitoring Partnership members about how to fund the next national seabird census, which ideally should be starting around now. Plan A was a bid called "Seabirds Count" that was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund and was co-ordinated by JNCC and RSPB. Unfortunately that bid was unsuccessful, so we will now be contributing towards discussions about a Plan B. The Seabird Group has ~£25k of legacy funding that will contribute towards our members fieldwork costs associated with this census, but the wider question is whether we look to contribute our experienced volunteer resources and have more of a leading role in census co-ordination. This would be challenging, given that we are a voluntary organisation, but it is something to carefully consider and discuss if funding remains tight. Any initial thoughts and suggestions, either for funding and/or regarding our role, can be communicated to me by email.

Finally, I also hope to see many of you at our **AGM**, which this year will be held on **15 November in Carrbridge at the 40th Scottish Ringers conference**. As well as voting in our new ExCom, I hope you will join me in discussions about our role in the next national seabird census.

Dr Russell B Wynn
Seabird Group Chairman
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SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS

SCARE ROCKS GANNET SURVEY

Counting gannets is addictive so when Stuart Murray discovered that Dave Cowley, a photographer with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), was planning a flight to survey potential archaeological sites below the high water mark around the Solway Firth, we immediately wondered if it would be possible to bolt on an aerial survey of the Scare Rocks gannetry. Dave was keen, so all we had to do was produce the money for the actual flying time. The only snag was the survey was scheduled for 5 days later!

Normally, applying for research grants is a lengthy procedure requiring months not days to get a decision. However, as gannet addicts we wanted our next fix of white dots so undeterred we sent off an email describing our predicament to the Chairman and Secretary of the Seabird Group asking whether there was any rapid response mechanism that would allow us to take advantage of this opportunity. Despite the fact that at the time the Chairman was at sea over the Rockall Bank with only limited access to email, within 48 hours he replied that the majority of Excom members had responded positively. Thus with Seabird Group support we were in business and the survey could go ahead.

In the event the weather was fine, coverage of the colony complete and the images pin-sharp (Plates 1 and 2). We will be counting the little white dots shortly and hope to present the results in Seabird. However in the meantime we wanted to record our thanks to the Seabird Group Excom for dealing with our request so speedily.

Sarah Wanless, Stuart Murray and Mike Harris





I have just started the third year of my PhD looking at seabirds as monitors of shallow coastal habitats at the University of Glasgow. This is a very broad title but I am focusing this on shags and gulls across south-west Scotland and Northern Ireland. Seabirds make good indicator species as being apex predators they depend on changes at lower trophic levels and they have been shown to respond to changes in environmental conditions. Breeding colony counts are therefore frequently used to provide invaluable information about the temporal variation of seabird populations; however, being long-lived species, detecting significant changes in these trends can be very difficult. Instead this project aims to exploit existing spatial variation in population trends to collect information on traits other than counts that may also relate to the environment as well as the species' demography. Seabird traits which reflect environmental change over shorter time frames could provide an early warning that the marine environment is experiencing adverse environmental conditions; enabling management and conservation actions to be considered more immediately. I found spatial variation in coastal seabird population trends does exist across south-west Scotland and Northern Ireland; therefore, ten colonies which have experienced contrasting population trends over the past three seabird censuses were selected to focus our attention on.

A team of us have spent the past two breeding seasons at these colonies collecting information on key shag and herring gull traits covering foraging behaviour, specifically provisioning rates and nest attendance, and for the herring gulls, whose nests are much more accessible; egg size and pigmentation values, and diet information from pellets and stable isotope analysis of chick and adult feathers. These targeted traits should reflect what is occurring within the local marine environment over relatively short time scale of weeks to months as they are closely associated with food availability. For example, the majority of seabirds show very little variation in clutch size therefore egg size may instead be used to assess female condition as eggs are costly to produce; if local food availability is poor females may respond to this through laying smaller eggs. Furthermore, if herring gulls are foraging on terrestrial items it may suggest that there is not enough more typical, and higher quality, intertidal food available within close range of the breeding colony. To obtain additional information on the resource use of the gulls we have deployed a number of

GPS loggers on adult herring gulls at four of our colonies. These will not only provide us with information on which habitats and resources the birds are visiting during the breeding season but also over winter. Updates on our gull movements can be found at:

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/bahcm/staff/ruedinager/ruedinager/seabirdecology/movementofgullsincoastalhabitat/>.

Over the next year I will be analysing all this data to identify firstly, which seabird traits show spatial variation and are sensitive to local environmental conditions, and secondly, whether these traits have demographic consequences. The combination of traits which most accurately reflects what is occurring can then be combined to provide an indication of the environmental status of our coastal marine habitats.

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<http://www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/bahcm/staff/postgraduates/ninaohanlon/>

CONSERVATION NEWS

WELSH GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES PROTECTED SITES AT SEA

On the 7th October Minister for Natural Resources Carl Sargeant announced additional protection in the seas around three key sites for seabirds;

A marine boundary extension of 2km around Grassholm (RSPB), 4km around Skomer and Skokholm (The Wildlife Trusts of South and West Wales) and 9km around Bardsey (managed by the Bardsey Island Trust).

Grassholm is home to 40,000 pairs of gannets. Skomer and Skokholm are estimated to be home to over 350,000 Manx shearwaters. Bardsey Island holds another 16,000 pairs of Manx shearwaters and was home to Wales' oldest recorded razorbill, aged 41 in 2008.

These sites will contribute to the network of protected special sites at sea, used by breeding seabirds aiding the colonies to be healthier and more resilient to other issues such as the effects of climate change, like the recent winter storms and sea temperature rise.

SKOMER ISLAND GUILLEMOT MONITORING FUNDING

Thank you very much for your comments and interest in the fate of the long term study of guillemots on Skomer Island. Following the decision to cut funding for ongoing Guillemot monitoring study on Skomer Island (SGN 126: June 2014) and because there seems to be no other way to be able to continue the study I have resorted to crowd-sourcing:

<https://www.justgiving.com/timbirkheadguillemots/>

If you can help I will be extremely grateful. The support I have had already is breath-taking.

Tim Birkhead

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LEUCISTIC PUFFINS ON THE SHIANTS

The Shiant Isles in the Minch off the east coast of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) comprise three islands, Eilean an Taighe (or 'Tighe'), Garbh Eilean and Eilean Mhuire. The puffin is the most numerous breeding seabird, estimated at 65,200 pairs in the last survey in 2000 (Brooke et al 2002), with the largest colony on Garbh Eilean (also known as Rough Island), mainly on boulder scree.

During an RSPB expedition to the Shiants, at round 09.00 on 31 July 2014, Phil Taylor and Thomas Quinn spotted a white puffin while they were swimming in the bay off Carnach Mhór, Garbh Eilean. They first noticed it flying before it landed in the massive auk raft around them in the bay comprising an estimated 2500 birds, predominantly puffins with much smaller numbers of common guillemots and razorbills.



Photo 1: The 2014 white puffin (Alec Taylor)

No boat was available for a close approach. However, the bird was readily located up to a few hundred metres from shore by telescope. The bird (photo 1) had white plumage all over except for, apparently, some black primaries and secondaries (creating at rest and in flight a black wedge on the trailing edge of the wings). The eye was pigmented (appearing just dark at telescope range), while the colouration of the eye ornaments could not be discerned. Legs and feet looked the normal orange colour in flight; the beak was also evidently coloured and there was no reason to believe it was anything other than a normal puffin beak pattern. Collectively, these are the characteristics of leucism in which the melanin of the normal pigmentation is diluted (see van Grouw et al 2011 for this and other colour aberrations in seabirds).

The Shiants white puffin was distinctive in the raft by its restlessness; it swam constantly and purposefully and was typically followed at close quarters, and seemingly mildly harassed, by a flotilla of other puffins. With the naked eye, scanning across the massive flock scattered across the bay, the white puffin with its retinue could quite easily be picked out by this dynamic swimming and clustering (photo 2). By contrast, the other auks in the raft were mostly at rest, stationary, preening etc or making short swimming movements that were leisurely and not unidirectional like the prevailing pattern for the white bird and its procession. At intervals up till 15.00hrs, the white puffin flew a few low circuits before landing again, as if to escape the attentions of its followers. The bird also dived from time to time during the 6 hour span in which it was, on and off, under observation. At no time, however, was it seen to enter the colonies on neighbouring Garbh Eilean or Eilean Mhuire so we were unable to determine if the bird was associated with any particular breeding area on the Shiants.



Photo 2: The 2014 white puffin with followers (Euan Dunn)

A 'partially albinistic' puffin was recorded by the Shiant Auk Ringing Group (SARG) in the Airighean a Bhaig boulder scree colony on the north slope of Garbh Eilean in all of the years 1972-1976 and also in the Carnach Mhor colony in 2012 (see also annual ringing reports in http://www.shiantisles.net/nat_hist/index.htm, in which 'Rough Island' = Garbh Eilean). The 2012 bird (photo 3) had much more black on the wings, mantle and flanks than the one we saw in 2014, so is clearly a different individual. Given the lack of sightings in the interim since 1976, despite repeated visits to the island by SARG, neither of these two individuals is likely to be the same bird as the one (assuming there was just one) seen in 1972-1976. Even though the oldest ringed puffin on the Shiant is now 37 years (with many others over 30 years: SARG), any survivor from the early 1970s would be a European longevity record (exceeding the 41-year-old puffin killed by a predator on Røst, Norway: Anker-Nilsson 2009 in Harris and Wanless 2011).



Photo 3: The 2012 white puffin (Martin Cooper)

Allowing for the variable extent of black pigmentation, the two Shiant leucistic puffins resemble the one in Plate 26 of Harris and Wanless (2011), photographed by Barbara Fryer off Annet, Isles of Scilly in March 2010. Another photograph of the Scillies individual by Joe Pender <http://www.scilly-birding.co.uk/finders-reports-rarity-descriptions-and-id-articles/leucistic-puffin-off-western-isles/>) indicates that only a few scattered primaries, primary coverts and

greater coverts are black. Although not intended as a comprehensive list, there are other records of leucistic puffins in the UK, including on Shetland (<https://www.facebook.com/promoteshetland/posts/694922473857389>) and earlier there by Bobby Tulloch (<http://www.bobbytulloch.com/image45e0.html?id=304&categ=63>); also on Lundy (<http://www.mashpedia.com/player.php?q=WxriCjhNikM>) and the Farne Islands. There is a specimen of a leucistic puffin in the Natural History Museum in London, and records of white puffins in Iceland the Faroes.

Refs:

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Harris, MP and Wanless, S (2011) *The Puffin*. T & AD Poyser. London.

Van Grouw, HJ, Russell, S & Merne, OJ (2011) Notes on colour aberrations in Common Guillemot *Uria aalge* and northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*. *Seabird* 24, 33-41.

With grateful thanks to Tom Nicolson.

Euan Dunn, Philip Taylor (Philip.taylor@rspb.org.uk), Thomas Quinn and David Steventon

SEABIRD GROUP NEWS

VACANCY – EDITOR FOR SEABIRD JOURNAL

I'll be standing down as Editor of *SEABIRD* at the 2015 AGM, and thought it might be sensible to work alongside a successor in jointly editing Volume 28 (2015). The tasks may seem fairly straightforward: assessing whether submitted manuscripts can go straight to two appropriate reviewers or need more work, assessing resubmissions, checking final versions before graphic design, checking for newly published books, dealing with publishing houses, finding appropriate book reviewers, and sourcing a classy but interesting front cover photo. In all this I've been helped by a strong Editorial Board, and especially by Andy Webb (Production Editor) who has prepared Figures, deconstructed formatting, checked or commented on statistics, and picked up typos or breaches of house style at a late stage. Andy then hands everything over to Harry Scott (Pica Design) for layout and graphic design, which takes several weeks and frequent email exchanges of large attachments. Finally, I check the printer's proof, by which time I can recite much of the text in my sleep. Eventually, there is the satisfaction of holding a hard copy, before clearing out 100s of emails and versions 1-7 (or more) and starting all over again.

SEABIRD publishes papers and short communications on any aspect of seabird biology, conservation, identification, and status (or so it says inside the front cover). This attracts a broad range of submissions, from academics who have been publishing papers for 50 years, to keen amateurs or reserve wardens who may have full notebooks or a series of unpublished reports and want to convert these into something more substantial, permanent and accessible. The former can be relatively straightforward to deal with. The latter can take a lot of time and diplomacy, in helping the author cope with reviewers' comments (which can be blunt) and develop and structure the manuscript without him/her being put off by the effort involved. I have, however, found these papers the most rewarding to help publish and would be very keen to see this continued.

An Editor needs to have a reasonable writing style, as the English and grammar skills of contributors (both overseas and UK!) will vary, and you may have to rewrite or rearrange large chunks of text. You also need a knowledge of and access to the seabird literature, not just current but going back to key publications from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, in order to spot inappropriate references, or those that do not support the statement claimed, and suggest others. One upside of the job is that, of necessity, you broaden your knowledge of seabirds (at least I have). The downside is that it can take up a considerable amount of your life (and there is no salary). Those interested should contact the Chairman, Secretary, or myself.

Martin Heubeck martinheubeck@btinternet.com

2nd WORLD SEABIRD CONFERENCE

26-30 October 2015 Cape Town, South Africa

Seabirds: Global Ocean Sentinels

<http://www.worldseabirdconference.com/2nd-world-seabird-conference/>



SEABIRD GROUP CONFERENCE

Edinburgh Univeristy
6th-9th September 2016

Save the date, preparations are underway for the next conference. Full details will be advertised on the Seabird Group website and via other media (including the next Newsletter).

SEABIRD GROUP AGM



The **49th Seabird Group AGM** will be convened at the Scottish Ringers conference in Carrbridge, (Carrbridge Hotel, PH23 3AB) which is being held from 14th-16th November 2014. The AGM is scheduled for **1500 hrs on Sat 15th November**.

All Seabird Group members are of course welcome, The conference is hosted by Highland Ringing Group, and full details can be found at <http://www.bto.org/news-events/events/2014-11/40th-scottish-ringers-conference>



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	Lucy Quinn (2016)	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
Student Ordinary Member	Jenny Sturgeon (2015)	Jenny.sturgeon@abdn.ac.uk
Website Officer	Jeff Stratford (2016)	jeff.stratford@pms.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.**