



NEWSLETTER 131

FEBRUARY 2016

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INTRODUCTION FROM OUR NEW CHAIR – STEPHEN VOTIER

Stephen Votier, Chair/University of Exeter



Our new Chair, Steve Votier, studying Gannets on Grassholm

As new Chair of The Seabird Group, I would first like to extend my thanks to the outgoing Chair, **Russ Wynn**. Russ has overseen a number of important developments to the group and leaves us in a very healthy state. As well as overseeing a fantastic 2014 conference in Oxford and engaging with the second World Seabird Conference in Cape Town in 2015, he has also seen our membership exceed 300. But for me, perhaps the most exciting development is the significant increase in the number of early career researchers adopting important roles on the Executive Committee. This injection of youth suggests a very bright future for The Seabird Group and more broadly for the study and conservation of seabirds. The willingness and commitment of such a young but highly skilled group of individuals was a key element in my decision to take on the challenge of the Chair.

Despite this air of optimism, there are considerable challenges ahead for seabirds in general and The Seabird Group in particular. It is nearly 14 years since the last comprehensive survey of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland was completed; yet the next **census** is now long overdue. However, despite the global significance of British and Irish seabirds and their importance as barometers of marine health, continued savage funding cuts mean the future of this survey remains unclear. The parlous state of global seabird populations highlights the critical importance of maintaining effective population monitoring - not only are they declining faster than any comparable group of birds (Croxall et al. 2012), but monitored seabird populations have also

declined by nearly 70% between 1950 and 2010 (Paleczny et al. 2015). It is of the utmost importance that the fourth complete seabird census takes place; The Seabird Group and its members have a key role to play in this.

Another, admittedly less serious, challenge we face is the search for a new editor of our journal, *Seabird*. After 8 years as Editor, Martin Heubeck has decided to step down for a well-earned rest. I would like to go on record to sincerely thank Martin for his herculean effort in turning *Seabird* into the fantastic publication that it is today. His contribution cannot be underestimated and he will be a huge loss. Further details of the vacant position can be found in this newsletter – rest assured that any interested parties would receive the full support of the Executive Committee.

A major event in 2016 will be our **13th International Conference** in Edinburgh on 6th-9th September. I am indebted to Francis Daunt for taking on organisation of this particularly special conference in The Seabird Group's 50th year. The recent success of both the Oxford Conference, as well as the World Seabird Conference in Cape Town, hints at great things for Edinburgh. We need to ensure this interest is translated into a brighter future for seabird populations worldwide.

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13TH SEABIRD GROUP CONFERENCE, 6-9 SEPTEMBER 2016, EDINBURGH

The **13th International Seabird Group Conference** is taking place in Edinburgh on **6-9 September 2016** and is being organised by

Francis Daunt and colleagues at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. The conference venue is the John McIntyre Conference Centre, Pollock Halls, which is located close to the Scottish Parliament and the Royal Mile and set in the shadow of Arthur's Seat at Holyrood Park. The conference will commence in traditional fashion with a plenary lecture and reception on the evening of 6 September. Three days of talks on current topics in seabird biology and ecology will follow, including further plenary talks. Confirmed plenary speakers so far include Tony Martin (South Georgia Heritage Trust/University of Dundee), Emmanuelle Cam (Universite de Toulouse), and Tim Birkhead (University of Sheffield). You can read more about the conference on the website <http://www.seabirdgroupconference2016.info>.

Conference registration is now open and costs £225 (early bird) / £275 (regular) and includes a welcome drinks reception, poster reception as well as lunch and coffee on all days. A limited number of rooms are available and can be booked at the time of registration for £69/night. To register, visit: <https://www.efdelegates.ed.ac.uk/13SeabirdGroup>.

Abstracts for oral and poster presentations should be sent directly to Francis Daunt at frada@ceh.ac.uk by **15th April 2016**. Please include a title, author list, 200-word abstract and indicate preference for oral or poster presentation. You must register for the conference before submitting an abstract and should include your conference registration code at the time of submission.

Early Bird registration and abstract submission closes on **15 April 2016**. Further details will be published, as they become available, on the conference website, as well as on The Seabird Group's [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) pages. For those on social media, we recommend that you follow the hashtag **#seabirds16** and tag any relevant posts. Additional activities to be announced in due course will include dedicated Early Career events, as well as a post-conference excursion involving a cruise around Bass Rock – the largest Northern Gannet colony in the world!

Stuart Murray, Seabird Census rep.

It is now 14 years since the end of the previous national seabird census, *Seabird 2000*, which counted virtually all of the breeding seabirds in the UK and Ireland. However, since these counts took place over five seasons, some population estimates will be almost 20 years out-of-date. The hope of a census every decade following on from that success is well behind us, and there must be doubt as to whether or not we will see such a survey again. The reasons are, as ever, money and politics. To carry out such a logistical challenge requires, at the very least, a full time coordinator with resources to call on. The best-placed organisation to do this is the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) who oversaw *Seabird 2000* and maintains the seabird colony database in Aberdeen. At a meeting in Aberdeen last November, attended by all the national conservation agencies and leading NGO's, it was clear that JNCC would likely face budget cuts in the next financial year and are in no position to fund a census coordinator or contract out any census-related fieldwork. All of the other national agencies - Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and Department of Environment Northern Ireland - are also facing budget cuts, so will be in no position to take on new projects.

Summary of geographic and species coverage so far:

Scotland: Most of south-east Shetland covered. Key National Nature Reserves and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) were targeted for cliff-nesters and a third of the Black Guillemot colonies were recounted. Coverage of Orkney, the Western Isles and mainland Scotland was limited, although East Caithness Cliffs SPA was counted. Cliff-nesting species on St. Kilda were surveyed by the National Trust for Scotland.

Wales: All SPA colonies counted.

England: Isles of Scilly fully surveyed. Some important SPAs covered e.g. Farne Islands, Coquet (although not for Puffins).

Isle of Man: Minimal coverage.

Republic of Ireland: Most important cliff-nesting colonies counted.

Northern Ireland: Good coverage by BTO-led Northern Ireland seabird network. In addition, the National Trust has carried out complete counts of Strangford Lough SPA and Outer Ards SPA.

Channel Islands: All colonies counted, except large gulls, terns and burrow-nesting species.

Species coverage: All Northern Gannet colonies in the UK and Ireland were counted between 2013-15 as part of the decadal Gannet Survey, otherwise the majority of individuals and colonies of all other species remain to be counted.

That leaves non-governmental organisations - principally the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) - to take the census forward, but they have budget constraints of their own and will not be investing in the census unless they can win funding from charitable foundations or by public appeal. The BTO are leading on this, principally to try and gain support for a coordinator position. Even if they are successful in securing funding, it will be 2017 before anyone is in place. Beyond that, there is no funding from the UK government, who have little interest in, or understanding of, the value of seabirds. So where does this leave us?

It has been agreed by the Census Steering Group (which includes a representative - myself - from the Seabird Group) that any work carried out in 2015 will contribute towards the census. The next meeting of the Census Steering Group will take place in February 2016 and the action points agreed at the last meeting will be under discussion. Whether this brings the census closer remains to be seen, but until there is some clarity about funding, nothing is likely to happen. Also under discussion will be the creation of a priority list of the species most under threat and to which, ideally, resources should be directed. **Kittiwake** will be high on that list and could be a candidate for an all-out-effort to count all UK and Irish colonies in one season.

Following on from 2015, it is more than likely that any census work in 2016 will be undertaken in a similar piecemeal fashion. As far as the Seabird Group is concerned, there is scope for volunteers to contribute to census work and small grants will be available to support surveys, should group members want to undertake counts in 2016. We would be particularly eager to support proposals for expeditions to more inaccessible locations. The next meeting of the Executive Committee will consider how best we can contribute to the census with the modest funding we have available, and we will give more specific guidance as to which sites or species we think should be prioritised. In the meantime, if you have any well thought-out proposals, please contact me: murraysurvey@yahoo.co.uk.

POSITIONS VACANT: SEABIRD EDITOR

We are currently looking for nominations for the role of Editor of the Seabird Group's journal, *Seabird*, following Martin Heubeck's retirement after 8 years of dedicated service. *Seabird* is published once a year as a full-colour paper journal, featuring original research papers and short communications on any aspect of seabird biology, ecology, conservation, identification and status. The role of Editor involves overseeing the submission and peer-review of manuscripts as well as liaison with the copyeditor and printer. Viola Ross-Smith, our social media rep., is taking over the role of Production Editor and will provide full support to the Editor in all aspects of production. A suitable nominee would be someone with a reasonable amount of professional experience working with seabirds and who is looking to gain editorial experience. A long-term goal is for the journal to be indexed in Web of Science; as part of this, the Seabird Group is in the process of making significant improvements to the archiving of *Seabird* papers on our website, facilitating the indexing of papers with major search engines, thus improving the reach and potential impact of all published papers. Please contact our chair, **Steve** (S.C.Votier@exeter.ac.uk), if you would like to discuss the role further.

GRANT REPORTS

PUZZLING OUT THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE COMMON/MEW GULL COMPLEX



Kamchatka Gull at Gangneung, South Korea
(Chris Gibbins)

Chris Gibbins (University of Aberdeen) and Peter Adriaens (ornithological consultant)

The **Common Gull** *Larus canus* (or Mew Gull as it is called in North America) has a circumpolar distribution and consists of four taxa: nominate *L. c. canus* (**Common Gull**) in Europe (including parts of European Russia), *L. c. heinei* (**Russian Common Gull**) throughout Russia and Siberia, *L. c. kamtschatschensis* (**Kamchatka Gull**) in eastern Siberia, and *L. c. brachyrhynchus* (**Short-billed Gull**) in western North America. Although there has been a wealth of new published information in the last decade on the identification of larger gulls, knowledge of how to separate the Common Gull taxa has stood still. In the two most recent gull monographs, *heinei* is pictured as a bird that is more or less inseparable from *canus* (Olsen & Larsson 2003, Howell & Dunn 2007). This lack of knowledge of their

field characters, especially in immature plumage, hinders assessment of the geographic ranges and status of all four taxa, and especially the occurrence of vagrants.

Over the last two years we have been trying to clarify the identification of the Common Gull taxa. As part of this project, we have travelled to many parts of the world, to study them within their accepted ranges. Key to putting together the jigsaw was being able to study birds from overlap zones, e.g. between *canus* and *heinei* in the west, and *heinei* and *kamtschatschensis* in the east. We were fortunate in securing funding through The Seabird Group for a visit to the Zoological Museum in Moscow, to study such birds.

Thanks to this funding, we spent five days in Moscow in November 2014, examining birds (skins) collected on breeding grounds extending from around Moscow westwards to the Kamchatka Peninsula. The collection in the museum included many birds from core areas, but also others from areas of potential intergradation. Based on our field studies and examination of specimens, we have now written a number of papers on the identification of the Common Gulls (look out for papers in *Dutch Birding* and *Scottish Birds* in early 2016). Our work shows that, in fact, many individuals of all age classes can be identified in the field with confidence. Adults can be separated most easily, using a combination of their wing-tip patterns and bare-part colours. A paper on this topic is currently in preparation. We hope the paper will allow birders and ornithologists to approach the identification of Common Gull taxa with more confidence than hitherto possible.

SURVEY OF BREEDING TERNS, RYE BAY

Lewis Yates

During the breeding season of 2014, a survey of the activity of terns within Rye Bay was carried out. This area of South East England supports breeding **Common**, **Sandwich** and **Little Terns**, which are all listed under the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA designation. Rye Bay is also home to many wildlife sites, including Rye Harbour (Sussex Wildlife Trust) and Dungeness (RSPB) nature reserves, so provides a network of protected sites. However, breeding success has been variable over recent years and often very low.

This project aimed to bring together observations of breeding terns and monitor their use of marine and inland waters for feeding and roosting. This was done through observations of dive rates and foraging success during hunting forays for all three species of breeding tern. Surveys of small fish were also undertaken to assess the quality of the area for breeding terns, as food supply has been proposed as a limiting factor for productivity.

Overall, it was found that food supply is an issue, as the preferred food items of Sandeels were absent from the fish surveys and chicks were often seen being fed sub-optimal prey. However other factors such as ground predator incursions and untimely bad weather also played a role in the low productivity of the season. The report is posted in full on the **Sussex Wildlife Trust** [website](#) and on the Seabird Group's [website](#).

Many thanks to the Seabird Group for supporting this project through their grants program.



Little Tern carrying a fish, Rye Harbour (Lewis Yates)

REPORT FROM 2ND WORLD SEABIRD CONFERENCE, CAPE TOWN, OCTOBER 2015

Annette Fayet (University of Oxford) & Vicky Warwick-Evans (University of Liverpool)

In October 2015, the beautiful city of Cape Town, South Africa, hosted the 2nd World Seabird Conference. No fewer than 600 delegates from all over the world gathered for five days to share their latest seabird research and network and socialise with other seabird-enthusiasts. The conference program was packed with exciting talks, symposia, workshops, poster presentations and early-career sessions. After a welcome reception including African drums and sushi on the Monday evening, the conference got going the next morning. **Jane Goodall**, opening the conference via video, wished us a successful conference as well as demonstrated her ability to mimic the chimpanzee call, and she set us the challenge of imitating our study species. The scientific program offered parallel sessions on a broad range of topics such as demography, individual variation, foraging and migration, as well as numerous conservation-oriented sessions focused on fisheries, oil spills, marine debris and island restoration, and some specialist sessions, e.g. on parasites, rare seabirds, and even species-specific such as the penguins and skuas sessions.

A highlight of the conference was the double symposium on individual variation in movement strategies. Tracking technology is providing more and more insight into the lives of seabirds at sea, and tracking of individuals over multiple years is starting to reveal how individual consistency in foraging and migratory movements seems to occur across many species. **Tim Guilford** (University of Oxford) opened the symposium with a thought-provoking talk on the possible cognitive mechanisms of seabird navigation, which drew on the research of many of his students. Tim discussed the idea that exploration, learning and memory in the early years of life may play an important role in the development of individual migration routes, and could lead to individual fidelity to migration routes combined with inter-individual differences, without the necessity for a genetically- or culturally-transmitted component of migration. This was an excellent talk to begin the conference with, since several studies throughout the conference suggested that the “exploration-refinement” hypothesis, if too early to be validated, at least deserves full consideration. **Thomas Clay** (British Antarctic Survey) - awarded best student talk - presented a dataset of individual albatrosses tracked over 13 years, which would make any seabird researcher jealous. Thomas’ results show that the majority of birds are consistent in their movements and behaviour over time (including during the immature period) and such individuals may be at greater risk of being caught as fishing bycatch. **Jacob González-Solís** (University of Barcelona) closed the symposium with an interesting talk comparing individual consistency in migratory behaviour among the Procellariidae, suggesting that the plasticity of various behavioural traits varies according to the predictability of the conditions that they encounter throughout the year. A special issue of *Marine Ecology Progress Series* will be published later this year on the theme of this symposium.



(A) a preening Black-browed Albatross (James Grecian); (B) conference participants enjoying a pelagic trip - from left to right: Fi McDuie, Amanda Gladics, Vicky Warwick-Evans, Bianca Vieira and Steve Votier (James Grecian); (C) early career researchers at Chapman’s Peak (Jonathan Handley); (D) African Penguins, Boulder Beach (Holly Kirk).

Another highlight was the symposium session “From movement ecology to population dynamics”, opened by **Henri Weimerskirch** (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique [CNRS], France) who gave a fantastic talk presenting an overview of the complex interactions between movement and population ecology. Using the **Wandering Albatross** as a model species, Henri showed how foraging behaviour and demography differs according to sex, age and personality. **Francis Daunt** (Centre for Ecology & Hydrology) then discussed the population-level consequences of partial migration. He showed that **European Shags** demonstrate high repeatability in their overwintering strategy, and this is fixed at a young age. Additionally, resident Shags breed earlier and more successfully than migrants. **Stephen Votier** (University of Exeter) provided support for the exploration-

refinement hypothesis by showing that breeding **Northern Gannets** demonstrate high repeatability in their foraging locations, whereas immature birds do not. The session was closed by **Heather Lynch** (Stony Brook University, USA), discussing why seabirds are colonial, and how they may be affected by climate change. What is the best strategy: adapt, move or die?

After the drinks and drums of the first night, two evenings were dedicated to poster sessions. Both students and senior researchers presented an impressive array of posters on a variety of topics, ranging from genetics, diet and tracking to bycatch, pollution and renewable energies. The award for best poster went to **Alice Trevail** (University of Liverpool) for her excellent poster on plastic ingestion by seabirds. Poster sessions were also an opportunity to network with other researchers and to discuss the oral presentations of the day, while enjoying a glass of South African Pinotage. An evening session was also held for early-career scientists. Four renowned senior scientists - **Petra Quillfeldt** (Giessen University, Germany), **Yutaka Watanuki** (Hokkaido University, Japan), **Pierre Pistorius** (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa) and **Karen Baird** (BirdLife New Zealand) - talked about their career path and job-searching experiences. They answered questions from the audience, giving useful advice on securing postdoctoral positions and funding, but also on other important topics, such as combining a career in science with a family. After this workshop, early-career scientists headed to the "ECS Speed Dating Session" which, despite its slightly dubious-sounding name, was a great success. In this session, groups of ~8 junior scientists enjoyed a nice dinner on round tables while senior scientists - a dozen in total - sat at each table for 5-10 minutes before moving to the next table, talking about their career path and answering questions. This informal setting allowed for easy discussion between senior and junior members, as well as the opportunity to meet a range of scientists with different backgrounds and experiences. Overall, the important message of this ECS evening was that it is possible to lead a successful career in seabird science, but that it is important not to get disheartened by grant- and job-rejections. Even the best scientists out there have had their share of rejections and it does not reflect on one's individual ability, but on the competitiveness of academic research. Self-confidence and perseverance are key!

The closing ceremony provided a thought-provoking overview of the conference. The take-home messages focused on the unfortunate decline of many seabird species, and the worrying expectations of what may be to come. Making our research more widely available to the public and accessible to policy makers is vital. The final evening was the banquet, and we couldn't forget the challenge from Jane Goodall: with a bit of Dutch courage, an impressive variety of seabird calls were presented. A buffet was followed by plenty of dancing, and the after-party continued at our new favourite bar, Tiger Milk, where many Seabird Group members met throughout the week. It proved to be a fantastic end to an informative and fun week, and we are already excited about the next one, which we think should be held on a ship cruising the ocean, for a combined pelagic trip/conference experience.

We are very grateful to have received grants from the Seabird Group, to mark their 50th anniversary, to facilitate our participation in the conference.

Editor's note: You can check out the response of participants to Jane Goodall's invitation here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSP6q8kG5SU>.

CAPE TOWN'S SEABIRDS

Vicky Warwick-Evans (University of Liverpool)

Cape Town provided a great assortment of non-academic opportunities. Those of us lucky enough to have some extra time in the country experienced some amazing wildlife. Pelagic trips in the area can be really fruitful and WSC2 conference-goers were treated to the sight of sometimes thousands of seabirds. For many (including myself) pelagic trips produced the first-ever sightings of albatrosses, including Atlantic (*Thalassarche chlororhynchos*) and Indian (*T. carteri*) Yellow-Nosed, Shy (*T. cauta*) and Black-browed (*T. melanophris*) Albatross. Other favourites were the Pintado (Cape) Petrels (*Daption capense*), Wilson's Storm Petrels (*Oceanites oceanicus*), huge numbers of White-chinned Petrels (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) and plunge-diving Cape Gannets (*Morus capensis*), which collectively were awe-inspiring. Seabirds aside, other marine species made appearances, including Ocean Sunfish (*Mola mola*), Orca (*Orcinus orca*), and breaching Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). A few kilometres from Cape Town is the African Penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*) rescue centre on Boulders Beach; it was incredible to observe these birds, which have unfortunately declined significantly in recent years. Along with other early career researchers, I ascended Table Mountain. The views were incredible, with plentiful flora and fauna. Elsewhere around Cape Town, there was plenty more to see, from the stunning flora of the Kirstenbosch botanical gardens, to the impressive whales loafing just off the coast in Hermanus, and it is a trip that I, and many others, will never forget.

CALL FOR HELP WITH PLASTIC POLLUTION RESEARCH...

Alice Trevail (University of Liverpool), Sjúrdur Hammer (University of Glasgow) & Jennifer Provencher

Plastic pollution is a huge problem globally. Interactions with plastics have been documented in a total of 557 marine species and 50% of all seabird species (Kühn, Rebolledo, & Franeker, 2015). Seabirds can be valuable biological monitors of marine litter, however we need your help:

Do you like walks on the beach? When walking along your stretch of coastline, please keep an eye out for beached **Northern Fulmars**. Fulmars regularly mistake plastic for real food items, and retain this debris in their stomachs. We dissect beached birds to study marine plastics in different regions as part of international efforts. Importantly, both the OSPAR convention (Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-east Atlantic) & the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive use Fulmar monitoring to assess targets for reducing plastic litter, so every beached bird found is extremely valuable. We also collect tissue samples from every carcass to investigate the biochemical consequences of plastic pollution. Chemicals from plastics can act as endocrine disrupters, which means they can interfere with processes associated with development, reproduction, the nervous system and immune system. This will not just affect birds – plastics are found in stomachs throughout the food chain, including in the fish that we eat. You can read more about the fulmar work here: <https://alictreavail.wordpress.com/south-west-fulmar-project/>.

If you find a dead Fulmar, please collect it, record where and when you found it and get in touch (you can find our contacts below). We'll help you find your regional co-ordinator who will collect the carcass.

Do you have access to Great Skua colonies? To investigate the trophic transfer (i.e. through the food chain) of plastic pollution, we wish to collect pellets from Great Skua colonies. Early research has found links between prey and plastic content in the pellets of Great Skua, so we're hoping to investigate this further and expand this study across the North Atlantic. If you're able to collect pellets, or are already collecting them, please get in touch. Find out more about plastic in skua pellets here: <https://naturallyspeakingpodcast.wordpress.com/2015/01/19/research-on-marine-plastics-is-revealing-its-spread-up-the-food-chain/>.

Contact us at: alice.treavail@liverpool.ac.uk / s.hammer.1@research.gla.ac.uk / jennifpro@gmail.com

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EARLY CAREER MEMBER ACTIVITIES

Kat Booth-Jones, Early Career Rep. 2014-2015

Conferences are always a great way of escaping the office, but sometimes their locations can be a bit dull. However, Early Career members of the Seabird Group lucked out when we were able to attend the 2nd World Seabird Conference in Cape Town, South Africa. Situated under the iconic Table Mountain and within a stones-throw of some great beaches and hikes, it was almost a shame to duck out of the blazing summer sunshine into the International Conference Centre to spend a day indoors listening to presentations and viewing posters. Happily the conference programme was rammed full of incredible seabird research from across the globe and I wouldn't have missed any of it, even for a nice cold South African beer by the sea.

It was great to see a focus on Early Career development and there was a strong presence of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) at the conference. Over 200 presentations were given by ECRs, which included many members of the Seabird Group. The conference organisers put on a brilliantly informative event for early career scientists, with talks from senior researchers on how they got where they are today, and an alcohol-assisted speed-dating style dinner, where one could ask a range of researchers all those things you've always wanted to ask.

The Seabird Group is committed to supporting the career development of our members in the early stages of careers working with seabirds. As part of this, we presented awards to two deserving Early Career members to support their attendance at this

fantastic conference (see article on p.5). **Rob Dunn** has now taken over as Early Career rep for 2016 and a key objective for him will be to organise an event for our Early Career members at our conference in September. If you have any ideas or suggestions for events or for how the Seabird Group can support early career members by other means, please get in touch with Rob (dunnr@protonmail.ch). If you consider yourself to be 'Early Career', but do not think you are listed as an Early Career member with us (this has only recently been introduced to our membership form), please get in touch with Rob. Furthermore, you can keep make contact with Rob and keep up-to-date via the dedicated 'Early Career Seabird Group' on Facebook; contact Rob if you would like to receive an invite to the page.

NEWS

PROTECTED AREAS

A recent spate of new legislation could spell good news for European seabirds. The UK and Portuguese governments have released plans for the formation of marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) covering coastal and offshore waters, all of which have the potential to influence several seabird species.

The Portuguese government recently approved the formation of two new SPAs and the expansion of two existing areas at Cabo Espichel and Costa Sudoeste. Together these sites will offer protection to foraging and resting seabirds, including the critically endangered **Balearic Shearwater** and also breeding **Cory's Shearwater** and **Audouin's Gull**.

In early 2016, the UK government declared the creation of a further 23 MCZs in British waters. The full list of MCZs can be found here (<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4525>). These zones cover a wide range of habitats and will hopefully safeguard against dredging and trawling, which have decimated benthic species in some areas. However, there are worries from experts that the level of protection given to these MCZs will not be high enough to have a positive effect. Further afield, a new SPA has been proposed around Ascension Island (a UK overseas territory), covering an area over 230,000 km². Around half of this area will be totally closed to fishing, which should also lead to economic benefits for fisheries elsewhere around the island. Home to many tropical seabird species, including the endemic **Ascension Island Frigatebird**, this protected area could be implemented as soon as 2017.

In addition to these pieces of good news, **BirdLife Malta** announced the identification of several Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the Maltese waters of the Mediterranean. These are now being considered for designation as marine SPAs by the Maltese government, under the EU Birds Directive. The proposed SPAs have the potential to protect the large numbers of birds which breed on Maltese islands, including **Yelkouan** and **Scopoli's Shearwaters**, and the **Mediterranean Storm Petrel**.

BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN 4

The fourth review of the population status of birds in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man was published in December 2015. The Birds of Conservation Concern 4, compiled by a coalition of the UK's leading bird conservation organisations, assessed 244 species of bird that either breed or overwinter in the UK against objective criteria, placing each on either the Red, Amber or Green Lists. The report makes worrying reading for the UK's breeding seabirds, as **Atlantic Puffin**, **European Shag** and **Kittiwake** join Common Scoter, Balearic Shearwater, Arctic Skua, Roseate Tern and Herring Gull on the Red List. Two species of wintering seaduck - **Long-tailed Duck** and **Velvet Scoter** – also join the Red List. The report provides the evidence base to support a complete census of Puffin and Kittiwake in 2016, to contribute towards the next national seabird census – see Stuart Murray's update on the census on p.3. You can download the report [here](#).



L to R: European Shag, Kittiwake (both Fair Isle, Shetland, UK), and Atlantic Puffin at Runde, Norway (Johan Nilsson).

UNPRECEDENTED NUMBERS OF WIND-BLOWN LITTLE AUKS IN SCOTLAND

The first few weeks of 2016 were wild and windy in the North Atlantic. On the east side of the ocean, unprecedented numbers of **Little Auks** (*Alle alle*) were found washed ashore all around the Scottish coastline, with the highest numbers appearing around the Moray Firth. Some birds were even found several kilometers inland. These birds breed in Arctic colonies and usually spend the winter in the North Sea off Sweden and Denmark. Current estimates suggest around 200 individuals have been recorded on beaches around Scotland. Most of the Little Auks found this January were well enough to be released back at sea, although a number were unfortunately found dead.

Over in the United States, around 8000 **Common Murres** (*Uria aalge*; or Common Guillemots, as we call them in Europe) were found on beaches south of Anchorage, Alaska. After examining a sample of over 100 emaciated birds, local experts determined that the animals had died due to food shortage. It is possible that a combination of the current El Niño event and the area of warm water in the Pacific Ocean (termed “The Blob”) have contributed towards low prey availability (usually herring and capelin) during the 2015 breeding season. The monitored colonies of Common Murres from this area had a much lower breeding success than previous years, and birds were observed foraging much closer to land, possibly increasing their competition with sea lions. A difficult breeding season, followed by winter storms, is a likely cause of this dramatic increase in winter mortality.

PAPER REVIEWS

Alice Trevail, Membership Secretary/University of Liverpool

THIEBAULT, A., SEMERIA, M., LETT, C. & TREMBLAY, Y. 2015. HOW TO CAPTURE FISH IN A SCHOOL? EFFECT OF SUCCESSIVE PREDATOR ATTACKS ON SEABIRD FEEDING SUCCESS. *JOURNAL OF ANIMAL ECOLOGY*, 85(1):157–167.

The dramatic nature of multi-species predator attacks on marine prey aggregations has earned such events their place on TV screens time and again. This paper by Andréa Thiebault *et al* capitalises on this by using documentary footage (from the 2009 film, Oceans) to learn more about mass feeding events. Predator aggregations may both facilitate prey capture whilst increasing competition; however, the effect on individual success is relatively unknown. Here, exceptionally high-quality film allowed the authors to investigate **Cape Gannet** foraging success during the annual sardine run off the coast of South Africa. Cape gannets benefit from the presence of conspecifics and other predators, regardless of prey availability, because they act to disorganise the fish shoal. However, increasing the number of predators beyond a threshold causes too much confusion and thus reduces individual foraging success. Nevertheless, individual foraging success was always lowest when foraging independently. The sardine run represents a remarkable migration of marine prey biomass, and therefore predators may have been able to learn the most efficient foraging strategy over time. The authors conclude that it would be very interesting to know whether these mechanisms are common amongst other species foraging in different situations.

VAN FRANEKER, J.A. & LAW, K.L. 2015. SEABIRDS, GYRES AND GLOBAL TRENDS IN PLASTIC POLLUTION. *ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION*, 203:89–96.

Less than a decade after the onset of mass plastic production, ingestion of marine plastic debris was first reported in the food chain during the early 1960s. Since then, studies have quantified marine plastic pollution across the globe, and international legislation has incorporated a suite of measures in an effort to monitor and reduce marine litter. This study by Van Franeker and Law provides a unique evaluation of plastic monitoring comparing stomach contents of **Northern Fulmars** (*Fulmarus glacialis*) to levels of marine litter in one of the five major oceanic gyres where wind and current convergence lead to plastic accumulation. Importantly, the authors found that trends in plastic ingestion by Fulmars from the North Sea are reflected in trends in surface plastic levels in the North Atlantic gyre, with a slight time lag. Both indicator measures show a decrease in industrial plastic pollution over the study period: a success story of global mitigation efforts. Other plastic types remained constant in both time series, despite continual inputs of marine litter into the oceans. The authors therefore conclude, validating previous theories, that floating plastic debris is rapidly lost from the ocean surface. One key question remains, however: “where is all the plastic?”

Jaclyn Pearson, Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project Project Manager

The Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project is protecting seabirds by keeping the islands of **St. Agnes** and **Gugh** 'rat-free'. This is the largest community rat-removal project in the world to date, with a resident population of 84 people. The Isles of Scilly have 20,000 breeding pairs of 14 different species of seabirds, but many are declining. Among many challenges our seabirds face, the greatest threat on land is predation of eggs and chicks by introduced Brown Rats. Two species of seabirds in Scilly are at greatest risk from rats – **European Storm Petrels** (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) and **Manx Shearwaters** (*Puffinus puffinus*), and within two years



Manx Shearwater fledgling outside burrow at Wingletang, St. Agnes (Nick Tomalin)

of removing brown rats from St Agnes and Gugh, both species successfully bred on these islands for first time in living memory!

The removal of brown rats from St. Agnes and Gugh used a ground-based rodenticide operation carried out by New Zealand based contractors Wildlife Management International Limited (WMIL). The operation began on 7th November 2013 and the last sign of rats was detected on 30th November 2013. The success of the winter removal operation was mainly attributed to preparation work, getting the islands 'rat-free ready' by removing waste and food sources ensuring the rats were likely to take the bait. The use of over 1000 bait stations reduced the availability of bait to non-target species (such as rabbits and birds) and ensured that bait take by rats could be recorded.

At the time of writing this article we are currently undergoing the 'final check phase' in January 2016. According to international protocols, 'rat-free status' can only be confirmed by a thorough monitoring check for any remaining rats after a two-year period (the maximum lifespan of a rat), so WMIL are back on the islands to hopefully provide the good news - fingers crossed! For project staff and volunteers, the most rewarding news so far has been the sighting of 10 Manx Shearwater fledglings 'wing-flapping' and 'star-gazing' outside burrows on St. Agnes and Gugh in September 2014; in 2015, 28 chicks were recorded doing the same. The good news continued with Storm Petrels returning to breed within just two years of rat removal. In July 2015, we heard adults responding from within their boulder beach nesting sites to playback, and we then recorded evidence of five chicks on St Agnes and Gugh. We were delighted that these tiny pelagic seabirds returned to nest so soon.

The spring and summer of 2015 was also an exciting time as a team of seabird ecologists and 25 volunteers carried out a full survey of the breeding seabirds in the Isles of Scilly. The last full survey of

Biosecurity measures employed in the Seabird Recovery Project

Prevention: There is bait onboard boats that serve the islands. The local community has been trained to check high risk items being brought ashore (e.g. hay and animal feed), to ensure good waste management practices and remain vigilant at all times for sign of rats and encourage all visitors to be equally vigilant.

Detection: 100 permanent monitoring stations are examined every two to three weeks. Chocolate wax inside the permanent boxes around the coastline is checked for teeth marks. So far any marks have only been from shrews. A 'Rat On A Rat' (ROAR) hotline phone number was set up enabling visitors and residents to call about anything suspiciously 'ratty'.

Surveillance: This is where someone trained in biosecurity measures carries out an investigation into a suspected rat sign.

Incursion response: A 300 m wide, 50 station monitoring grid is set out with flavoured wax or tracking tunnels. This is checked over a monthly period. If there is a rat, it will be detected. If there is no sign, then the grid is brought in after that month and vigilance returns. So far the ROAR hotline has had 28 calls, for which we have subsequently set up grids. Thankfully all of them have been false alarms.

this Special Protection Area (SPA) was conducted in 2006 and confirmed Scilly as the most significant seabird colony in the southwest. Juggling weather and tides, the full island survey involved landing on as many as 50 individual rocks and islands in order to count the number of active nests. For species, such as gulls and terns, this was a straightforward case of searching the shoreline for nests with eggs. For other birds, such as fulmars that tend to nest on cliffs, a count of sitting birds was undertaken from a boat. Initial analysis of the survey results indicates a mixed bag for our seabirds' fortunes. The results will be published in February 2016 and will inform future conservation projects.

Other surveys are monitoring post-rat eradication changes to the abundance and distribution of rabbits, shrews, vegetation, invertebrates and land birds on St. Agnes and Gugh. The abundance of **Lesser White-toothed Shrews** (*Crocidura suaveolens cassiteridum*; endemic to the Scillies) is increasing due to the removal of rats - yet another success story of the project.

Within the three years of the project, it is clear that removing rats improves the fortunes of burrow-nesting seabirds (and Scilly Shrews!). Thus, in order to keep St Agnes and Gugh rat-free, biosecurity is paramount. Biosecurity measures designed to keep the island rat-free are summarised in four stages – see text box.

The project is funded by LIFE, the EU's financial instrument for the environment and the Heritage Lottery Fund and is a partnership project between the RSPB, Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, AONB, Natural England and Duchy of Cornwall. Thank you to everyone who has assisted the project so far, from counting seabirds to reporting 'rat-sign'. If you would like to find out more about the project please visit www.ios-seabirds.org.uk.

ADDITIONAL UPCOMING CONFERENCES

IAPC6, BARCELONA, 19-23 SEPTEMBER 2016

Registration and abstract submission is now open for the **6th International Albatross and Petrel Conference (IAPC6)**, which will be held in Barcelona, Spain, from 19-23 September 2016. The conference venue will be the "Paranimf of the University of Barcelona", located in the city centre. Welcome and icebreaker will take place on 19 September, with tours and other activities taking place both before (17-19 September) and after (24-25 September) the conference; tours will include "La Mercè Festival" and the "Delta Birding Festival". For further information, visit the conference website <http://iapc6.info/>. The local organising committee looks forward to seeing you in Barcelona!

Key dates for your diary:

- Abstract Submission Deadline - 1 March
- Travel Award Submission Deadline - 1 March
- Early Registration Deadline - 1 March
- Travel Award Winners Announced - 1 June



9TH INTERNATIONAL PENGUIN CONGRESS, CAPE TOWN, 5-9 SEPTEMBER 2016



The **9th International Penguin Congress (IPC9)** takes place on 5-9 September 2016 in Cape Town. The Congress is the primary gathering of the world's leading scientists, research managers and policy makers working on penguin biology, ecology, health and behaviour. The Congress usually attracts around 200 delegates working on all 7 continents. The main venue will be The Avenue, a new conference venue in the vibrant Waterfront area of Cape Town, situated next door to the Two Oceans Aquarium. More information can be found at the conference website: <http://ipc9.adu.org.za/>.



The **6th North American Ornithological Conference**, hosted by the Smithsonian Institute ([Migratory Bird Center](#)), will bring together an estimated 2000 ornithologists, both professional and amateur, from around the world. The conference takes place during 16-20 August 2016 at the Washington Hilton Hotel, located in the heart of Washington DC, USA. The venue is located close to the eclectic Dupont Circle and historic Georgetown and is one mile from the Smithsonian National Zoo. NAOC VI will offer a packed scientific programme featuring plenary talks, oral and poster sessions, lightning symposia, workshops and round-table discussions. The hosts will also offer field trips and other associated events, more details of which will be announced at a later date. The call for oral abstracts closes on 15 April, while poster abstracts must be submitted by 6 May. Registration opens 1 February, with early-bird registration closing on 1 May. Details of student travel grants will be announced in due course. Keep an eye on the website <http://naoc2016.cvent.com>, where you can also register to be notified of updates. You can also keep up to date with announcements by following NAOC on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

MINUTES FROM THE 50TH AGM, 21 NOVEMBER 2015, CARRBRIDGE

1. Present and Apologies

Present: Ellie Owen (Secretary), Martin Heubeck (Journal Editor), Viola Ross-Smith (Ordinary member – Communications and Social Media), Hannah Watson (Newsletter Editor), Will Miles (Treasurer), Bob Swann, Andrew Ramsay, Bernie Zonfrillo, Rab Morton, Mike Harris, Sheila Russell, Mark Newell, Johan Nilsson, Brian Etheridge, Liz Humphreys, Rob Robinson, Mark Oksien, Ian Darling, Tony Fox, Morag Jones, Laura Shearer, David Jardine.

Apologies: Sarah Wanless, Stephen Chapman, Russell Wynn (RW - Chairman), Alice Trevail (AT – Membership Secretary), Jeff Stratford (JS – Website Officer), Holly Kirk (HK – Ordinary Member – Assistant Newsletter Editor), Stuart Murray (SM – Ordinary Member – Seabird Census).

Martin Heubeck chaired the meeting in place of Russell Wynn.

2. Minutes of the 49th AGM

Minutes were proposed by Mike Harris and seconded by Andrew Ramsay.

3. Matters arising from the minutes.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. The 50th Annual Report

Martin Heubeck went through the 50th Annual report, which was proposed by Liz Humphreys and seconded by Mike Harris.

5. 50th Anniversary of the Seabird Group

Martin Heubeck reported that two travel awards were granted to enable members to attend the WSC2 to mark the Group's 50th Anniversary. These were awarded to Annette Fayet (Oxford University – £250) and Victoria Warwick-Evans (Liverpool University – £500). Their presentations acknowledged "Seabird Group 50th Anniversary Travel Award" funding and they will be providing a report on the conference for the newsletter.

6. 2014–15 Accounts and Treasurers Report

Will Miles presented the accounts and highlighted that no gift aid claim was put in for 2013–14 and so the next claim will be for both 2013–14 and 2014–15 and should total approximately £4000. Expenditure was high in this report due to the Seabird Group conference in Oxford, the first grants that were awarded from the legacy fund, and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) Seabird Monitoring Project (SMP) grant payments covering 2 annual cycles. Mark Oksien asked about the incidence of fraud and Will explained that this had been reimbursed by the bank and is unfortunately common in the accounts of charities.

Accounts were proposed by Rob Robinson and seconded by Ian Darling.

7. Membership

Alice Trevail had reported by email in advance of the meeting that: “As of this AGM, the Seabird Group has 316 paid members (including life members, statutory institutions). Membership is rising, in 2015 17 new members have joined including 1 life member. Effort has been made to iron out some missing details in the database.” Martin Heubeck explained why the 316 was so much lower than the 364 at the 49th AGM which was due to Alice Trevail removing all the old members who were still paying old fees despite several reminders to increase. Those ex-members who had not renewed and not responded to multiple reminders were also removed.

Martin Heubeck thanked Alice Trevail for her efforts to correct the missing details in the database.

8. Seabird Journal

Martin reported that *Seabird 28* was making good progress and thanked the reviewers and submitting authors. Ecotone continues to sponsor the back cover of the journal. All thanked Martin Heubeck for overseeing the production of this volume, his final as Editor.

9. World Seabird Union

Martin Heubeck explained our role in the 2nd World Seabird Conference and asked how many of those present had attended WSC2. Only two of those present had attended, which was universally acknowledged to be unusually low. Three members of the Seabird Group ExCom had attended (Holly Kirk, Alice Trevail and Katherine Booth-Jones). Liz Humphreys reported that she is now the European Representative for the WSU and that it was regrettable that there had not been greater visibility of the Seabird Group at WSC2. Martin acknowledged this and suggested if more members had attended there would have been more scope to have a presence.

10. The next Seabird Group Conference (Edinburgh 6–9th September 2016)

Martin Heubeck reiterated the date and venue and highlighted that it was during the week rather than over a weekend. He passed on that there had been a suggestion to include a themed session on outputs using SMP data. Mark Newell reported that the call for papers would start in the New Year and that the local organising committee hoped to know how many would attend the conference by April. Publicity for this call and for the conference would be via Seabird Group emails, social media forums, the Seabird Group February Newsletter, our website, and on www.seabirds.net.

Bernie Zonfrillo asked about the location; Mark Newell described the benefits of Pollock Halls as they are within walking distance of the city of Edinburgh. Martin Heubeck asked about accommodation; Mark Newell explained that a sensible number of university rooms had been reserved.

11. The next national Seabird Census

Martin Heubeck explained that Stuart Murray had attended the Census Steering Group meetings on behalf of the Seabird Group. There are still no solid funds for a census and JNCC is no longer able to fund a co-ordinator (following 30% cuts in funding from DEFRA), leaving the census without funds and without co-ordination.

Fieldwork did take place in 2015 with some organisations counting colonies where they had specific responsibility (e.g. RSPB on many of its reserves). This included the census of two sites, which were part funded by the Seabird Group (Sule Skerry and North Rona). The Seabird Group remains poised with legacy funds to support the census.

There was a general discussion amongst those attending the AGM. An opinion emerged that a piecemeal approach may be a constructive way to achieve counts for at least some species. In particular, Stuart Murray (by email) and Mike Harris (present)

suggested that they would be interested in organising the census of Kittiwake and Puffin, respectively, with the support of members of the Seabird Group. These species were suggested because most of the colonies could be counted with relative ease (relatively discretely located and many birds in a small number of big colonies); they are species which the general public is fond of; and, therefore might gather support for the counts. In the case of Kittiwake, counts are fairly easy to perform. During these counts, other species should be counted, if possible, but not to the detriment of counting Kittiwakes or Puffins. Mike Harris made the point that, in the last census, a disproportionate amount of funds was used to count a small number of species (e.g. Manx Shearwater and storm petrels) and therefore should not be focused upon. Liz Humphreys, who had attended the Census Steering Group, on behalf of the BTO, said that it was now in JNCC's hands and they should be urged to circulate minutes from the last meeting quickly to prevent periods of inactivity. Mike Harris suggested that the Seabird Group inform the Steering Group of its intention to count Kittiwake. Bernie Zonfrillo suggested that a book should not be produced and that the results could be published in *Seabird* instead.

***AP:** Stuart Murray to discuss the idea of counting Kittiwakes with the Census Steering Group.

12. Nominations to the Executive Committee

Following a vote, Steve Votier was elected as Chair. Proposed by Ellie Owen, seconded by Mark Newell. The membership thanked Ruedi Nager for standing for Chair and it was noted that we hoped to make use of his skills and experience in future.

Martin Heubeck asked for nominations from the floor for the Journal Editor role. None were forthcoming so this post remains vacant.

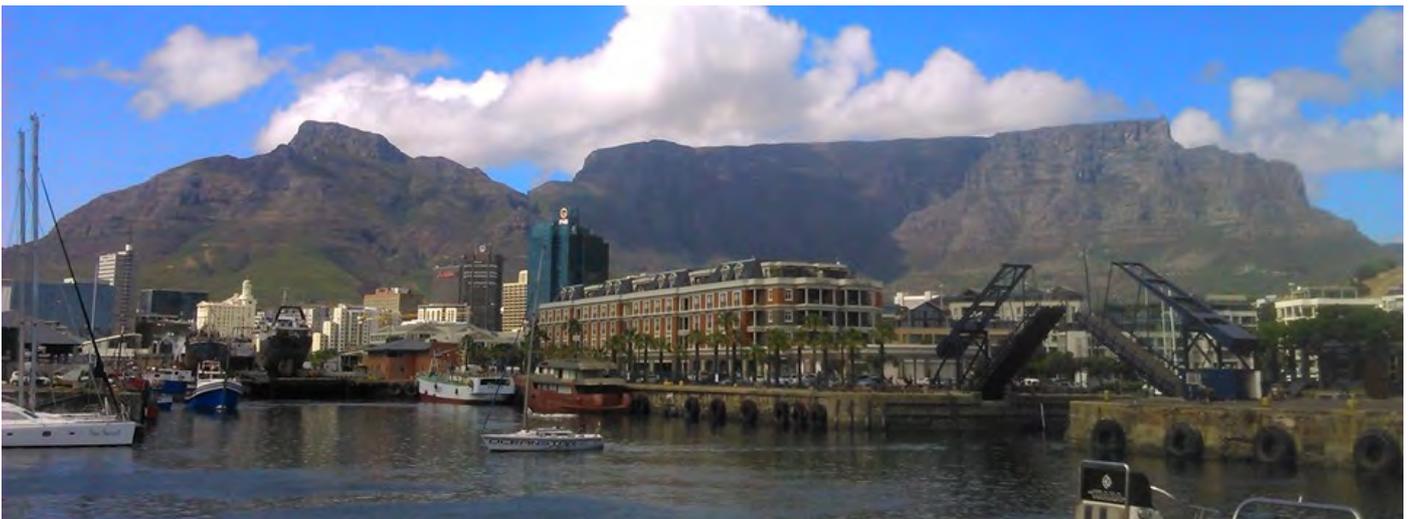
Exiting members were warmly thanked and applauded and the new member welcomed to ExCom.

13. AOB

Mike Harris asked if copies of his book 'The Puffin' could be offered to members at a reduced rate since the publisher had extended this offer to him. It was agreed that members would be grateful of this offer and it would be made via email to the membership.

Andrew Ramsay asked that we minute how grateful we all are to Martin Heubeck for his long service to the Seabird Group, which was loudly applauded.

The meeting ended at 15:35hrs.



View of Table Mountain, Cape Town (Nina O'Hanlon)



Website: www.seabirdgroup.org.uk

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

Twitter: [@TheSeabirdGroup](https://www.twitter.com/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.

SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

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

Chairman	Steve Votier (2019)	S.C.Votier@exeter.ac.uk
Secretary	Ellie Owen (2016)	ellie.owen@rspb.org.uk
Treasurer	Will Miles (2018)	willtsmiles@hotmail.com
Membership Secretary	Alice Trevail (2018)	membership@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Seabird Editor	Position vacant – nominations welcome	
Newsletter Editor	Hannah Watson (2018)	newsletter@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Website Officer	Jeff Stratford (2016)	jeff.stratford@pms.ac.uk
Ordinary Members:		
Assistant Newsletter Editor	Holly Kirk (2018)	holly.kirk@merton.ox.ac.uk
Early Career	Rob Dunn (2016)	dunnr@protonmail.ch
Seabird Census	Stuart Murray (2018)	murraysurvey@yahoo.co.uk
Social Media	Viola Ross-Smith (2018)	viola.ross-smith@bto.org

Current membership rates

Standing Order	£20
Concession	£15
Institution	£35
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 January (February edition); 15th May (June edition); and, 15th September (October edition).**

Submissions for the newsletter must be in electronic format and should be no more than 1500 words. Please email photographs/figures as separate files, with appropriate captions/legends and 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. If you have any concerns about any of the information or contacts provided, please contact the Newsletter Editor. 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.