the Seabird Group

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Contents

A precise view from above: using drones to monitor seabirds

Jarrod Hodgson & Rowan Mott, University of Adelaide, Australia

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), colloquially referred to as drones, are demonstrating that they can be a valuable tool for wildlife monitoring. In recent years, UAV technology has drastically improved and led to reliable, affordable off-the-shelf units. Researchers have embraced the technology for a range of conservation applications including orangutan nest monitoring, surveys for elephants and cetaceans, and even in the battle against rhinoceros poaching. Both multi-copter and fixed-wing UAVs are capable of carrying a variety of sensors and can capture data that exceeds the resolution of remotely sensed imagery from manned aircraft and satellites. This resolution is particularly useful for identifying small animals such as breeding seabirds.

Lesser Frigatebirds from above (J. Hodgson)

Seabird populations have traditionally been monitored from the ground. Typically, this involves experienced personnel, armed with little more than binoculars and spotting scopes, making estimates of the number of individuals or nests in a given area. The results allow for the detection of population trends and therefore inform management decisions.

Comparison of Crested Terns viewed from a UAV and at ground level (J. Hodgson)

Having spent many hours in the field wondering if there might be a better way to count seabirds, our team decided to investigate how ground counts of Australian colonies of **Crested Terns** *Thalasseus bergii*, **Lesser Frigatebirds** *Fregata ariel* and **Royal Penguins** *Eudyptes schlegeli* compared to estimates made using aerial imagery captured via low-cost UAVs. Experienced observers made counts on the ground while photographs of the colonies were captured from

above. Back in the laboratory, volunteers reviewed the imagery and counted the number of birds that they could detect within each colony.

So how did the techniques compare? Counts of the imaged birds were consistently closer to each other than those made by ground counters. Additionally, UAV-derived counts were similar to or larger than ground counts. These results are especially interesting as some of the volunteers that counted UAV-imagery had never seen the species they were counting, whereas the team of ground counters each had years of bird-counting experience.

Author, Rowan Mott, shown launching a UAV on Macquarie Island, Australia (J. Hodgson)

In the field, we were not able to assess the accuracy of either count method as there was no measure of the 'true' number of individuals. So, together with the University of Adelaide's Unmanned Research Aircraft Facility (URAF.org), we're pitting experienced ground counters against drones to see which technique is more accurate at estimating the number of individuals in simulated seabird colonies – with thousands of decoy teals on the beach, this study promises to be an interesting spectacle! Another area of interest is the level of disturbance UAVs cause to seabirds. The results of future disturbance experiments will inform the development of general and species-specific protocols for mitigating or alleviating potential disturbance.

Already our work has demonstrated that UAVs return more precise seabird monitoring data. Increased precision will heighten the ability of seabird biologists to detect population change and facilitate early action to mitigate threats. This promises great benefits to seabird conservation. Very soon we hope to have an even better understanding of the quality of UAV-derived data and look forward to seeing this powerful conservation tool receive wider use.

Precision wildlife monitoring using unmanned aerial vehicles (2016) was published in Nature Publishing Group's Scientific Reports and is available via open access.

You can follow the authors on Twitter at @jarrodchodgson and @roamingmoth.

Grant report

Insights on the mating strategies of a vulnerable seabird - Monteiro's Storm-petrel *Hydrobates monteiroi* (Order Procellariiformes)

Cristina Nava, Verónica Neves & Joël Bried

Mating strategies can have a major effect on the genetic variability and genetic structure of populations. In small and isolated populations, genetic diversity is expected to be low due to increased likelihood of inbreeding (occurring when pair mates are genetically related to each other). Populations with low genetic diversity have limited ability to deal with stochastic variability and, as a result, are more likely to be at risk of extinction. Therefore, the long-term conservation of vulnerable or threatened species requires an understanding of mating strategies in order to guarantee the success of protective measures (see e.g., in the case of translocations, Gregory *et al.* 2012).

Monteiro's Storm-petrel *Hydrobates monteiroi* on Praia Islet (Paulo Henrique Silva/SIARAM)

Having this in mind, last year, the seabird research team from the University of the Azores conducted a study aiming to assess population genetic structure and mating strategies of **Monteiro's Storm-petrel** *Hydrobates monteiroi*, to supplement the demographic survey conducted since 2000. Monteiro's Storm-petrel is a seabird endemic to the Azores archipelago. Although it was extremely abundant when the Portuguese settled in the Azores from the late 15th century onwards, human colonisation induced a strong demographic bottleneck (Monteiro *et al*. 1996). Current numbers are estimated at 250-300 pairs, known to breed only on two mammal-free islets - Praia and Baixo (Bolton *et al.* 2008). Breeding is also suspected on Flores and Corvo islands; birds have been heard prospecting and one adult has been observed in a cavity on Alagoa Islet (Flores), but proof of breeding is still lacking. For these reasons the species is classified as "Vulnerable" (BirdLife International 2016).

A view of Praia Islet from Graciosa Island
(Paulo Henrique Silva/SIARAM)

The study focused on Monteiro's Storm-petrels breeding on Praia Islet, the most important breeding colony for the species, holding at least 50% of the population. Fieldwork consisted of the identification of breeding pairs and their chicks each year, blood sampling for genetic analyses (molecular sexing and genotyping using microsatellite markers) and monitoring the breeding success, over a period of 16 years (2000-2015). This information was collected by different researchers and benefited from the financial support of a variety of organisations, including funding from the Seabird Group in 2015.

Installation of artificial nests on Praia Islet
(Verónica Neves)

Based on these data, the extent of inbreeding and current levels of genetic diversity in the population of Monteiro's Storm-petrels was assessed. The results show that, even in strongly reduced populations, genetic diversity can be maintained and inbreeding does not necessarily occur. Monteiro's Storm-petrels pair randomly with respect to genetic relatedness and this strategy has no significant consequences for pair fecundity. Additional details of this research are given in a paper that is being prepared for publication in an international scientific journal.

The seabird research team from the University of the Azores would like to thank the Seabird Group for awarding the grant to CN in 2015. The Seabird Group funding also enabled the seabird team to install 14 additional artificial nests on Praia Islet; three of them were readily occupied by Madeiran Storm-petrels *Hydrobates castro* a few months later and hopefully Monteiro´s Storm-petrels will also start using them during the 2016 breeding season.

References:

BirdLife International 2016. Species factsheet: *Hydrobates monteiroi*. Downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org on 3/05/2016.

Bolton, M., Smith, A.L., Gómez-Díaz, E., Friesen, V.L., Medeiros, R., Bried, J., Roscales, J.L., Furness, R.W., 2008. Monteiro's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monteiroi*: A new species from the Azores. *Ibis* 150: 717–727.

Gregory, A.J., Kaler, R.S.A., Prebyl, J.P., Sandercock, B.T., Wisely, S.M., 2012. Influence of translocation strategy and mating system on the genetic structure of a newly established population of island ptarmigan. *Conservatin Geneics*. 13: 465-474.

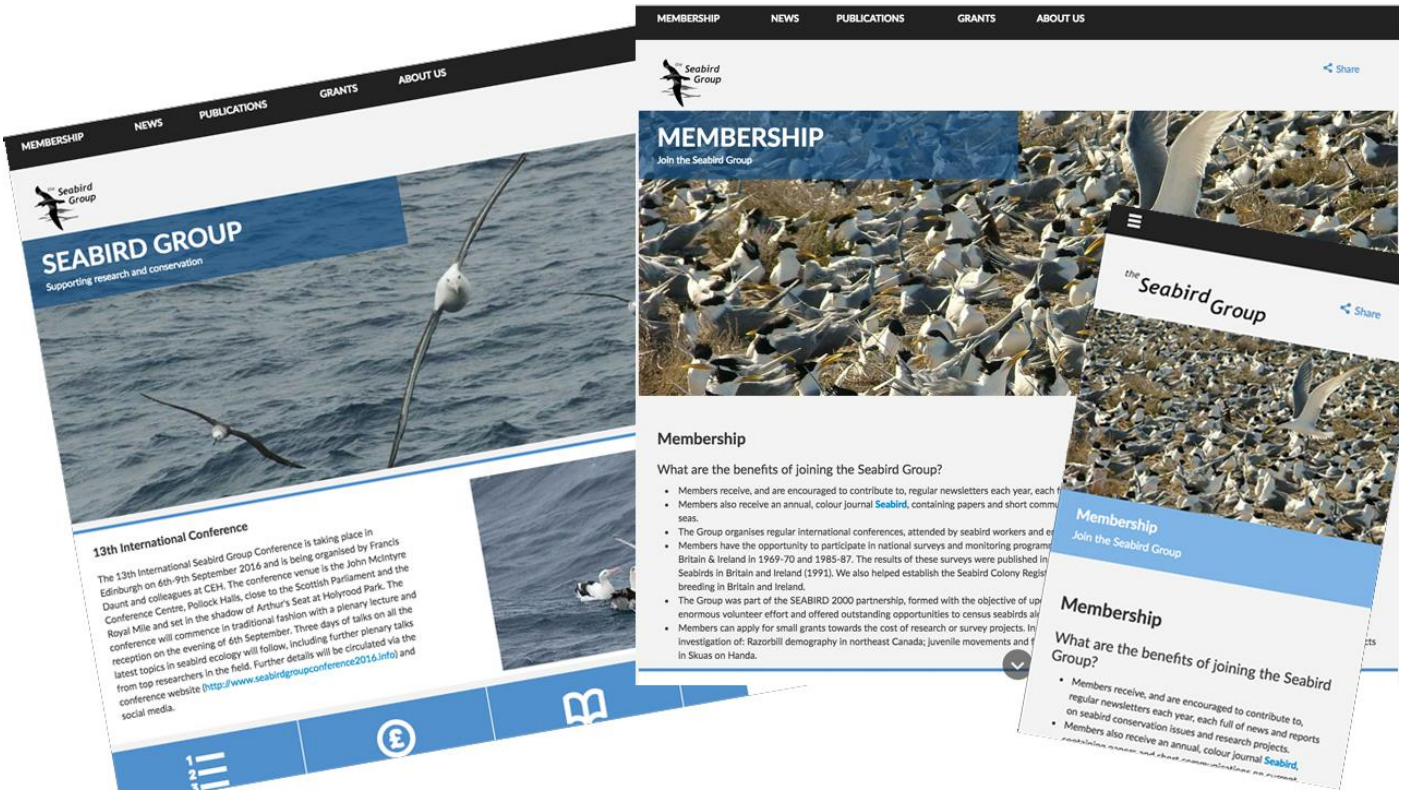
Monteiro, L.R., Ramos, J.A., Furness, R. W., 1996. Past and present status and conservation of the seabirds breeding in the Azores archipelago. *Biological Conservation* 78: 319-328.

The Seabird Group has a new website!

Jeff Stratford, Website Officer

The Seabird Group website is undergoing an overdue refresh and redesign to improve functionality, accessibility, user experience, and to integrate with social media. The design strategy taken was a mobile first approach with progressive enhancement to optimise experience and page speed on all devices. A significant amount of work is in progress on improving our presence in search engines, particularly with respect to *Seabird* articles. The site will be released in a series of phases with an initial release in mid-June followed by a series of enhancements and development of new functionality. Work is already underway to significantly improve the online journal experience; journal search engine presence; site search; and online forms.

We hope users will find the site more useful and engaging and encourage you to explore it at www.seabirdgroup.org.uk. We welcome any comments or suggestions to website@seabirdgroup.org.uk.



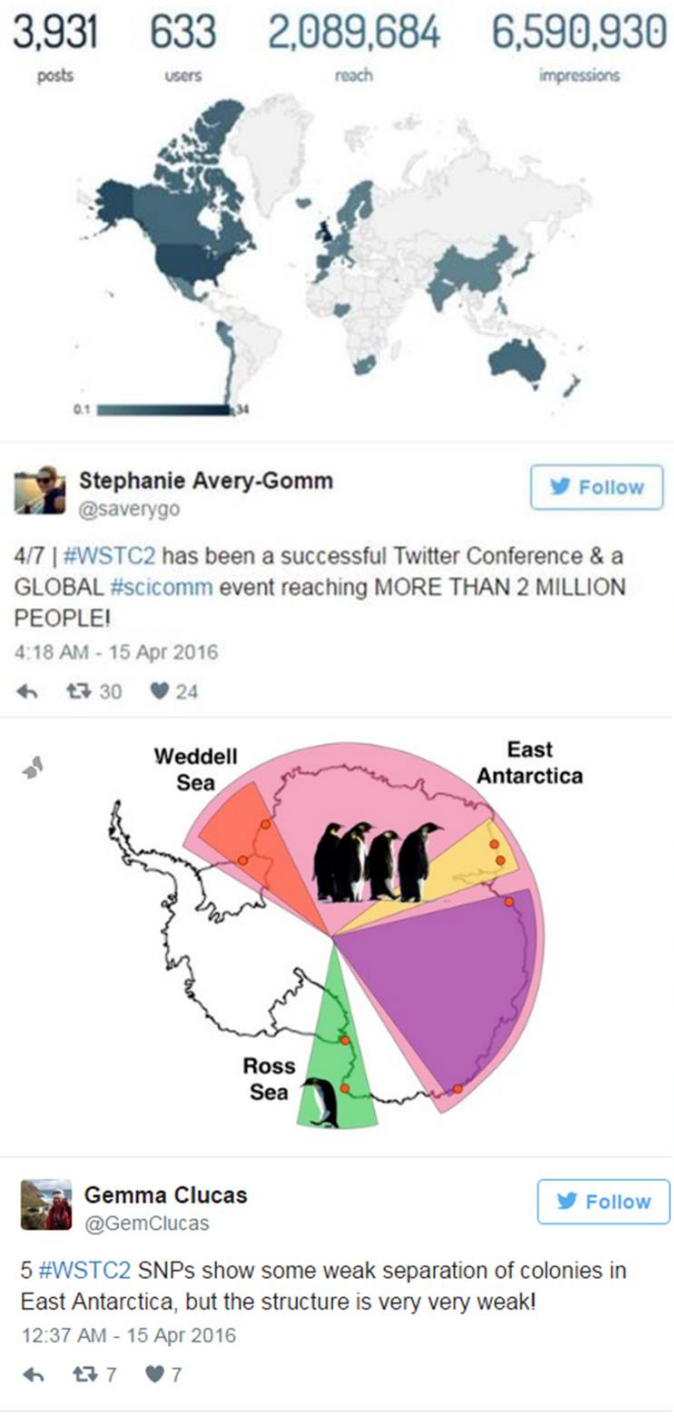
2nd World Seabird Twitter Conference

The 2nd World Seabird Twitter conference, **#WSTC2**, took place from 13th- 15th April 2016 and was a resounding success! Organised by Seabirds.Net, part of the World Seabird Union, the conference involved the participation of 71 seabird researchers from across the globe. The topics covered ranged from population dynamics and demography, through diet, behaviour and tracking, to the effects of climate change, pollution and marine renewables.

For those not familiar with the concept of a Twitter conference, each presenter is given a time slot for their topic, and allowed six tweets (of 140 characters each) to convey their research. Tweets were allowed to contain links, pictures and even animations, with the aim being to make things as succinct and engaging as possible.

The full line up of presenters can be found in the conference manual here, and all the tweets have been collated using Storify, which is currently available on Seabirds.Net and via this link.

The standard of "presentations" was very high, and judging by the reach (over 2 million people) this provided a great platform to publicise seabird research. A prize for the best presentation was donated by Mendeley and the World Seabird Union, which was won by @project_pelican (Juliet Lamb) from the USA. Juliet presented work on nestling diet and adult foraging behavior in **Brown Pelicans** breeding in the Gulf of Mexico. She used figures and animation to illustrate her finding that parental feeding frequency predicts nest productivity. Close runners-up were @GemClucas with her work on **Emperor Penguin** population genomics and @SamCPatrick who showed boldness in albatross species affects foraging and fitness.



Screen shots showing some of the top tweets from the 2nd World Seabird Twitter Conference, 2016. Tweets included here are from the winner of best presentation, @project_pelican (Juliet Lamb, Clemson University, Florida) and the two runners-up, @GemClucas (University of Oxford, UK) and @SamCPatrick (Liverpool University, UK), along with a summary tweet from one of the organisers, demonstrating the reach of the conference.

Firth of Forth Windfarms

Legal action by RSPB Scotland has delayed the start of building the Neart na Gaoithe windfarm (proposed for the outer Firth of Forth). The RSPB, along with local wildlife agencies, raised concerns that the planned 64-turbine farm could result in large numbers of **Northern Gannet** deaths due to its close proximity to the colony at Bass Rock. This comes after new research, by scientists at the universities of Exeter, Glasgow and Leeds, estimating that the number of gannets potentially killed by collision with turbines is up to 12 times greater than the mortality predicted using other available flight-height estimates (Cleasby et al. 2015). The outcome of the judicial review is currently awaited.

References:

Cleasby IR, Wakefield ED, Bearhop S, Bodey TW, Votier SC & Hamer KC. 2015. Three-dimensional tracking of a wide-ranging marine predator: flight heights and vulnerability to offshore wind farms. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 52, 1474-1482.

Tony Martin – Conservationist of the Year

Professor **Tony Martin** (pictured) has been named Conservationist of the Year by the Zoological Society of London. Tony is a professor in animal conservation at **Dundee University** and is director of the **South Georgia Heritage Trust**'s (SGHT) Habitat Restoration project. In recent newsletters, we have reported on the progress of the ambitious project that seeks to reverse two centuries of devastation caused by rats that threatens South Georgia's globally important seabird populations. The final bait-load was only dropped in 2015, but already there have been promising signs of recovery with an increase in the number of breeding Wilson's Storm Petrels and the return of the endemic South Georgia Pipit. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure every last rodent has been eradicated.

The inspiring story of the Habitat Restoration Project is now captured in a stunning book "***Reclaiming South Georgia: the defeat of furry invaders on a sub-Antarctic island***". It offers a personal account by Tony of the challenges and triumphs over the last few years.

We are pleased to welcome Tony as a plenary speaker at our conference in Edinburgh in September. To read more about the South Georgia Heritage Trust, the eradication project, and to purchase a copy of the book, visit http://www.sght.org/. Also look out for a review of the book in the next issue of *Seabird*, later this year. See page 9 for further details of our conference.

Skokholm Seabird Report

Richard Brown & Giselle Eagle, Wardens, Skokholm

In 1927 Ronald Lockley took over the lease of Skokholm Island, an exposed shard of Old Red Sandstone lying off the southwest tip of Pembrokeshire. He had long imagined an idyllic Island existence and intended to finance his time on Dream Island through farming. However, it was not long before the remarkable wildlife with which he coexisted became the main focus of his attention; the challenging practicalities of commercial farming on an Island, coupled with the potential to raise funds through introducing an eager public to his world, led to a change in direction. Guided and supported by several ornithological luminaries of the time, Lockley began a pioneering period of seabird studies. His work on the Manx Shearwater, Storm Petrel and Puffin, which provided the basis for both scientific papers and popular books, was in many ways revolutionary and delivered the first information on the life histories of these remarkable pelagic species. His writings captivated the scientific community and the general public alike, leading to a steady stream of academics and adventurers bringing capital and expertise to the Island, visits which helped to inspire the establishment of Britain's first Bird Observatory in 1933.

Skokholm is home to approximately 45,000 pairs of Manx Shearwater, 2000 pairs of Storm Petrel, 6500 Puffins, 3600 Guillemots, 2300 Razorbills, 180 pairs of Fulmar, 1500 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gull, 300 pairs of Herring Gull and 80 pairs of Great Black-backed Gull (Giselle Eagle)

The War Office evacuated Skokholm in 1940 although Lockley again took up residence in 1946 when he was accompanied by John Fursdon, the first Skokholm Bird Observatory Warden. Seabird studies were reinstated, with breeding numbers and productivity studied in more detail, whilst a series of projects designed to reveal more about their mysterious pelagic lives were undertaken. Homing experiments, trialed on a small scale in the 1930s, were used to show how birds could return from inland areas of which they had no previous experience and at speeds which suggested that they had remarkable navigational abilities; one **Manx Shearwater** released in Boston, Massachusetts famously returned to its burrow in 12 and a half days, ten hours before the note which confirmed that the bird had been released. In the spring of 1950 a flight duration recorder, which used the marks created on photographic emulsion by radioactive polonium to infer that the wing was flapping, was trialed on Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

In 1963 the Edward Grey Institute for Field Ornithology at Oxford University became responsible for overseeing seabird studies on Skokholm. They focused on understanding the factors influencing Skokholm's seabirds, with long-term ringing projects to look at survival and recruitment to the breeding population. Sadly, complicated island politics were to bring an end to these studies, with the landowners decreeing in 1976 that all handling of birds must stop. Although the seabird assemblage continued to be monitored, with the number of breeding birds and, where possible, productivity logged each year, there was much less of an understanding of what was influencing the changes in numbers. The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW), the forerunners of which have been guardians of Skokholm since 1946, purchased the Island in 2006, a fantastic achievement which laid the foundations for a return to in depth monitoring. However, the Island buildings, the fabric of which had been neglected for some time, were no longer suitable for habitation. Despite limited funds, the Friends of Skokholm and Skomer, a charity devoted to supporting our work, used volunteer labour and the generosity of local businesses to rectify this problem, completely renovating the 18th century farm complex with the bulk of these works coming to an end in 2013. We were again in a position to accommodate researchers, welcome guests and re-establish the Bird Observatory which was reaccredited in the spring of 2014.

Using unique rings, birds can be individually identified, which is vital to understand movements and survival (Gie Gorris)

The last three years have been incredibly exciting on Skokholm. WTSWW, with guidance from our Island Conservation Advisory Committee (which includes representatives from the various bodies with an interest in Skokholm) have begun to reinstate studies which necessitate handling of the birds. For the first time since 1976, we are able to recognise birds as individuals, unique

rings allowing us to monitor adult survival in Manx Shearwaters, **Puffins** and **Great Black-backed Gulls**. We are thus in a position to look at how the winter wrecks of 2013-2014 influenced Puffin survival or how the increasing Great Black-backed Gull population is linked to high adult survival.

We are also again able to welcome visiting researchers to the Island. In 2014 the British Trust for Ornithology initiated a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** tracking project, designed to investigate how the gulls use areas suitable for the development of offshore renewables; this project has produced a wealth of exciting data and shown where the gulls have fed during the breeding season (which seemingly impacts productivity) and where they have journeyed in the winter. An OxNav project GPS tagged Manx Shearwaters during the chick provisioning period in 2015, the resulting tracks being compared to those taken from Skomer birds at the same time and which reveal sea areas in need of protection.

With so much exciting work going on, we felt that it was important to share the results with as wide an audience as possible. We thus redeveloped the format of the Seabird Report and Annual Report in 2013, the plan being to provide a more interesting narrative for each species, pulling together the long-term study data, specific projects and the Bird Observatory data into one report. They can be downloaded here, for free.

Skokholm produce an annual Seabird Report, detailing census results and ongoing research projects, and an Annual Report that provides a full account of the wildlife recorded during the season. These reports can be downloaded here**.**

A few words from the new Editor of *Seabird*

Richard Sherley, Editor, *Seabird*

I want to echo Steve's earlier thanks (see SGN 131) to Martin Heubeck for all the work he has put into ***Seabird*** over the last eight years. Since I received my first issue, as a PhD student in 2008, I have read each printed copy with great interest. So, it is both exciting and a little daunting to take over the reins of *Seabird* after Martin's many years of fine stewardship; I hope together we can see the journal continue to go from strength to strength.

All *Seabird* papers are currently indexed – and thus searchable - in Thomson Reuters Zoological Record, a database within the widely-used Web of Science platform. We are also currently making a number of changes to the archiving of *Seabird* papers to facilitate indexing within additional academic databases, including the freely-available Google Scholar, increasing the visibility and reach of the journal.

I'd like to take the opportunity to remind all our members that, besides the standard research papers, *Seabird* is happy to accept submissions of notes and letters to document observations of note or reports on preliminary findings that may foster future research ideas. We also plan to introduce review papers on topical issues affecting seabird conservation and ecology in the Atlantic. So, if you have a paper to submit, or an idea you would like to discuss, please get in touch. In particular, we encourage students and Early-Career researchers to consider submitting to *Seabird* to gain experience with the publication process.

I look forward to reading your submissions! Email me at journal@seabirdgroup.org.uk.

Bio: Richard has been a Leiden Conservation Foundation Research Fellow with the University of Exeter and the Bristol Zoological Society since 2015. His research focuses on the population ecology and conservation of seabirds, with a particular focus on how the threatened taxa of the Benguela upwelling ecosystem in southern Africa interact with fisheries. He was awarded a PhD from the University of Bristol in 2010 and was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Cape Town between 2011 and 2014.

Paper reviews

Genovart, M. *et al.* 2016. Demography of the critically endangered Balearic Shearwater: the impact of fisheries and time to extinction. *Journal of Applied Ecology*. doi:10.1111/1365-2664.12622

As Europe's most endangered seabird species, the population of **Balearic Shearwaters** breeding within the Mediterranean has come under scrutiny, especially since the introduction of new fisheries policies by the EU. The Balearic Shearwater is at risk from fishing bycatch, but also benefits from discards. Genovart *et al*. use multi-event mark recapture modelling and data from between 1985 to 2014 to predict time to extinction in this species. Under the present demographics, the Balearic Shearwater is expected to become extinct by 2077, a time to extinction of just 61 years. Here, the authors show that the main impact on adult mortality is fisheries bycatch and therefore should be the main focus area for future conservation.

Dehnhard, N. *et al*. 2016. Is individual consistency in body mass and reproductive decisions linked to individual specialization in foraging behaviour in a long-lived seabird? *Ecology and Evolution*. doi:10.1002/ece3.2213 (published Open Access)

Individual specialisation has been uncovered in a wide range of seabird species, but as yet little is understood as to how this may be affected by environmental factors, especially those subject to increasing changeability. Here Denhard *et al*. examine the repeatability foraging behaviour and trophic niche use in **Southern Rockhopper Penguins** breeding on New Island, Falkland Islands. Blood and feather samples were taken during the breeding season from 2006 to 2013. The effects of global (Southern Annular Mode and Southern Oscillation Index) and local (sea surface temperature) environmental variables on stable isotope values $\delta^{15}N$ and $\delta^{14}C$ were compared at different times during the breeding season, and shown to have no effect on individual repeatability. The degree of individual isotopic niche specialisation across the years was high, despite the Southern Rockhopper Penguin being considered a generalist species. Interestingly, the extent of specialisation within the population varied across the annual cycle, with a greater proportion of behavioural repeatability occurring during the pre-breeding period.

13th International Seabird Group Conference

Early-bird registration and abstract submission have closed, but there is still time to register for our upcoming conference, taking place in Edinburgh over 6-9 September 2016. The conference is being hosted by Francis Daunt (CEH) and Sue Lewis (University of Edinburgh) and colleagues. Over 50 oral presentations and 40 poster presentations have been confirmed, covering a wide range of topics in seabird ecology. The conference starts at 1800 on 6 September with a plenary from Tony Martin (University of Dundee/South Georgia Heritage Trust) and welcome reception, and it closes with Tim Birkhead's (University of Sheffield) plenary on the afternoon of 9 September (ends 1500). Further plenaries during the conference will be delivered by Emmanuelle Cam (Université de Toulouse) and Paulo Catry (MARE/ISPA Instituto Universitário, Lisbon). Additional events include a special session to mark the 30th anniversary of the Seabird Monitoring Programme and a conference banquet on the evening of 8 September). We will also have exhibits from CEFAS, Ecotone, Wildlife Acoustics, Second Nature, Scottish Ornithologists' Club and TechnoSm*Art*. We are very grateful to our sponsors: Anstruther Pleasure Cruises, British Birds, Derek Robertson, Journal of Avian Biology, Leo de Feu, Natural Power, NHBS, Opticron, Osprey of Anstruther, RSPB, and the Scottish Seabird Centre.

Full details of the conference can be found on the website or follow this link to go straight to the registration portal. Registration costs £275 and includes refreshments and lunches over the 3 days of talks, a welcome reception and a poster reception. Additional options that can be booked during registration include a banquet, accommodation, and a post-conference cruise round Bass Rock.

Call for census proposals

The Seabird Group has set aside some legacy funding, specifically to support survey activities that will contribute towards the UK's next national seabird census, "**Seabirds Count**". We are inviting proposals from members to survey sites and species of their suggestion. In particular, we would be keen to fund the census of hard-to-reach locations. While we have previously suggested that, given the limited infrastructure to support the census, it may be better to focus on two key species - Puffins and Kittiwakes – we are willing to review applications for any species or groups of species. We encourage members - young and old – to team up and utilise the opportunity to train younger members who may have limited, or even no, experience of censusing seabirds. If you would like to discuss ideas or how to go about building a census team, prior to submitting a proposal, please contact our census representative, **Stuart Murray** (murraysurvey@yahoo.co.uk). If you are keen to get involved, but have limited experience and/or don't know those with the required experience, get in touch with Stuart or anyone else on the committee and we will try to help team you up with other budding surveyors. Grant applications can be submitted, using the usual grant application form, directly to our secretary, **Ellie Owen** (ellie.owen@rspb.org.uk). Application forms can be downloaded from our website.

Stories from Gough Island

Derren Fox, Senior Research Assistant, Gough Island

Gough Island is a jewel in the crown of the southern oceans, and arguably the most important seabird island in the world. Rising to over 900m and covering just 65km^2, Gough lies 2,700km west of Cape Town, is a dependency of Tristan da Cunha and part of the British Overseas Territory. From sea level, around most of the coast, cliffs rise hundreds of metres making the island inaccessible apart from a few small beaches and the low cliffs in Transvaal Bay where the island's meteorological station and base is situated. Forming part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Gough and Inaccessible Islands, this pristine island is home to an astounding number and variety of species of birds.

East coast of Gough Island (D. Fox)

In recent years the island has hit the headlines with news of the introduced House Mouse (*Mus musculus*) on the island attacking and killing many of the islands bird species, including **Tristan Albatross** chicks many times larger than themselves. Since then it has come to light that mice are impacting most, if not all, of the islands breeding birds, causing rapid declines in many species. The RSPB and Tristan government are hoping that if funds can be raised, an eradication could happen in 2019 and fund raising has commenced for this extremely challenging project. Seeing the effects of the mice on the island first-hand is dismaying to say the least. It certainly makes me wonder what the island used to be like before the mice were accidentally introduced here more than 150 years ago, or what it will hopefully be like once they are eradicated.

I am lucky enough to be part of a three person team on the island working for the Tristan Da Cunha Conservation Department and funded by RSPB, in conjunction with the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, staying on the island for thirteen months. Our work here involves monitoring several globally threatened and regionally important species, including the **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, Atlantic Petrels**, and **Great Shearwaters**, building up long-term data on population trends as well as shorter term projects on breeding biology and other aspects of the bird life here, much of which in recent years in relation to the potential future mouse eradication work. The variety of bird life on the island is staggering, and being a bit of a seabird fanatic, it's an absolute delight to be live and work here for a time.

As well as the surface nesting birds, including the near endemic Tristan Albatross (*Diomedia dabbenena*), a few pairs of which breed annually on Inaccessible Island, Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalassarche chlororhynchus*), and **Sooty Albatross** (*Phoebetria fusca*), to name but a few, the island is riddled with the burrows of species such as Great Shearwaters (*Ardenna gravis*), **Soft-plumaged Petrels** (*Pterodroma mollis*) and **Atlantic Petrels** (*Pterodroma incerta*) up to and above 500m in altitude. Full of life during the day, as dusk falls the sky is filled with tens of thousands of Great Shearwaters coming to feed chicks, swirling around off shore in a vortex as they gain height and wait until the darkness provides a shroud of safety from the ever vigilant **Tristan Skuas** (*Catharacta antarctica hamiltoni*).

Female Tristan albatross
(D. Fox)

As winter now begins to take hold of the island, many of our summer breeders leave, the Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses have fledged and the Sooty Albatrosses will have gone by the time you read this, along with the Great Shearwaters. The Tristan Albatross chicks huddle on their nests awaiting a parent's return and will not fledge until the end of the year, due to their protracted breeding season (almost a year from nest building to chick fledging) but they are now joined on the island by winter breeders such as the Grey Petrels (*Procellaria cinerea*) and the skies are filled with the calls of Atlantic Petrels as they return to re-find mates and burrows.

One of the most exciting aspects to working on Gough is that there is still so much potential discovery. So little of this magical island has been covered in detail that even today new species to the island are being discovered and there are still many aspects of the breeding birds' biology to research. Just two years ago, in 2014, a species new to the island the Blue Petrel (*Halobaena caerulea*) was discovered on the Island by Peter Ryan and Alex Bond. This species, previously unrecorded on the island as a breeder, was found in a small colony on the west coast during an overnight camping trip.

As well as the bird monitoring and research being carried out here, an important aspect of our work here is the control of Procumbent Pearlwort (*Sagina procumbens*), a low growing invasive plant species accidentally introduced to the island. This species has the potential to radically alter the native flora of some special habitats on the island.

Work on Gough is carried out under the auspices of Tristan da Cunha Conservation Department. Funding was provided by the John Ellerman Foundation and the Department of Environment and Rural Affairs. Special thanks go to Trevor Glass and the RSPB for initiating and supporting our work. Advice has been kindly provided by the Percy FitzPatrick Institute for African Ornithology, with logistical support from the South African National Antarctic Programme.

Website: **www.seabirdgroup.org.uk**

Facebook: **www.facebook.com/pages/TheSeabirdGroup/**

Twitter: **www.twitter.com/TheSeabirdGroup (@TheSeabirdGroup)**

Registered charity No. 260907

The Seabird Group promotes and helps co-ordinate the study and conservation of seabirds. Members also receive the journal *Seabird*. The Group organises regular conferences and provides small grants towards research.

CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

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

Chairman	Stephen 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	Richard Sherley (2019)	journal@seabirdgroup.org.uk
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 both members and non-members on issues relating to seabird research and conservation. We aim to provide a forum for readers' views so that those provided in the Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or Seabird Group.

Submissions for the newsletter should be emailed to the newsletter editor: newsletter@seabirdgroup.org.uk. We recommend a maximum of 1500 words and ask that photographs and figures are sent as separate files and with full credits, where appropriate. **Deadlines are: 15th January (February edition); 15th May (June edition); and, 15th September (October edition).**

Every effort is made to check the content of the material that we publish. It is not, however, always possible to check thoroughly 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.