

## **NEWSLETTER 66**

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### **EDITORIAL**

The longest article in this issue is written by Clive Craik. It details what must be one of the worst current impacts on British seabirds: that of predation by relatively recently introduced mink in west Scotland. He is understandably upset that little is being done to control or halt this impact. Much effort has been put into controlling and reducing impact from oil spills, yet here is a problem that is far worse. In Britain, the problem of introduced predators on islands has been tackled recently mostly by well motivated individuals. There has been no major concerted action by either the voluntary or statutory conservation agencies. I have tried in the past to get a programme going, but have failed. With the "re-organisation" of governmental conservation, the possibility to achieve such a programme has become yet more distant. If South Africa can organise the elimination of cats from the 30,000 hectare, and remote, Marion Island, surely the UK could organise some similar work on our own doorstep.

Mark L Tasker

## NOTES FROM A WAR ZONE

One gull pair will hatch (say) forty to sixty and fledge twenty chicks in a lifetime; only two of these need to survive and breed for numbers to be maintained. The adults will probably outlive any control programme. Thus, compared with the killing of adults, killing of chicks or eggs is ineffective in controlling gull numbers.

This valid argument seems to have metamorphosed into a vague consensus that it doesn't "matter" very much if seabird chicks are killed. Even if you kill most of the chicks regularly, so the argument goes, the necessary two chicks per pair are likely to survive. Thus any chick-killing regime likely to be inflicted will probably not affect adult numbers very greatly.

The last idea is now being involuntarily tested (I am tempted to say "to destruction") over a large area of west Scotland. Here, ground-nesting and cavity-nesting seabirds such as gulls, terns, shags and cormorants, black guillemot and eider breed colonially on the many small islets and skerries. They very rarely, if ever, nest on adjacent mainland, one obvious reason being the need to avoid ground predators such as fox and stoat.

All this is now changing as mink spread and become more abundant. Mink find and kill chicks over a wide area much more reliably and persistently than Man could. In a study area which extends along about half of the West Highland Coast (from Mallaig to Machrihanish), most common gull colonies and most tern colonies now lose all their offspring every year because of the activities of mink. Work here in 1992-93 has shown differences in style of predation between otter and mink, two mammals which together appear to be the most significant predators of these seabirds. Typically, an otter may prey steadily throughout the season at a large tern colony, eating incubating adults, then eggs, small chicks and large chicks as each becomes available and, in general, killing only what

it needs to eat. It appears to spend only limited periods in the colony each night or every few nights; thus it does not cause all the adults to desert and, at large colonies, some or many chicks may fledge. By contrast, I have repeatedly gained the impression that a mink, arriving at a tern or gull colony during incubation, will hide as many eggs as it can (usually all the eggs if there are less than about 100 clutches). Row upon row of empty nests of gull, tern or shag is sometimes the only overt sign of such predation. Later in the season, a newly arrived mink will kill and cache intact as many chicks as it can (usually all if there are less than about 100 large chicks). In such circumstances, a mink will take up permanent or near-permanent residence in the colony, often causing all the adults to desert within a few days of its arrival.

So just what **does** happen if, as a result of the activity of mink, all the offspring of a seabird species die every year at most colonies?

Seemingly, the first effect is that, after one or a few years of mink-related failure, the adults move. The common gull is one of the species most severely affected by mink. The reaction of common gulls is to move to the nearest possible island, or sometimes the nearest mainland where of course they usually do badly. Herring gulls and terns move further, usually to existing colonies. Shags and cormorants have eggs and chicks that are ideal-sized prey for mink, and at least one former large shag and cormorant colony here, Eilean nan Coinean, has been almost extinguished by mink. From ringing and other evidence, it is known that the adult shags have dispersed to islands near and far, some setting up new colonies in mink-free areas.

As mink spread, the tendency is for larger tern and gull colonies to form as birds move to breed in dwindling mink-free areas. Mink eventually reach these, particularly in July when young mink become independent and disperse. This is usually when one observes the mass slaughter for which mink are renowned.

At large colonies affected by mink (unlike small colonies), **some** chicks usually fledge but it may be very few. There is no doubt that the breeding success of whole populations of these seabirds is severely reduced in the presence of mink. As mink have spread in my study area since 1987, there has been a steady decline of population numbers (nest counts), at least of common terns and arctic terns and possibly also of common gull and black guillemot. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these are cause and effect. Either adults dying normally are not being replaced, or adults are leaving the area, or both.

In Argyll and SW Highland Region now, three zones are broadly discernible. One is mink-free and, at most colonies, chicks fledge normally (common gulls and terns 0.3 - 1.0 chicks / pr; shags and cormorants 1 - 2 chicks/pr). In the second zone, the most extensive, mink are present at colonies and complete breeding failure is the norm except at the very largest colonies, where success is very reduced. The third zone contains sites where these seabirds bred until some years ago, but where severe mink predation of offspring then occurred for one or more years; these are now completely deserted. The number of these ghost colonies sadly increases year by year; the species concerned are common and herring gulls, common and arctic terns, shag and cormorant, and black guillemot. Other species known to have very low breeding success in the presence of mink but for which local extinction as breeders has not yet been noted are eider, red-breasted merganser, mute swan and lesser black-backed gull. Of this group of ground-nesting seabirds, only the great black-backed gull seems able to breed successfully in the presence of mink, although I have found its eggs cached by mink and total breeding failure in the presence of mink at one colony. How will this all end? To the best of my knowledge, mink have not yet spread to Skye or the far NW and N mainland (please let me have any records). Coll, Tiree and Colonsay are free but unlikely to remain so in view of ferries, yachts and

the mink's fondness for hiding in dark places. An official view seems to be that a new equilibrium will eventually be reached accommodating both predator and prey, that mink have never been shown to affect our native fauna adversely, that by filling an empty waterside niche mink are an attractive addition to our fauna, that prey determine predator abundance rather than vice versa, etc. My experiences over the last few years suggest that some of these ideas are mistaken. Several species of ground-nesting seabirds simply cannot breed adequately in the presence of mink.

I have previously described the heavy surplus killings by mink of tern chicks (Seabird Group Newsletter Sept. 1991 and Scottish Bird News Sept. 1990) so won't describe more here other than to say that similar incidents occur with common and herring gull chicks. However the following discovery this summer was illuminating.

Eilean Fada, L. Caolisport, Argyll.

This is a small island which used to hold a large (80-100 prs) tern colony in the early eighties, plus smaller numbers of common and black-headed gulls and a single black guillemot nest site where I used regularly to ring the chick(s).

30 May 1993: Nine CG nests (four of which are empty) and 12 BhG nests only one of which is empty. In the black guillemot nest cavity the two eggs are cold and pushed to the cavity edge, out of the nest. In long grass at the top of the island there is a network of deep (1-2 ft) runs almost certainly made by otters over decades. At two places these enter/exit the sea via almost vertical scrapes. At both these entry sites, hidden under long grass, are piles of fresh mink scats. At the end of one run, a hole, contents inaccessible, with mink scats at its mouth. At various places in the runs are: three adult black guillemots (skin and feathers and bone, meat freshly eaten), a female mallard mostly eaten, a female eider mostly eaten. Predated nests of both ducks are on the island. Elsewhere a wing of common sandpiper.

19 June 1993: Not a single live chick found on island. Three CG and seven BhG clutches, mostly replacements since I marked all eggs on last visit. Four common tern clutches and two predated clutches, the shells with a fine 1.5 mm hole as of a mink canine. Black guillemot cavity empty. The runs contain: much fresh mink scat; two freshly killed CG chicks, a further four adult black guillemot corpses, and a killed female merganser. A black guillemot is in the water waiting to come ashore.

10 July 1993: Island deserted by breeding birds. In the runs there are: a further black guillemot head, the remains of four more CG chicks, and a wing of meadow pipit. No eggs or live chicks on island, no black guillemots on sea.

Two interesting points about this example are (1) the black guillemots were apparently queuing up to occupy the single desirable residence and the mink was picking them off as they came, a total of eight adults, and (2) all the evidence was well hidden in deep runs which were themselves clothed in long grass. Thus all this was invisible to the casual observer. One has only to multiply this example by all the islands and black guillemots along the west coast of Scotland to understand why the species has recently disappeared from many traditional breeding sites and will continue to do so.

Over large areas, mink are causing attractive seabirds such as terns, common gulls and black guillemots to become extinct as breeding species. By any standards this amounts to a considerable environmental tragedy. Comparisons are odious but instructive. Oil-spills kill large numbers of adults, but as long as the affected species are able to breed, numbers can be maintained in the long term. The crucially damaging feature of mink predation, of gulls and terns at least, is that breeding is largely disrupted year after year so that steady natural mortality of adults from other causes can lead to decline in numbers. These two kinds of mortality seem to be an interesting reversal of the popular idea (see above)

that killing of chicks doesn't "matter" but that killing of adults has more serious consequences.

POSTSCRIPT: Why not trap the mink? I am doing this at the largest tern and common gull colonies and can point to improved fledging success at both as a result. But - think of the last twenty or thirty seabird colonies you have been to. Now think of visiting them all every day to check the traps, as the law demands. It is not practical without abundant man and boat power.

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## **MARION ISLAND CAT-FREE**

Marion Island is now believed to be free of cats. This is very encouraging for those attempting to restore islands to a mammalian predator free state. More than 3000 feral cats have been eradicated from the 30,000 hectare island. Five domestic cats were taken to Marion Island in 1949. Their offspring ran wild and by 1975, the population was estimated at about 2200, but increasing at about 23% per year. An estimated 450,000 burrowing petrels were killed by cats in that year. In 1977, when the cats had reached 3400, feline panleucopenia was introduced, and by 1982 the population had dropped to about 620. However, these survivors had become immune to the virus, and numbers started to rise again. Hunters were bought in, and between 1986 and 1989, nearly 900 cats were shot, and poisoned bait probably removed more. Not a single cat has been seen since 1991.

Mark L Tasker

## NATIONAL BEACHED BIRD SURVEY, FEBRUARY 1993

There was a very good turn out of over 650 volunteers for the annual Beached Bird Survey at the end of February. This was co-ordinated by the regional staff of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and in Shetland by Martin Heubeck for the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group. Over 2770 km of beaches were surveyed, including the coast of Northern Ireland, providing even greater coverage than last year's 2100 km (Sears in press). Excluding records of 'wings only', a total of 2823 dead birds was found, more than three times as many as were found last year (791). Of these 2823 birds, 2686 were recorded as seabirds, wildfowl, divers and grebes, and the remaining 137 recorded as waders, land birds and unidentified. Overall the average number of dead birds found was just over one per kilometre, many more than found last year

(0.4 birds/km). The greatest difference was in the number of auks found (Table 1) where the average density was several times higher than last year.

The rate of oiling was much lower than last year; overall 264 of the 2686 seabirds, wildfowl, divers and grebes were recorded as having oil on their plumage (9.8%), compared with 17.5% in 1992.

The highest densities of birds were found in Orkney and north-west Britain (Table 2), whereas the highest proportions of oiled birds were again recorded in Shetland and on the south coast of England (see SGN 65). The percentage of beach length with oil present was also much higher on the south coast at 15% compared with an overall average of 5.5% in 1993. The rate of oiling along the south coast during the three recent annual surveys, 1991-93, has been consistently high, indicating the continuing problems of chronic oil pollution in the Channel.

Table 1 Average densities and proportion oiled for seabirds found in the national Beached Bird Survey, comparing February 1993 with February 1992

	February 1993			February 1992		
	Number	Density birds/km	% oiled	Number	Density birds/km	% oiled
Auks	1379	0.50	13.7	158	0.07	46.2
Gulls	821	0.30	3.3	283	0.13	6.0
Cormorant & shag	170	0.06	6.5	62	0.03	4.8
Fulmar	103	0.04	9.7	30	0.01	33.3
Gannet	52	0.02	26.9	24	0.01	41.7
Total distance		2771.8 km			2106.5 km	

Wings not included. Oiled includes lightly and heavily oiled birds. Auks include guillemot, razorbill, puffin, black guillemot, little auk and "auks". Gulls include all *Larus* gulls and kittiwake.

We would like to thank all the volunteers who took part in this survey and the regional co-ordinators. The results have been added to an international database in Denmark and will contribute to international efforts to monitor oil pollution and promote adequate methods to control chronic discharges. Next year's national beached bird survey is planned for the weekend of 26/27 February and anyone interested in taking part should contact their local RSPB regional office.

## Reference

Sears, J. (in press) National beached bird survey, February 1992. In: S.P. Carter (ed.) Britain's birds in 1991-92; the conservation and monitoring review. British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford.

Jane Sears and Sarah Curren  
RSPB

Table 2. Numbers, density and proportion oiled of all seabirds found dead in the national Beached Bird Survey, February 1993

Region	Distance covered (kms)	Number	Density birds/km	% oiled	Number oiled
Shetland	48.2	36	0.75	36.0	13
Orkney	45.7	143	3.13	2.8	4
North-east	380.7	289	0.76	16.6	48
South-east	279.7	263	0.94	11.4	30
South	419.6	453	1.08	24.3	110
South-west	586.6	287	0.49	9.8	28
North-west	538.5	984	1.80	2.0	20
Northern Ireland	472.8	102	0.20	2.0	2

Wings not included. Oiled includes lightly and heavily oiled birds. Seabirds include auks, gulls, petrels, cormorants, shearwaters, gannets, terns and skuas.

## OFFSHORE STUDIES BY THE INSTITUTE FOR BIRD STUDY ON HELGOLAND

Although seabirds breed on Helgoland and on some Wadden Sea islands of the German North Sea coast, almost nothing is known about their pelagic ecology. Stimulated by colleagues from the Netherlands, regular counts of seabirds from ships started in 1990. In following years, more detailed and comprehensive programmes have been initiated by the Vogelwarte Helgoland. At the moment the following topics are covered in the off-shore area:

1. Distribution of seabirds in the south-eastern North Sea. Strip-transect counts using methods very similar to those of Tasker *et al.* (1984) are carried out. Apart from general distribution patterns, the main emphasis is put on small-and meso-scale variability of seabird distributions and communities. Three years of regular sampling has taken place on the main route from Helgoland to Cuxhaven on *RV Uthörn* and on ferries. Counts have also been made to some other locations on the mainland. In addition, a few cruises throughout the North Sea (mainly using *FRV Walther Herwig* and *RV Heincke*) were manned with observers from the Vogelwarte. Most of the data from all these surveys are computerised, and the first analyses of seabird distribution are planned for the last quarter of this year. All data of the strip-transect counts flow into the joint

European Seabirds at Sea (ESAS) database in Aberdeen (currently run by JNCC).

2. Special cruises will start in July 1993 with simultaneous recording of basic hydrographical parameters (temperature, salinity) and birds. The results are aimed at gaining understanding of the general distribution patterns of those species which are associated with water masses, especially at the very complex river plume fronts and tidal mixing fronts in the German Bight.

3. Methodological studies which focus on the reliability and accuracy of strip-transect counts have already been started. For example, the influence of factors such as velocity of the vessel, observer height during the counts, locating birds by eye or by binoculars and type of vessel are critical in our understanding of estimating the density of seabirds at sea.

4. Utilisation of discards and offal from fisheries by seabirds.

Two essential parts are involved in this project. First, a quantification of the amount of both discards and offal and their availability for birds is necessary. An estimate of the discards from the sole *Solea vulgaris*-fishery has already been done (Garthe 1992). A similar study is planned for the cod-fishery in the German Bight. Second, the qualitative and quantitative consumption of discards and offal by different seabird species and age groups are essential for understanding which species benefit to what extent from fishery waste. Experimental discarding from research vessels has been conducted near Helgoland in summer and winter 1991 and 1992 (Garthe 1992) and in summer 1992 on a large scale in the North Sea (Garthe & Hüppop in prep.). Also, the Vogelwarte took part at the EC-project "Seabirds feeding on discards in winter in the North Sea" with colleagues from the Netherlands, Scotland and Denmark (Camphuysen *et al.* 1993). Future work will aim more at the quantitative aspects of the food consumption under realistic conditions, i.e. on board commercial vessels. Also, a

more synoptic overview about fisheries-seabird interactions in the German Bight is needed, including the distribution of fishing vessels and activity rhythms of seabird species during the 24 hours-cycle.

5. Results from the work in the breeding colony of common guillemots *Uria aalge*, kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* and fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* on Helgoland, which are not reviewed here, ask for details about the feeding range and the feeding behaviour in vicinity of the island. Therefore, in 1990 and 1991 Mardik Leopold and other colleagues from the Netherlands Institute for Sea Research studied the at-sea-distribution of these species around Helgoland (Leopold *et al.* 1992, Leopold *et al.* in prep.). Many questions remain. Because almost nothing is known about changes in distribution and feeding ranges within and between breeding seasons, we have started a study on this topic.

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**FIRST DATA ON BREEDING STORM  
PETRELS *HYDROBATES  
PELAGICUS* IN GALICIA (NW  
IBERIA)**

Following a study in 1991 (Costas *et al.* 1992), storm petrels were searched for on four islands and two headlands off Galicia. Mist netting, with tape lures, was carried out on Cape Prior and Cape Vilán (two visits). One 12m mist net was erected on prominent sites facing the sea, and the tape recorder placed behind the net, facing the sea. Daytime searching, using a tape lure and smelling suitable crevices in rocks and caves was carried out on two rocky islets near Cape Prior, on the

Sisargas islands, on Cape Vilán (two visits) and at a rocky islet near Cape Silleiro. We intended to visit another four suitable islets, but were thwarted by poor weather. We noted the presence or absence of rats, rabbits and nesting yellow-legged herring gulls at each site.

Results are presented in Table 1. Eleven birds were mist netted at Cape Vilán, all of them had well developed brood patches and four vomited a strong-smelling reddish oil when handled. No birds were retrapped. An occupied nest was found on a rocky islet near Cape Prior. It was in a south-facing crevice and held an adult and a blind nestling (indicating it was less than five days old). We found seven broken eggs near yellow-legged herring gull nests on the same islet, and many crevices smelt of storm petrels. Rats and gulls (nesting and roosting) were present at all sites, and rabbits were absent only from the smallest rocky islets.

We can thus only confirm nesting storm petrel on the rocky islet near Cape Prior, and we suspect that they may breed on inaccessible islets near Cape Vilán. We thank the Seabird Group for supporting this search for storm petrels.

Reference

Costas, R., M.G. Pousa and V.X. Cabaleiro. 1992 Sobre la reproducción de *Hydrobates pelagicus* en Galicia. *GIAM*, 15: 3-4.

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Table 1. Results of searches for storm petrel in Galicia in summer 1992.

Site	Date	Netting	Hours	Birds	Nest searching time	Result of nest search	Rats?	Rabbits?	Gulls?
Cape Prior	31/7-1/8	Y	2.5	0	0		Y	Y	N
Islets near Cape Prior	1/8				5 h	1 nest	Y	N	Y
Sisargas Islands	8/8				10 h	nil	Y	Y	Y
Cape Vilán	11-12/7	Y	5.5	10			Y	Y	N
Cape Vilán	18/7				2 h	nil	Y	Y	N
Cape Vilán	8-9/8	Y	4.5	1			Y	Y	N
Cape Vilán	9/8				1h	nil	Y	Y	N
Islets near Cape Silleiro	6/8				1h	nil	Y	N	N

## RECENTLY ACCEPTED RECORDS OF RARE SEABIRDS IN IBERIA

The following records are the more interesting ones accepted by the Iberian Rarities Committee, with comments on some of the others. Unless otherwise noted, all records are from 1990. All were published by De Juana, E. y el Comité Ibérico de Rarezas 1992 observaciones homologadas de aves raras en España y Portugal. Informe de 1990. *Ardeola* 39: 73-83.

There are the usual annual records of red-necked grebe from northern Spain where they are regular in Gijón Bay (Asturias). There is an interesting southerly record of a Slavonian grebe from Doñana (Huelva) in January 1990. There are the usual scattered records of long-tailed ducks from the Biscay coast, but one from Cádiz is noteworthy for the site, an inland one, as much as for the date, late July to mid August. There are records of long-tailed skuas from the Atlantic in August (Azores, also 290 km from the Portuguese coast and one only 5 km from the coast at Cabo Raso), as well as yet another from Valencia, this time a sick juvenile (which later died) in September.

The Nearctic gulls are represented by three species. There are two records of

laughing gull from Galicia (NW Spain), a juvenile in October in La Coruña province and an adult in May in Pontevedra. There are two records of Bonaparte's gull, a first winter bird was present in a park in Gijón (Asturias) between mid January and mid March (alongside a multitude of ring-billed gulls) and an adult was seen near Lisbon between late February and early April. Winter 1989-1990 was the year of the invasion of ring-billed gulls. At least 21 were present in Gijón between December 1989 and early May 1990. Other ring-billeds were seen in winter-spring in Galicia (5 birds), the Portuguese coast (7, as well as one in the following autumn). Only one penetrated the Mediterranean and was seen in Gerona (NE Spain).

A full chronological listing of all records of Nearctic gulls in Iberia (including the Canary Islands) is currently in preparation for the book *Aves Marinas de Iberia, Baleares y Canarias* and will be published separately in a future GIAM bulletin.

Andy Paterson

## **AUDOUIN'S GULL**

The amazing story of the expanding Ebro colony continues. After the increase to 7400 pairs in 1992, there has been yet another jump. In 1993 nearly 9000 pairs were present and in late June the number of chicks present was estimated at around 24000. However, these figures are provisional and at the time of writing I have no firm figures. Passage along the Alborán coast shows a very high percentage of juveniles and numbers at Gibraltar are reported higher than ever.

On the negative side, there is still a fishing moratorium in place of Castellón province, and this resulted in no breeding at all on the Columbretes Islands but does not appear to have affected those from the Ebro so drastically as in previous years.

There is no doubt that the species is no longer immediately endangered, although the Ebro colony represents a very high percentage of the world breeding total.

Andy Paterson

## **MEDMARAVIS, PROCEEDINGS OF THE 2nd MEDITERRANEAN SEABIRD SYMPOSIUM (CALVIÀ, 1989)**

At long last the proceedings of this important symposium on Mediterranean and Black Sea seabirds have been published in a soft back edition of 386 pages. The proceedings are split into four sections: status and distribution of breeding populations (14 papers), post-nuptial distribution (6 papers), recent ecological research (7 papers) and habitat conservation and Mediterranean action plan (CAPMICE) (5 papers), as well as 9 poster summaries. The majority of papers are in English and those in Spanish have ample English summaries. This is a very important publication for any who are interested in Mediterranean/Black Sea seabirds.

The price is 2,500 pesetas plus 300 pesetas postage and packing. The print

run is very limited and those interested in obtaining a copy should write or fax immediately to the SEA, Facultad de Biología planta 9, 28040 MADRID, Spain. (Fax: + 34 1 549 5740).

## **ATLAS OF SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE ALBATROSSES**

The authors of an increasing number of seabird books illustrate species distributions by shading huge expanses of ocean while saying little, if anything, about the data and assumptions upon which their maps are based. This atlas has been assembled by Seabird Group member Lance Tickell. It builds on the American Geographical Society's Antarctic Map Folio Series number 14 published in 1971, which brought together all at-sea records of southern albatrosses to the end of the 1960s. It is based on 5° x 5° rectangles, which is a comparatively coarse scale, but in keeping with the distances that albatrosses can cover in a day. A shaded rectangle on the maps represents one or more sightings. Maps are by species, and sub-species and ages have been pooled. Breeding sites have also been mapped.

The atlas has been issued loose leaf, in order to encourage photocopying, and the maps are backed up with an extensive list of references (although those that the Antarctic Map Folio Series were based on are not repeated). These maps provide a good step forward from the usual swath of colour for species distributions in the southern oceans. Anyone contemplating a trip to those waters, particularly away from the less well plied routes would be wise to take a copy of this atlas.

Mark L Tasker

## **BERINGIAN SEABIRD BULLETIN**

The first issue of a new seabird bulletin has been published jointly by the Russian

Institute of Biological Problems of the North and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. This bulletin was prepared jointly by workers from both sides of the Bering Sea. A Russian and an English edition have been prepared. The first issue has 20 papers and one book review. Eight of the papers have a Russian lead author. Most papers summarise current seabird investigations occurring in Beringia and nearby north Pacific regions. Scott Hatch and co-workers describe studies on an Alaskan kittiwake colony suffering from persistent breeding failures. Several papers describe the difficulties of censusing burrow and crevice nesting species in large talus slopes. Patrick Gould and Kent Wohl describe the results of studies on by-catches in large-scale drift nets in the North Pacific. This drift-netting has now apparently stopped, but the kill in the 1990 season included over 17,000 Laysan albatrosses, over a quarter of a million sooty shearwaters, and an overall total in excess of 400,000 seabirds. Kent Wohl also describes the ways in which Russian and US seabird workers are co-operating to conserve Beringia's seabirds; this includes the establishment of a joint seabird colony register.

Copies are available from Kent Wohl, United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, 1011 E. Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199, USA.

### **PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP BULLETIN, VOL. 20 No 1.**

This issue was the first of the Pacific Seabird Group's third decade. It shows the PSG is in good shape. The first paper, by Scott Hatch, reviews the history of Alaska's seabirds and the pressures they have faced, and then discusses the present trends in populations. The second article describes the databases that PSG is considering establishing, or at least fostering. These are a) Seabird colony catalogue, b) Pelagic seabird database, c) Seabird monitoring database and d) Seabird bibliographic database. These

would be established on a Pacific scale or North American scale. Food for thought for Europeans. Craig Harrison, PSG's new vice-chair for conservation describes conservation issues in the PSG area - removal of alien predators from islands is regarded as the most important issue in Alaska.

John Piatt and Thomas van Pelt describe what must have been a massive die-off of common guillemots in Alaska early this year; they estimate, on admittedly limited information that between 10 and 100 thousand birds died. A large proportion were sub-adults, and appear to have become trapped inshore when large schools of juvenile herring came inshore and then disappeared. A review of the 1993 annual meeting, and abstracts fill much of the remainder of the issue. The next meeting will be in Sacramento from 26-28 January 1994. Theme symposia at this meeting will include one on behaviour, ecology, and population status of the rare alcids. This is to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the extinction of the great auk. Another symposium will focus on the marine ecology of seaducks, while Tony Gaston is organising one on the comparative marine ecology of Pacific and Atlantic seabirds. In order to balance the emphasis on the *Uria* guillemots, another symposium will examine the behaviour and ecology of *Cephus* guillemots.

Mark L Tasker

### **SEEVÖGEL VOL. 13 no 4, VOL. 14 no 1.**

Papers in these issues include a description of the extraordinary amounts of litter arriving on beaches in the south-eastern North Sea: a total of 345 kg of rubbish on two 100 m sections of beach over 12 weeks. This rubbish turns up in kittiwake nests; 39% of nests in the colony at Jammerbugt in north Denmark held visible rubbish; and 5% of a sampled nest was artificial material. Seabirds are still breeding in large numbers however; the latter issue contains the 1991 breeding

numbers summary for the German North Sea coast. Common and herring gulls form the majority of the population.

## **REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

The RSPB has produced two questionnaires for seabird workers. One focuses on the breeding biology and movements of storm and Leach's petrels, and the other deals with the impact of mammalian predators on seabirds. They aim to gather together current knowledge so that future research can be targeted more effectively. Both are easy to complete. If you are interested please write to

Dr Emma Brindley  
RSPB  
The Lodge  
Sandy  
Bedfordshire  
SG19 2DL (Tel. 0767 680551)

## **GANNET CENSUS 1994-95**

The last complete census of British, Irish and Channel Island gannetries was made in 1984-85. Ten years on we think it is time for another survey. If you are planning to visit a gannetry in June or July 1994 and would be prepared to make a count, please get in touch with me as soon as possible.

Sarah Wanless  
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology  
Hill of Brathens  
Banchory  
Kincardineshire  
AB31 4BY

## **COLOUR RINGING OF STORM PETRELS ON NW IBERIA**

Due to the high corrosion suffered at sea by the aluminium rings of the Spanish ringing scheme and to make it possible to identify future recaptures of the birds, storm petrels captured in summer 1993 on Cape Silleiro and Cíes Islands (NW Iberia)

were ringed with a white or black plastic ring. I would be pleased to hear of any captures of these birds.

Rafael Costas  
Avda. da Florida, 95, 7ºB  
36210 Vigo (Pontevedra)  
Spain

## **BARDSEY ISLAND WARDEN**

A post to carry out the above job on a one year contract starting 1 January 1994 has become available. It is a new post combining wardening of the Bird and Field Observatory with wardening of Ynys Enlli National Nature Reserve off the Llyn peninsula, Gwynedd. Qualifications required include ornithological, biological and ecological knowledge with practical land management and communication skills. You will need to be a BTO ringer and be computer literate. Ideally you should be Welsh speaking or willing to learn. The salary is £7,450, with fairly basic accommodation provided on the island with free lighting and heating. Full details and job description can be obtained from B. Craddock, 44 Haling Road, Penkridge, Stafford ST19 5DA, England. Tel: 0785 712733. Fax: 0785 42176. The closing date for applications is 5 November 1993.

## **THE TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SEABIRD GROUP**

The twenty-eighth Annual General Meeting of the Seabird Group will be held at 1745 hours on Saturday 8 January 1994 during the British Trust for Ornithology's Ringing and Migration Conference at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

### **PROVISIONAL AGENDA**

1. Minutes of 27th Annual General Meeting held at Swanwick on 9 January 1993.
2. Matters arising.
3. Motion to adopt 28th Annual Report (1992-1993).
4. Hon. Treasurers report and motion to adopt accounts for 1993
5. Election of Auditors
6. Election of new officers

The following is due to retire from the Executive Committee at this AGM

Bob Furness (Treasurer)

There is also an existing vacancy on the committee. Nominations are being sought by the Chairman for these two posts, any proposals should be notified to him (Dr K Taylor, Easter Brae, Springfield, Culbokie, Ross-shire IV7 8JU Scotland).

7. Any other business

Martin Heubeck  
Honorary Secretary