

NEWSLETTER 79

MARCH 1997



SEABIRD 2000 STARTS

We are delighted to announce that the next count of all of Britain and Ireland's breeding seabirds has received support from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of the three statutory nature conservation agencies) and from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The Seabird Group will be a full partner, contributing through its members and by supporting their work. Partnership details in Ireland have yet to be completed.

The Seabird Group undertook the first survey of the whole of UK and Ireland's seabird population in 1969/70 (Operation Seafarer) and were key partners again in 1985/87 in association with the establishment of the Seabird Colony Register. There were several large changes in populations between these previous two surveys (for example a 50% decrease in herring gull and a 70% increase in kittiwake populations), and monitoring since 1985/87 of sample colonies has indicated further changes are occurring. However the status of many seabird populations are becoming less certain and by the turn of the century, the majority of seabird populations and most remote colonies

will not have been censused for fifteen years. The Seabird 2000 counts aim to remedy this situation. The counts will not replace the Monitoring Programme, but will add to it and set a new baseline.

Large scale surveys over a short period are essential for a number of reasons.

- To quantify the size of overall populations in order to put individual colonies in context.
- To identify which colonies are of national or international importance in order that they may be given legal protection.
- The changing status of seabird populations can give an indication of the regional variation in the various pressures faced in the marine environment.
- There is a legal requirement to ensure that populations of certain species are maintained at a favourable conservation status.
- To place the Seabird Monitoring Programme in a proper context.

Recruitment of a co-ordinator is under way at present: the co-ordinator will be

based in JNCC's Aberdeen office alongside the Seabird Monitoring Programme to enable full co-operative working between the two projects. Counts will be carried as far as possible to standards as described in the Seabird Monitoring Handbook. It is likely that a slimmed down version of the handbook (e.g. removing sections on assessing breeding success) will be issued to surveyors in due course. The core of the counting will be undertaken in 1999 - 2000, with 2001 being used to target any particular remaining gaps in coverage. A book based on the results of the project will be completed in 2002. Counts undertaken during 1998 and the last few years will be used in several circumstances: for instance it may be better to use the recent gannet census figures rather than use many resources in repeating the costlier parts of that survey.

The help and participation of Seabird Group members is vital to the success of the project, and it is important that we rise to this challenge. If you are visiting a colony this summer, we will certainly be able to use any counts undertaken. The survey will also be needing regional co-ordinators to help ensure full coverage of the coast. Further details will be provided in the next Seabird Group Newsletter, but if you can volunteer to help, please contact myself or Kate Thompson at JNCC, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen, AB10 1UZ.

Mark Tasker

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UPDATE ON THE PROPOSED SEABIRD/SULA MERGER

In the September newsletter there was a short article on the proposed merger between Seabird and Sula (the journal of the Dutch Seabird Group). Your views on this were sought and I would like to thank all the members who responded to this appeal. The topic was also discussed at the AGM in January where the comments from the floor echoed those already received. Thus the main concern was the potential loss in input from non-professional authors. Reassurance was provided that there is no intention, either on the part of the Seabird Group Executive Committee or the Dutch Seabird Group, that such a loss should occur, indeed the editorial policy will be to ensure that non-

professional authors receive as much assistance and support as they need.

The second issue to generate lively discussion was what the new journal should be called. The final choice will be a joint decision between the two groups. However, Seabird Group members felt that it was preferable to have 'Seabird' somewhere in the title rather than a genus name and there was no enthusiasm for calling it the 'Journal of'.

At the end of the discussion the Meeting voted unanimously to go ahead with the merger and gave the Executive Committee a mandate to negotiate a suitable name for the journal.

Another topic on the AGM agenda which had a bearing on the new journal was the election of Jim Reid as Editor. Given the extra workload associated with the forthcoming changes I will be responsible for the last issue of Seabird leaving Jim to devote his time to the challenges of the new journal. There will be an Executive Committee meeting in early March at which Kees Camphuysen, the current editor of Sula, will be present. Hopefully most of the production and distribution details can be sorted out at this meeting and we can establish a realistic date for the first issue. Having got some of the administrative problems sorted out the biggest priority now is to get some papers in for the new journal. These should be sent to : Dr Jim Reid, c/o JNCC, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen AB10 1UZ.

Sarah Wanless

**SURVIVAL RATES OF
REHABILITATED GUILLEMOTS
BTO Research Report No. 186 (July
1997)**

**Chris Wernham, Will Peach &
Stephen Browne**

Published by the BTO and the
Countryside Council for Wales

The analysis of ring recoveries of North American seabirds published by Brian Sharp in *Ibis* in 1996 showed that post-release survival was very low, leading to concerns about the value of seabird rehabilitation programmes. After the *Sea Empress* oil spill in February 1996, the Countryside Council for Wales, on behalf of the Sea Empress Environmental Evaluation Committee, commissioned the BTO to investigate the post-release survival of guillemots rehabilitated after oiling (RH), using recoveries from the British and Irish Ringing Scheme. We compared the survival rates of these guillemots with natural survival from general ringing (non-RH), assessed whether improved rehabilitation techniques have increased post-release survival in recent years and critically evaluated the available information on rehabilitated seabirds and how this can be improved in the future. We focused on guillemots ringed since 1985 because these were all ringed with 'guillemot specials' and documentation of RH guillemots in the ring recoveries database is poor before 1985.

Since 1985, more than 70% of RH guillemot recoveries have occurred within 14 days of release and the median survival time has been only 7 days (n=77). This compares with median survival times of 599 days for non-RH guillemots ringed when fully-grown (n=113) and 227 days for non-RH guillemots ringed as pulli (n=1784). It has been suggested that the reporting rate (that is, the proportion found and reported by the public) of RH guillemots soon after

release may be higher than general guillemot reporting rates because carers and other interested parties are out in force checking beaches for injured birds soon after most RH birds are released. If this were true, then the large number of recoveries of RH birds in the period shortly after release would cause us to underestimate the true survival of these birds. We checked this possibility in two ways. First, we estimated 30-day post-release survival rates for RH guillemots using a state-of-the-art and internationally-accepted modelling technique, which also results in formal estimation of the reporting rate. Second, we calculated expected numbers of recoveries more than one year after release (when the reporting rate would not be inflated relative to the general rate for guillemots) based on natural survival and reporting rates, for comparison with the observed numbers.

Both of these analyses confirmed the poor post-release survival of British and Irish RH guillemots. Since 1985, their survival rates have averaged 17% per 30 days in the first 60 days after release and 86% per 30 days thereafter, equating to an annual survival of 0.6%. Hence for every 100 RH guillemots released, 17 will survive their first month, 3 will survive their second month and only 1 will be alive one year after release. This is only 0.7-1.3% of the natural annual survival rates of 46-88% (depending on age) for non-RH guillemots from ring recoveries. Of considerable interest is the result that the reporting rate for RH guillemots (2.4%) was well within the range of general reporting rates for guillemots from general ringing (1.3-3.4%, depending on age). The observed number of recoveries of RH guillemots more than a year after release (1 of 2699 ringed since 1985)

was only 5-7% of the expected number, confirming the high mortality of RH Guillemots in the first year after release, leaving few alive to be recovered subsequently. A simple comparison of medians times between ringing and recovery gave no suggestion that the survival of RH guillemots has increased since 1985.

Very small numbers of RH guillemots do survive and return to breeding colonies (eg Harris & Wanless, 1997, *Sula*, 11, 183-185) but, unfortunately, in Britain and Ireland we have not collected information during the rehabilitation process to allow us to investigate the factors which may potentially influence post-release survival. One long-surviving RH guillemot, ringed and released by Tyne and Tweed Ringing Group in 1970 and recovered more than eight years later, was known to have been held in captivity for five months while it moulted, which may have improved its survival chances. Our results showing poor post-release survival relate only to guillemots, and rehabilitation appears to be much more successful for some other seabird species (eg African penguins and Cape gannets).

After our critical evaluation of the available data, we make the following recommendations to improve information and perhaps future rehabilitation success:-

- 1) All RH birds should continue to be ringed with BTO metal rings before release.

- 2) As much information as is practically possible should be collected during the rehabilitation process about the factors which may influence the success of the rehabilitation effort (eg capture site, condition of the bird at capture, type and degree of oiling, time elapsed between capture and treatment, cleaning and treatment

regimes, experience of the carer, length of time held, condition at release, stage of moult, environmental conditions at the time of release, release site and so on).

3) A national ringing/recovery database should be established for all RH birds, indexed by ring number and containing the treatment and condition variables suggested above.

4) RH birds could be colour-ringed, so as to allow monitoring of whether they re-enter the breeding population and breed successfully. Such a scheme would need to be well publicised in order to encourage searches of breeding colonies. A specific colour ring for RH birds would minimise loss of colour combinations on RH birds.

Our study would not have been possible without the Ringing Scheme, funded as a partnership between the BTO, the ringers and the JNCC, and the general system of reporting recoveries by members of the public. Without the scheme, we would have no information on the post-release survival of rehabilitated seabirds, or on natural survival rates for comparison. In conclusion, at present there appears to be little conservation benefit from rehabilitating guillemots but there may be benefits for other species. Clearly, the rehabilitation of oiled seabirds should not be regarded as an alternative to strict controls to minimise the risks of oil spills in the future.

Copies of the report are available from Alison McLeod at the BTO (Phone 01842 750050, Fax 01842 750030, E-mail alison.mcleod@bto.org) at a cost of £5.

I am intending to convene a round table discussion, on the subject of improving our knowledge of the factors influencing the success of seabird

rehabilitation efforts, at the IOC, Durban, August 1998, in collaboration with Tony Williams of Cape Nature Conservation. This has not been confirmed yet but please contact me if you are interested in receiving further details.

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FROM SULA Vol. 11 no. 3.

In a similar way to the above report, an analysis has been undertaken by Kees Camphuysen, Piet Duiven, Mike Harris and Mardik Leopold of survival of guillemots ringed following rehabilitation in the Netherlands. The main text of the paper is in Dutch, but with an extensive English summary. The majority of recoveries of Dutch ringed birds were reported within a month of release, 90% within a year, but some survived longer and even bred successfully. It is estimated that some 22% of the rehabilitated and released guillemots survived while the remainder (78%) died during the first year after being set free. The next paper in this rehabilitation issue is from Ken Partridge, reiterating much of his article in Seabird Group Newsletter No 76 where he commented on the American studies of guillemot survival following rehabilitation. Mike Harris and Sarah Wanless describe in a short note how they managed to track down four rehabilitated birds on the Isle of May, where at least two of the birds bred. Further south, African penguins have a much better chance of survival following oiling: Les Underhill and co-workers show that most of these birds

are rehabilitated successfully following cleaning. Records of rehabilitation/cleaning of guillemots in Germany seem to be less well kept than elsewhere. Bernhard Grunsky-Schöneberg and Ommo Hüppop show that it has proved impossible to demonstrate the effectiveness of cleaning in Germany. Finally in a short note, Richard Rejnders demonstrates the remarkable resiliance of some gulls. A heavily oiled great black-backed gull was ringed and released untreated in February 1986. The same bird, apparently unoiled, was shot two years later on Helgoland. Unfortunately the bird was not resilient to lead.

FROM SULA Vol. 11 no. 4

Bill Bourne and Ken Simmons start this issue with a paper about a dark-rumped Leach's petrel found dying on a ship in the South Atlantic. This record adds further information to the debate about the identity of this type of petrel seen and heard around the North Atlantic. In the following paper, Bill Bourne gives a number of records of squid beaks being found in fulmar stomachs shot off Scotland and Ireland between 1970 and 1975. Squid is rarely found in regurgitated samples of stomach contents. The remainder of this issue largely comprises short notes. These include: common gulls eating Nilsson's pipefish, seabirds eating flatfish and a recent increase in the number of porpoises recorded in Dutch waters.

THE BREEDING SEABIRDS OF SANDA 1997

As usual two visits were made to Sanda in 1997. A complete census of the breeding seabirds of the main

island and its smaller satellites (Sheep and Glunimore) was undertaken.

This survey was done in two parts, a team of five people spent a week there in June to gather counts of nesting birds and another team of eight went back in late July to gather data on breeding outcome.

Counts were obtained using a variety of the standard methods described in the Seabird Monitoring Handbook. For Shags and Gulls all active nests located were individually counted. The Auks were censused as birds present and Fulmars as apparently occupied nests. Manx shearwaters were counted by totalling up burrows already known and noting new diggings in existing areas. New nests were also looked for in August when we were ringing the chicks. The Storm petrel estimates were arrived at using our very extensive retrap history cards and being in the colony while birds were singing in potential nest sites.

Fulmar

In recent years this colony has been more or less static with only a small number of new nest sites found in most years. This year shows the counts have returned to the peak year of 1988. Breeding success would appear to be very good.

Manx shearwater

Breeding in burrows and under boulders in many parts of Sanda. The main concentration of nest-sites are on the north and south faces of the eastern half of the island. Smaller numbers are also known on Wood Hill (behind the farm) and around the lighthouse. Groups of burrows are also located behind the sheepfold and on the eastern side of the south peninsula. Breeding is suspected on the north cliffs and on Sheep Island but has never been proved. This

species was severely depredated by American mink though it would seem that it is mostly the chicks that are being killed. It is encouraging to find that birds are still using burrows where the previous years chick had been killed.

Storm petrel

This is the only known colony in the Clyde Islands and has remained static at c.150 pairs for the last 4-5 years. This year a small increase in birds heard singing underground indicates an increase in potential breeders. Two new nests were discovered where the contents could be examined. One of these was the first located away from the main site at the lighthouse. This nest had an adult brooding a newly hatched chick on July 29th.

Cormorant

This species first colonised Glunimore Island in 1980 and has slowly increased over the years. They have now reached the stage where they are in direct competition with great black-backed gulls for nest sites. Breeding success appears to be excellent with broods of three common.

Shag

Since the early 1980's breeding pairs have fluctuated from year to year. In 1992 large numbers of unoccupied nests were recorded and very few large young were seen in late June. This year breeding success has been excellent as indicated by plenty of well grown young and no small ones to be found when we returned in July.

Common gull

The main colony is located on the western side of the island and extends along the shore for 400m. A total of 39 nests were located and quite a few had obviously failed at the egg stage, some young were found alive in June

and ringed, the majority of these were assumed to have fledged.

Lesser black-backed gull

A slow decline since 1987 may be reversing as breeding pairs are slowly increasing and birds are being found nesting in areas never before used by this species. In our experience breeding success is usually related to weather conditions at the time of hatching. In adverse weather small young can usually be found apparently chilled to death. Not so many chicks were found this year. We have started a colour ringing scheme for this species in conjunction with the national scheme.

Herring gull

The gulls are distributed across the islands:

Sanda	500 pairs
Sheep	400-500 pairs
Glunimore	10 pairs

A slow decline is underway which will be closely monitored in future years. A good breeding season with lots of well grown young present in June and plenty of fledged chicks around when we returned in July.

Great black-backed gull

Breeding numbers in the last six years has remained around thirty to forty pairs. Heavy grazing on top of Sheep Island would appear to have reduced breeding pairs there. Breeding success for this species is usually quite good.

Kittiwake

Birds have deserted their original colony on Glunimore and also the ledges they used on Sheep Island. The main reason for this is thought to be pressure from avian predators but lack of food in some years may also

have contributed. In their peak years during the late 1980s there were never more than seventy pairs breeding and 1994 was the last year when only fifteen pairs attempted.

Guillemot

This species is now restricted to Glunimore. The colonies on Sanda and Sheep Island have been taken over by razorbills in recent years. Breeding success as indicated by the number of young present in late June would seem to have been excellent with large numbers actually fledging then. When we returned in July the colony was empty.

Razorbill

Distribution within the island group is as follows.

SANDA: The main concentration is on the south-east shore where all the nest-sites are under boulders. Smaller numbers can be found on the north cliffs on ledges and in cracks.

SHEEP ISLAND and GLUNIMORE: Extensive colonies can be found around the shores of both islands mostly under boulders. Breeding success as indicated by the number of young present in June would appear to be excellent and large numbers fledged while we were there.

Black guillemot

Counts of individuals on the sea indicate that this species has not decreased this year due to the heavy mortality suffered by the arrival of mink last year as much as we feared though a decrease has been noted since their peak in 1993. This species was probably hardest hit by this predator.

Puffin

A slight drop in birds present would indicate that this colony has still to

recover from the attentions of the mink last year. Small colonies are known on Sanda but the major concentrations are on Sheep Island and Glunimore. Most of the nest-sites are under boulders making breeding success data difficult to obtain. Four accessible nests are monitored and they all contained well grown chicks in June.

Rab Morton

FROM COLONIAL WATERBIRDS Vol. 20 No.1

Colonial Waterbirds goes from strength to strength, and from this volume onwards aims to publish three issues per year. It is hard to pick out any papers of particular interest to Seabird Group members: too many fall into this category. Alan Burger examined the arrivals and departures of guillemots from ledges to determine if there was any evidence of exchange of information on good feeding locations. He found none based on this work, but proposes instead that the birds on the sea some 100 - 600 metres offshore may be observing incoming birds and may thus be gaining information there. Gilles Chapdelaine, in a study of ringing recoveries of razorbills off eastern Canada showed that shooting was the most important mortality factor for immature birds. Eduardo Mínguez has found that British storm petrels can occasionally lay a second egg if the first is lost early in incubation.

FROM COLONIAL WATERBIRDS Vol. 20 No.2

A paper by Blokpoel and Neuman reveals that sound levels inside some gull colonies are likely to be high

enough to damage human hearing after considerable exposure. Ear defenders are recommended. Vern Byrd and co-workers describe part of the plan to remove introduced predators from Alaskan islands: in this case to restore oystercatcher and pigeon guillemot populations. Interestingly, funding in this case was provided from the Exxon Valdez Oil Restoration funds; this removal plan will help restore populations damaged by the oil spill. Sarah Wanless and Mike Harris record successful double-brooding in shags. The final third of this issue are papers from a session at the last Colonial Waterbird Society conference on the importance of considerations of spatial and temporal scales in conservation. Vicky Friesen's paper on population genetics of various seabirds shows that temporal scales and spatial scales interact at the genetic level.

FROM PACIFIC SEABIRDS Vol. 24, No. 1

There is a debate under way on the future of the Pacific Seabird Group. It is presently in good health with an expanding role in collecting and disseminating seabird science. Its administrative load is going up and increased load is being carried by its officers. Tony Gaston and Julia Parrish have analysed these problems and propose a vision for the 21st century. This vision includes the spreading of influence of PSG to reach more parts of the Pacific, improved links with other seabird groups, the publication of an international seabird journal, the establishment of a permanent secretariat and an increased use of internet technology. It will be interesting to see how this debate progresses. Abstracts from the PSG annual meeting in Portland

Oregon in January 1997 make up the bulk of the issue.

FROM PACIFIC SEABIRDS Vol. 24, No. 2

Two papers at the start of this issue are the acceptance speeches of Bill Bourne and Jim King for their Lifetime Achievement awards. These are followed by an excellent summary by Vivian Mendenhall and Craig Harrison on the role of seabirds in relation to ecosystem management of fisheries. This topic has moved rapidly up the agenda in recent years - this summary was given as testimony to the US Ecosystem Advisory Panel on Marine Fisheries. Pacific Seabirds are now peer reviewing articles: this issue includes a summary of the fruitless search for long-billed murrelets on northern Hokkaido; the arrival of ticks on ancient murrelets on an island off British Columbia; the first breeding of slaty-backed gull in North America; sickness in guillemots on Coats Island and the spread of Caspian terns to Alaska. A good seabird conservation news section is worth reading to keep up with these issues in the Pacific and wider. Regional reports make up the majority of the remainder of the issue.

PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP: 25th ANNUAL MEETING, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

The Pacific Seabird Group returned to California for this landmark meeting. It proved to be the largest yet, both in terms of attendees (around 275) and in numbers of papers. There were 85 oral papers and 52 poster papers registered. The anniversary symposium was on the topic of "Seabirds in a changing ocean: advances in seabird science". The

symposium papers were spread through the meeting, with working sessions usually roughly following the topic of the symposium paper. Oral papers were usually in two parallel sessions and each was allocated 12 minutes. This latter caused a rattling pace, though poor time-keeping by both chairs of sessions and givers of the papers meant that the parallel sessions usually got out of synchrony and it proved difficult to swap successfully between sessions. Parallel sessions mean that it is very easy to miss good papers.

The opening talk was by Storrs Olson on "Fifteen million years of change in the marine environment and what it has meant for northern seabirds". Much of his work has been based on fossils found on the Atlantic margin and this proved (for me) to be one of the most interesting papers of the whole meeting. The North Atlantic was very different in the comparatively recent past. Just five million years ago, there were three gannet species, one pseudo-gannet species with a twenty foot wingspan, four razorbill-like species (up to great auk size - and they could fly) and 15 species of Procellariiformes. These included five albatross species. A colony of short-tailed albatrosses existed on Bermuda until about 450,000 years ago, when a rapid rise in sea-level appears to have wiped it out. Remarkably, there were no guillemots (Brunnich's, common or black) in the North Atlantic until 12,000 years ago.

I was a little disappointed with the symposium papers: these were undoubtedly tough to write and give, being reviews of areas of seabird research and activity as well as looks forward. Many were though very orientated towards the author's personal interests and some

significant areas of work were missed. Some papers valiantly tried to predict the future - I liked this and rather wish more had done so. Of the symposium papers, I singled out Lisa Ballance and Bob Pitman's paper on seabirds at sea as being particularly clear and comprehensive, and also challenging in identifying more conservation at sea as being the next step forward. I also enjoyed Vicki Friesen's paper on molecular genetics: did you know that pelicans are more closely related to shoebills than the gannets, and that frigate birds are closer to albatrosses and divers?

It is invidious to pick out other papers: many were excellent, and the standards of presentation continue to improve. I was pleased to hear that oil spill contingency plans in California are dominated by the need to safeguard wildlife but amazed to also hear that \$15 million had been invested by the state in wildlife rescue. Elizabeth Logerwell described how difficult it was to link guillemot feeding distribution to prey distribution at small scales, but that correlations were evident at larger scales of both space and time. One of the odder features I learned was about guillemots in some Californian colonies where numbers can change radically between years, only to revert to previous levels a few years later. Needless to say, this makes censuses difficult.

The poster session was equally good, with most presenters having learned the crucial difference in presenting posters as against written papers and deploying the skills and arts of advertising. As usual, the side discussions were a crucial part of the meeting, and plenty of space was left for these by the very efficient and effective organising committee. These opportunities included a visit to the

new open water wing of the Monterey aquarium, a particularly spectacular exhibit. If you want to catch up with developments in seabird science in the Pacific, the next conference is likely to be in February 1999, somewhere on the western seaboard of North America!

Mark Tasker

FROM PENGUIN CONSERVATION Vol. 10, No. 1

Dee Boersma reports a decline in Magellanic penguins on the coast of southern Argentina. Causes seem likely to be natural fluctuations coupled with anthropogenic changes. Two main man-made pressures are oil pollution and a rapid increase in fisheries off this area. Carlos Zavalaga and Rosana Paredes describe studies that they have commenced recently on Humbolt penguins in Peru.

A workshop on penguin marking techniques was held in Cambridge in July 1996. Bill Fraser reviews the meeting which is a good summary of the state of play in this area, both with internal and external tagging techniques. There has been considerable concern that flipper bands may be having undesirable effects. There now seem to be many techniques offering improvements over conventional flipper bands. The remainder of the issue relates to penguins in captivity.

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

The Seabird Group remains a BirdLife International associate organisation. As such we receive three publications at regular intervals (BirdLife

International update, BirdLife in Europe and World Birdwatch), and are entitled to attend their conferences. BirdLife International has also just established a Global Seabird Conservation Co-ordination Project. This will be co-ordinated by John Cooper based at Avian Demography Unit, Department of Statistical Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa
jcooper@botzoo.uct.ac.za

In the early part of this project the main focus will be on reducing the impact of long-line fisheries on seabirds. Further information is available on the project website: www.uct.ac.za/depts/stat/adu/seabirds/

The next world BirdLife International project will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 11-21 October 1999. The European Division of BirdLife International will be relocating to Wageningen in the Netherlands in the near future.

FROM BIRDLIFE IN EUROPE Vol. 2, No.s 1, 2, 3, 4

Issue 1 reports on a census of Audouin's gull in Greece. More than 350 islands in the Aegean were visited in 1995 and 1996. Prior to this survey, only six breeding sites of Audouin's gull were known. Twenty-two sites are now known, containing an estimated 350 pairs (a tripling of the known population). It seems likely that a few more sites remain to be found and that the population exceeds 400 pairs. In the eastern Mediterranean it appears that this species feeds on rocky coasts and not offshore as it does in the west of the Sea. This issue also reports the

successful defence by BirdWatch Ireland of Lady's Island Lake in Ireland (islands in the lake hold a major roseate tern colony) from the intrusion of a golf course.

Issue 2 reports on BirdLife's International's input to the Ministerial Conference on the Integration of Fisheries and Environmental Issues in the North Sea held in Bergen in March 1997. BirdLife International's input was apparently instrumental in improving the final declaration to add urgency to the need to carry out actions to protect species and habitats. Perhaps the greatest gain from the conference was to force a greater examination of the impact of industrial fisheries and to measures to reduce harm in sensitive areas.

Issue 3 announces the publication of "Habitats for birds in Europe: a conservation strategy for the wider environment" which includes a chapter on marine areas of Europe, analysing impacts and setting priorities for action in the wider environment. This chapter was the result of several years of work and three workshops bringing together experts from all parts of Europe. Input was also provided from a session at the 1996 Seabird Group conference. A meeting on Audouin's gull held in Melilla, Spain in 1997 concluded that the world population was about 18,600 pairs, with 90% in Spain (the Ebro delta holds 11,600 pairs alone). The population has increased in the past decade, but the species remains vulnerable. Further information is available from Juan Criado of SEO/BirdLife, email: seo@quercus.es.

**FROM WORD BIRDWATCH Vol. 19,
No. 4**

This issue reports a survey of Pink-footed shearwater (which breeds on only three islands off Chile) on Mocha Island. The population estimate was only 25,000 pairs, confirming the threatened status of the species.

**FROM BUTLLETÍ DEL GRUP
CATALÀ D'ANELLAMENT, Vol. 13**

There were only two seabird papers in this issue; one on biometrics of Cory's shearwater (demonstrating a method for sexing this species from measurements). The second paper describes the increasing number of records of eider from the Iberian peninsula - both from the north (Atlantic) coast, and from the north-eastern (Mediterranean) coast.

MINK AND SEABIRDS IN 1997

Most readers will be aware of the problems that American mink have posed to seabirds, especially terns, breeding on the west coast of Scotland. In 1996 and 1997, volunteers have been trapping and removing mink from key sites. This trapping improved the fledging rate of common terns at these sites ten-fold over similar sites where mink were not removed. An equivalent improvement of five-fold was recorded for arctic terns. We congratulate Clive Craik and his colleagues for their efforts.

**FROM WWF ARCTIC BULLETIN No
2 97**

There is little directly concerning seabirds in this issue, but an excellent series of short review and summary articles on cod stocks and their management in the North Atlantic. The decline in cod has hurt the economies of dependant communities and the ecosystem: good

management would seem to give a win-win solution. It seems strange that solutions cannot be more easily found.

MEDMARAVIS CONFERENCE

The next Medmaravis conference will be held in Malta from 29 September to 3 October 1998. The conference theme will be "Monitoring and conservation of birds, mammals and turtles of the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Four half-day symposia are planned on: distribution of less-known species, breeding distributions of seabirds and turtles, atsea distribution of birds and mammals and biological monitoring. Offers of papers should go to: Pierre Yésou, O.N.C., 53 rue Russeil, 44000 Nantes, France. (Fax: + 33 2 40481401). Further details from BirdLife Malta, PO Box 498, Valletta CMR 01, Malta.

ANOTHER APPEAL FOR COLOUR RING SIGHTINGS

Colour rings are being used to mark lesser black-backed and herring gulls in three large colonies in north-west England. All the colour rings are on the left leg. In 1997, rings were bright green with a white letter to indicate colony of origin. From 1998 to 2000 rings will be black with yellow letter/numbers to enable individual birds to be identified. Colony letters are as follows: R is for the Ribble, T for Tarnbrook Fell and W for Walney. All sightings should be notified to David Sowter, 5 The Grove, Penwortham, Preston, PR1 0UU, England.

RECORDS OF KITTIWAKES WITH CROSSED BEAKS

I observed several kittiwakes with crossed beaks while I was in the Bering Sea last summer. I have contacted both Russian and Norwegians working in the Barents sea area and no-one else appears to have seen this phenomenon. However I know how hard it is to observe these things unless you are tuned in to them. I have been on excursions on the Great Lakes in Canada specifically to observe defects like these, so I am probably more tuned into these defects than others might be.

I believe that the cause is most likely to be some transient(?) epizooty. However, highest reported levels in gulls of planar chlorinated organic contaminants are from Novaya Zemlya and especially Franz Jozef Land. Generally these contaminants will be deleterious to the immune system, so the possibility of a synergistic effect is worth taking into account.

I would be very interested to hear if any Seabird Group members have observed kittiwakes with crossed beaks and ask that those who have the opportunity to see many kittiwakes might specifically check for this.

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SEABIRD RINGING ON THE FORTH ISLANDS 1997

The Bass Rock, home of the gannet, and the Isle of May, home of the

famous bird observatory are the two well known islands in the Firth of Forth on the east coast of Scotland, but there are another dozen islands and islets in the Forth which hold colonies of breeding seabirds. The Lothian Ringing Group and its predecessor, the Edinburgh RG, have been ringing seabirds on two of these other islands - Craigleith and Inchkeith - for over 20 years. Craigleith is the small island off the seaside town of North Berwick, just a few miles east of the Bass. Inchkeith lies in the middle of the Forth between the ports of Leith and Kirkcaldy in Fife. During the last 20 years we have ringed over 20,000 seabirds of 19 different species and these have generated over 800 recoveries and controls and over 400 retraps. After a review of our seabird ringing five years ago, to see whether or not we could afford to continue, we decided to concentrate on five main species - fulmar, cormorant, shag, kittiwake and puffin - and set targets for each.

Our season begins in early June with visits to the cormorant colonies on Craigleith and Inchkeith. Cormorants have increased substantially in the Forth with about 400 pairs on five islands. Breeding at the older, well established colonies seems synchronous, but not at the newer colonies like Inchkeith - we were ringing cormorant chicks on Inchkeith in August 1997. We also collected cormorant feather and food samples for David Carss at ITE, Banchory. Our next visits are usually to Craigleith later on in June to ring shags and puffins. This season we were delayed by two weeks of wet and windy weather in late June. Puffins had been affected by this bad weather with many flooded burrows containing cold, wet eggs. Shags are still recovering from the two recent late winter wrecks.

We used to ring over 500 a year, but now cannot even ring our own self-imposed quota of 200. However, we do make a special effort to catch ringed adults in the colony. In early July we make a couple of trips to Inchkeith to ring kittiwakes, using extension ladders to reach the chicks in the nests. Kittiwakes did not appear unduly affected by the bad weather in June 1997, unlike the colonies on the Farne Islands and Bempton further south. We also collected kittiwake food samples for Sarah Wanless. Our final trips this season were to both Inchkeith and Craigleith to ring fulmars.

We are very grateful for the financial support we received in 1997 from BP Grangemouth, Fife Council, Scottish Ornithologists Club and the Seabird Group. Our boatmen: Dougie Fergusson of North Berwick and the coxswains and crew of the Forth Pilot cutters continued to provide a service beyond the call of duty.

John. C. Davies

ON HOLIDAY IN FRANCE - AND WANTING TO COUNT SEABIRDS?

GISOM, the French Seabird Group are carrying out a complete colony census on their shores during 1997 and 1998. In their last census in 1987-88 nearly 180,000 pairs of seabirds were counted. GISOM are looking for volunteers. If you are interested please contact Bernard Cadiou, SEPNEB, 186 rue Anatole France, B.P. 32, 29276 Brest cedex, France. Tel: +33 2984 90718, Fax: +33 2984 50842.

NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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