

## NEWSLETTER 80

AUGUST 1998



# MINK PREDATION HITS ROSEATE TERNS

## **PREDATION BY AMERICAN MINK AT THE BAY OF MORLAIX**

Clive Craik has doggedly fought a long battle against the presence of mink on the west coast of Scotland. Regrettably mink have also reached Brittany from where Bernard Cadiou reported in the SEPNB annual reserves report for 1997. The table below shows the number of corpses of seabirds collected by SEPNB staff from six islands in the Bay of Morlaix (Île aux Dames, Beclém, Ricard Ar C'hlaz Koz, Vézoul and île de Sable) between September 1996 and August 1997.

Species	Number of corpses
Shag	35
Little egret	5
Brent goose	1
shorebirds	17
Herring gull	16
Lesser b.b. gull	2
Sandwich tern	19
Common tern	24
Roseate tern	49
Puffin	1
Total	169

The terns were generally killed on their eggs or newly-hatched chicks in the first fortnight of June.

An example is given of the Roches Jaunes, in the north-east of the Bay of Morlaix. On 6 June 1997, the colony consisted of five or six abandoned gull nests (herring gull and possibly a great black-backed gull) and four abandoned shag nests. One herring gull and one shag corpse was found along with a number of empty egg shells. In 1987, these rocks supported 103 pairs of herring gull and 26 pairs of shag. There is no doubt that this desertion has been caused by mink predation. It is plain that this predator forms the greatest threat to seabirds nesting on nearshore islets off north-west Europe.

Bernard Cadiou (translated by Mark Tasker)

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Edited by Mark Tasker

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### A CONVENIENT METHOD FOR MEASURING GULL PRODUCTIVITY

A (new?) way of measuring numbers fledging at gull colonies

Most methods of estimating gull productivity rely on direct or indirect counts of large unfledged young. With the exception of species such as kittiwake (nests of which can be viewed from vantage points) direct counts are almost impossible. This is because the chicks of most gull species scatter and hide. To get round this problem, the Seabird Monitoring Handbook for Britain and Ireland (Walsh *et al* 1995) suggests four indirect methods for counting gull chicks:

1. **Mark-and-recapture** of large chicks, requiring at least two separate ringing runs through colony on the same day. Ideally this is repeated a week later. Use ratio (ringed/unringed) to calculate number of young present.
2. **Mark and obtain this ratio from sightings** of settled fledged young on a later visit.
3. **Enclose samples of nests in fenced plots** and count the large chicks in the sample.
4. Use **total number of chicks ringed** as estimate of young present. Almost always an underestimate.

As the authors make clear, all these methods have their drawbacks. They are complicated, indirect and to varying extents inaccurate. Also, most cause considerable disturbance and, not infrequently, some chick deaths. The most accurate method (mark-and-recapture) requires a second pass through the colony on the same day shortly after the first.

I suspect that anyone who has tried this method with herring gulls will have seen dead chicks that had been attacked by territorial adults as a result of disturbance during one's first pass. Moreover, common gull and black-headed gull chicks often take to the water and sometimes (too often) are killed opportunistically by adult herring or black-backed gulls. Such deaths are caused entirely by the investigator/ringer. Any method that does not require visits during the chick stage is preferable.

The following method requires a single short visit to the colony in the days immediately after most young have fledged. It is based on the fact that flying young of most gull species (common, black-headed, herring, lesser and great black-backed) remain at the colony, usually on their nest territories, for a considerable period after their first flight.

If one enters a gull colony during this period, all the adults and young fly up and circle around the point of disturbance. Within 5-10 minutes, the young tire and gradually settle into one or more well-defined flocks on the water. Most adults remain in the air. This behaviour makes direct counting of the young very easy.

The advantages of this method over the above methods are:

1. Single visit and single count only. So simple and quick that I found it easy to make repeated counts for accuracy.
2. Little or no disturbance of unfledged young causing chick deaths. Young fly directly back onto own territories rather than passing through others, so are not attacked.
3. One directly counts what one wants to measure (young that have reached the flying stage) rather than indirectly estimating number of large chicks present, some of which will not fledge in any case.
4. Only one other visit is needed to get an accurate measure of productivity. Earlier in the season (mid-May), count the clutches or occupied nests during incubation. Productivity is fledged young/pairs nesting.

The disadvantages are:

1. Late chicks that are unfledged at the time of counting are missed; however, one can make a separate estimate of these by searching vegetation on the same visit. Their numbers can be very few or none, in my experience, if one times the count correctly. In a very large colony several people may be needed, but this is also the case with other methods.
2. The time between first flight and departure of young from the colony area may vary with circumstances and should be determined locally. It is shorter for black-headed gull and common gull

(which in west Scotland fly late June-early July and leave mid-July) than for herring gull and other large gulls (fly early to mid-July and leave at end of July). This gives a period of at least a week for small gulls, longer for large gulls, during which counts can be made.

Unfortunately this method doesn't work for (common and arctic) terns. The recently fledged tern young leave the colony much sooner after first flight and those remaining don't, in any case, form convenient compact flocks on the water.

I have found this method to be much more convenient, and much less harmful, for the above five gull species than the methods based on marking, and at least as accurate. I hope that others interested in gull productivity may use and evaluate it.

J C A Craik, SAMS, PO Box 3, Oban, Argyll PA34 4AD

*Editors note:* The Seabird Colony Register co-ordinator, Kate Thompson, is keen to hear of any further experience with this method. She suggests that the method may not be suitable for larger colonies where timing of breeding (and therefore fledging) would be more spread out. Clive's method also requires at least some knowledge of the timing of the breeding season in order to visit at the appropriate moment.

## **SEABIRD 2000 CO-ORDINATOR**

We are pleased to welcome the appointment by JNCC of Ian Mitchell as co-ordinator of the Seabird 2000 project. We will be hearing from him in future Newsletters. He may be contacted at the JNCC Aberdeen office:  
Dunnet House  
7 Thistle Place  
Aberdeen  
AB10 1UZ

## **THE SOUTH-WEST ATLANTIC SEABIRDS AT SEA TEAM**

A new project to determine the abundance and vulnerability of seabirds and cetaceans in Falkland Islands' waters began in January 1998 and is being carried out by the JNCC (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) of the UK and sponsored by oil operators under the auspices of FOSA (Falkland Offshore Sharing Agreement) and the Falkland Islands Government. The potential impacts on wildlife from hydrocarbon related activities in waters around the Falkland Islands have long been a concern. Penguins, being flightless are probably the most vulnerable of all birds to oil pollution; the Falkland Islands are the world's most important site for rockhopper penguins, and second only to South Georgia for gentoo penguins and to Argentina for Magellanic Penguins. The first phase of the work is concentrating on the area to the north of the islands where exploratory drilling is already underway. It is anticipated that the project will be extended to cover the Special Area of Co-operation when it comes up for tender for oil licensing. The surveys are carried out primarily from Fisheries Patrol vessels and rig supply vessels.

Since January 1998, the JNCC team based in the Falklands has:

- travelled 9,263 km on survey;
- surveyed 2,779 square km of sea;
- recorded 40 species of seabird;
- a total of 17,623 bird records;
- involving 60,534 individual birds.

To date, two species comprise 50% of all birds recorded, the black-browed albatross (18,076) and prions (12,226). The imperial shag (9,178) accounts for another 15% of the total.

Initial findings suggest that the area of the licence blocks holds relatively few birds with the highest densities occurring in the area to the west of the islands, where the

majority of the fishing fleet is found. However, no conclusions can be drawn without further data.

Keith Gillon

## **REDUCING MORTALITY OF SEABIRDS IN LONG-LINE FISHERIES**

There are several global initiatives under way to tackle the problem of increasing mortality of seabirds in expanding long-line fisheries. These lines may be up to 80 miles long, and carry thousands of hooks. While the lines are being shot from the fishing boat, birds may dive onto the bait and get caught and drowned. Albatrosses and the larger petrels seem to be particularly at risk.

In one of the more promising initiatives the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has appointed a seabird technical working group to develop an action plan and seabird avoidance guidelines that will be applied globally and adopted by FAO and the UN. The working group met in March in Tokyo and developed guidelines that will go forward to a larger meeting in Rome in October, before being forwarded to a full meeting of FAO in 1999.

Elsewhere, regulations have been bought in by individual countries. In the USA, avoidance techniques are required in the Alaskan fisheries, where at least five of the globally endangered short-tailed albatrosses have been caught.

## **THE GREAT AUK**

A new monograph book on the great auk has been written and will be privately published by Errol Fuller. From its description, it might be described as a compilation of everything known about the great auk, in life and in death. This will be a large book in a limited edition of 450 copies. It will have 448 pages and 500 illustrations, and will be leather bound with

much decoration. It is scheduled for publication in September. The book will have a hand-coloured frontispiece and a signed limited edition print by Raymond Ching. Needless-to-say, the price is high: £385. For those who want further details of a book containing all you ever can find out about great auks contact The Great Auk Project, 65 Springfield Road, Southborough, Kent, TN4 0RD

## **ATLANTIC SEABIRDS**

This Newsletter comes out at the same time as Seabird 20. This is both the last issue of Seabird, and the last issue edited by Sarah Wanless. We thank her for the superb job that she has done over the past years.

Atlantic Seabirds will be launched early in the New Year. The joint editors, Jim Reid and Kees Camphuysen are looking for articles and papers, both long and short for the first volume. Please contact either:

Jim Reid  
Dunnet House  
7 Thistle Place  
Aberdeen  
AB10 1UZ  
Scotland.

Kees Camphuysen  
Ankerstraat 20  
1794 BJ Oosterend  
Texel  
The Netherlands

## **From *SULA* Vol. 12 No. 1**

Eric Stienen and colleagues report on the results of a monitoring scheme for black-headed gulls established in 1997 following signs of serious decline in numbers of this species in the Netherlands. Breeding success was monitored at three colonies on the Wadden Sea and three inland colonies. Hatching success was high at the Wadden Sea colonies, and very low at the inland sites. Eggs at these southern colonies were lost through flooding, trampling by geese, depredation or nest desertion. Chicks fledged at two of the Wadden Sea colonies where young were fed mostly with marine prey items. Elsewhere chick diet (prior to their death) included a large proportion of insects and

other invertebrates. Later in this issue, Eric Stienen reports on a search for tern rings in Senegal in 1996 and 1997, where trapping occurs during winter. A total of 210 rings were found, with 80% of these originating in the British Isles. The species most affected was Sandwich tern: the authors make a cautious estimate that around 500 Sandwich terns and 500 other species of tern are caught annually on Senegalese coasts. Catching of terns remains a common habit in this country despite the educational efforts of European BirdLife International partners.

Sandwich tern diet was studied at a German Wadden Sea island by Stefan Garthe and Ulrike Kubetzi. Sandeels formed 72% of the prey, with clupeids the vast majority of the remainder. Black-headed gulls stole fish in around 11% of the returns of Sandwich terns carrying prey items. Lurdes Morais and colleagues model the growth of the yellow-legged gull colony at Berlenga (Portugal) between 1974 and 1994. They conclude that immigration must have contributed substantially to the growth to around the 45,000 gulls present in 1994.

## **LAS AVES MARINAS DE ESPAÑA Y PORTUGAL**

After many years in gestation, I was delighted to see the publication of this book in late 1997. Seabird studies on the Iberian peninsula and the associated Balearic, Canary, Azores and Madeira island groups have grown rapidly in recent years, there was an obvious need to bring together what was known about seabirds in this area. There was also a need to bring this together in Spanish, as much original material had been published in English. The 444 page book is composed primarily of a series of species accounts for each of 86 species that have occurred in the area.. These accounts are mostly in Spanish, and consist of the sort of information that an English or German speaker would obtain from one of the standard handbooks. Information is also gathered together at a regional level for

Spain and Portugal. This latter is summarised and translated into English at the end of each species section. In this way Andy Paterson has cleverly maximised the amount of knowledge in the book for both the English and Spanish-speaking reader.

The introductory section contains much useful information on colour-ringing schemes, and organisations concerned with seabirds as well as biological background. There is a 46 page reference section which should satisfy the most ardent Iberian seabirder. This will be a standard reference for many years to come and is good value at £27.95. I like this book, and thoroughly recommend it to anyone interested in European seabirds. We look forward to the forthcoming accompanying seabird guide in Spanish.

Mark Tasker

### **From *PACIFIC SEABIRDS* Vol. 25 No. 1**

This issue starts with three "forum" articles; one of these a reflection on marine ornithology as a science by Tony Gaston. This thoughtful article concludes that among the positive of marine ornithology's traits is that it requires a broad range of information and ideas from many scientific disciplines and that it requires biologists to look at organisms on a very large scale. These traits can be both painful and frustrating, but also fun.

The next PSG annual meeting will be held in Blaine, Washington on 24-26 February 1999. Further details can be obtained from PSG's web page: [www.nmhm.si.edu/BIRDNET/PacBirds/](http://www.nmhm.si.edu/BIRDNET/PacBirds/)

Much of the rest of the issue is taken up with abstracts for the January 1998 meeting in Monterey.

### **From *COLONIAL WATERBIRDS* VOL21 NO 1.**

This issue has 12 seabird (as opposed to wading bird) papers. Two papers deal with deaths of Newell's shearwater on human structures (power lines mostly) on Kuai, Hawaii. Gerrit Peters and co-workers show that Magellanic penguins need light to dive and recorded them diving to the seabed at 100m. Jan Neuman and co-workers demonstrated that kittiwake courtship feeding was explained best as a male attempt to ensure that subsequent egg production was improved. An analysis of levels of selenium and mercury in double-dressed cormorants from southern Florida reveals levels high enough to put the birds at risk from poisoning. Steve Kendall and Beverl Agler found 12,130 +/- 8312 Kittlitz's murrelets in the three main areas which they inhabit in Alaska. Kaj Kampp and Knud Falk have identified a Brunnich's guillemot that recruited to a colony some 1,650 km from its natal site. Such movements are not unheard of in other alcids, but this is the first recorded for this species. Reviews and lists of recent publications complete the issue.

### **From *COLONIAL WATERBIRD SOCIETY BULLETIN* Vol21, No. 1&2**

This is the last printed issue of the Bulletin - in future it will be electronically mailed to all except those wishing a printed copy (available at a charge of \$4). The bulletin can be accessed at the CWS home page: [www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/CWS/](http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/CWS/)

A straw poll was also held to change the name of the Society to "Waterbird Society" (and the journal from *Colonial Waterbirds* to "Waterbirds"). These issues are discussed in three position papers by John Coulson, Donald McCrimmon and Ian Nisbet. CWS awarded its Robert Cushman Murphy prize to Pierre Jouventin.

The Society has also formed a conservation committee which has drafted a sample summary of waterbirds (nearly all seabirds in this case) at risk in North America. This approach follows that of

BirdLife International, both globally and regionally, and I cannot help feeling that CWS would be well advised to examine the international standards set by that organisation rather than re-invent some! BirdLife International, in Europe at least, has also moved on to examine habitat based approaches rather than individual species: surely the way to go for all but the most severely endangered species.

The next CWS meeting will be held in North Miami Beach Florida 21-24 October 1998 back-to-back with a meeting of the Flamingo Specialist Group. There will be two symposia: Ecology of waterbirds in subtropical and tropical wetlands, and Effects of human disturbance on waterbirds. If you wish to participate in the meeting, contact Rob Butler phone: + 1 604 940 4672, fax: + 1 604 946 7022, email: rob.butler@ec.gc.ca Registrations for the conference are being handled by Lisa Borgia, Dept. of Biological Sciences, Florida International University, Miami, Florida 33199, USA.

### **From *GISOM NEWSLETTER*, March 1998**

This reports on the meeting of GISOM held in Montpellier in February 1998. The meeting assembled rough figures for breeding seabirds in France from their colony census (which is still under way).

Results presented include:

Fulmar: no full census yet, but Morbihan is still the southern edge of its range.

Storm petrel: around 500 on Atlantic coasts, with less than 300 on Mediterranean shores.

Cory's shearwater: around 1,100 pairs.

Manx shearwater: minimum of 160 pairs.

Mediterranean shearwater: around 300 pairs.

Gannet: 13,310 pairs on the Set-Isles, with several attempts to become established in Mediterranean ports.

Shag: An increase continues on the Atlantic coasts, no full census presented, but record numbers at Chausey (Normandy) of 867 pairs and at l'île des

Landes (Brittany) of 673. In the Mediterranean numbers decrease.

Cormorant: On the coasts of Brittany and Normandy there are around 1900 pairs; inland the last census (1995) indicated around 1,100 pairs.

Audouin's gull: 55 pairs.

Slender-billed gull: 566 pairs. A colour-marking scheme began in the Camargue in 1997.

Common gull: no full census.

Mediterranean gull: A minimum of 880 pairs. The increase continues.

Yellow-legged gull: The increase continues, especially in urban areas.

Herring gull: A reduction is apparent in all "natural" colonies, but it is not possible to say yet whether this is compensated for by an increase in urban colonies.

Lesser black-backed gull: Numbers have decreased at a many colonies, but at the largest the situation is stable or increasing.

Great black-backed gull: Numbers continue to increase.

Kittiwake: around 4,900 pairs in total, but there has been a decrease in Brittany in the last few years.

Roseate tern: Unsure, due to the killing of adults by mink (see above)

Arctic tern: One pair bred on the Côtes d'Armor.

Common tern: More than 4,200 pairs in an incomplete census (particularly at inland colonies).

Little tern: At least 960 pairs in an incomplete census (particularly at inland colonies).

Sandwich tern: A total of 5,900 pairs.

Gull-billed tern: 225 pairs.

Razorbill: Twenty pairs.

Guillemot: About 250 pairs.

Puffin: About 260 pairs.

A book on French seabirds "Oiseaux marins nicheurs de France (1960-1990)" is scheduled for publication shortly.

The meeting also established working groups on petrels, on terns and small gulls, and on "problem gulls". GISOM looks to be in good shape at the moment, and are planning another meeting in 1999 (location to be decided).

### **From *MEDMARAVIS NEWS*, No. 20**

The issue reports on several recent meetings: a seminar on Audouin's gull held in Melilla in June 1997 determined that the global population was 18,580 with 91.6% in coastal Spain. A newsletter is being produced by BirdLife International to keep experts in contact with each other. Further meetings included a Berne Convention meeting examining action plans for Audouin's gull and pygmy cormorant. The next Medmaravis meeting is scheduled for 29 September to 3 October on Gozo, Malta. Sessions are included on studies of less known bird species, breeding distribution of seabirds and sea-turtles, at-sea distribution of birds and mammals, biological monitoring, networks for research in biological conservation, and on-going studies on seabird distribution and biology. For further information on registration please contact Medmaravis symposium, c/o BirdLife Malta, PO Box 498, Valletta, CMR 01, Malta. Fax: +356 225665.

Reviews of publications and other work reveals that the Balearic government has received 1,200,000 ECU for three years work on protecting Cory's shearwater.

### **From *BIRDING SCOTLAND* Vol. No.3**

This new journal is targeted primarily at the rarer bird hunter. However this issue includes a useful article on the identification of juvenile *Stercorarius skuas* by Mike Langman, and including a specially painted illustrative plate. The article provides a useful summary of the difficulties that seawatchers will encounter in identifying this group and some suggested features to look for. It cannot replace Olsen and Larson's 1997 book on the skuas and jaegers though.

The issue also includes a review of seawatching sites in Scotland (which inexplicably misses out Balranald and the

Butt of Lewis in Scotland's Western Isles), and an article on the cetaceans that might be seen around Orkney and Shetland. Subscription details for Birding Scotland are available from H.I Scott, 259 Union Grove, Aberdeen, AB10 6SX, Scotland. Email: picades@itb.co.uk

### **From *SEEVÖGEL* VOL 19 No 2**

Manfred Temme reports on the post nuptial moult of lesser black-back gulls in the Algrave and on Nordeney (Wadden Sea).

### **From *BIRDLIFE IN EUROPE* Vol. 3 No 1&2**

Issue 1 reveals that the Mediterranean sub-species of shag and Mediterranean shearwater have both been added to Appendix II of the Bern Convention and now require strict protection. Action plans will be developed for these species (as well as for roseate terns). It also reports that the spending of European Community funds to upgrade transport links has endangered some protected areas important for seabirds, such as coastal lakes in Greece. Encouragingly, the issue also reports that the German BirdLife partner, NABU has succeeded in blocking similar damaging spending of funds at sites in Germany - maybe environmental considerations will finally have to be taken into account elsewhere.

Issue 2 reports a disaster at the world's largest Dalmatian pelican colony. On 3 April a fisherman turned up at the colony at the Small Prespa lake in Greece and fired shots into the air. These disturbed the pelicans off their nests. By the time he left, three hours later, the eggs in up to 200 nests had been irretrievably chilled in the absence of an incubating adult. While pelicans are long-lived and it may be that this incident would have relatively little effect on its own, there appears to be very little wardening activity at this site, and little at present to prevent this happening again.

**From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol 20,  
No 1**

Issue 1 has a long article by Brian and David Bell about the Pitcairn Islands. These islands are particularly important for seabirds, but (needless-to-say) humans have introduced rats. During 1997, the UK Department for International Development and WWF-UK funded work to remove rats and cats from Pitcairn itself and rats from two of the smaller islands (Oeno and Ducie) in the group. The project also set out to investigate the much bigger task of removing rats from Henderson Island.

The team first persuaded the islanders to cut a network of tracks on a 25-metre grid across Pitcairn. Following a delay caused by stormy weather (the 8 tonnes of poison on the supply ship could not be unloaded), bait was laid across the island, and trapping of feral cats began. After baiting, attention turned to one of the smaller islands, which had much more open vegetation, and thus baiting was more easily accomplished. A second round of bait was then laid on Pitcairn. Little of this bait was taken, reflecting success of the first attempt. Cats were much easier to catch too, as most of their prey was gone. The pet cats on the island were all neutered with the exception of four left to breed to replace pet cats which die (no animals are allowed on the supply vessel).

Henderson is large, covered with thick vegetation and has rough terrain. It would be virtually impossible to carry out a hand-laid eradication programme there. Aerial dropping of bait might be a possibility, but the risk of poisoning some of Henderson's endemic birds needed to be assessed. It seems likely that should the logistical problem of getting a ship-based helicopter to the area be overcome, some temporary management programme for Henderson crakes would be required to avoid secondary poisoning.

Back on the small island of Oeno, no trace of rats could be found, and hundreds of young petrel chicks had hatched and survived. An expedition in 1991 reported that rats had killed nearly all the chicks that year. Rats were also eliminated from the small island of Ducie. On Pitcairn, a few signs of rats remained, and the islanders were experiencing difficulties with dealing with all of the ripe fruit available as a result. The Pitcairn administration have arranged for further bait to be available to deal with any pockets of remaining rats.

Once the campaign is complete in 1998, the way will be open for more restoration work, such as the reintroduction of species. All involved should be congratulated on the boldness of this project to eventually restore what must be one of the jewels of the seabird world.

**From *PENGUIN CONSERVATION*  
Vol 11 No 1**

This issue is full of information for those who are into penguins. The first paper deals with the taking and preserving samples of DNA. Rosana Parades and Carlos Zavalaga then review the effects of El Niño on Humboldt penguins and other seabirds. The sea surface temperature is higher at the site than ever previously recorded, and most birds appear to have either not bred or to have died shortly after fledging.

Mike Bingham then reviews the status of the penguins of South America and the Falkland Islands. Counts of the non-*Spheniscus* penguins are based on an aerial census carried out in 1996/97. The world population of southern rockhopper penguins now stands at about 475,000 breeding pairs, with around 2/3 in South America and 1/3 on the Falkland Islands. The Falkland Islands population has crashed to about 10% of its former size, with much of its decline occurring in the 1980s and early 1990s. The South American population has shown no such decline. The reason for these different

fortunes may not unrelated to the very heavy fishery that occurs around the Falklands, but which does not occur off South America. Magellanic penguins are monitored on the Falklands and this species also appears to be in steep decline. Only about a half of the numbers present in the late 1980s are present now.

A report on a symposium on the ecology and conservation of penguins in Chile. Some 100 delegates discussed current research described in ten papers. Humboldt penguins are being caught in gill nets and illegal hunting and unregulated tourism are also posing problems for this species. There appears to have been considerable discussion of the problem of foreign researchers working in Chile, and not communicating results within Chile. Delegates recommended a better permitting system. Abstracts of the papers at this symposium complete this issue.

#### **From *WWF ARCTIC BULLETIN* No.s 4.97, 1.98 and 2.98.**

Issue 4.97 has a large section on tourism and its management in the Arctic, including a code of conduct for responsible tourism. The area of the Arctic with most tourists is northern Scandinavia, followed by the Yukon.

The first issue of 1998 reports that the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management has put forward Bear Island (one of the North Atlantic's most important seabird colonies) as a nature reserve. The proposal covers not just the land but also waters out to 4 nautical miles offshore. The proposal has been opposed by oil and fishery interests in Norway.

The second issue of 1998 has little of direct seabird relevance. A set of guidelines for commercial consumptive use of wild species is printed in the centre of the issue.

#### **WESTWARD MARCH OF MEDITERRANEAN GULL**

Those interested in the rarer breeding seabirds of northern Europe will be pleased to hear that Mediterranean gulls have now bred in Ireland. In 1995 a pair bred (unsuccessfully) on Larne Lough, and one young was reared in 1996 at Lady's Island, Co. Wexford.

#### **THE 32nd ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SEABIRD GROUP, 1997**

There were two changes to the Executive Committee during 1997. Stephen Sutcliffe was elected to fill the Ordinary Member position left vacant by Peter Weaver's resignation. Greg Mudge resigned from his Ordinary Member position during the year owing to a change in job and Andy Douse was co-opted to replace him. Both Sarah Wanless who has been filling the posts of Chairperson and Editor and our long-standing Treasurer Bob Furness continued to fulfil these roles in the absence of any nominations to allow them to resign. At the end of this year, Keith Hamer reaches the end of his four year stint as Ordinary Member, and Sarah Wanless and Bob Furness wish to resign as Editor and Treasurer respectively. Although, considering Greg Mudge's resignation, we have lost two Ordinary Members of the Committee, only replacement is required since for the past two years we have had one Officer filling two posts (Chairperson & Editor) and an extra Ordinary Member to make the Committee up to its requisite nine. Hopefully the doubling up of Chairperson and Editor will end at this meeting and the extra Ordinary Member will not be required. Hence only one vacancy. I shall use this opportunity to flag up a number of vacancies that arise at the end of 1998. Both Euan Dunn and Dave Okill reach the end of their four year stints as Ordinary Members. Mark Tasker is due to retire as Newsletter Editor and John Uttley also reaches the end of his

term as Secretary. Any member of the Group wishing to stand for election to the Committee should contact a member of the existing Committee.

At the end of 1996 the Seabird group had 288 paid-up members (down 9), a further 20 who had not paid for the year (up 3) and 2 who still pay only £5 per year by standing order and do not receive *Seabird* (down 2).

*Seabird 19* was published and contained 9 articles and 2 book reviews. The papers covered topics as diverse as the predation of kittiwakes by great skuas in Shetland, surveys of storm petrels in Orkney and the Western Isles and ectoparasites of Balearic shearwaters.

3 Newsletters (76, 77 and 78) have been published since the previous AGM. Contributions to the Newsletter seem to have been from a wider range of sources than in recent years and this trend will hopefully continue. Articles on ongoing projects or your personal point of view on particular issues are welcome.

Two executive committee meetings were held, one immediately before the last AGM in Glasgow in November, and another in September in Edinburgh. Two items dominated the Committee's work during the year: the continuing build-up to SEABIRD 2000 and the proposed merger of *SEABIRD* with *SULA* which will be debated at this year's AGM. SEABIRD 2000 has now received the formal backing of RSPB and at the time of writing this report the JNCC are considering including the core funding of administration, data entry and analysis in their budget. No formal decision has been reached yet but the proposal has had a favourable reception to date. The proposal to merge *SEABIRD* with *SULA* came from the Editor of the Dutch Journal and after consideration by the Committee Sarah wrote an article for the September Newsletter setting out the Committee's recommendation that we join together to produce a bi-annual or quarterly journal, in English, under joint editorial control. Work on a new recruitment leaflet has been

postponed until this proposal has been debated and a consensus reached on the future of *SEABIRD*. Other items which have been discussed during the year included a proposal from Peter Becker that the Seabird Group organise a conference in Wilhelmshaven, Germany in 2000. The Committee agreed that this was a good idea and provisional dates of 17-19 March 2000 have been booked. The conference will be part of an EXPO and will be subsidised by the EXPO organisers. One concern of the Committee was that many amateur members could be excluded from the conference by virtue of its location. We considered organising something in Britain in the interim but we felt that a full-blown conference would be too difficult to organise in the time available. It is hoped that a workshop on SEABIRD 2000 will be held in the winter of 1998/99 prior to fieldwork on that project beginning. The Seabird Group may also have its own Web site in the not too distant future. Wylie Horn has offered to set up and service a site from Oxford University.

Grants were awarded to the Scottish Wildlife Trust (£300) for rat eradication on Handa, to Peter Robinson (£200) for storm petrel survey work in the Scillies, to Mick Canham (£200) for seabird ringing in East Caithness and to the Forth Ringing Group (£100) for seabird ringing. So far this year no applications have been received, so please come forward with projects that you think that Group should be assisting.

John Uttley, Hon. Secretary