

NEWSLETTER 81

NOVEMBER 1998



GLOBAL AGREEMENT REACHED ON REDUCTION OF SEABIRD KILLING IN LONGLINE FISHERIES

Agreement was reached on 30 October on a global accord to reduce the incidental killing of seabirds in longline fisheries. Representatives of eighty nations met at the Rome headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations and agreed upon an International Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries. This accord urges fishing nations to adopt avoidance measures to prevent the unnecessary death of hundreds of thousands of seabirds that become impaled on hooks (and eventually drown) while trying to eat the fish or squid bait. One factory autoliner vessel may deploy 35,000 baited hooks on fishing lines that may extend for 60 miles. The agreement provides for each nation to assess their longline fisheries for seabird bycatch and, if there is a problem, develop and implement a National Plan of Action by 2001. Each nation is expected to implement cost-effective techniques to prevent seabirds from taking the baits. Some of these rather simple measures that are detailed in the accord include: weighting the hooks

and lines; night-setting; avoiding the discharge of offal during setting; thawing bait; and using bird scaring lines off the stern during setting. These measures can significantly reduce or eliminate the killing of seabirds. Even though the agreement is voluntary and was weakened from the original draft, the accord is a giant step forward in focusing fishing nations attention to resolve this unnecessary killing that is clearly resulting in the decline of albatrosses and other seabirds. Of the 61 species documented as killed by longliners, 25 are listed by the World Conservation Union as globally threatened. Seabird specialists have concluded that incidental mortality in longline fisheries poses the most serious threat facing albatross populations. The agreement is expected to be ratified by the FAO's Committee on Fisheries in February 1999. Without such a global agreement, a number of seabird species could become perilously closer to extinction. For a copy of the FAO agreement and an informative technical paper (FAO Circular 937), see the FAO web site at www.fao.org

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Edited by Mark Tasker

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ROSEATE TERN NEWS FROM ÎLE AUX DAMES, BRITTANY - AN UPDATE

In 1996, 105-110 breeding pairs of roseate terns were recorded on île aux Dames, highest numbers since 1989, and productivity was at least 0.85 young/pair. Predation by American mink occurred in July, with numerous Sandwich and common tern chicks killed. In 1997, about the same number of pairs were seen at the beginning of the breeding season, before heavy predation by mink (see SGN 80), and at least 49 adults

roseate terns were killed, mainly on their nests. Breeding success appeared to be low. Unfortunately, only one mink was trapped, before the arrival of the terns on the colony. In 1998, there were 65-70 breeding pairs of roseate terns, and productivity was at least 0.75 young/pair. Mink had not attended the colony and neighbouring islands after March, and thus only affected the distribution of breeding shags. Unfortunately, no mink was trapped this year.

Many thanks to Clive Craik for prompt advice on mink trapping.

Bernard Cadiou & Ewenn De Kergariou
Bretagne Vivante - SEPNEB, 186 rue
Anatole France, BP 32, F-29276
BREST cedex, France
Tél : +33 2 98 49 07 18 / Fax : +33 2
98 49 95 80 / E-mail :
sepnb.brest@wanadoo.fr

LATE BREEDING OF STORM PETREL IN BRITTANY

Laying dates of storm petrels were very late in Brittany in 1998, with first eggs laid on the 20-25 May, 50% of laying on the 1-5 July, and latest eggs on the 1-10 August, i.e. about 1.5 month later than in previous years. This delay was probably due to variation in oceanographic and feeding conditions just before laying. I would be interested to know if other colonies such as those on the Isles of Scilly and perhaps colonies in Wales or Southern Ireland were also affected.

Bernard Cadiou
Bretagne Vivante - SEPNEB, 186 rue
Anatole France, BP 32, F-29276
BREST cedex, France
E-mail : sepnb.brest@wanadoo.fr

ENDANGERED SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSSES KILLED IN ALASKAN WATERS

On 21 September 1998, an observer recovered the carcass of an eight year old short-tailed albatross caught by an Alaskan longliner and one other short-tailed albatross mortality was recently observed falling from another vessel's lines. The short-tailed albatross killings are of great concern as this species was once thought to be extinct and now numbers less than 1,000 birds. Despite the adoption of regulations requiring avoidance/mitigation measures on larger vessels in the Alaskan longline fishery in 1997, seabird mortality continues. In Alaskan waters in 1996, there were 2,646 vessels registered to fish for Pacific halibut and 15 million hooks were set. Another 1,281 vessels set 201 million hooks for other groundfish such as Pacific cod and sablefish. More than 13,000 seabirds were killed as bycatch in Alaska in 1996. These are estimates as there is very little observer coverage on halibut vessels and many other vessels do not have observers. Species killed include northern fulmars, black-legged kittiwakes, sooty and short-tailed shearwaters, Laysan and black-footed albatrosses and the endangered short-tailed albatross. ABC is leading efforts by the conservation community to increase the use of effective seabird avoidance techniques in Alaska and to require the adoption of seabird avoidance measures. In Hawaiian waters, an active fleet of 120 tuna and swordfish longliners killed an estimated 4,000 Laysan and black-footed Albatrosses in 1997. Observer coverage is very low (4% of vessels). The vessels are not required to employ avoidance/mitigation measures. There is concern that this killing of black-footed albatrosses in

Hawaiian, Alaskan, and other fisheries will cause a population decline. This seabird species has recently been accorded the IUCN status of Vulnerable, based on observed rates of decline.

CARIBBEAN SEABIRD NESTING THREATENED BY PROPOSED ROCKET SITE

One of the few undeveloped sites in the Caribbean, Sombrero Island the northernmost island in the Lesser Antilles provides nesting habitat for a number of seabird species. Among them: roseate terns and brown pelicans, which are endangered in the Caribbean. Red-billed tropicbirds, least terns, and masked boobies all species of special concern in the region also nest on the island. However, this small, mammalian-predator-free Island is currently being eyed by Beal Aerospace for a rocket-launch site. The proposed development of this mile long island would likely result in substantial loss of nesting sites. Also of concern are possible bird aircraft collisions as planes approach the island to land. There is still time to comment on this proposal. Although scheduled for release in September, the Environmental Impact Statement still had not been issued as of early November. The British National Space Centre has promised to make the EIS or portions thereof available on its website at www.open.gov.uk/bnsc/bnschome.htm

Comments may be sent to Dr. Pippa Goldschmidt, British National Space Centre, 151 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 955, UK and to the Honorable Hubert Hughes, Chief Minister, P.O. Box 60, The Valley, Anguilla.

US AUTHORITIES POISED TO DESTROY LARGEST CASPIAN TERN NESTING COLONY

Although Caspian terns are declining in California and considered vulnerable in British Columbia, the US federal government is apparently preparing to destroy this species' nesting habitat on Rice Island in the Columbia River estuary. Used by 30% of the North American population, this is probably the largest Caspian tern colony in the world. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) blames terns for the demise of certain salmonid populations because the birds eat hatchery-raised smolts of federally listed coho salmon and steelhead populations. Pacific Seabird Group (PSG) has asked the natural resource agencies to focus recovery efforts on salmon habitat and other genuine causes for depleted salmon runs on the Columbia River. PSG has petitioned NMFS under the Freedom of Information Act asking for data on the past 20 years on the percentage of smolts that have returned each year to spawn in the Columbia River system. PSG will analyze this information to assess whether the growth of the Caspian Tern colony since 1987 has affected the recruitment of salmonids. At an October Senate hearing, NMFS, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers pledged to Senator Dirk Kempthorne to destroy the habitat before the 1999 nesting season. The government has just released an Environmental Assessment for public comment; feedback is due by November 30. To obtain a copy, contact Bob Willis at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, +1 503-808-4703 or robert.e.willis@usace.army.mil

SEABIRD STUDIES IN FOULA, 1998

Weather conditions in July 1998 in Foula were the worst for seabird fieldwork I have ever experienced in Shetland in summer. It was persistently wet and windy, making it very difficult to reach colonies of auks, kittiwakes and shags safely, and making it impossible to enter colonies or handle chicks on most days due to risks of chicks becoming wet. Thus no data were collected by handling auks or adult kittiwakes, and no tern chicks were handled. In addition, it was clear that many seabirds were having difficulty in finding food (certainly true of terns, kittiwakes, puffins, divers, fulmars, and possibly also of other species), so that catching birds to obtain food samples or disturbing breeding adults was undesirable.

Not surprisingly, 1998 was generally a poor season for breeding seabirds. Shags and divers had late breeding seasons. Red-throated divers attempted breeding at 12 sites. Only 5 chicks were hatched and only 2 chicks fledged. Eider numbers were similar to those in 1997; 109 males and 78 females were present on the east coast on 22 July, with a total of 33 ducklings that day; 139 males, 73 females and 27 chicks were counted on 31 July. Arctic skua numbers fell to 114 aots (down 3 from 1997 when there were 3 less than in 1996) though adult survival was again high. Arctic skua breeding success was good (about 100 chicks were reared to close to fledging) but mortality at fledging was quite high due to predation by great skuas. Great skua adult survival rate was high and breeding success was the best for more than 10 years; sandeels and whitefish were prominent in the diet and few birds were killed during June. In July, herring and mackerel were frequent in

the great skua diet and there were no regurgitates of sandeels after 10 July. Numbers of breeders increased noticeably in several but not all parts of Foula, and numbers on clubs continued to recover. Kittiwake breeding success varied from zero at Logat and several other colonies where there was predation by great skuas, to 0.40 chicks per nest at the Noup colony where there was no evidence of any predation, but 41 uneaten dead emaciated chicks were found below the nests and weights of live chicks were very low indeed; kittiwake breeding numbers continue to decline. Food availability to kittiwakes appeared to be very poor, consisting of small (6-8 cm) sandeels. Arctic terns (perhaps 500-1000 pairs in May but only 200 pairs remaining in late June) had a poor season with only about 70 chicks fledged. Puffin activity in colonies was less than in 1996 and 1997. Both puffins and razorbills carried small or very small sandeels to chicks. Many dead emaciated puffin chicks were present at burrow entrances.

Paulo Catry, Simone Pfeiffer, Stefan Garthe and Claudia Eidtmann helped collect this information. I particularly thank Tony Mainwood for providing eider counts, Arctic skua and red-throated diver data for this report, and for ringing shags and Arctic skuas.

Bob Furness

SEABIRDS AND LICE

My colleagues and I are studying the co-evolution of seabirds and their lice, and I'm keen to obtain lice from as many seabird species as possible. If anyone is in a position to collect lice from seabirds (e.g., as part of another study, from washed-up birds, post-

mortems, etc.) we'd be extremely grateful. Ideally the lice would be freshly collected (or taken from frozen specimens), stored in 70-90% ethanol alcohol, and posted to:

Dr Roderic D. M. Page
DEEB, IBLS
Graham Kerr Building
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ, U.K.

More details on collecting and storing lice can be obtained from <http://taxonomy.zoology.gla.ac.uk/~vs mith/collection.html>.

For details of our project see <http://taxonomy.zoology.gla.ac.uk/Jobs /NERC/seabird.html>.

Rod Page

SAMPLES OF DEAD GUILLEMOTS REQUIRED

Professor Claude Joiris is working on pollutant dynamics in seabirds in the southern North Sea, and is keen to make comparisons between mercury and PCB levels in guillemots from Scotland collected at different times of year with his data from the southern North Sea guillemots (which include some Scottish breeding birds and young from Scotland in winter, but living in very different food and oceanographic conditions). The ideal samples would be batches of 20-30 birds collected at a particular time of year and locality, and he would like samples from any (or all four) seasons. If anyone has samples of birds that are frozen and available for him to use could they please contact me. Alternatively, if anyone comes across lots of freshly dead guillemots this winter (adult or juvenile birds are both of interest) I'd be most grateful if you could either freeze them for this

project or contact me to see if I can uplift them fresh if you cannot freeze them. But please do NOT post me individual birds, as we can only make use of large sample sizes (and the university post sorting room is rather small and warm!). I can be contacted by phone (01301 702603 or 0141 330 3560) or by email (r.furness@bio.gla.ac.uk). Many thanks.

Bob Furness

PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP ANNUAL MEETING, FEBRUARY 1999

The Pacific Seabird Group is sponsoring a symposium on seabird by-catch at their 26th annual meeting in February 1999. The meeting is 24-28 February in Blaine, WA, a town at the US - Canada border. The symposium is entitled Seabird By-catch: Trends, Roadblocks and Solutions.

In general, PSG would like to feature completed studies that:

- 1) quantify seabird by-catch,
- 2) characterise the effect of fisheries by-catch on seabird populations,
- 3) explore methods to reduce seabird by-catch, and
- 4) explore by-catch management policy and identify legal, cultural or social barriers or incentives to reduce the by-catch of seabirds.

We would like to feature work not previously presented at past PSG annual meetings; however, well researched retrospectives that provide new insight are welcome. In some cases, where a common theme exists and by-catch studies are in the planning stage and/or works in progress, panel presentations will be considered.

We have a strong interest in featuring the following topics:

Pacific longline fishery-seabird interactions: status of albatross populations in both hemispheres, Hawaii and Alaska fishery by-catch, lessons from South Pacific fisheries, FAO and CCAMLR policy activities and current status of research on reducing the by-catch of seabirds in longline fisheries.

Coastal gillnet fishery-seabird interactions: status of gillnet by-catch in fisheries from Japan to California as well as the Atlantic, population level effects of by-catch, research and/or management to reduce seabird by-catch and its status or success, management actions resulting from previous by-catch studies and related management issues.

Recreational fishery by-catch: As an emerging area of attention, studies quantifying the take and possible population level effects of seabird by-catch in recreational fisheries are of great interest.

High Seas Drift Gillnet Fisheries: retrospective look at seabird by-catch in these fisheries, the effect/s of international net bans on seabird populations, and effects of currently operating drift gillnet fisheries within the exclusive economic zone of individual countries.

The Influence of Conservation Law and Treaties on Ecoregional Management of Seabird By-catch. (Endangered Species Legislation, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Depending on the response - the quality and diversity of papers received - we will seek funding to publish the symposium proceedings through PSG. Travel funds for symposium speakers are not currently available; however we are attempting to develop some support. Abstracts are due 11 December 1998.

For more on the Pacific Seabird Group see:
<http://www.nmnh.si.edu/BIRDNET/PacBirds/index.html>. The call for papers and details about the Annual meeting will also be on the PSG web site in the near future.

I hope you will take this the opportunity to share your work and join us in exploring the seabird by-catch issue. Please contact me for more information. And of course please pass this on to anyone who might have an interest.

Ed Melvin
Symposium Organiser

Ed Melvin, Marine Fisheries Specialist
Washington Sea Grant Program
460 Fisheries Center
School of Fisheries, University of Washington
Box 357980, Seattle, WA 98195-4650
Voice: +1 206 543-9968;
Fax: +1 206 685-7471

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL PENGUIN CONFERENCE

Those of you who like putting meetings in diaries some way ahead of the event might like to note the first announcement of the Fourth International Penguin Conference. This is to be held in La Serena, Chile from 4-8 September 2000. This will be

the first time that the conference has been in South America. If you are interested in participating please send an email to:
gluna@nevados.cecun.ucn.cl
expressing an interest in participating. The second notice will be sent out with details of papers, abstracts etc in due course.

Guillermo Luna-Jorquera
Universidad Catolica del Norte
Department of Marine Biology
Larrondo 1281, Casilla 117
Coquimba, Chile

From: WORLD BIRDWATCH Vol. 20, No. 3

This issue announces the find of the first breeding site of Saunder's gull outside of China. It was found in May 1998 on the west coast of South Korea.

A long article on the Seychelles highlights Cousin Island, which when it was purchased by BirdLife International in 1968 became the first land-and-sea reserve in the Indian Ocean. Most of the conservation efforts on the island have been devoted to restoring habitat for endemic passerines, but the 300,000 individuals of seven seabird species nesting there have benefited from the continuing absence of rats and cats. A seabird monitoring programme is scheduled to start in 1999.

From: PENGUIN CONSERVATION Vol. 11, no.2

An entertaining 8 page article on penguin hand-rearing fills the first half of the issue. This includes details on hand-rearing diet and "SeaWorld Fish Shake". I am not sure how many

Seabird Group members hand-rear birds, but this article certainly looks comprehensive. Much of the rest of the issue is taken up with articles on over-fishing. Two recently retired senior staff members of FAO have written a report commissioned by Greenpeace indicating that a 50% cut in capacity is required world-wide to prevent continued over-fishing and collapse of further fish stocks. After a resolution at FAO in 1995 there was indeed a sharp decrease in the numbers of new vessels commissioned and a reduction in total tonnage compared to previous years, however there was once again an increase in 1997 with a return to the construction of large-tonnage vessels. These vessels comprise 1% of fishing vessels globally, but constitute 50-60% of the world's total fishing capacity.

Sadly rather few nations have ratified the landmark UN treaty on straddling stocks of fish signed in 1995.

An article also reports on the development of illegal long-line fisheries for Patagonian toothfish in the southern oceans. A minimum of 100,000 tonnes has been taken illegally (compared with 30,000 tonnes in the legal fishery). This long-lining is also increasing the seabird bycatch in the area. Unsurprisingly, no scientific studies have been made of the illegal fishery, but estimates of by-catch range from 5,000 to 145,000 seabirds depending on assumptions made.

From SEA SWALLOW Vol. 47

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society has been computerising its records. They propose at present to code all records published so far in Sea Swallow and all incoming records. Other archival material will be

assessed for future projects. About 13,000 (half of the total) records had been processed by the time that this issue of Sea Swallow went to press.

A survey carried out of the seabirds of Diego Garcia, its three offshore islets and of Anniversary Island in the Chagos Archipelago in August 1997 is reported. More than 16,000 breeding pairs of red-footed booby, 500 pairs of brown noddy and 180 pairs of white tern were counted. The breeding cycle of these species were also assessed. Alien predators, primarily cats and rats have had a heavy influence since they were introduced in the 19th century.

The usual lists of land-bird and seabird records make up much of the issue. Bill Bourne and Ken Simmons have compiled a preliminary list of the Birds of Ascension Island and report in this issue.

From WWF ARCTIC BULLETIN No 3.98

An interesting article points out that although some 56% of the Svalbard archipelago is within protected areas, this is insufficient to conserve biodiversity. In particular razorbill and guillemot colonies are poorly represented. A dispute continues to the east of Svalbard over fisheries access.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF 33rd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 33rd Annual General Meeting of the Seabird Group will be held at Swanwick Conference Centre, 1745 9 January 1999.

Draft Agenda

1. Minutes and matters arising from 32nd AGM
2. 33rd Annual Report
3. Accounts and Treasurer's Report
4. Election of new Officers
Secretary
Editor of Newsletter
Two Ordinary members
5. Progress with Seabird 2000
6. Progress with final issue of Seabird and first issue of Atlantic Seabird
7. Any Other Business

John Uttley
Honorary Secretary

If any members wish to be nominated for the vacant positions on the Executive Committee please contact Sarah Wanless on 01330 826343.