



**SEABIRD 2000
IT'S NOT OVER YET!**

Seabird 2000 is the latest census of all breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland (see Newsletter no. 82 and Mitchell 1999, *British Birds* 92:36-39), following on from the previous 'marathons' of Operation Seafarer in 1969/70 and the Seabird Colony Register in 1985/87. Contrary to what the project's name suggests, the census work for Seabird 2000 did not only take place this year, it got underway in 1999 (some work was undertaken in 1998) and is due to continue next year, with the results expected to be published in the latter half of 2002.

For me, Seabird 2000 got under way on 12 April 1999 at 7.20am in the back of a Ford Escort estate on a cliff-top in Yorkshire! I was in fact, taking part in a live interview on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. This was the first in an assortment of TV and radio coverage of the project's official launch at the Bempton Cliffs RSPB Reserve. The launch was attended by Elliot Morley MP, the Minister for Fisheries, Food and the Countryside. This may have been the 'official' launch, but the project had already begun...

Since late March, Martin Heubeck and his team in Shetland and SNH's Fraser Symonds and Tony Mainwood in Caithness had already been making early morning forays in their respective inflatables, in search of pre-breeding rafts of black guillemots. In Ireland, black guillemot

surveys began even earlier, back in 1998. Since then an army of volunteers and Dúchas (Heritage Service) Rangers have scoured almost the whole coastline of the Republic, nearly all on foot. Counts are conducted in April, several weeks before work on the other species begins.

The reason for this is that black guillemots nest hidden away in rock crevices, so that once breeding gets underway, it is impossible to obtain a meaningful count of breeding pairs. Hence, surveys are carried out at the start of the breeding season in April, before egg-laying begins and when the breeding birds gather on the sea near the colony at first light to display and mate.



Rob Robinson, Roddy Mavor & Andy Webb (left to right) demonstrating the quickest way to nausea on board *Poplar Diver*, St Kilda 1999. (Photo: Tina Norris, Scottish Viewpoint)

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In Scotland, the black guillemot colonies are scattered along thousands of kilometres of some of Britain's remotest coastline and islands. To survey them requires specialist teams in inflatables that can get close to the rocky shores where the birds aggregate to breed. They must also be fast enough to cover large distances in the short three hour window that is available to count these birds after first light, before they disperse to feed. In Scotland, work is progressing well. Martin and his team have now finished their survey of Shetland's tysties with a total of 15,670 adult birds compared to 11,330 during the last complete survey in 1982-84 (both figures exclude Fair Isle). Elsewhere in Scotland, staff from SNH, RSPB and JNCC have been working alongside volunteers to cover huge stretches of coastline in Orkney, Lewis and Harris, Skye, Ayrshire and the whole west coast of mainland Scotland between Cape Wrath and Mull (see www.jncc.gov.uk/tystiediary).



Another challenge for Seabird 2000 has been to improve our current knowledge of the numbers and distribution of breeding Leach's and storm petrels. Due to their subterranean and nocturnal breeding habits, both species have proved impossible to accurately census in the past. So much so, that the population estimates for many colonies are given as '?' or 'present' and the current estimates of 70,000-250,000 pairs of storm-petrel and 10,000-100,000 pairs of Leach's petrel in Britain & Ireland (Lloyd, Tasker and Partridge 1991 *The Status of Seabirds in Britain and Ireland*. T & AD Poyser) are the widest ranging population estimates for any species of bird in Britain (see Stone *et al.* 1997). However, the recent development of the tape play-back technique for censusing both species, has allowed us to accurately census those petrel colonies, where previously we could only guess their size.

Despite the development of an accurate census method, censusing petrel colonies is still a challenging undertaking due to the remoteness and difficulty of access to the islands where these birds breed. At the start of this year, Birdwatch Ireland and JNCC successfully secured a substantial grant from the EC INTERREG Atlantic Programme to fund surveys of petrel and Manx shearwater colonies along the Atlantic Frontier of Britain and Ireland. In June and July this year the funding enabled the first ever survey of the Leach's petrels breeding on St Kilda, probably the largest colony on this side of the Atlantic. In Ireland, Steve Newton of Birdwatch Ireland mounted expeditions to survey petrel colonies on the Kerry islands of Inishvickillane, Inishtooskert, Puffin Island and Great Skellig. Next year the INTERREG funding will be used to continue the petrel surveys further north off Mayo and Donegal, while I intend to run expeditions to survey the remaining Leach's and storm petrel colonies on islands off the north and west coasts of Scotland, such as the Flannans, North Rona and Sule Skerry.

The play-back technique is a useful tool for determining the presence of breeding petrels and is carried out during the day, obviating the need to wander around remote rocky islands at night. Earlier this year, a joint RSPB and English Nature survey of England's only storm petrel colony on the Isles of Scilly was able in just a few weeks to visit 28 likely petrel islands to assess the presence of breeding petrels and, on the 11 that were found to be inhabited, they found a total of 1,475 breeding pairs. The survey also found that on some islands where petrels had been caught by mist netting in the past, there was no evidence of incubating birds present in burrows. So regardless of whether tape-lures are used, mist-netting can give misleading information about the location of petrel colonies.

The majority of the cliff-nesting seabirds (*eg* fulmars, shags, kittiwakes, guillemots and razorbills) have now been counted throughout Britain and Ireland. Table 1 lists counts of guillemots and kittiwakes from some of the largest colonies, which in total represent 49% and 31% of the combined British and Irish populations of guillemots and kittiwakes respectively as found during the last census (Lloyd *et al.* 1991).

Table 1

	Guillemot			Kittiwake		
	1985 to 1987	1998 to 2000	% change	1985 to 1987	1998 to 2000	% change
Scotland						
Foula, Shetland	37472	41435	11	4331	1982	-54
Fair Isle, Shetland	32437	39257	21	19072	10481	-45
Copinsay, Orkney	30973	20045	-35	9888	4364	-56
W.Westray, Orkney	60670	54577	-10	30980	34761	12
Sule Skerry, Orkney	8924	10331	16	973	1275	31
Sule Sgeir, Western Isles	25382	20877	-18	1065	1206	13
Mingulay & Berneray, Western Isles	30881	32590	6	8614	5511	-36
St Kilda, Isles Western	22705	23457	3	7829	3886	-50
Handa, Sutherland	98686	112676	14	10732	7013	-35
Fowlsheugh, Aberdeenshire	52355	62330	19	22051	18800	-15
Isle of May, Firth of Forth	17546	21694	24	6765	4196	-38
St Abbs, Borders	26702	40720	52	15182	9576	-37
England						
Farne Islands, Northumberland	17250	31386	82	5915	5492	-7
Wales						
Skomer, Pembrokeshire	6192	12135	96	2543	2156	-15
Northern Ireland						
Rathlin, Island Co. Moyle	39840	95567	140	6420	9847	53
Republic of Ireland						
Lambay Island, Co. Dublin	44495	59839	34	3005	4091	36
Cliffs of Moher, Co. Clare	12957	19943	54	4038	7698	91
Great Saltee, Co. Wexford	16329	18000	10	2908	2122	-27
Horn Head, Co. Donegal	4806	6548	36	4256	7698	81
TOTAL	586602	723407	23	166567	142155	-15
Britain & Ireland Total	1203100			543500		



It remains to be seen whether the increase of 23% in guillemot numbers and decline in Kittiwakes of 15% will be realised once data from all the colonies has been collated. However, it is worth noting that the increase in guillemot numbers is consistent throughout the British Isles, occurring in 16 of the 19 colonies listed in Table 1.

Kittiwakes appear to be showing opposite trends on different sides of the Irish Sea. In Britain 11 out of 14 colonies declined, whereas in Ireland 4 out of the 5 colonies listed increased. This is admittedly a crude analysis since changes may not have occurred in such a linear fashion as this single comparison may suggest. However, at some colonies, such as Rathlin where by far the greatest changes have occurred, Seabird 2000 is the first whole colony count since the last census in the mid-eighties.

In addition to the input of staff from the Seabird 2000 partner organisations, I have had an enthusiastic response from not just self confessed seabird enthusiasts, but also from a wide range of volunteers, ranging from life-long birders to people who make up for their lack of experience with enthusiasm. So far, around 400 volunteers have either taken part or pledged to take part in the project and the list is growing every day as completed survey forms trickle in to our Aberdeen office. With their help and the co-ordination by 46 regional organisers, in just two years we have been able to survey over 90% of Britain's cliff-nesting seabirds, all of Britain's breeding terns and conduct our first comprehensive survey of inland breeding gulls in Britain and Ireland. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have taken part in Seabird 2000 so far. However, it's not over yet and if you would like to take part again or for the first time, then please contact me at the address below. It is likely that there are still some inland gull colonies in your area that need counting or you may wish to move further afield and take a holiday in Donegal to help out with the Irish tystie survey or perhaps plug some gaps in the survey along the coasts of Skye and Sutherland.

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For further information on Seabird 2000 or to offer help contact either:

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or

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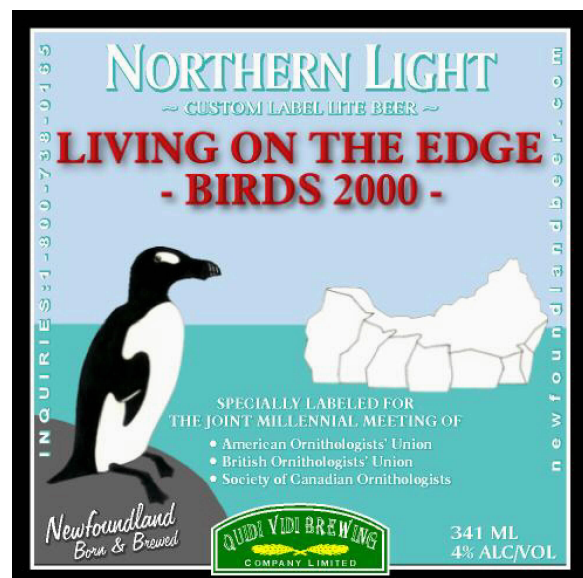
Seabird 2000 Partners: JNCC, RSPB Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group, Birdwatch Ireland, The Seabird Group, English Nature, CCW, SNH, Duchas (the Heritage Service, Ireland)

LIVING ON THE EDGE – BIRDS 2000

Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union in conjunction with the Society of Canadian Ornithologists and the British Ornithologists' Union

Memorial University of Newfoundland, St Johns, Newfoundland, Canada

14-19 August 2000



St Johns, Newfoundland was an appropriate setting for Living on the Edge – Birds 2000. The conference logo, designed by Ian Stenhouse, of a Great Auk solemnly contemplating an iceberg, was omni-present on tee-shirts and CDs, billboards and beer bottles (the latter full of Northern Light, Newfoundland's own craft brewed beer!!).

The conference was attended by over 700 delegates, mostly from the US and Canada. The first day was given over to meetings and workshops, many with a strong seabird slant, for example ‘the biological basis for the conservation of colonial waterbirds and seabirds’ and ‘the effects of oil pollution on marine bird populations’. However the conference really got underway in the evening with a Newfoundland Night Reception during which we were entertained with live folk music and a stunning film, produced by the BBC/National Geographic, entitled People of the Sea.

On each of the four formal days of the conference, the day started with a plenary lecture. Seabird enthusiasts had to wait until the final day for John Croxall’s contribution ‘Seabird Ranges and Oceanic Habitats – Remote Tracking in the Service of Marine Conservation’. This tour de force used recent work in the southwest atlantic on albatrosses and petrels to illustrate how satellite tracking is revolutionising our ability to delimit the distributions and migrations of seabirds. In a thought provoking conclusion, John suggested that combining insights from satellite tracking with existing data on at-sea distributions, might enable the definition of critical habitats for seabirds at both regional and global scales. This approach has been widely used to identify terrestrial based Important Bird Areas, but with a few exceptions, notably the North Sea, English Channel and the Kattegat, has not been fully exploited for marine birds.

After the Nutrition Break (North American speak for an upmarket coffee break), the seabird theme continued with a symposium organised by Bill Montevecchi, Dick Veit and Sarah Wanless on ‘Birds Foraging at Sea – Performance Indicators of Prey and Oceanographic Changes’. Bill Montevecchi chaired the session and introduced the first two papers which were both on gannets, the first by Keith Hamer on foraging and food provisioning strategies and the second by Stefan Garthe on foraging behaviour as an indicator of food availability and hydrography. These talks revealed previously unsuspected capabilities in terms of foraging range and dive depth and duration. The third talk by Dick Veit focussed on the foraging strategies employed by seabirds and used an elegant modelling approach

to test whether large scale movements of black browed albatrosses were the cumulative outcome of numerous local scale decisions or could be predicted from responses to prey distributions and other foragers. Sarah Wanless then described how the same type of logger used by Stefan Garthe on gannets, was being used to provide new insights into the foraging behaviour of kittiwakes and common guillemots in the North Sea. To end the session, Yutaka Watanuki presented some fascinating results of a comparison of foraging performance of adelic penguins at colonies with and without easy access to open water.

In addition to this symposium, there was plenty to interest the seabird enthusiast, with sessions on penguin and tern biology, seabird reproduction and biology, an all embracing session on seabirds as well as many posters on seabird-related topics.

The full and varied programme of talks was interspersed with numerous social events including a barbecue, student night, and poster session at which ‘the Great Auk Beer Bottle’ was a popular and recurring fixture. The middle day of the conference was free for field trips. I opted for the Witless Bay trip, the highlight of which was spectacular and prolonged close up views of a humpback whale beating the water with its flippers. A truly awesome sight!

The conference organiser was Bill Montevecchi and, together his indefatigable team of helpers, his enthusiasm and joie de vivre ensured a friendly and convivial atmosphere that was ideal for renewing old acquaintances and making new ones. At the Conference Banquet it was unanimously agreed that the next millennial AOU/SCO/BOU conference will, global warming permitting, be held in St Johns. I hope I’ll be there in spirit!!

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With thanks to Iain Stenhouse for the logo

THE NOT-SO-PERFECT STORM

A year ago I wrote in Newsletter No.83 of the gale of 22nd May 1999, which raised a devastating south-westerly swell that washed away large numbers of Guillemot eggs and Shag nests in Shetland. At the time, I thought I'd seen the largest sea the north-east Atlantic could throw at a seabird colony during the breeding season, but I was wrong. When the forecast was faxed through to Sumburgh Head on the morning of 12th June warning of a south-westerly gale the next day with winds of up to Storm 10, I immediately asked Mick Mellor to check the Shag and Kittiwake breeding success study plots despite having done so only four days earlier. A heavy swell on 7th June had already washed out 14 nests in our Shag plots at Sumburgh Head and I feared we were in for a repeat of the 1999 scenario.

The following morning the wind was SW 8 gusting 9 and Mick went up the Head early on to see what was happening. Despite a heavy swell, it didn't seem to be reaching breeding ledges and he went home to get on with paperwork. By 11am the situation had changed dramatically. A very deep swell was rolling in from the south-west, the wind had increased to the forecast Storm 10 (gusts of 75 knots shattered the previous June record of 61 knots in 1955), and I watched as wave after wave totally engulfed the large stack in Smithfield Geo on the west side of the Head, which normally holds 3,500-4,000 Guillemots. Some of these poor birds were still on the stack but as successive waves crashed over and above it, the last remaining stalwarts struggled into the air while hundreds of tonnes of seawater drained off, carrying with it unfledged chicks and three months of accumulated guano. The guano had actually turned the surf the colour of milky coffee, which couldn't have done much for the plumage of those birds embroiled in it. For those who know Sumburgh Head, I even saw one wave reach the little Glasgow University hide on the ridge behind the stack, making this the largest sea I have ever seen there and considerably worse than last May's effort. Even the south-westerly hurricane on 3rd January this year, which gusted to 92 knots and was pretty scary, produced a swell that only reached half-way up the 'big stack'.



Despite the devastation it was an exhilarating sight, and exploring different parts of the Head from the shelter of the dyke, Mick and I realised that few Shag nests on the west side of the Head would survive (many nest sites were under 50 feet of water) and that some groups of nesting Kittiwakes were taking a real battering. When the Shag plots were rechecked on 15th June, it was found that of the 162 nests with eggs or young on 12th June, 76 (47 %) had either disappeared or only contained dead chicks, mostly on the west side of the Head (75 % lost). Overall, 53 of the pairs (70 %) that lost their nests in the storm rebuilt and relaid but by the latest check on 21st August only 20 of these (37 %) were still 'active', and those now with small chicks will be very vulnerable to the first gales of autumn. Amazingly, only 46 (17 %) of the 270 Kittiwake nests being incubated in our plots on 12th June were lost in the storm, although one small colony was badly hit. The storm occurred far too late in the season for Kittiwakes to relay, as was the case for Guillemots which probably lost about 7-8,000 chicks from the Sumburgh Head colony as a whole.

This storm will have affected seabird colonies exposed to the south-west from St Kilda to Hermaness, but not just cliff-nesting species suffered. Even in relatively sheltered situations, beach-nesting terns were washed out by the heavy surf, and there is good evidence that Tysties nesting in boulder beaches and Red-throated Divers nesting on the north and east sides of lochans lost clutches. One storm doesn't make a disaster and colonies such as Noss will have been largely untouched by this one, but this makes two years in succession that massive seas from the south-west have caused havoc. Quite how such a short-lived gale generated such a devastating swell is unclear, as is any link to global warming. However, one thing is clear. If these events become regular then it can only be bad news in the long term for some seabird populations, with Shags probably one of the most vulnerable species.

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With thanks to Mick Mellors for the photos

OIL SLICK SPY IN THE SKY

On 14 August 2000, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (the MCA) revealed their pilot scheme for Satellite-mounted Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) oil-spill monitoring of UK waters, including the Shetlands and the offshore oil fields. By this means, oil slicks at sea of even a few metres in length can be detected night and day from outer space, in most cloud and weather conditions and over a large area. Oil has a suppressing effect on waves - the 'oil on troubled waters' principle - the oil slick shows up on the specialised radar because of its different, smoother, surface texture.

Lloyds List, the specialist daily newspaper of the shipping industry, appreciating the impact that this news would have on its readership, splashed the story across its front page the very next day (15-08-2000), under the heading "Britain unveils oil slick 'Spy in the Sky'." This news was also covered in *The Times* ("Satellite to catch polluting ships" by Nick Nuttall, 28-08-2000), on BBC Television and so on, and is continuing to get media coverage.

As the SAR-carrying satellite is unseen and it passes unannounced, it acts as a powerful deterrent to the deliberate dumping at sea of used or waste oil from bilge- or tank-washing. The deterrent effect has already been noted in other countries where similar systems have been deployed for several years.

It is essential that full use is now made of the information picked up in this way, and that the pilot scheme be continued after its eight month trial period, which is due to end next January. Taking the English Channel as an example, that is precisely the peak period for oiled seabird casualties. Every year an inestimably large number of Guillemots, Razorbills and other diving birds are caught up in oil pollution in that area alone. Only those that come ashore and are picked up can be counted.

No sea area can be regarded in isolation. Currents, tide and wind can and do carry oil, oil

covered plastic and other debris - as well as bottle messages - for great distances. One example is the loss overboard, from a ship in a storm in the North Pacific, of distinctive training shoes, which resulted in 1300 shoes travelling more than 2000 kilometres in 7-9 months. Recently, a 'For Sale' board with the name and address of a Folkestone (Kent) estate agent, was found on a beach in Soljenäs, Sweden, among other (oil-contaminated) marine debris.

In the wake of the *Erika* disaster (12-12-99), the climate of change provides the opportunity to maximise efforts to combat oil pollution at sea.

There is a new and welcome awareness, and now a general admission that deliberate oil pollution problems do exist. Oil is a toxic and dangerous substance. Much that comes ashore on seabirds is 'used' heavy fuel oil. Heavy oil does not evaporate or go away. It is 'persistent'. Changes, which increase the dangers inherent in such oil, can be brought about by exposure to seawater and sunlight. While oiled seabird casualties provide the quantifiable face of oil pollution, it is at the same time affecting each and every form of marine life.

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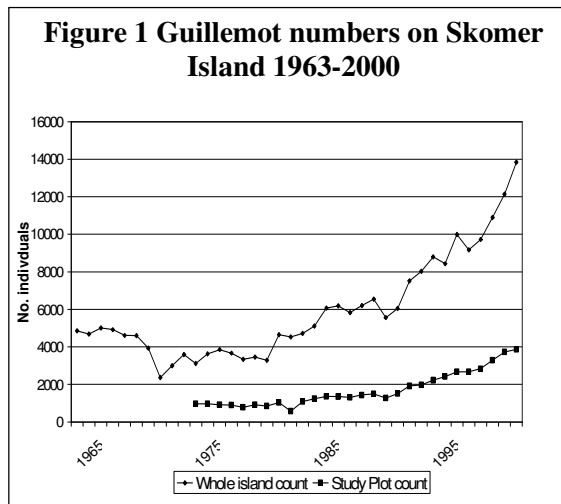
SEABIRDS ON SKOMER ISLAND IN 2000

On arriving back at Skomer at the beginning of March this year we were relieved to be greeted by thousands of Guillemots and Razorbills crowding the cliffs - and no signs of oiling. The *Erika* oil spill had taken a massive toll, and concerns were raised that our birds could have been affected whilst wintering in the Bay of Biscay. However, any initial impact on the breeding auk populations would not be known until census and other monitoring work were carried out in the following months, and even then it may be years before the full picture emerges if sub-adults were affected.

The Wildlife Trust West Wales, under JNCC contract, carries out annual census and breeding success studies of a number of seabird species on Skomer. In addition, survivorship and productivity of other species are measured by the Edward Grey Institute, also under JNCC contract. Sheffield University, headed by Tim Birkhead and Ben Hatchwell, has also been undertaking more detailed studies of Guillemots and Razorbills, and this season received funding from the Countryside Council for Wales to look at sub-adult attendance in the light of the *Erika* disaster.

The whole-island Guillemot count yielded 13,852 individuals – an increase of 14.1% from 1999, and apparently in keeping with the rate of increase in recent years (Figure 1). However, the sum of means of seven counts of three study plots failed to show a significant change from last year. The only other time plot counts have not significantly increased from year to year since 1990, was 1996 – the year of the *Sea Empress*. As study plot counts were repeated seven times and were all conducted from land, and the whole-island census was a one-off, with

many sections counted from a boat, it could be assumed that the plot data paint a more accurate picture. A discontinuity in fieldworkers during the past three seasons further complicates matters, though. In sum, this preliminary analysis of the data should be treated with caution. Tim Birkhead and Ben Hatchwell of Sheffield University are currently analysing survivorship data.



Guillemot productivity was equal to that of 1999.

Razorbill numbers were the highest ever recorded, at 3894 individuals. Study plots were significantly up, by 24.9% on last year's counts (but last year's study plot counts were low in comparison with previous years). 96.8% of marked adults present in 1999 returned to a study colony in 2000 – on par with previous years. Breeding success was very poor, with a 'whole island' value of 0.5 chicks fledged per pair. Sheffield University study sites yielded a measly 0.36 fledglings per breeding attempt (compared to 0.74 in 1999). This was due to excessive localised predation, predominantly by Ravens. The high nest failure of Razorbills may have accounted for such a high all-island census, if failed breeders were more likely to be 'standing around' in the open.

Of the other seabirds, Fulmars displayed a 19% increase from 1999, redressing the decline of the past four years, but had the lowest productivity on record at just 0.33. Kittiwakes experienced a slight increase, although breeding success was down on last year's high; Lesser Black-backed Gulls continue to decline (from c.12,000 pairs in

1999 to c.10,000 in 2000) with a lowish productivity on par with last year's figure; and Great Black-backed and Herring Gull numbers remained steady (the former experiencing a higher breeding success than recent years and the latter a lower one). Puffin numbers were similar to previous years.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Tim Birkhead and Rob Field for some of the data. Much of the seabird monitoring on Skomer is funded by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Juan Brown

Warden, Skomer Island Nature Reserve

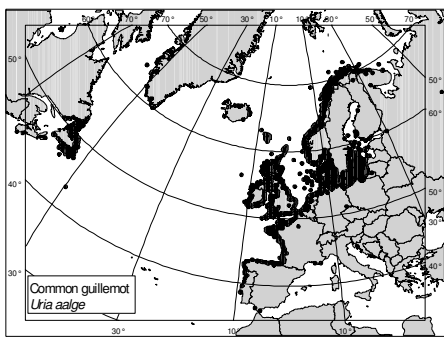
E-mail: skomer@connect.wales.co.uk

A RECOVERY DATABASE OF COMMON AND BRÜNNICH'S GUILLEMOTS RINGED IN THE ATLANTIC

A database containing all recoveries of common and Brünnich's guillemots ringed in the Atlantic is now established. The source data were delivered by the national ringing centres in Canada, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Russia (Kandalaksha State Nature Reserve), Sweden, UK and USA. The number of recoveries registered for common and Brünnich's guillemot is currently 12485 and 4968 respectively, comprising all recoveries reported up to 1998. The data are stored in EURING format. A front-end program named "RECOVERY", made by the author, has been prepared for easy access to the data and to facilitate different types of analysis. It is also possible to import the data files directly into Geographical Information Systems (GIS) programmes like Arc View (Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc.).

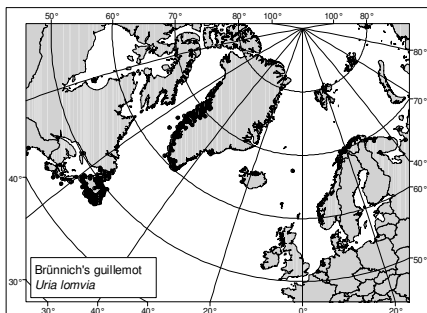
Many types of analysis are possible with such an international recovery database (*eg* migration patterns, wintering areas and mortality causes). In addition, it is hoped that the database may contribute to increased international co-operation in research on guillemots. This type of database and analysis may also act as a template for similar work on guillemots in the Pacific and

for other bird species in general. Except for the ringing data associated with the recovered birds, the total ringing material is not included in the database. However, it is necessary to have this available in order to analyse life history parameters (eg survival rates) and proportions of recoveries. Analyses of recoveries may give important additional information for research and management, which is otherwise often unavailable. The recovery database of guillemots will be used as the basis for analyses of the migration patterns, wintering areas and causes of death of the different populations breeding in the Atlantic. According to regulations given by the individual ringing centres, the recovery database can not be freely distributed. As an example of the data stored in the database, recovery areas in October-March of common and Brünnich's guillemots ringed in the Atlantic are shown on the included maps.



Maps

Areas with recoveries of common (above) and Brünnich's guillemots (below) in October-March (black) ringed in the Atlantic. To be visualised on the maps the recovery locations are buffered with a 30-km zone.



This project is also linked to the International Murre Conservation Strategy and Action plan prepared by the Circumpolar Seabird Group

(CSWG) in 1996 (CSWG 1996). The working group functions under the auspices of the program for the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), which was initially established under the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) in 1991 and is now part of the Arctic Council. The goal of the Murre strategy is *to facilitate circumpolar implementation of initiatives to conserve, protect and restore murre populations in the Arctic* (CSWG 1996). One main issue for research and monitoring is a need for comprehensive national and circumpolar computerised databases (CSWG 1996).

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FISHER ARCHIVE

Members of the Seabird Group will be aware that the original Operation Seafarer record cards are held in the JNCC office in Aberdeen. These cards still prove useful in the work of the JNCC's Seabird Colony Team but their value has been accorded increased significance recently with the deposition in the Natural History Museum of some Operation Seafarer and other material related to the late James Fisher. In order to retain the integrity of all bits and pieces relating to Operation Seafarer (record cards, supporting and related information, correspondence and photographs), the Seabird Group at its last AGM resolved to borrow the material gifted to the Museum. The Museum library kindly agreed to this and accordingly I visited South Kensington earlier in the year and collected several large cardboard boxes containing a variety of files, envelopes and folders.

The boxes are safely stored in the JNCC Peterborough office awaiting imminent transfer

to Aberdeen. We intend to return the borrowed materials, perhaps accompanied by the original Operation Seafarer record cards, to the Natural History Museum by December 2006 for permanent storage. Meantime, if any members of the Seabird Group wish to consult these (uncatalogued) papers then they should contact me by e-mail at the address below. It will be possible only to do this by appointment and in Dunnet House. The archive contains:

Material deposited by David Saunders

1. Large scrapbook of cuttings relating to the fulmar and the gannet;
2. Package of letters between David Saunders and Bill Bourne during Operation Seafarer;
3. Three miscellaneous gannet files;
4. Three packets of photographs relating to gannet colonies;
5. Three gannet cuttings files; and
6. Folders on gannet colonies arranged by places or countries: Great Britain (7 wallets), Ireland and the Channel Islands (2 envelopes), other gannet colonies (7 wallets), Atlantic general (1 wallet).

Material deposited by Bill Bourne

1. Sheaf of seven envelopes containing correspondence relating to England, Wales, Scotland, Shetland and Orkney, the Outer Hebrides, Ireland, and the north Atlantic during James Fisher's fulmar census of 1959;
2. An envelope containing James Fisher's correspondence with the Seabird Group, 1967-70, including his papers as Chairman of its Census Committee;
3. Six folders containing the top copies of the summaries by David Saunders of the results for each species in Operation Seafarer, 1968-1970, namely (a) fulmar; (b) petrels, Manx shearwater, gannet, cormorant, shag; (c) skuas and terns; (d) gulls, excluding (e) herring and common gull; and (f) auks;
4. Sixteen files of associated correspondence for first the pilot survey in 1968 and operation Seafarer in 1969-70, namely A-L and M-Z to September 1968, October 1969 – February 1969, A-G, H-P and R-Z February-May 1969, A-L and M-Z May–September 1969, September–December 1969, December 1969 – May 1970, April–July 1970, and unsorted correspondence after June 1970; and

5. An envelope of papers relating to the wreck of the *Torrey Canyon* in 1967.

Jim Reid

E-mail: reid_j@jncc.gov.uk

JOURNAL REVIEWS & 'BITS' BY MARK TASKER

From *PACIFIC SEABIRDS* Vol 27 (1)

The refereed articles in *Pacific Seabirds* may disappear soon into the new online version of *Marine Ornithology*. The two articles in this issue are on lesser frigatebirds in Hawaii, and seabird conservation on the Cook Islands. The latter, almost needless to say, is dominated by the problems of mammals imported by humans. Seabirds are breeding on islands without such introductions, but these in turn are the focus of tourist visits. A description of the workings of *Marine Ornithology* appears next - from 2001 it will be published both in hard format and on its own website: www.marineornithology.org where articles, refereed to full academic standards, may be downloaded free. An appreciation of Dick Brown, one of the pioneers of modern studies of seabirds at sea, appears next. The Pacific Seabird Group has given him a lifetime achievement award - sadly he is now permanently hospitalised and so was unable to collect the award at the most recent meeting of the group. Conservation News includes news of a court order stopping the destruction of the large colony of Caspian terns on the Columbia River as well as news of a reprieve for the seabirds of Sombrero Island (Anguilla) which was due to be turned into a new base for launching rockets. The next PSG meeting will be in Hawaii on 7-11 February 2001, with tentative locations for future years being Santa Barbara, California (2002), Vancouver (2003), Baja California (2004) and Oregon (2005). Abstracts of the 2000 meeting occupy the second half of the issue.

From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol 22(2)

The "return" of avian gillnet entanglement problems is noted. It appears that this cause of mortality has become significant for yellow-eyed penguins in South Island, New Zealand. In Malta, it appears that concerns over the impact

of a proposed tuna-penning project on the nearby Cory's shearwater colony on Ta' Cenc cliffs has led to the project being told to seek another location by the planning authorities. There is an extensive review of the impact of long-lining on the world's seabirds - to coincide with BirdLife's major campaign on this topic (and the subject of fundraising at this year's British Birdwatching Fair).

MELOPSITTACUS - A NEW BRAZILLIAN JOURNAL

Although this issue does not feature any articles on seabirds, readers interested in Brazilian birds may be interested to note that from the next issue, articles will also be published in English (previously only Portuguese and Spanish were accepted). The annual subscription will be the equivalent of US\$30. If you are interested, then contact the publishers at melopsittacus@ornitologia.com.br. If anyone wants to see the specimen copy sent to the Seabird Group, please contact Mark Tasker (Tasker_M@jncc.gov.uk).

From BIRDLIFE IN EUROPE

The March 2000 issue highlights the damage caused by the oil from the wreck of the *Erika*. At that stage 52,000 dead seabirds had been collected and a further 9,000 live oiled birds were being treated. The launch of the massive two-volume *Important Bird Areas in Europe* headlines the June 2000 issue. These books are thoroughly recommended for those wishing to know the location of the largest seabird colonies right across Europe. A project on the Berlengas islands off Portugal has started in an effort to improve the habitat for nesting Cory's shearwaters and to further educate visiting tourists.

Seaduck specialist group of Wetlands International

For those interested in seaduck, the Seaduck Specialist Group now has a homepage on the web, where recent publications may be downloaded and news of the group's activities may be found. The Group plans to hold a meeting, focused on scoter, in November 2000. The site is at:

<http://www.dmu.dk/coastalzoneecology/seaduck/index.html>

From SEEVÖGEL Vol. 21 (2)

Silke Kahle and Peter Becker review the concentrations of mercury, pesticides, PCBs and HCB in herring, common and black-headed gull eggs and feathers on German coasts. Herring gulls, which feed on aquatic items on the Elbe, were found to be most heavily contaminated. The two small species feeding in the same area, but on terrestrial items, were much less contaminated. Compared with earlier years, the levels of contamination appear to be decreasing, and are not endangering reproductive success.

From ROYAL NAVAL BIRDWATCHING SOCIETY BULLETIN No. 142

The RNBWS journal *Sea Swallow*, may cease publication after 2001 to be replaced by a tri-services journal. Members views are being canvassed, so a firm decision has not yet been taken. Stan Howe has continued in his Herculean task of placing all published RNBWS bird records on a database. At the time of publication some 27,500 records had been added, and he expected to complete work in 2000. No doubt the database will help greatly in elucidating the distribution of several seabirds. Bill Bourne has looked at the Lisle Letters from Calais. These 16th century documents reveal that gulls were reared for the pot at that time and that, thanks to a dispensation from the Pope, puffins were classed as fish and could therefore be eaten on Fridays.

From GISOM May 2000

GISOM will be giving 500 FF to aid publication by all those writing a thesis on marine birds in France - with the condition to GISOM is supplied with a two page summary to publish in its newsletter and a corrected copy of the thesis for its library (maybe an idea that could be copied by ourselves?). GISOM have also given 5000 FF for studies on the Reunion petrel. The next meetings of GISOM are on the first weekend of February. In 2001, it will be in Vendée or in the Loire-Atlantique region, while in 2000 it will be on l'île de Tatihou, Saint-Vaast la Hougue. Various studies to examine the after-effects of the *Erika* spill are noted.

From MEDMARAVIS NEWS, Spring 2000

Studies on Audouin's gulls in the Mediterranean continue. There are now believed to be in the order of 18,000 pairs. A working group on the species has been established. The Group met in Greece in October 1999 and will meet again on 11-15 October 2000 during the Medmaravis seabird symposium in Benidorm. A project to found a colony on Benidorm Island is under way with EU funding (although the species does not appear to have ever bred there previously!).

THE MINK MENACE

It seems a pity that Clive Craik (*Seabird Group Newsletter* No. 85) should try to divert attention from the true importance of his splendid work in Argyll by laboriously setting up a tired old Aunt Sally about whether mink control makes any difference in order to knock it down again. Although it seems debatable if Mink are doing any more damage now than crofters did in the past, the fact that Clive has shown so elegantly that mink are easily controlled by trapping (as also reported by Stephen Rumsey from the opposite end of Britain in *British Birds* 93: 293) is surely of much more interest?

Let us hope that good trapping-time will not now be wasted by theoretical arguments about whether trapping is worthwhile, notably where mink are still making a rapid long march down the Long Island towards seabird colonies of international importance on the Bishop's Isles of Berneray and Mingulay. Are there traps set yet on every staging-post along the way?

W.R.P. Bourne

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In addition to sending this short note, Bill also pointed out that Ian Nisbet had 'escaped' from the photos taken at the Wilhelmshaven Conference (published in Newsletter No. 85). Bill has kindly sent a photo to ensure that Ian doesn't feel left out (apologies to Ian and the other 'victims' this time!).



Kees Camphuysen, Ian Nisbet and Dave Sowter (left to right) at the 7th International Seabird Group Conference in Wilhelmshaven, March 2000 (Photo: Bill Boune)

**6th MEDITERRANEAN SYMPOSIUM
ON SEABIRDS
Conference on Fisheries, Marine
Productivity and Seabird
Conservation
Benidorm, Spain 11-15th October 2000**

Unfortunately, this conference will be imminent by the time this issue of the Newsletter is published. The event is organised by the Mediterranean Seabird Association (MedMarAvis) and the Sociedad Espanola de Ornitologia (SEO/Birdlife). The Generalitat Valenciana is sponsoring it, with financial assistance from the Life-Nature Programme. The Council of Benidorm and the Instituto Mediterraneo de Estudios Avanzados (CSIC-UIB) are also collaborators.

The symposium is structured around the following topics:-

- Conservation of seabird populations;
- Theoretical population models as a management tool;
- Management of seabird metapopulations;
- Fisheries and seabird conservation; and
- Seabirds and local economy

The official languages are English and Spanish, and simultaneous translation services will be available. Further information from the SEO web site: www.seo.org or from Elsa Gheziel (valencia@seo.org). [See also 'Editorial']



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The Newsletter is published three times a year. The editor welcomes articles from members and others on issues relating to seabird research and conservation. These should be received by 15 May (for June edition), 15 September (for October edition) or 15 January (for February edition).

The Seabird Group promotes and helps co-ordinate the study and conservation of seabirds. Members also receive the journal *Atlantic Seabirds*, containing papers on current research. The Group organises regular conferences and also provides small grants towards seabird research. Current 2000 membership rates are:-

Ordinary £10.00
Direct Debit £9.00
Concession £5.00
Institution £15.00

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to Newsletter No. 86! I am once again indebted to all those who have found the time to send articles and photos for this (very full) edition of the Newsletter, and to Mark Tasker for finding lots of interesting snippets to include. I hope you enjoy the varied mixture of contributions.

If any Seabird Group members are attending the 6th Mediterranean Seabird Symposium (page 13) and would like to write a short summary for the Newsletter afterwards, then I would be very grateful. Please get in touch if you could do this for the benefit of other Members who cannot attend the symposium. Many thanks!

Those Members with access to e-mail will probably have been avidly following the adventures of Peter, Pamela and Percy penguins in the wake of the Treasure oil spill off South Africa in late June. I had intended to write an article on this for the Newsletter but have reserved it for the next issue due to lack of space. A huge amount of information can be found on the University of Cape Town's ADU web-site:

www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/oilspill/

There are satellite tracks for the released penguins, and there is already a manuscript detailing the massive translocation efforts and the effects of the spill on the penguins and other seabirds. You can marvel at the travel feats of the penguins, the logistical feats of those involved in the rescue process and the feat of them also managing to write a scientific paper on it all so soon after the event!

Chris Wernham

GROUP NEWS

AGM 2000

The 35th Annual General Meeting of the Seabird Group will be held at 1500h on Saturday 18th November 2000 during the Scottish Ringers' Conference at the Fife Arms Hotel, Braemar, Grampian Scotland. A provisional agenda was sent out to all members with the last issue of *Atlantic Seabirds*. We hope for a reasonable turn-out as so many members live in Scotland. I will be seeking views on the Newsletter at the meeting. If you are unable to attend but have views or ideas then please contact me directly.

GROUP MAILINGS

We are trying to mail the Newsletter and *Atlantic Seabirds* together whenever we can. However, there may be times when the journal is not ready and we still want to get the Newsletter to you on time. If you have e-mail and would like to receive the it in this way, then please e-mail Sheila Russell to advise her of this:

Sheila-Russell@CloberFarm.in2home.co.uk

This may be particularly useful for overseas members who would like to receive their copy of the Newsletter as promptly as possible.

If you have not contacted Sheila after the request in the previous Newsletter then please do so as soon as possible. Many thanks!

STOP PRESS !

Lance Tickell's new book on albatrosses has just been published by Pica Press. There will be a review in the next issue of the Newsletter.