



*the* **Seabird  
Group**

**NEWSLETTER 87**

**February 2001**

**LEUCISTIC CORMORANTS**

On the Inner Solway Firth between Silloth (Cumbria) and the Islands of Fleet (Dumfries & Galloway) there are currently six colonies of breeding Cormorants. From east to west, these colonies are found at Grune Point, Port o'Warren, Balcary Bay, Orroland, Little Ross and the Murray's Isles.



Of these colonies, the most recently established population is on the Murray's Isles, in the Islands of Fleet. The colony was established in 1998 when 6 occupied nests produced 13 chicks. In 1999, the count was 38 nests with 64 chicks while, in 2000, it had risen to 46 nests with over 110 young. Cormorants, mostly non-breeding birds, have always visited the Islands of Fleet during the summer months but 1998 saw the first breeding record.

During a visit to ring and colour mark Cormorants chicks on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2000, the author



and other members of the North Solway Ringing Group found two leucistic young in one nest (see photographs). The chicks were completely covered in buff/mushroom coloured feathers and down, and their bills and feet were a similar colour but their eyes were black (the normal colour for Cormorants). Both birds appeared well-fed and in good condition.



**CONTENTS**

	Page
<b>Leucistic Cormorants .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Genetic study of Guillemots .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>6<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Seabird Symposium</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Manx Shearwater Workshop .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Ronald Lockley obituary .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Waves and birds' nests .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Darvic rings and Sooty Terns .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>SEABIRD 2000 update .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Journal reviews &amp; 'bits' .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>QuickTide .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>35<sup>th</sup> Annual Report .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Fisher Archive .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>A new book on albatrosses .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Colour-flagged Antarctic Terns .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Recent threats to seabirds .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Editorial &amp; Group news .....</b>	<b>14</b>



North Solway Ringing Group has been ringing Cormorants on the Solway Firth since 1965 but these are the first leucistic birds that we have encountered.

### **Ken Bruce**

North Solway Ringing Group  
Mallaig  
Wellington Street  
Glencaple  
Dumfries DG1 4RA

**I am very grateful to Ken for allowing me to use his excellent photographs to accompany this interesting article (Ed).**

## **GENETIC STUDY OF GUILLEMOTS TO TRACE THE ORIGIN OF SEABIRDS KILLED IN THE ERIKA OILSPILL**

Following the wreck of the ERIKA tanker in the Bay of Biscay in December 1999, over 60 000 wintering seabirds were oiled and washed up on the west coast of France. The Common Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) was by far the most heavily affected species. Out of concern for the environmental impacts of this accident and its influence on wildlife populations, our laboratory, funded by the French Ministry of the Environment, is setting up a population genetics study on Common Guillemots.

The programme aims to assess the geographic extent of the impact using genetic material taken from birds killed in the oil spill and samples taken from birds nesting in colonies across northern Europe. Using the genetic characteristics of individuals, we hope to assign individual birds to their breeding area of origin.

This study will complement independent research based on ringing recoveries and could provide information about colonies where no ringing has occurred. The provisional results on the geographic origins of ringed oiled birds suggest that not only birds from Irish Sea colonies were involved, but also birds from as far afield as western and northern Scotland (see BTO news "Ringed birds reveal extent of Erika devastation": <http://www.bto.org/news/newshome.htm>). Thus, the geographic scale of colony sampling needs to cover a large portion of the breeding area of guillemots in the north-east Atlantic.

Samples of genetic material from breeding colonies could consist of either blood or growing feather, from which DNA can be extracted. We need to sample around 30 individual breeding adults or chicks from each colony to be considered in the study and we are seeking assistance with sampling from seabird biologists. We plan to send members of our team to several locations to carry out sampling, and collaboration with individuals or groups already established in the field could greatly enhance the coverage of breeding areas. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you feel you could contribute to the sampling effort. Sampling permits are currently being sought from the appropriate agencies. Any assistance offered will be acknowledged in project outputs.



Analyses of samples will be carried out in collaboration with Vicki Friesen's research team from Queens University, Canada, which has extensive experience in seabird population genetics. Additional genetic markers to the one existing for guillemots are being developed currently in our lab. In France, we are also working in collaboration with the NGOs that set up care centres for oiled birds and keep samples of oiled birds (notably LPO and SEPNEB).

We see this as a unique opportunity to examine the extent of the impact of oil spills of this nature. Such accidents clearly have the potential to impact populations of birds that breed at distance from the site of a wreck, underlining the international nature of the problem of oil pollution. Additionally, the study will provide a unique occasion to investigate dispersal from guillemot colonies at different scales.

**Thierry Boulinier**

Laboratoire d'Ecologie  
CNRS - UMR 7625  
Université Pierre & Marie Curie  
7 quai St Bernard  
F-75005 Paris, France.  
Tel.: (33) 1 44 27 32 13  
Fax.: (33) 1 44 27 35 16  
Email: [tboulini@snv.jussieu.fr](mailto:tboulini@snv.jussieu.fr)

**6<sup>th</sup> MEDITERRANEAN SYMPOSIUM  
ON SEABIRDS  
CONFERENCE ON FISHERIES,  
MARINE PRODUCTIVITY AND  
SEABIRD CONSERVATION  
Benidorm, Spain, 11-15<sup>th</sup>  
October 2000  
Organized by Medmaravis and the  
Sociedad Española de Ornitología  
(SEO/Birdlife)**

At first glance, Benidorm seems an unlikely setting for a symposium about marine bird conservation. However, as was gradually revealed throughout this conference, this popular holiday destination has a surprisingly rich fauna located in its surroundings. The conference was attended by over 100 delegates, coming from several different disciplines such as ornithology, fisheries research and conservation management. The main slant was a discussion of the main factors affecting seabirds, often directly or indirectly as a result of human activities.

Three of the five days were spent on the outskirts of the town, where the lectures and workshops took place, along with the poster presentation. The impact of fisheries was a recurring theme; discussed in the context of mortality from long-line fisheries by John Cooper. The incidence of the use of discards

was frequently mentioned, especially in species such as Audouin's Gull. Despite the fact that these discards have played a role in increasing the productivity of some colonies, a certain dependence on this human-produced resource was shown to be dangerous. Robert Furness discussed how a decrease in discard availability, due to changes in fishing methods in the North Sea, caused a prey switch by Great Skuas from discards to the unsuspecting Kittiwakes. Audouin's Gulls have also experienced this problem in the Chafarinas Islands, due to a prey switch by the Yellow-legged Gull, as discussed by Jacob González-Solís.

Difficulties in conservation were clearly demonstrated by Daniel Oro in his talk 'Managing seabird metapopulations in the Mediterranean'. The dynamic nature of these populations has meant that new colonies can arise rapidly by immigration, leading to problems when the birds move from a protected to unprotected sites. The role of mathematics in helping to gain an understanding of these dynamics was illustrated by Jean-Dominique Lebreton.

Workshops were centred on specific species. The Mediterranean Shag was shown to be highly understudied, and the Balearic Shearwater now considered a separate species and the subject of a current EU Life Project.

Two fieldtrips were offered, one to the magnificent 'El Hondo', complete with Greater Flamingos and the Marbled Duck, and the other to Benidorm Island, home to an important colony of European Storm Petrels, some of which are breeding successfully in artificial nests. In fact, on this island it is planned to attempt to establish a colony of Audouin's Gulls.

Overall, the conference was a success, with a mix of great talks and a friendly atmosphere. There was talk of the next symposium to be held somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean - a good idea to continue to bring to attention different conservation projects.

**Diana Bowler**

([Dbowler55@hotmail.com](mailto:Dbowler55@hotmail.com))

## MANX SHEARWATER WORKSHOP MADEIRA 2000

A group of over thirty enthusiasts met in Funchal, Madeira from 12th to 16th September 2000 for the first Manx Shearwater workshop, arriving from places as far apart as Brazil, the Azores and New Zealand as well as the UK and Portugal. Duarte Camara, Director of the Parque do Ecologico do Funchal, Madeira, organised the workshop to try and bring together those studying many diverse aspects of these wonderful birds.

David Saunders kicked off proceedings by reviewing the life and times of that remarkable man, the late R M Lockley, who pioneered much baseline work on shearwater biology and migration. Bernard Zonfrillo of Glasgow University then gave a presentation embracing the diet and ecology of the Manx Shearwater in UK waters and added some comments on other species of *puffinus* shearwaters. Chris Perrins from the EGI provided a Lockley link, with a talk on the censusing of the Manx Shearwater colonies on Skokholm and Skomer, a total population (with nearby Middleholm) of about 150,000 pairs. Such bird numbers require careful monitoring and Juan Brown subsequently spoke on the conservation management of Skomer.

The colony on Bardsey was described by Peter Hope Jones and the nocturnal attraction, often fatal, of the shearwaters to the lighthouse there. John Stewart and Neville McKee from Northern Ireland reported on some results obtained from almost 50 years of study by the dedicated band of volunteers on the Copeland Islands. One of the major threats to shearwater colonies everywhere is that of rats, and the workshop heard from Abbie Patterson, National Trust for Scotland, of the planned control programme, which it is hoped might save the decimated shearwater numbers on the islands of Canna and Sanday, Inner Hebrides.

Maria Pitta described the ancient historical records and present conservation management of seabirds in the Azores, while from the same archipelago, Mark Bolton reported on the technology that he has developed in order to study in detail Madeiran Storm-petrels. Duarte Camara then enlightened us on the breeding of Manx Shearwaters on Madeira, where they

inhabit high, remote, steep, wooded valleys - probably the most difficult of all situations in which to study Manxies.



**Cory's Shearwater (Bernie Zonfrillo)**

There were two amazing pelagic trips. The first was a 10-hour sail around the Deserta Islands, during which we had close encounters with birds such as Fea's Petrel, Bulwers Petrel, Cory's Shearwater and Little Shearwater as well as half a dozen cetacean species, including a pod of Cuvier's Beaked Whales.



**Fea's Petrel off the Desertas (Bernie Zonfrillo)**



**Cuvier's Beaked Whales off Madeira  
(Bernie Zonfrillo)**

**RONALD M LOCKLEY  
1903-2000**

The second trip saw us land on Deserta Grande for four hours, allowing time to see chicks of Bulwer's Petrel and Cory's Shearwater while noting the rather tame Berthelot's Pipits and Canaries resident there. On return from the colourful Desertas, we had a Great Shearwater fly alongside the ship and saw many flying fish and Loggerhead Turtles as we headed back to Funchal. An enigmatic 'Cory's Shearwater' with a white head and neck tantalisingly flew at distance beyond most telephoto lenses, giving some of us thoughts of Streaked Shearwater.

A final excursion on the last day was to the top of Madeira, where a bright moonlit night was spent listening for Zino's Petrel. A few silent ghostly forms flew around and a brief call was heard - enough to make a fitting end to a great week. I can't thank our hosts enough for such an enjoyable conference. It is hoped another can be organised within a few years, probably somewhere appropriate in the UK.

**Bernard Zonfrillo** ([8804751z@udcf.gla.ac.uk](mailto:8804751z@udcf.gla.ac.uk))

Ronald Lockley was born in Cardiff in 1903. At Michaelmas 1927 he took the lease on a then rather obscure island off the Pembrokeshire coast in southwest Wales. The island was Skokholm and it was to become one of the world's best known seabird islands. Lockley renovated the farm, greatly helped by the fortuitous wreck of the coal-carrying schooner *Alice Williams*. He bought this wreck for £5, and rarely can so small a sum have produced such valuable scientific rewards. His proposed rabbit farm came to nothing, but Lockley and his first wife made a subsistence living from farming and, later, by writing and the formation and running of Britain's first Bird Observatory.

It was at this time that he started ringing birds which allowed him to make his pioneering studies of individual Manx Shearwaters, British Storm Petrels and Puffins. The first results of this work emerged just in time to be incorporated into Witherby et al.'s *Handbook of British Birds*.

One can only speculate on the profound satisfaction of discovering something so unexpected as the desertion of a young shearwater by its parents and the completion of its development on the fat reserves. During the 1930s over 15,000 Manx Shearwaters were ringed on Skokholm. Although not a vast number compared to some more modern efforts, one must remember that birds were caught with the aid of paraffin lamps and each ring had to be individually shaped. It is a pity that he did not have the satisfaction of getting a shearwater recovered in South America, an event that did not occur until the 1950s. In his monograph, *The Manx Shearwater*, Mike Brooke stressed how he was “very conscious of his debt to Ronald Lockley who set the ball rolling over 60 years ago”.

During this period Skokholm became a mecca for biologists – Julian Huxley (who with Lockley produced one of the first natural history films – *The Private Life of the Gannet* in 1934), David Lack, H.B Alexander and others. The 1934 International Ornithological Congress in Oxford made a field trip to Skokholm with transport supplied by the Royal Navy. Later Geoffrey Matthews undertook his classic homing experiments with Manx Shearwaters on Skokholm, studies that produced the first unequivocal evidence of true navigational ability in a wild bird.

He is probably best remembered through his books on life on Skokholm, island-going, seabirds, rabbits, seals and natural history in general. Two of his books changed my life completely. The first was *I Know an Island* (1938), with its vivid descriptions of shearwaters on Skokholm, birds at North Ronaldsay Lighthouse, the bird ringing garden on Heligoland, Gannets on Grassholm, the Faroes, the Blaskets, Bardsey and Ramsey, kindled my own life-long interest in islands. The second, the New Naturalist *Seabirds* (1954) with James Fisher, started me on the study of seabirds.

When I became warden of Skokholm Bird Observatory in 1962, with the task of revitalising the Manx Shearwater studies, it was with some trepidation that I had my first meeting with Ronald among his shearwaters on the knoll above the cottage. But he was kind, though

somewhat put out (I think) that I had been appointed without his views being solicited. He became a fairly regular visitor often calling in to take us for an afternoon jaunt to Grassholm, and once even to the Smalls Lighthouse further out in the Irish Sea.

His career as a naturalist and author carried on for decade after decade with a stream of books, few however could match his earlier writings. He travelled from the Arctic to the Antarctic and was a popular guest lecturer on the cruise boat circuit. Sitting quietly at a table, resplendent in his maroon velvet smoking jacket, and asked by an elderly lady passenger what he would like to drink, he would demure slightly before asking for a double gin and dubonnet. Latterly he lived in New Zealand, where our paths crossed again. He met me at Auckland airport and whisked me off to see Wrybills, and then home to lend me some of his old glass slides of Puffins and Gannets on Grassholm and of building the heligoland trap on the Isle of May. Even in his last years he still managed to visit his beloved Skokholm. With his death seabird research has lost one of its founding fathers.

**Mike Harris**

## **WAVES AND BIRDS' NESTS**

Martin Heubeck (*Newsletter 86*) wonders why a monstrous swell hit Shetland in association with only a moderate storm last June. Waves arise mainly as a result of the transfer of energy from the wind to the water, although also sometimes as a result of water movements and earthquakes. Their size is related to the amount of energy involved, and hence the strength of the wind and the length of time that it continues blowing in the same direction, or the size of the earthquake.

Once waves start moving, they continue in the same direction and, owing to the low friction in water, they take a long time to stop. Thus, for example, Ascension Island in the tropical Atlantic with very stable trade-winds is periodically washed for days on end by ‘rollers’ that may also destroy birds’ nests. They apparently originate in storms in the higher latitudes of either hemisphere – some we saw could be related to past gales off Newfoundland – and the tsunamis that follow earthquakes may cross the Pacific.

The relationship between a storm and the resulting waves is not necessarily simple. Thus, if the storm is moving slowly the waves may travel ahead of it, instead of following it as one might expect. If the storm wanders off in another direction, the waves may arrive without it. If one or more storms are moving around in this way, they may cause waves travelling in different directions, leading to cross-swells, since where the crests or troughs coincide they are added together, creating the mountains of water alternating with 'holes' in the sea sometimes reported in the Southern Ocean.

The same considerations also apply to the turbulent weather off NW Britain, alleged to be amongst the worst in the world (and after finding myself looking up at a wave from the bridge of a fairly large ship, something that never happened in the Southern Ocean, I can believe it). There used to be a story current in the oil industry that one company initially agonised over the maximum size of wave in 100 years that they should allow for west of Shetland. If I remember rightly, they settled for 90 ft. Their next annual report announced "we now have working experience of 110 ft waves".

Quite how high does Martin think the swell reached on Sumburgh Head? Clearly the Shags ought to find somewhere else to breed (but where?).

### **W R P Bourne**

Ardgath  
Station Road  
Dufftown  
Keith AB55 4AX

**Martin notes that the maximum estimated height of the waves during the worst swells on 13 June 2000 was 40-50 ft from trough to crest (Ed).**

### **DARVIC RINGS AND SOOTY TERNS**

From 1993 to 1995 and in 1997, Sooty Tern chicks on Bird Island, Seychelles, were given Darvic coloured rings to act as age markers in an investigation of the age of first breeding in Seychelles Sooty Terns. In 1993 and 1997, colour-ringed birds were also given numbered

alloy BTO rings. Coloured Darvic rings were additionally used on other Sooty Tern breeding colonies in Seychelles, different colours denoting birds from different islands, to investigate inter-colony movements of these birds. The Darvic rings were coiled, with an internal diameter of 5.25 mm.



**Sooty Tern (Chris Feare)**

Many earlier studies of seabirds and other species have used Darvic rings and they have proved satisfactory for long-term studies. They were thus considered suitable for indicating the year of birth of Sooty Terns that would appear in colonies later and for identifying birds that had been ringed on other islands, giving the advantage that birds could be identified as belonging to age and place categories without having to be caught. There was little cost differential between Darvic plastic rings and alloy BTO rings, size D2.



**Sooty Terns at colony (Chris Feare)**

In 1997, the first bird that had been ringed in 1993 was found in the colony, and a further 43 birds have been found up to 2000. All of these

birds have been identified from their BTO rings, and none carried a Darvic ring.

The first birds bearing Darvic rings were seen on Bird Island in 1999, when eight were found; seven of these were caught and given a BTO ring. In 2000, 13 further colour marked birds were found and most of these were given BTO rings. All of these birds carried one Darvic ring and were assumed to have been ringed as chicks in 1994, when each bird was given one ring, whereas in 1995 each chick was given one ring on each leg. Some of the Darvic rings had begun to uncoil, however, and some fell off during handling. One of the rings that had uncoiled had rotated around the bird's leg, trapping the leg between coils; this ring was cut off to avoid possible future injury to the bird. These findings indicate that these coiled Darvic rings are not suitable for long-term studies of Sooty Tern biology.

The problem of rings uncoiling with age could be overcome by gluing the rings together with a suitable contact adhesive at the time of ringing. This would, however, require the glued surfaces to be roughened, as is done with rings for Canada Geese. These processes would increase the time taken to ring the birds. As ringed Sooty Terns are generally so easy to catch using a hand net, however, I recommend that all future studies in the Seychelles should use numbered metal rings, made of alloy, since these have proven reliability under Seychelles conditions – alloy rings used in 1972 and 1973 still appear as new! (Aluminium rings put on in 1972/3, on the other hand, are still legible but very thin, having worn on the inside through abrasion with the leg.) Coloured rings could be used for small scale behavioural studies, within one breeding season, though the rings should be glued to avoid problems of uncoiling, loss, and possible injury to the birds' legs. The reason for the failure of Darvic rings on Seychelles Sooty Terns is not known but climatic factors may be involved.

### **Chris Feare**

WildWings Bird Management  
2 North View Cottages  
Grayswood Common  
Haslemere  
Surrey  
feare\_wildwings@msn.com

## **SEABIRD 2000 UPDATE**

### **SEABIRD 2000 STILL NEEDS YOU!**

Seabird 2000, the latest census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland, is about to embark on its third and final field season of surveys (see *Newsletter 86*). Support from Seabird Group members has been excellent so far, but I would hope that this can continue for one more year to help fill the gaps that still remain. Most notably, there are still inland and urban colonies of gulls all over Britain that need counting. We would hope to repeat and expand on the coverage that was obtained for roof-nesting gulls back in 1994 (Raven & Coulson, 1997 *Bird Study* 44(1)).

We are also desperately in need of more counters throughout Yorkshire. Coastal cliff-nesting and roof-nesting seabirds still remain to be counted at Filey, Speeton Cliffs, Bridlington and between Stathes and Whitby. In addition, there are many inland Black-headed Gull colonies that need to be covered.

So if you would like to count urban or inland gulls in your local area, or if you live in any part of Yorkshire or plan to visit on holiday, and wish to take part in Seabird 2000, then please contact me for more details at the address below.

### **Ian Mitchell**

Seabird 2000 Co-ordinator  
Joint Nature Conservation Committee  
Dunnet House  
7 Thistle Place  
Aberdeen AB10 1UZ

Tel. 01224 655 717  
Fax. 01224 621 488  
E-mail: [ian.mitchell@jncc.gov.uk](mailto:ian.mitchell@jncc.gov.uk)  
Web-site: [www.jncc.gov.uk/seabird2000](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/seabird2000)

## **EARTHWATCH HEBRIDEAN SEABIRD SURVEYS**

EarthWatch Discovery Projects and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee are running four five-day long work parties in the Outer Hebrides later this year to help complete the

counts of breeding seabirds around the islands, as part of Seabird 2000. The work-parties are open to both experienced seabirders and complete beginners alike. The first two parties during May 17-22 and May 24-29 will be based on the Isle of Harris, while the remainder will be based on North Uist during May 30-4 June, June 4-9. The cost per person is £260 (EarthWatch Members £230) and includes all food and accommodation. For further details, please contact:-

**Maria Boyle**

Earthwatch Institute  
57 Woodstock Road  
Oxford OX2 6HJ UK

Tel: 01865 318813  
Fax: 01865 311383  
[mboyle@uk.earthwatch.org](mailto:mboyle@uk.earthwatch.org)  
[www.earthwatch.org](http://www.earthwatch.org)

**SEABIRD 2000 GRANTS**

The Seabird Group has already awarded over £12,000 in grants during 1999 and 2000, (under its contract with the JNCC), towards the cost of fieldwork for Seabird 2000. This coming season (2001) the Seabird Group wants to provide further funding, from its own resources, to ensure complete coverage of all the seabird colonies in Britain and Ireland. Ian Mitchell, Seabird 2000 Co-ordinator, has compiled a list of colonies that have not been counted so far. The main remaining target species and areas are mentioned in his article (above) and Steve Newton's request for help in Ireland (right). Applications for funding to count these colonies should be sent to Bob Swann, Secretary, The Seabird Group, 14 St.Vincent Road, Tain, IV19 1JR, Scotland (or e-mail to [Bob.swann@freeuk.com](mailto:Bob.swann@freeuk.com)) by 31 March 2001, stating the proposed colonies/areas, dates of trips and amount of grant requested. We will do our best to make early decisions on those applications received before the deadline, and will consider those received after the deadline if any funds remain.

**Bob Swann**

**SEABIRD 2000  
A REQUEST FOR HELP IN  
THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

The spring and summer months of 2001 mark the last opportunity to cover uncounted seabird colonies in Ireland for this important 3 year project. Much remains to be done.....Black Guillemots in Kerry and Donegal, west coast cliffs and islands (all species including petrels and shearwaters), inland (lake) nesting gulls, urban roof-nesting gulls..... Can you help? If you have a few days, or a week or two to spare, please get in touch:-

**Steve Newton**

Seabird 2000 Co-ordinator  
BirdWatch Ireland  
Ruttledge House  
8 Longford Place  
Monkstown  
Co. Dublin IRELAND

Telephone 00353-1-2804322  
E-mail: [bird@indigo.ie](mailto:bird@indigo.ie)  
[please put 'Steve' in the subject box]

**Thank you**

**HELP NEEDED ON BARDSEY!**

Help to census the Manx Shearwater colony on Bardsey Island in North Wales is needed in the summer of 2001. The dates have yet to be fixed but it will take place between late May and mid-June. If you wish to help, then please could you contact me as soon as possible. Many thanks!

**Steve Stansfield**

Bardsey Bird Observatory  
Cristin  
Bardsey Island  
Pwlheli  
Gwynedd  
LL53 8DE

## **JOURNAL REVIEWS & 'BITS' BY MARK TASKER**

### **From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol 22(3)**

The first nests of the Chinese Crested Tern have been found - on a small Taiwanese islet. Adults of the species are very rare - the last definite record was of specimens collected in 1937, though there have been some sight records, most recently in 1991. The islet was already a wildlife sanctuary - now conservation efforts will be re-doubled.

A two-page article by Les Underhill documents graphically the fabulous rescue effort of African penguins at risk from yet another iron ore carrier (the *Treasure*) sinking off South Africa. Many Seabird Group members will remember the sinking of the *Apollo Sea* in 1994, when some 10,000 penguins were oiled, and 5,000 were cleaned and released. In June 2000, another sinking oiled 23,000 birds, but in an unprecedented and brave move, SANCCOB (the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds) moved a further 20,000 birds around to Port Elizabeth, 800 km eastwards and released them in the expectation that by the time they had reached home north of Cape Town, the oil slick would have been cleaned up. By September, only 3,000 penguins remained in captivity and the rest had been released. This result must be attributed to the lessons learned from the *Apollo Sea* spill - large stores of special penguin boxes are kept on the breeding islands ready for such a circumstance, and the vets had learned that rapid feeding of activated charcoal to oil spill victims, followed by an electrolytic fluid minimises poisoning and starts rehydration. Three of the unoiled penguins were fitted with satellite tags before release and their progress home monitored and results placed on the web. This served both to attract the media and to motivate the salvors in cleaning the wreck. The average return time was around 18 days.

The bird cleaning operation was also impressive. At one point some 12% of the world population of the species was in one warehouse (a temporary Important Bird Area?). About 500 birds per week were cleaned by volunteers - each bird was then kept for two-three weeks to regain its waterproofing before being tested prior

to 'graduation' from the cleaning facility. The heroic efforts of SANCCOB mean that probably only some 1% of the global population of the species will have been killed, as opposed to 25% likely to have died without such action.

Such action costs money - some may be recovered from the *Treasure's* insurers, but meantime SANCCOB has launched an appeal to help - if only to keep their facilities available if idle. If you wish to contribute, then their bank account is SANCCOB Treasure Account, First National Bank, Tableview Branch, South Africa. Account number 620 178 439 22, Branch code 20 38 09, or donate via their website: [www.sanccob.co.za](http://www.sanccob.co.za).

### **From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol 22(3)**

The good news in this issue is that Campbell Island, New Zealand is to be cleared of rats. This island (and one tiny offshore islet) is the only breeding place of the Campbell Albatross (recently split from Black-browed Albatross). Action to remove rats will cost about US\$1 million spent over four years and is one of the key conservation measures listed in BirdLife's new book *Threatened Birds of the World*.

### **From *BIRDLIFE IN EUROPE* Vol 5 (3)**

International co-operation to conserve Pygmy Cormorants has led to the design and deployment of special nets around fish farms in the Balkan Peninsula. These nets protect the stock of fish and reduce the pressure from fish farmers to kill the birds.

In an update on the *Erika* spill, about 63,100 birds were taken to be cleaned; regrettably only some 2,100 survived to be released back into the sea (and their subsequent survival is not known). As with the *Treasure* spill reported above, there have been many fund-raising initiatives to support the clean up efforts of Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux.

### **From *SEEVÖGEL* Vol. 21 (3) and (4)**

There is one article in issue 3 on seabirds: the annual report on numbers of seabirds breeding on German coasts.

Issue 4 has the annual report on beached birds from the German North Sea coast (for winter 1999/2000). Some 6,600 dead birds were found, with nearly half of these being Guillemots and between 5% & 10% were Common Scoter, Eider, Razorbill, Fulmar and Kittiwake. Proportions of auks oiled have declined since the mid 1980s but have now stabilised at between 40% and 50%. A mass mortality of Eiders in the Wadden Sea over this winter led to some 4,000 birds being found dead (with a low oiled proportion).

A study by Gudrun Hilgerloh of the food of Eiders reveals that the number of mature mussels has decreased greatly in the past decade; this probably helps account for the recent die-off of this species.

### **From *Penguin Conservation* Vol 13 (1)**

The first part of this issue is occupied with a report from the 4<sup>th</sup> International Penguin Conference held in Chile in September 2000. Gerald Kooyman opened the conference by summarising what has been learned about that most extreme seabird - the Emperor Penguin. The current depth record for this species is 518m, and it has remarkable feeding travels at sea as well as across the sea ice. Telemetry devices apparently featured strongly in many papers at the meeting. An artificial egg has been developed to see how penguins incubate - this knowledge in due course will be used to programme incubators for captive breeding efforts. Further studies on the hydrodynamics of penguin swimming has shown 2.6 mps to be the most efficient swimming speed for Adelie Penguins. Studies the by-catch of Humboldt Penguins in local drift nets have revealed that in most years less than a dozen birds are caught. However, in one extreme 20-month period some 650 birds were caught. This episode was probably due to the convergence of fishermen on the area where penguins were feeding - probably on the prey that were the fishers' main target species. That this period was unique in 20 years of study indicates the importance of long-term studies.

Judy Clark and Knowles Kerry have written a very extensive and in depth review of the diseases and parasites of penguins. This 19-page article is a particularly good review and

summary of knowledge of this area. Readers with an interest are advised to get a copy. A further review of the *Treasure* oil spill fills much of the rest of the volume.

### ***Arctic Birds: an international breeding conditions survey. Newsletter No 2***

This summary is issued by the Wader Study Group and summarises reports from 45 localities all around the Arctic (although somewhat strangely omitting Svalbard) in 1999. While the majority of the reports are of waders, there are many comments on seabirds, particularly skuas and also gulls. Predictably, skuas did best in areas where the lemming population was at a high. These studies are summarised in the Newsletter, and a full list of contacts for further details is provided. Four maps of environmental conditions and breeding success are included.

## **QUICKTIDE**

An alternative to conventional tide tables, this folded card has a map with a colour-coded coastline. Using this, an integral coded calendar and a simple rotating disc, it allows prediction of tide times. Three 'cards' are available: Northern Britain (though omitting most of western Scotland), SE England, and SW England with South Wales. Perhaps these might provide a useful alternative to some local tide tables, although they are not necessarily easier to use. Other than suggesting the occurrence of spring tides, the cards do not give tide heights, which is surely a draw-back. As for accuracy, the card that I saw appeared to work for the two contrasting sites that I have visited recently enough to still remember the states of tide. The cards do seem rather expensive at £7-99 each, although each is valid for two years. Further information and details of stockists can be obtained from the QuickTide web-site at:-

www.quicktide.co.uk  
or by phoning 0117-973-6688 (FAX 6699)  
QT International Limited  
19 Canynge Road  
Bristol  
BS8 3JZ

**Reviewed by John Calladine**

## THE 35<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SEABIRD GROUP, 2000

There were 4 changes to the Executive Committee during the year. Mike Harris became Chairman (replacing Sarah Wanless), Bob Swann became Honorary Secretary (replacing John Uttley), Chris Wernham, Newsletter Editor (replacing Mark Tasker) and Steve Hunter, Ordinary Member (replacing Chris Wernham). The Group owes a great debt to the 3 retiring members who have been responsible for the continuing existence of the Group over several decades.

At the end of October 2000 the Seabird Group had 276 paid up members (down 19) and a further 32 who had not paid for the year (up 20). In addition, *Atlantic Seabirds* and/or the *Newsletter* was sent to 15 statutory institutions, 16 other subscribers (institution and foreign non-member subscribers via subscription services) and 4 other groups in exchange for their own publications. Although membership totals have changed little in recent years, serious efforts must be made to recruit new members.

The 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Seabird Group with the theme ‘Seabird Reproduction’ was held at Wilhelmshaven, Germany on 17-19 March 2000. This was a spectacular success and details (and pictures of some of the 138 delegates from 15 countries who attended) can be found in *Newsletter* 85. Many thanks are due to Peter Becker and Elke Weichmann for the local organisation, to Kees Camphuysen and Mark Tasker who arranged the scientific programme and to the city of Wilhelmshaven and the numerous sponsors who made the conference such a hospitable event.

The 34<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting was held at the Wilhelmshaven conference on 17 March. Twenty members attended which compared with the normal 20-30. Following a recommendation of this meeting, the correspondence resulting from Operation Seafarer has now joined the original record cards at the JNCC offices in Aberdeen. This material forms part of the James Fisher Archive (material deposited at the Natural History Museum, London SW7 by David Saunders and Bill Bourne) and is now available for examination by appointment (see *Newsletter*

86). It is intended to return this material to NHM by December 2006 for permanent storage.

It is becoming extremely difficult to arrange Executive Committee meetings but luckily all members can now be contacted by email which facilitates most business. A single formal meeting was held at the Scottish Ringers Conference in Braemar.

During the year three issues of *Atlantic Seabirds* appeared by the end of October– Volume 1 (1999) No 4 and Volume 2 (2000) Nos 1 & 2. Starting from Volume 2 there will be three issues a year. Two *Newsletters* (No 85 and 86) appeared with the welcome addition of photographs. It is planned to have three *Newsletters* per year and to send them out with *Atlantic Seabirds* to save on postage.

Seabird 2000 completed its second field season and the majority of coastal sites have now been surveyed. The main achievements were coverage of almost all of Shetland and the west coast of Scotland, plus a census of all Britain’s breeding terns. Seabird 2000’s objective to improve our present knowledge of breeding petrel numbers is progressing well, with the first ever counts of Leach’s Petrels on St Kilda and of Storm Petrels on the Isles of Scilly and the Kerry Islands of Inishtooskert, Puffin and Great Skellig. The main gaps remaining to be covered in 2001 are among inland and urban nesting gulls. There are also plenty of island petrel colonies that need assessing and no doubt others that remain to be discovered! Ireland also needs some help and grants will be available to assist volunteers to visit these areas to enable us to achieve full cover.

**Bob Swann**  
Honorary Secretary

## FISHER ARCHIVE

Members should note that we have added to the James Fisher Archive (kindly lent to us by the Natural History Museum – see *Newsletter* 86) a catalogue of the RAF aerial photographs taken for Operation Seafarer. This was received from Bill Bourne. Remember that this information may be consulted by members in Dunnet House,

the Aberdeen JNCC office, by arrangement with Jim Reid (jim.reid@jncc.gov.uk).

## **A NEW BOOK ON ALBATROSSES**

Members are reminded of the recent publication of *Albatrosses* by Lance (W.L.N.) Tickell.

This well illustrated and produced volume by one of the world's leading aficionados of these fabulous birds is published by Pica Press. A review will be published in a future *Atlantic Seabirds*. The price is quoted as £40 but members can obtain copies for £38 post free from Combined Book Services, Units1/K, Paddock Wood Distribution Centre, Paddock Wood, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 6UU.

## **A REQUEST FOR SIGHTINGS COLOUR-FLAGGED ANTARCTIC TERNS**

In September 2000 we sent out this request to watch out for marked terns.

*Will you be visiting the Southern Ocean this coming Antarctic summer season? If so, you can make a valuable contribution towards unravelling the species' migration pattern by watching Antarctic Terns on their breeding grounds!*

*Bird Island (33° 50'S, 26° 17'E) in Algoa Bay off Port Elizabeth, South Africa, is of global importance for Antarctic Terns *Sterna vittata*. Between May and September, more than 10 000 birds visit this small island to roost there at night. However, we do not know where they come from.*

*Antarctic Terns breed on a number of islands in the Southern Ocean. Closest to southern Africa, breeding has been reported from Kerguelen, Crozet, Marion, St. Paul and Amsterdam islands in the Indian Ocean. In the Atlantic Ocean, they are known to breed on Gough and Tristan da Cunha, on South Georgia, South Shetlands and on other islands of the Scotia Arc. All of these places could be contributing to the large winter flocks seen each year off southern Africa.*

*As the subspecies are poorly defined in the literature, the taxonomy is of little help in determining the origin of the birds. Between July 1998 and September 2000 we have therefore*

*ringed more than 1000 Antarctic Terns caught in mistnets. Some 600 of these also carry very conspicuous yellow plastic flags on their left tarsus.*

*To understand the migratory flyways of Antarctic Terns, your observations on the species' breeding grounds are needed now!*

*On your return from fieldwork at the end of the southern summer 2000/2001 we would be very pleased to hear from you whether or not you have seen colour-flagged birds. Negative results are as useful as positive sightings.*

In early January 2001, we received news that Eric Woehler of the Australian Antarctic Division saw one of our birds on Heard Island (53°S 73° 30'E), some 4,300 km away from the ringing site on Bird Island in South Africa. This sighting - although not unexpected - has been a big step forward towards resolving the annual winter migration of Antarctic Terns.

**We are anxious to receive other reports from any fieldworkers visiting appropriate areas.**

**Norbert Klages and Tony Tree**

Dr Norbert Klages  
P.O. Box 13147  
Humewood 6013  
South Africa  
ph Intern. +27 41 3673554  
fax Intern. +27 41 5862175  
pemntk@zoo.upe.ac.za (work)  
klages@netactive.co.za (home)  
(tony.tree@xsinet.co.za)

## **RECENT THREATS TO SEABIRDS**

As this *Newsletter* goes to press, we are hearing in the daily news about the recent oil spill from the *Jessica* off the Galapagos archipelago. The most up-to-date information I have found so far is on the Charles Darwin Foundation web-site at:- [www.darwinfoundation.org/oilspill.html](http://www.darwinfoundation.org/oilspill.html).

Members may also be interested to find out about a serious fire on South Jason Island in the Falklands, believed to have killed many penguins and albatrosses, see:-

[www.rspb.org.uk/news/archive/500.htm](http://www.rspb.org.uk/news/archive/500.htm)

**Ed**



**Registered Charity No. 260907**

The Seabird Group  
c/o BTO  
The Nunnery  
Thetford  
Norfolk IP24 2PU  
England, UK.

**E-mail:** [seabird@bto.org](mailto:seabird@bto.org)

**EDITOR**

Chris Wernham (BTO)

**JOURNAL REVIEWER**

Mark Tasker

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 2001 membership rates are:-

Ordinary £10.00  
Standing Order £9.00  
Concession £5.00  
Institution £15.00

Sheila Russell  
Membership Secretary  
Clobber Farm  
Milngavie  
Glasgow G62 7HW  
Scotland, UK.

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to Newsletter No. 87! It is once again full of interesting snippets from the world of seabird research and conservation. I am grateful, as ever, to Mark Tasker for the reviews and to John Calladine for proof-reading. Thanks also to Diana Bowler for answering my request for a review of the 6<sup>th</sup> Mediterranean Seabird Symposium and to all the other contributors. Would all members please think about articles that they would like to see in the *Newsletter* and contact me with ideas (or offers).

The promised article about the *Treasure* oil spill off South Africa will appear in the next issue, as Les Underhill has kindly agreed to write it for me. It will be worth the wait!

Chris Wernham

## GROUP NEWS

### RENEWALS FOR 2001

Subscriptions for 2001 were due on the 1 February. If you have not yet renewed, and do not pay by standing order, then please send your subscription to Sheila as soon as possible.

### WEB HELP REQUESTED

The Seabird Group would like to take the plunge into the modern world and develop an eye-catching web-site to promote us and our interests. If any of you have recently looked at the sites maintained by other organisations, you will have seen how attractive and useful they can be. Such a site could be particularly important in promoting the Group to a younger audience. If any member would like to take on the challenge of developing a site for the Group, or knows of someone that would, then please

contact one of the Committee (details below). An honorarium payment is likely to be available to help with expenses.

### RECRUIT NEW MEMBERS!

You will see that a further copy of our new leaflet, and another subscription form, are enclosed with this mailing. We would be really grateful if each member could persuade one new member to join within the next few months. To maintain a healthy and vibrant Group, we really need to recruit as many new members as possible, particularly younger seabird enthusiasts (or potential enthusiasts). Please give it a go!

### CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

#### Chairman

Prof Mike Harris  
CEH, Hill of Brathens, Glassel,  
Banchory. AB31 4BY  
(mph@ceh.ac.uk)

#### Secretary

Bob Swann  
14, St Vincent Raod, Tain,  
Ross-shire. IV19 1JR  
(Bob.swann@freeuk.com)

#### Treasurer

John Davies  
31, Easter Warriston,  
Edinburgh. EH7 4QX  
(jcd@george-heriots.com)

#### Membership Secretary

Sheila Russell (left)

#### Editor, *Atlantic Seabirds*

Jim Reid  
JNCC, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle  
Place, Aberdeen. Ab10 1UZ  
(jim.reid@jncc.gov.uk)

#### Editor, *Newsletter*

Chris Wernham (left)

#### Other Members

Andy Douse  
Steve Hunter  
Alan Leitch