the Seabird Group

NEWSLETTER 91

June 2002

A BRIEF LOOK AT THE SEABIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND

Thirteen years ago I failed to find any Yellow-eyed Penguins (*Megadyptes antipodes*) in the Otago Peninsula of New Zealand. Last year, in December, I did my homework first, and found myself a member of a group on a conducted tour of the Yellow-eyed Penguin Reserve some fifty minutes' drive from Dunedin. This privately financed project was established by Howard McGrouther and Scott Clarke in 1985, when there were only eight breeding pairs of this, the largest and rarest of the New Zealand penguins. Now there are 35 in one of the largest breeding colonies in the South Island. We were conducted along a maze of trenches, covered with camouflage netting, to a series of hides overlooking nest boxes, in which pairs of penguins were rearing young. We could watch them coming in from the sea, preening, contemplating and taking over duty at the nest. One bird took exception to the approach of a stray Greylag Goose and saw it off the premises in no uncertain fashion.

Yellow-eyed Penguins are 65-70 cm tall and weigh 5-6 kg. The yellow iris and head-band give them their name.

> "Ah! well a-day! What evil looks
> Had I from old and young!
> Instead of the cross, the Albatross
> About my head was hung."

If it was a Royal Albatross (*Diomedea epomophora*) that the Ancient Mariner killed, it was indeed a heavy burden for him to bear. It is the biggest of the albatrosses, weighing in at more than 8 kg, with a wing span of up to 3.2 m.

Not far from the Yellow-eyed Penguin Reserve, the Department of Conservation manages a wildlife reserve on Taiaroa Head (access by appointment, December-September). It holds the only mainland colony in the world of these huge birds. Breeding was first noted there in 1920 and a reserve established so successfully that more than 40 pairs now return every second year to breed. After my rather exhausting Yellow-eyed Penguin experience in the heat of a southern summer, I swallowed my pride and chose to climb to the hide on the headland by an electric car with an attendant.

Royal Albatross
(Photograph by Peter Cunningham)

From the hide, we were able to study seven of the sitting birds at close quarters and found them about as exciting as any other sleeping, sitting birds!

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More interesting were those soaring above us on their immense pinions, arriving or departing the feeding grounds - who knows how many thousands of miles away?

We were told about one bird which, on the routine approach of the warden to check its egg, would stand up and step aside until he was finished! Another, which was reckoned to be thirty years old and a grandmother, had failed to return for the first time.

Below the hide, a large group of shags were roosting, which included Stewart Island, Little and Spotted species (L*eucocarbo carunculatus chalconotus, Phalacrocorus melanoleucos* and *Stictocarbo punctatus)*. The latter two were common elsewhere on the coast.

A visit to friends in Wellington afforded the opportunity to make a double crossing of the Cook Strait by car ferry. The rail journey from Christchurch ran for a while along the coast north of Kaikoura, where large numbers of seabirds were flocking offshore. From the wrong side of a train, and without a telescope, it was impossible to identify them but it is likely that most were Sooty, Fluttering and Flesh-footed Shearwaters (*Puffinus griseus, P. gavia and P. carneipes*).

When I crossed the Strait in 1988, I had excellent views of Giant Petrels (*Macronectes giganteus*), Pintado Petrels (*Daption capense*), unidentified albatrosses, prions (*Pachyptila* sp.), Australasian Gannets (*Morus serrator*) and Southern Black-backed Gulls (*Larus dominicanus*) but, on this occasion, none was seen except the last two.

Visits to the estuaries of the Ashburton and Rangitata rivers were rewarded with views of Black-billed Gulls (*Larus bulleri*) and Red-billed Gulls (*L. novaehollandiae)* and, on the headwaters of the Ohau River, a colony of nesting Black-fronted Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida).*

A pleasant memory of a tour of the Southland is of a Silver (or Red-billed) Gull (*L. novaehollandia*e) perched on the head of a statue of Robert Burns in the centre of Dunedin.

Our tour took us to Bluff, the most southerly conurbation in New Zealand, whence I cast a longing look across the misty Foveaux Strait to Stewart Island and its unique wildlife.

Mixed group of shags at Taiaroa Head wildlife reserve
(Photograph by Peter Cunningham)

I was surprised that, in a group of islands a thousand miles long and embracing thirteen degrees of latitude, from sub-tropical to sub-temperate, I should come across in even a brief visit so few species of some native genera: only three species of gulls, for instance, two terns, two crows, one pipit and so on.

However, I am grateful to my non-ornithological host for what I did see and cannot blame him for what I didn't.

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REVIEWS

COMMON GUILLEMOTS IN THE WESTERN USA AND CANADA

Manuwal, D.A., Carter, H.R., Zimmerman, T.S. and Orthmeyer, D.L. (eds). 2001. *Biology and conservation of the Common Murre in California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. Vol.1: Natural history and population trends.* U.S. Geological Survey, Biological Resources Division, Information and Technology Report USGS/BRD/ITR-2000-0012, Washington, D.C.. 132 pp. Obtainable from National Technical Information Services, 5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield, VA 22161, USA.

Over the past 30 years, the Common Guillemot has been recognized as a prominent indicator of marine conservation issues in North America, especially regarding oil pollution, certain fisheries and human disturbance. To assist the effective management of the guillemots and the marine environment in which they live, this summary of available information on the biology and regional status has been sponsored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

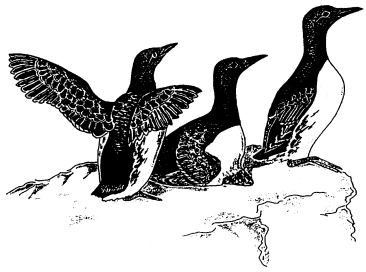
In Volume 1 (Chapter 1), the natural history is summarized, drawing heavily on the important, long-term breeding studies carried out on the South Farallon Islands, California, plus a host of detailed studies from the North Atlantic.

Common Guillemots by Chris Wernham

Population trends are summarized in great detail in Chapter 2, which focuses on the changes in-whole colony counts determined mainly from aerial photographs taken between the late 1970s and 1995. Complete coverage of colonies in 1988-89 suggested a total population of 1.1 million breeding adults – 5-8% of the world population and 13-28% of the Pacific Ocean population. The population covered in this report is well dispersed with 712,000 (with little recent change) in Oregon, 261,000 (little change, apart from large-scale nonbreeding during the severe 1992-93 El Nino) in Northern California, 90,000 (mixed fortunes, but the main colony on the Farallons increased) in Central California, 8,000 (unknown trend) in British Columbia and 7,000 (declining) in Washington. Historical data and human impacts to colonies since the early nineteenth century are also summarised.

Volume 2 will deal with population threats, conservation and management.

Mike Harris



Ian Johnstone

A FAREWELL TO GREENLAND'S WILDLIFE

Hansen, K. 2002. (Translated by R. Worrall). *A Farewell to Greenland's Wildlife*. [Contact gyldengroen@bog.dk or BæreDygtighed, Taastrupvej 31, DK-4672 Klippinge, Denmark.]

This small book describes the recent status of the birds, mammals, crustaceans and fish that are exploited in and around Greenland. As the title suggests, it is not an optimistic account.

The first two sections recount a recent history of hunting and collecting, hunting methods, hunting legislation and enforcement. The third section forms species accounts, giving population trends and hunting statistics for Brünnich's Guillemot, Common and King Eiders, Arctic Tern, geese, Polar Bear, six species of seal, four species of whale, Caribou, Musk Ox, plus shrimps, scallops, crabs and a variety of fish species. Although the sources of all information are not always made clear, the bulk appears to be derived from Greenland's own statutory bodies, scientists and other regulatory groups and organizations. The statistics are reinforced with anecdotal accounts that confirm drastic declines and contraction in ranges of most of the species covered. Examples include declines from about a half-million Brünnich's Guillemot to 10,000 between Disko Bay and Upernavik Isfjord during the last 60 years, and the disappearance of the world's largest colony of Arctic Terns that held 50-80,000 pairs in 1950. Unsustainable levels of hunting, egg collecting and fishery by-catch mortality are all given as proximate causes, although the ultimate cause is given as a lack of political will to acknowledge that there is a problem. The book reports a reluctance by the Greenland authorities to implement regulations to halt and reverse the declines. For example, the eleven Ramsar Sites gazetted in Greenland have never received the required protective legislation under Greenland law. Even where there has been legislation, for example to prevent disturbance at seabird colonies, the author reports reluctance for enforcement and even to report breaches. Within the book, there are quotes from other sources by those who defend the seemingly unregulated *status quo*, suggesting that Greenlanders live in equilibrium with their environment and have a "flair for sustainable exploitation". The statistics presented refute this. A fourth section lays out the author's recommendations for a way forward that include hunting closed seasons, enforcement of protected areas, tight regulation of hunting methods and equipment, obligatory tests for hunters (as in Scandinavian countries) and the setting of realistic quotas that will permit restoration of wildlife populations. Above all, he recommends the employment of wildlife officers dedicated to enforcement. Some new legislation introduced at the beginning of this year, which presumably post-dates the original Danish edition, although mentioned, receives little discussion.

The book acknowledges the importance, both culturally and economically, of hunting to Greenland but the statement that the nation's fishermen and hunters are "bent on sinking the boat on which they float" says a lot. Even more alarming are the levels of subsidy (from the Danish taxpayer) enjoyed by the hunters of Greenland: not just socially but also for their equipment, boats and so on. I guess that subsidy-driven degradation of the environment is not restricted to the farmlands of the European Union.

The book is a fascinating if disturbing read and surely the experiences from Greenland are of much wider relevance to other areas, where exploitation goes on unregulated under the guise of traditional, sustainable use. However, I would like to see a little more in any subsequent editions. For example, it would be useful to know what protection measures have been successful in the vast north-east national park that includes *c.* 40% of Greenland's land area. I would also like to know more about any impact of locally increasing numbers of Caribou and Musk Ox (which have been encouraged to increase hunting opportunities) are having on vegetation and other wildlife. A 'right to reply' chapter from a Greenland politician and also from a representative from KNAPK, the organization representing fishermen and hunters in Greenland, would be enlightening additions.

John Calladine

SEADUCKS

We have rather neglected seaducks, divers and grebes in recent editions of the *Seabird Group Newsletter*, yet these represent a fascinating, and often enigmatic, group of birds inhabiting the marine environment. In this issue, Martin Heubeck kindly provides a detailed report on a recent meeting aimed at reviewing the current state of knowledge of Common Eiders in the Baltic and North Sea and at providing recommendations for more effective monitoring and reversal of adverse trends in the future. I also thank Tony Fox for providing a copy of the resolution agreed at the meeting, for publication here. **Ed.**

WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL SEADUCK SPECIALIST GROUP MEETING

Workshop on Baltic/North Sea Common Eider populations and Progress workshop on Steller's Eider, 17-21 April 2002 at Roosta Holiday Village, Estonia
Convened by the Wetlands International Seaduck Specialist Group (SeSG) and National Environmental Research Institute (NERI), Denmark, and organised by the Estonian Institute of Zoology and Botany and the Estonian Ministry of Environment

This Workshop was prompted by concern over recent declines in breeding and wintering populations of Common Eiders in north-west Europe. The aims were to review the distribution, numbers and conservation status of Common Eiders in the Baltic and North Seas, discuss factors responsible for changes in numbers and distribution, and devise a strategy for improved future monitoring of population sizes and trends. The main emphasis was on the Baltic/Wadden Sea flyway but with reports also from Norway, the British Isles, Greenland and Alaska. The Common Eider Workshop was followed by one on Steller's Eider, with progress reports on their numbers and conservation status in the Baltic, and satellite-tracking studies in northern Norway.

The isolated Roosta Holiday Village, on the north-west coast of the country, was a perfect location for the Workshop, comprising comfortable chalets tucked away in pine woods around a modern and well equipped conference centre. A short walk to the beach before breakfast on the first morning revealed flocks of Long-tailed Ducks just offshore, Woodlarks on the forest edge, migrating Black-throated Divers, an early Caspian Tern, and a distant White-tailed Eagle - as I said, an inspired venue!

Common Eiders on the Isle of May
by Sheila Russell

The 40 or so participants heard welcoming addresses from Urmas Tartes and Andres Kuresoo of the Estonian Institute of Zoology and Botany, after which Tony Fox (NERI) reported news from Wetlands International and the SeSG, and then opened the first session, ***Abundance and conservation status in range states***. For countries in the Baltic/Wadden Sea flyway, there was a common theme to population trends - increases during the 20th century until the early or mid 1990s, followed by either stability, or in most cases, declines - either in breeding or wintering numbers, or both. In recent years, there had been mass mortality during winter in The Netherlands, a 50% decrease in wintering numbers and outbreaks of avian cholera at breeding colonies in Denmark, and low duckling survival and falling breeding numbers in Finland, to cite just three examples. Attempts to match estimates of breeding and wintering numbers in the flyway, and to quantify the scale of decrease during the past decade, proved difficult, and highlighted the need for better co-ordination of surveys and monitoring between the relevant countries. It also highlighted the difficulty involved in undertaking comprehensive surveys of the Baltic region, with tens of thousands of islands available for nesting and vast areas of shallow waters available for

use by feeding flocks. From farther afield, we heard of both decreases and increases along different sections of the Norwegian coast, but relatively stability in the largely resident population in the British Isles.

The organisers had put together a very full programme, and we reconvened for an evening session on ***Lessons from specific discrete populations***. Reports were generally unfavourable, with an 80% decline in breeding numbers in west Greenland since the 1960s, and winter hunting of both local and migrant Canadian birds continuing at an unsustainable level. The small, resident population in the Shetland Islands had declined by two-thirds in the past 25 years, with oil pollution having been a significant negative factor. More encouragingly, numbers in western Scotland had increased, and had fuelled range expansion into Ireland and Wales. Finally, population modelling for a large but declining Danish colony suggested that adult survival was lower than had been assumed.

After nine hours of talks and discussion, there was a rapid migration to the bar where the very friendly, but perhaps over-enthusiastic, barman seemed content to pull glasses of Saku beer for as long as his customers could stay awake - black coffee and orange juice were popular choices at breakfast a few hours later!

The next session, ***Causes of changes in abundance and distribution***, covered disease, parasitic infection, hunting, predation and food scarcity. Avian Pasteurellosis had caused mass mortality of females at colonies in Denmark, and in the St Lawrence Estuary, where some drastic habitat management and provision of artificial nest shelters had helped breeding numbers recover. In Denmark, a surprisingly high infestation rate of the acanthocephalan worm *Profilicollis botulus* was discovered, although no relationship was found between parasite load and body condition. Coming from Scotland, it was a bit of a culture shock to be reminded that Common Eiders are still legally hunted in Europe - the Danish bag has declined to a mere 80,000 birds in recent winters (equivalent to shooting the entire British and Irish population!), and a third of the breeding population there carries spent shot, but the declining bag is thought to reflect largely a reduction in the number of hunters. Perhaps the most worrying situation in the Baltic/Wadden Sea flyway is the mass deaths of Common Eiders through starvation in The Netherlands in recent winters. The western Wadden Sea has traditionally been the main breeding and wintering area for Common Eiders in the country, because of the stocks of shellfish there (Blue Mussels and Common Cockles). In what, to an outsider, seems to have been gross ecological mismanagement, overfishing of these stocks has altered the benthic ecology of the Wadden Sea to the extent that Common Eiders now move to adjacent North Sea coasts in winter, where they feed on nutritionally inferior *Spisula* (itself subject to a commercial fishery). Tens of thousands of birds have starved to death in the past three winters, and local breeding numbers and success have been reduced severely. Migrant Common Eiders from the Baltic use the Wadden Sea in large numbers during winter, and the food supply problem there could be affecting breeding populations in a number of countries.

The afternoon was spent reviewing ***Methods to monitor numbers and distribution***, and discussing what could be done to help restore the Baltic/Wadden Sea population, or at least better quantify population trends and understand the processes underlying changes in numbers. Common Eiders may be surveyed on their wintering grounds, on spring migration, during pre-breeding gatherings near colonies, in colonies themsleves, or during the moulting period. The appropriate mix of the timing of such surveys will vary between different parts of the flyway, but a co-ordinated and standardised approach is essential if accurate population figures are to be derived. Monitoring of parameters such as reproductive output and adult survival, especially of females, were also identified as important in understanding demographic processes. The conclusions were carefully crafted into 'The Roosta Resolution' (see below).

Two other fascinating talks concerned satellite tracking studies of Common Eiders breeding in two separate areas of Alaska (in both areas birds wintered in the closest available ice-free habitat), and assessment of moulting and wintering populations of King Eiders in West Greenland, through aerial surveys and satellite tracking. About 40,000 King Eiders moult along

the coastline (*cf* 200,000 in the 1950s) and *c.* 300,000 winter there, although further surveys are needed to firm up the latter estimate.

The Workshop Banquet that evening was a splendid affair, and I was not alone in assuming that the magnificent spread of starters constituted the main course! Short speeches and toasts were made, especially thanking our Estonian hosts who had worked very hard to ensure the Workshop ran so smoothly, and in such a friendly and convivial atmosphere. Unfortunately, the insomniac barman was on duty again, which led to some confusion over the identity of various bird calls heard from the forest by the diehards, wending their way back to their chalets in the dark.

The Steller's Eider Workshop on the Saturday morning heard of recent dclines in wintering numbers in Estonia, and of studies of their wintering ecology in Lithuania, where it was worryingly reported that up to 10% of birds might be drowning each winter in gill nets. An intriguing report from a satellite telemetry study of Steller's Eiders caught in spring in Varanger Fjord, Norway, suggested the presence of a moulting area off the west coast of Novoya Zemlya, and possible breeding areas further west along the Siberian coast than previously thought. The session ended with a review of current threats to the species, and a discussion on conservation work and future research priorities.

So, all too soon, a most enjoyable and constructive meeting came to an end. Having spent nearly 25 years counting Common Eiders in the relative isolation of Shetland, I found it highly rewarding to discuss the species with fellow dunter-counters (dunter is the Shetland name). Hopefully, the deliberations will soon lead to improved and more co-ordinated population monitoring of Common Eiders, and a better understanding of the causes of recent declines in numbers. Many thanks to Tony Fox and Thomas Kjaer Christiansen in Denmark, and to Andres Kuresoo, Leho Luigujoe and everyone else in Estonia, for their hard work in organising the Workshop.

Two post-Workshop excursions had been arranged, an afternoon trip to Matsalu Bay, and a longer trip to Saaremaa island, also stopping off at Matsalu on the way. Seventeen of us opted for the longer excursion, guided by Andres Kuresoo, the highlight of which was to be Steller's Eiders on the north-west coast of Saaremaa. Matsalu Bay is a site of immense conservation value for birds, and you only need to check out page 213 of Vol.1 of *Important Bird Areas in Europe* to get a flavour of the species to be seen there. We briefly visited the Haeska observation tower on the north side of the bay (with cracking views of a pair of White-backed Woodpeckers on the way) and 'scoped the thousands of waterfowl in that part of the Bay, the highlight being close views of a pair of Lesser White-fronted Geese. After dinner in Lihula, we boarded the ferry for Muhu and Saaremaa - a stop at the causeway linking these two islands giving all three European swans in the same field of view - and overnighted in Kuressaare.

On a lovely calm, sunny Sunday morning, we drove north-west through forests to the Tagamoisa Peninsula, where we were met by Arvo Kullapere, Director of Vilsandi National Park. Arvo guided us straight to Undva Cape, where about 500 metres offshore was a tight feeding flock of Steller's Eiders, just distant enough for me to be grateful for having lugged telescope and tripod all the way from Shetland. The birds, diving highly synchronously, were impossible to count accurately but it was instructive to hear the muttered 'guesstimates' from all these seaduck experts ranging from 320-580!

After a morning exploring the stunningly wild countryside around Uudepanga Bay, we stopped for lunch at the imposing and beautifully restored Loona Manor, headquarters of the Vilsandi National Park, where Arvo's hospitality was second to none. Then a couple more stops - Andres got quite excited over some migrant Ring Ouzels, the rest of us were very pleased with close views of Black Woodpecker at the nest hole - and we had to catch the ferry again back to the mainland, and Tallinn. We only got a small taste of Estonia, but the birdwatching attractions of the country are tremendous and I'm sure I'll go back again on holiday.

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THE ROOSTA RESOLUTION

Seaduck Specialist Group Meeting
Roosta Estonia
19 April 2002

1. Thirty-six seaduck experts from thirteen countries around the globe gathered at the Seaduck Specialist Group Meeting in Roosta, Estonia during 18-22 April 2002 and agreed the following:

2. The Meeting noted the major declines in wintering numbers of the Baltic/Wadden Sea population of the Common Eider *Somateria mollissima mollissima* and reductions in breeding numbers at individual colonies in Finland, Denmark, The Netherlands and in some areas in Sweden and Estonia. It recognised that the Baltic/Wadden Sea wintering population of Common Eider has declined by up to a half in the last 10 years and therefore qualifies as a huntable species of unfavourable conservation status. It noted recent declines in other discrete breeding and wintering Common Eider populations in Greenland, Shetland and Norway.

3. The Meeting recognised that consecutive annual changes in the size of Common Eider breeding populations are highly susceptible to small-scale changes in adult survival, but relatively robust to large changes in reproductive success. Hence, changes in additive mortality are critical in affecting year to year changes in breeding number (*eg* as a result of disease, starvation, drowning in fishing nets or hunting), but poor breeding output contributes relatively little to between year changes in breeding population size. Very high breeding female philopatry and skewed sex ratio means that adult female survival is an especially sensitive parameter in local breeding population dynamics.

4. The Meeting recognised that death of incubating females from Avian Cholera has caused dramatic declines at some Danish colonies in 1996 and 2001, and perhaps affected Baltic colonies elsewhere. Predation pressures from mink, fox and other species have increased at many Baltic breeding sites. Although neither factor can easily be eliminated, management techniques may be available to locally minimise their effects. Hunting in Denmark since the 1980s has declined in line with eider abundance. Nevertheless, whilst respecting that the earlier hunting kill was sustained during a period of population increase, the present declines in abundance give cause for concern.

5. The Meeting recognised that wintering eiders have shifted from the Dutch Wadden Sea to adjacent parts of the North Sea, coinciding with years of high mortality (*ie* mass death through starvation), in years of scarcity of sublittoral mussels. Studies found high levels of Acanthocephalan infestation in healthy wintering Danish birds, with no relationship between parasite numbers and individual body condition, suggesting unusual parasite loads were not responsible for mass mortality events in the Wadden Sea. The Meeting noted that a great deal more needs to be known about the factors affecting food profitability before we can estimate the sustainable harvestable fraction of a shellfishery resource and understand its role in the population dynamics of the Common Eider.

Common Eiders by Sheila Russell

6. The Meeting noted that many factors potentially affecting population trends of the Common Eider can be identified (e.g. starvation, disease, predation, pollution, hunting, drowning in fishing nets, etc.). There remains an urgent need to assess their relative contribution to declines in Common Eider numbers through population modelling or some other approach. Such analysis would identify the most effective use of resources to increase annual adult female survival and enable restoration of the population to favourable conservation status.

7. The Meeting recommends the immediate establishment of a working group to identify current and future potential threats to the nominate race of Common Eider and develop

effective integrated research and monitoring mechanisms to enable assessment of the potential for population recovery. The Meeting recommends combining independent count methods (*eg* at breeding colonies, at migration points, moult concentrations and on the wintering grounds) and monitoring of demographic parameters (*eg* duckling production and female annual survival) into a future population monitoring strategy.

8. The Meeting urges the Ornis Committee to accept the dramatic declines in the population and formally recognise that the Baltic/Wadden Sea population of the Common Eider is a Birds Directive Annex II huntable species of unfavourable conservation status. The Meeting accordingly urges the drafting of an EU management plan for the population as soon as possible to prioritise remedial actions.

Tony Fox
(tfo@DMU.dk)

LONG-LIVED SEABIRDS FROM EITHER SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC!

Though seabirds are easily one of the longest-lived groups of birds, new longevity records that beat the long-standing ones are rare. It was thus surprising when the Ringing Unit at the BTO recently received two calls, within days of each other, both reporting incredibly long-lived individuals.

The first of these was one of the late Professor George Dunnet's Eynhallow Fulmars. This bird was initially ringed (and colour-ringed: 'Green/Green/Spot-Black') as a breeding adult female in 1951. She was then resighted many times up to her last (successful) breeding attempt in 1996, over which time she fledged 21 chicks. So, this bird was at least 45 years old when last seen. However, the age of first breeding of Fulmars is thought to be at least seven years, so this bird may well have been over 50 years old. This report is a great credit to the work of Professor Dunnet and a fitting tribute.

At the same time, we also heard about a Manx Shearwater that was caught at a burrow on Bardsey Island in April 2002. This bird (FV36168) has a somewhat complex ringing history, having been re-ringed twice. Its newest ring was fitted on the island in April 1977, replacing AT73387 (fitted in July 1961), which itself replaced AT46622. This first ring was given to the bird when it was full-grown, on 22 May 1957. This, in itself, would make the bird just under 45 years old. However, after fledging, Manxies don't usually come back to their natal island for several years, so this bird could well be much older than this, and competing with the Eynhallow Fulmar for the crown of Europe's oldest bird. As this bird is still breeding, I'm sure we haven't heard the last of FV36168.

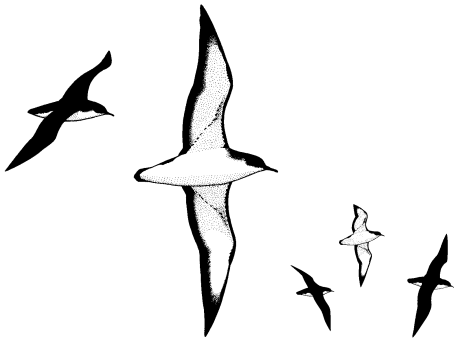
A ballpark calculation by Steve Stansfield on Bardsey also revealed the incredible movements of this bird. Just considering migratory movements (and not feeding movements), this Manxie must have travelled in excess of 850,000km, or the equivalent of a return journey to the Moon, plus a couple of laps of the Earth to celebrate!

Contact: Mark Grantham, Ringing Unit (BTO) (mark.grantham@bto.org).

At the other side of the Atlantic, one of Chandler Robbins' ringed Laysan Albatrosses has just set a new longevity record for North American birds in the wild. In February, he recaptured a bird that was originally banded in 1956. At the time of banding it was incubating an egg, indicating that it was then at least 5 years old. The worn band had been replaced by Chandler in 1962, and his colleagues had replaced bands again in 1985 and 1993. When he gave the bird its 5th sequential band in 2002, it was brooding a healthy chick at the grand old age of at least 51 years! This beats the previous record for a North American bird (held by the same species) of 42 years and 5 months.

Contact: Chandler Robbins, Patuxent Wildife Research Refuge, 11410 American Holly Drive, Laurel MD 20708-4015, USA (ChandlerRobbins@USGS.gov).

MOVEMENTS OF BRITISH & IRISH SEABIRDS - THE BTO MIGRATION ATLAS



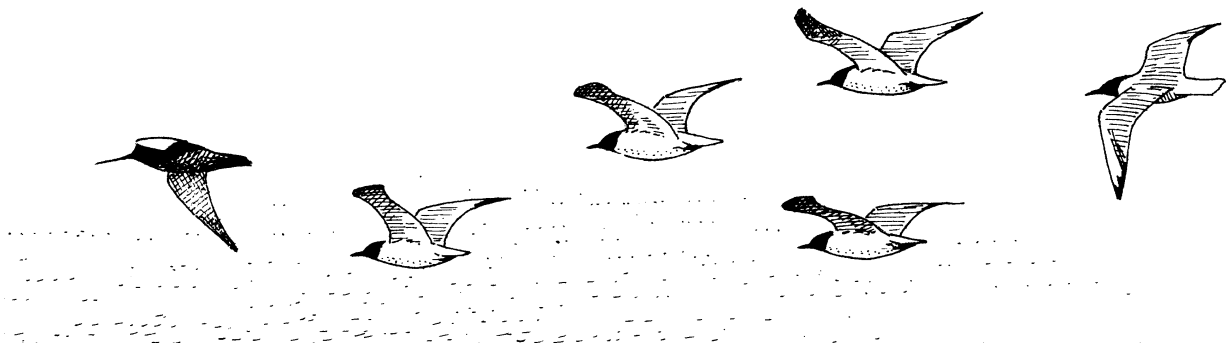
I am just in the process of checking the page proofs for the *Migration Atlas*, which we now expect will be published in September. As I explained in *Newsletter 84*, the book is designed to provide a comprehensive but concise summary of what we know about the movements of British & Irish birds, using information gained from bird ringing and from a variety of other sources. The book contains 188 major species accounts, plus 73 shorter accounts.

There are full accounts for 24 British & Irish 'seabird' species - Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, Storm and Leach's Petrels, Gannet, Cormorant, Shag, Arctic and Great Skuas, Black-headed, Common, Lesser Black-backed, Great Black-backed and Herring Gulls, Kittiwake, Sandwich, Roseate, Common, Arctic and Little Terns, Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Black Guillemot and Puffin – and for other species that are principally marine for part of the year (*eg* Red-throated Diver, Common Eider and Scaup). The full accounts contain one or a series of maps for each species, and deal with different topics (such as seasonal movements, differences in movement patterns between the sexes and age classes, differences between regional breeding subpopulations, natal and breeding dispersal and so on) in a standard order for easy reference [see *BTO News*, May-June 2002, no.240, pp.12-13, for colour examples of material from the book].

Shorter accounts are provided for species that have provided ring-recovery only rarely, if ever (*eg* Cory's, Great, Sooty and Balearic Shearwaters, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas, Mediterranean, Little, Sabine's, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, and Little Auk) and for a number of seasonally marine species (*eg* Black-throated and Great Northern Divers, Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes, Common and Velvet Scoters, Red-breasted Merganser and Grey Phalarope). Many references are included within the accounts, to allow the reader to follow up specific points when desired.

The species accounts attempt to provide the 'bread and butter' information on movements that is required for the effective conservation of British & Irish seabirds – in an easy-reference form. However, there is a great deal of important, supplementary information on seabird movements contained within the supporting chapters of the book.

Rigorous analyses have been carried out, lead by BTO's Gavin Siriwardena, to quantify the degree of migratory behaviour in an objective manner for each species. This has been achieved by looking at the distribution of winter records, and the frequency distribution of distances moved by individual birds, in relation to their breeding areas.



Black-headed Gulls – illustrated for the BTO Migration Atlas by John Reaney

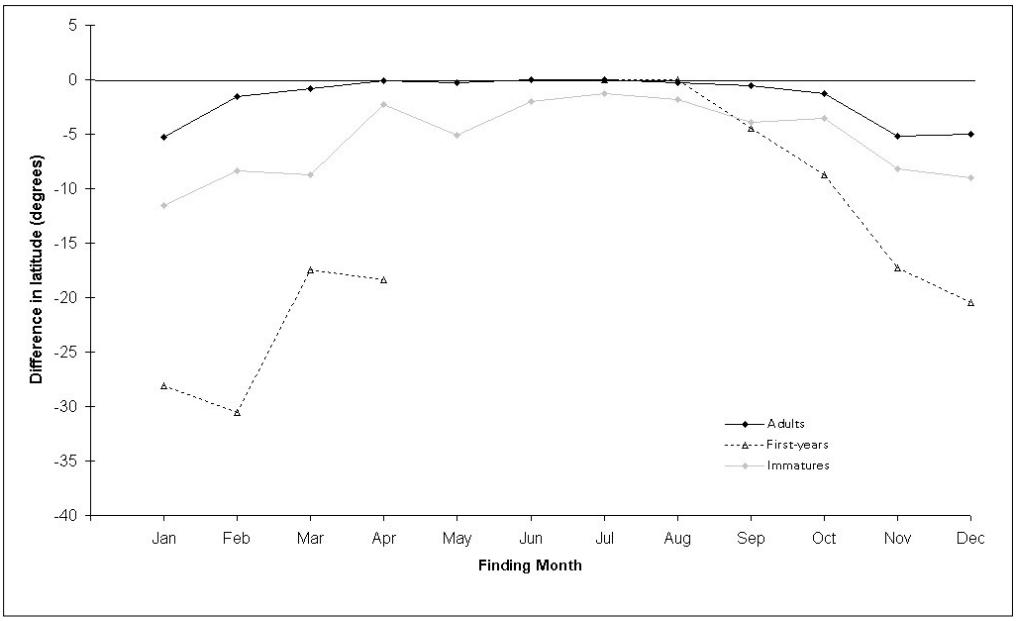
Using the criteria set out in the book, most of our breeding seabird species are either short-distance or long-distance migrants, with the exception of the rather sedentary Tystie.

Another set of tests looked for differences in the movements of seabirds of different sex and age class, and also between those from different subpopulations. Some of these tests statistically confirmed, and quantified further, existing knowledge of seabird movements. For example, the tests demonstrated that the average adult British & Irish Gannet travels no further than the Bay of Biscay for the winter (*ca* 600 km), while the average distance moved by immatures is *ca* 1,400 km. This means that immatures winter significantly further south (by 9° of latitude) than adults; first year birds winter on average as far south as West Africa, while older immatures show intermediate seasonal movement patterns; see graph below).

The analyses revealed how little we know about the movements of seabirds of differing sex. Only two species (Shag and Guillemot) had sufficient data in the database (more than 10 seasonally appropriate recoveries of each sex) to allow testing of their wintering areas, and even for these the maximum number of records in any class was 13. Although not statistically significant, the results were suggestive of females moving further than males for both species.

Some of the tests comparing the movements of seabirds from different regional subpopulations gave important results to inform conservation. Those for breeding subpopulations indicated whether segregation occurs on the wintering grounds, which has implications for predicting the wider effects of localised oil spills on breeding populations, for example. For 9 of the 10 species that could be tested, significant differences in either distances moved or average wintering area were detected between birds from the different breeding 'regions'.

For species with sufficient data (the gulls only amongst seabirds), it was possible to compare the breeding origins of individuals wintering in different areas of Britain & Ireland. For three gull species (Black-headed, Herring and Common – see map below), the results indicate parallel migration movements: birds wintering in northern Britain also breed significantly further north than those wintering in the south. The same is true for some other species from other ecological groups (*eg* Oystercatcher, Blackbird and Starling). Such results are of general importance for the conservation of migratory species within Britain & Ireland (not just gulls) – we need to identify the breeding populations for which we are responsible and the areas that are important for them in winter.



Average differences in latitude (south) between ringing and recovery location by month for British & Irish Gannets of three age classes.

Exploratory tests were carried out to look for changes over time in the wintering area of each species with enough data. Across all ecological groups of species, 22 of 73 species tested showed some change in wintering area over time (of which 11 were seabird/gull species). More work on the ring-recoveries will need to be carried out on a species-by-species basis (*eg* to assess whether changes in methods of recovery have changed through time) before we can draw firm conclusions. This is, of course, an area of research that needs to be pursued in greater depth in order to understand retrospectively any changes that have already occurred, given the future need to predict the likely impacts of global climate change on our seabird populations.

The final chapter of the *Migration Atlas* is a synthesis of what we know currently, and what we still need to know, about the movements of British & Irish birds, with an emphasis on knowledge needs to allow their effective conservation. Despite the huge amount of valuable information that has been collected since ringing began in 1909, the book reveals many gaps that remain to be filled, particularly for the more enigmatic, pelagic seabirds. Movement patterns interpreted from ring-recovery information are also prone to more bias for seabirds than for some other groups, because rings cannot generally be recovered at sea. The book recommends that several avenues of research into seabird movements are of high priority for the immediate future, including further work on changes over time, and research to validate ring-recovery patterns against other sources of information on distribution outside the breeding season that will continue to be more expensive to obtain (such as at-sea ship-based surveys and satellite telemetry data).

There are many challenges laid down for research into the movements of our seabirds in the future . . .

Chris Wernham
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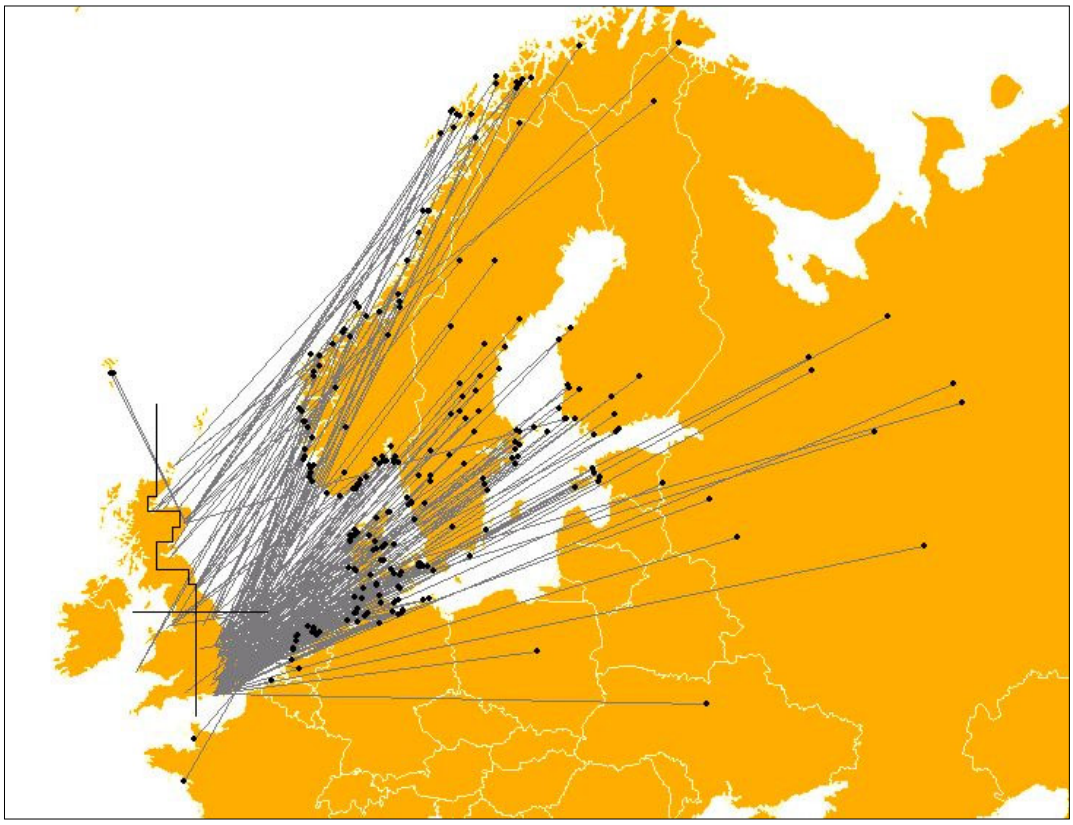
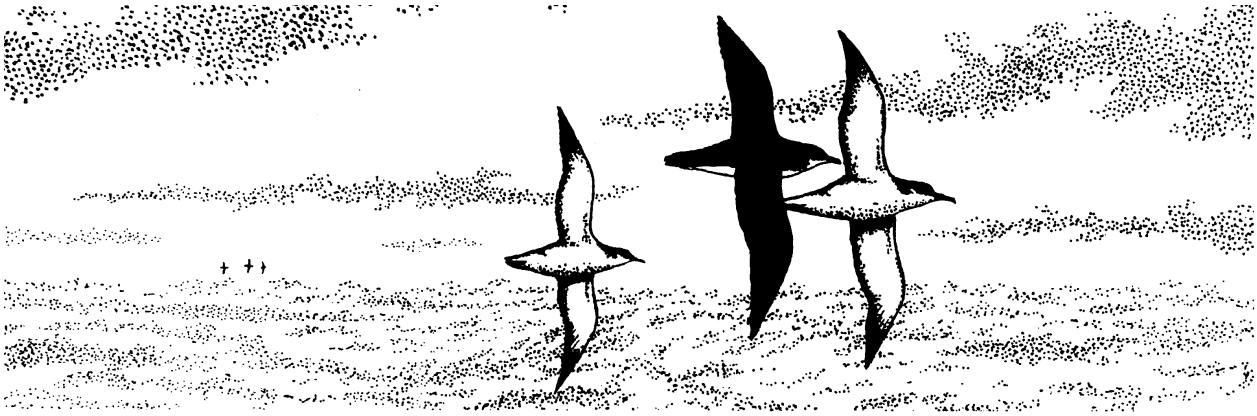


Movements and recovery locations of Common Gulls ringed in Britain & Ireland outside the breeding season and recovered abroad. Individuals that breed further north within continental Europe spend the winter significantly further north within Britain & Ireland than those that breed further south, suggesting parallel migration routes.

The BTO *Migration Atlas* will be published by T. & A.D. Poyser in September 2002 at a cost of £55. A pre-publication offer of £39-50 is available to all current BTO members and registered ringers. For further details, or to join the BTO and take advantage of the pre-pub offer, contact Sue Starling (BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk. IP24 2PU. 01842 750050. sue.starling@bto.org).



Manx Shearwaters – illustrated for the BTO Migration Atlas by Lawrence Chappell

MORE ON PENGUIN RESEARCH

In the last edition of the *Newsletter* (no.90), I reported on research that has been carried out to satellite track Rockhopper Penguins around the Falklands. Unfortunately, I forgot to mention that the work was a collaborative project between Falklands Conservation (R.I. Ingham & Dr A Clausen) and the Antarctic Research Trust (Dr K Putz) – my apologies to them for this omission. They would like to let readers know that the results of their studies are available in reports that are available from Falklands Conservation, and a paper is in press in *Marine Ecology Progress Series*.

Contact: Falklands Conservation
- please note that they have a new website:
www.falklandsconservation.com

Readers may have seen a recent item on *Tomorrow's World* about the testing of new, more 'comfortable' plastic tags for marking African Penguins (see http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/English/sci/tech/newsid_1959000/1959563.stm). More information on this joint project between the Physics Department of the University of Bristol, UK, and the Avian Demography Unit of the University of Cape Town, Robben Island Museum and the South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (in collaboration with the Earthwatch Institute) can be found on the ADU website (www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/ew_intro.htm).

Chris Wernham

BOOBY HITCHES A FREE RIDE

Dick McClary of the yacht Alacazam sends details of a ringed Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) that arrived on his yacht on 19th January 2002, whilst he was 500 miles northwest of the Cape Verdes at 21°32'N, 29°11'W. The bird remained on board for the next 11 days. It took frequent sorties away from the boat but spent most of the time perched on the foredeck. Here it waited until a flying fish took off from the bow wave. The bird then instantly went after the fish and both would hit the water surface simultaneously, usually to the distinct disadvantage of the fish. The bird stayed on board until 30th January 2002, when it left when the yacht was 330 miles east of Guadeloupe at 16°49'N, 56°05'W. The bird had been ringed at Archipelago de Sao Pedro, Sao Paulo, Brazil (0°55'N, 29°20'W) on 4th October 2001.

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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 2002 membership rates are:-

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

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GROUP NEWS

CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

Current retrial dates are shown in bold after the name of each member. Nominations (which should be submitted to the Secretary) from Group members for replacements on the committee are always very welcome.

Chairman
Prof Mike Harris **(2003)**
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Secretary
Bob Swann **(2003)**
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(bob.swann@freeuk.com)

Treasurer
John Davies **(2005)**
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Membership Secretary
Sheila Russell **(2002)**
(see box)
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01786 466560
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Martin Heubeck **(2005)**
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Other Members:
Steve Hunter **(2003)**
Alan Leitch **(2004)**

CONTENTS OF THE NEWSLETTER

As Editor of the *Newsletter*, I make every effort to check the content of the material that we publish against original sources or with the organizations to which articles refer. However, in attempting to keep the news items as timely as possible, it is not always possible for us to check comprehensively every piece of information back to its original source, particularly material derived from web-based sources. We must leave readers to make further checks, at their own discretion, if they have concerns about any of the information or contacts provided, and to contact us to allow us to give feedback to readers if necessary.

We also try to provide a forum for readers' views to be expressed, which means that those provided in the *Newsletter* are not necessarily the views of the Editor or the Seabird Group.

Chris Wernham

SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS

Don't forget that the deadline for the first round of Seabird Group grants in 2002/03 is 31 October. If you would like to apply for a grant to carry out fieldwork in the 2003 breeding season, please try to send your application by this date. Any unallocated grant money from the first round will be made available for suitable projects proposed in the second round (for which the closing date is 31 March 2003) but apply this autumn to ensure consideration of your project. Applications forms are available from the Secretary, or can be downloaded from the website:

'www.seabirdgroup.org.uk'