



2002 LITTLE AUK EXPEDITION TO SPITSBERGEN

What do Soviet-era amphibious vehicles, fish landing nets, manicure tools, Polish cuisine, Norwegian helicopters and freighters, surplus rifles from the Third Reich, binoculars and sample bags all have in common? No, they're not the stuff of a paperback action novel - they were all essential components of the 2002 Little Auk expedition to Hornsund, Spitsbergen. With generous support from a Seabird Group grant, we travelled to Hornsund in July and August 2002 to work on the breeding, feeding, and behavioural ecology of Little Auks (*Alle alle*).



Little Auk (*Alle alle*) with zooplankton-filled throat pouch (Photo © Tom Van Pelt)

We sampled chick diets directly, adult diets indirectly, and also measured a range of feeding ecology parameters to be merged with an ongoing study of Little Auk foraging ecology.

Additional field work focused on sex differences in parental behaviour and provisioning during the chick rearing and fledging periods. The expedition was based at the Polish Polar Station in Hornsund, Spitsbergen, in the archipelago of Svalbard.

The first international Little Auk Expedition to Hornsund took place in 2001, with a multi-national team (Nina Karnovsky, USA; Fridtjof Mehlum, Norway; Lech Illiszko, Poland; Ann Harding, UK) led by Jan Marcin Węślawski from the Institute of Oceanology, Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS). The primary aim of that expedition was to examine how the foraging behaviour of Little Auks is influenced by heterogeneous water masses surrounding the colony. Given that plankton populations closely track changes in ocean temperatures, plankton-feeding Little Auk populations are likely to be affected by changing climate and ocean currents.

The Atlantic section of the Arctic is currently undergoing large-scale changes in the distribution of water masses, and Little Auks may be forced to forage in areas with sub-optimal conditions if the pattern of Atlantic and Arctic water flow shifts. The colony at Hornsund is adjacent to an important confluence of Atlantic and Arctic Ocean currents, and therefore presents an ideal situation to investigate Little Auk feeding ecology and foraging activity in the context of variable oceanographic conditions.

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The 2001 work was very successful, and the study was planned to continue for at least another year. However, most of the 2001 participants were unable to make a return trip in 2002, and the funding situation was looking grim. But Ann Harding was very keen to return for a follow-up year of study, and by the late spring of 2002, the PAS Institute of Oceanology was able to commit to providing food, lodging, and fundamental logistical support to Ann and to Tom Van Pelt, and the same Institute arranged for Magda Owczarek to come to the station as a volunteer worker. Small grants from the Gino Watkins Memorial Fund, the Augustine Courtauld Trust, and Alaska Pacific University nudged us closer to financial viability, and when the news came of a grant from the Seabird Group, the dark clouds of funding shortfalls had finally cleared. Now all we had to do was get our gear and ourselves to Hornsund in time for the Little Auk breeding season.

The Svalbard archipelago is probably the world's most easily accessed High-arctic area, with the Longyearbyen airport (78°15'N) served by daily scheduled jet flights from mainland Norway. However, unless you've planned (and paid) to be aboard one of the many luxurious eco-tour vessels based out of Longyearbyen, the ease of travel takes a steep nose-dive once you've exited your Norwegian airliner. During the ice-free summer, reaching Hornsund requires a full day's passage down the exposed waters of the west coast of Spitsbergen. The three members of our team solved this transport problem differently: Magda, arriving first, came aboard a Polish Maritime Academy training ship (M/V *Horyzont*) that makes three annual resupply voyages to Hornsund from Gdansk, Poland. Ann, our team leader, arrived next; the Norwegian Polar Institute offered Ann transport from Longyearbyen aboard their R/V *Lance*, and ferried her to shore in spectacular fashion via their shipboard helicopter. Tom, arriving last in mid-July, was generously given a berth aboard the PAS R/V *Oceania* as it worked its way down the western coast from Longyearbyen to begin oceanographic work in Hornsund Fjord.

With the team safely assembled, fieldwork began in earnest, focusing on the Little Auk colony at Arikammen (77°03'N, 15°10'E), 1 km north of the Polish Polar Station. The breeding season was a little earlier than average, but Ann

and Magda were ready to begin working during the end of the incubation period. Initial work focused on locating and signposting nest sites, marking individuals with metal and colour rings, and collecting blood samples from family groups for molecular sex identification and analysis of extra-pair paternity rates.

Our chief priority in collaboration with the PAS was to collect chick diet samples from breeding Little Auk adults during the early chick-rearing period, concurrent with work by the PAS Institute of Oceanology in the fjord and surrounding waters to characterize the marine habitat and the distribution and abundance of the zooplankton that the Little Auks prey upon. Thus, while the R/V *Oceania* and its full crew of planktonologists, oceanographers, benthic ecologists, and chemists worked throughout the 24-hour polar days doing zooplankton net tows, CTD casts, SCUBA work, and hydroacoustic surveys, we had a crash course in capturing adult Little Auks.



Little Auk caught in mistnet with zooplankton chick meal in its throat
(Photo © Ann Harding)

Our initial approach was to use a mist net strung perpendicular to the slope, catching flying birds returning to their talus nest crevices with food for their chick in a distensible pouch beneath their tongues. With the bird in hand, complete chick meals were gently scooped out of the pouch using one of a range of manicure tools that we'd brought along for this purpose (birds were released unharmed within ca. 5 minutes of capture, and were handled under permit from Norwegian authorities). The mist-net method was productive, but involved some very long waits between captures, and more than a few hectic mass-nettings of Little Auks spooked off

the colony by a patrolling Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*).

So, employing a small fish-landing net with an extended handle, we began to stalk and capture individual Little Auks posturing on the colony with full throat pouches. After some comical misses and much trial-and-error, the hand-net became our tool of choice, allowing more rapid and predictable captures. By the time the workers aboard the *Oceania* had completed their work and prepared to leave, we'd achieved our target sample size of chick diet samples to be analysed in relation to the data collected aboard ship. We handed the samples over to the Polish research team for transport and later analysis back in Poland (Institute of Oceanology, J.M. Węśławski principal investigator).



The collection of a zooplankton chick meal from the throat pouch of a Little Auk (Photo © Tom Van Pelt)

We carried out two more capture sessions during the middle and late chick rearing periods, ending up with a total of over 80 chick diet samples. To learn more about seasonal changes in both chick and adult diets, we also collected blood samples from chicks and adults during each of the three capture sessions for later stable isotope analysis. We randomly selected chick diet samples from each capture phase for stable isotope analysis, and workers aboard the R/V *Oceania* (Kasia Dmoch and Wojtek Walkusz) collected voucher specimens of all key zooplankton prey types, providing benchmark values to strengthen interpretation of the stable isotope analyses. We're collaborating with Dr Keith Hobson (Canadian Wildlife Service) in this aspect of the study and all samples are currently being analysed in his lab.

The next priority was to continue the behavioural work, focusing on sex differences in parental provisioning and time spent at the colony. Ann and Magda had found 15 accessible nests with visible entrances during the end of the incubation period, captured and individually identified both parents from each of those nest-sites, and taken a small blood sample from each parent for molecular sex identification.

The low density of nest sites with both accessible adults and clearly visible entrances forced them to split the 15 nests into two groups, requiring a team of two people to observe all nests simultaneously. Because we wanted to learn more about seasonal changes in behaviour between the sexes, we planned to conduct 24-hour watches during early, middle, and late chick rearing. The early chick-rearing phase was happening before Tom arrived ... so Ann and Magda did the first watch with no relief, making for a very long 24 hours. Luckily some of the staff at the Polish station kindly brought hot soup, tea, and some massive down overpants and jackets to fight the arctic chill. The second and third watches were made much less stressful by the addition of a third person, allowing the team to rotate observations and rest time in a tent set-up near the colony, so that two people were always observing while one rested. In addition to the three 24-hour watches, we also conducted four night watches during the peak diurnal fledging period (between 2200-0200).

We three must have made quite a sight for the bemused Polish staff as we trudged up to the colony, loaded down with tent, layers of warm clothes, thermoses, binoculars and home-made chairs, all topped off with a heavy 1939 vintage rifle. Polar bears are regular summertime visitors to the area around the Polish station, and all workers there are required to be armed whenever they leave the station. For some unknown reason, the rifles for hire at every outfitting shop in Longyearbyen were all alike; antique but reliable Mausers, surplus from the Second World War. We also carried flare guns as non-lethal deterrents. Needless to say, we did a lot of looking over our shoulders while we tried to focus on the bird work at hand. Although we did have two unforgettable encounters away from the station, we were grateful to never see a bear in the vicinity of our study colony.

Male and female roles during the chick-rearing period are aspects of Little Auk behaviour that have so far eluded a thorough understanding. Like other semi-precocial Alcid species, Little

Auk chicks are fed at the nest until they've reached at least 65% of adult size. However, while chicks of other semi-precocial alcid species are completely independent from their parents after fledging, Little Auk fledglings are accompanied to the sea by one parent. Limited past data from parent-chick pairs shot at sea have indicated that the parents accompanying Little Auk chicks are males (as with the closely related Razorbill and guillemots [*Alca torda* and *Uria* spp.], but this has never been confirmed with observations at the colony. More importantly, a detailed observational study of parental behaviour during the chick rearing and fledging periods has never been carried out, in part due to difficulties in sexing these birds in the field. With collaboration by Prof. Jan Lifjeld and Dr Fritdjof Mehlum (Zoological Museum, University of Oslo), all our individually marked birds used for behavioural observations were later sexed in Lifjeld's lab using molecular techniques, allowing us to examine differences in male-female parental care (results soon to be submitted for publication, Harding *et al.*).



Little Auks in flight above Ariekammen, Hornsund, with Hansbreen and Fannytoppen in the background (Photo © Tom Van Pelt)

A SUMMARY OF BLACK GUILLEMOT BREEDING AT BANGOR, NORTHERN IRELAND IN 2002

The fledging period was a blur of frantic activity - chicks madly exercising their wings outside their nests, parents nervously eyeballing the patrolling Glaucous Gulls, and parent and chick pairs performing aerial acrobatics in eluding chasing gulls. By the end of August, most of the fledglings had gone and the colony was eerily quiet. Our work was winding down. Groups of plump Purple Sandpipers (*Calidris maritima*) were staging along the beaches, Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) chicks were nearly adult size, and flights of Barnacle and Pink-footed Geese (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) were passing overhead. The tundra was painted in gorgeous shades of reds and yellows, and we could feel a distinct chill in the air at the summer sun's first dip below the horizon. It was time for us to leave.

We'd made arrangements to be picked up by a Norwegian container ship running between Tromsø and Longyearbyen. A few days were spent waiting for word ... finally one night at 01:00, the station's radio crackled to life with notice that we were to be in the water ready for pickup at 03:00. The station has no pier; all supplies are brought on land using a 1950's-era Soviet-surplus tracked amphibious vehicle. Ceremonial departures are accomplished the same way, in fine style. Bobbing in the dark ocean, we sat waiting, as the cargo freighter's bright red hull loomed towards us in the grey light. The friends we'd made at the Polish station waved goodbye as the all-Russian crew hoisted us aboard the ship *Norbjorn*. A big Atlantic swell quartered against our stern as we exited the fjord mouth and turned north towards Longyearbyen.

Acknowledgments: Thanks to the Governor of Svalbard for permission to work in South Spitsbergen N.P., and to the Norwegian Polar Institute for logistical help in Longyearbyen. We thank Lucjan Nowosielski (station leader), Tomasz Moczadłowski (assistant leader) and all our friends at the Polish Polar Station for their overwhelming hospitality, warm friendship, and efficient support. Further information about the Polish Polar Station can be found at: <http://hornsund.igf.edu.pl/station.html>.

Report written by **Tom Van Pelt:**
(thomas_van_pelt@usgs.gov)

Team members: Ann Harding, Tom Van Pelt,
& Magda Owczarek.

Black Guillemots (*Cepphus grylle*) have nested in the harbour wall at Bangor, Co. Down, Northern Ireland since 1911. In the late 1980's, a marina was built in Bangor Bay and now there are over 50 nesting holes in the three piers of the marina, many of which have been purpose-built for Black Guillemot nesting (Greenwood 1998). I began monitoring breeding in 1985 and now have 18 years of breeding data. This report therefore updates the 1998 paper that summarised 13 years of monitoring. There are 15 nesting holes in the North Pier, which was the pier first used by the birds back in 1911. There are a further six holes in the South Pier: the pier that is the main access on to the marina pontoons. The Central Pier has the largest number of nesting holes with 27 purpose-built concrete boxes beneath it. There are three further chambers on the outer face of the Central Pier. Black Guillemots are opportunistic and occasionally use other odd holes and crevices associated with manholes and service ducts.

The number of pairs of Black Guillemots attempting to breed in 2002 was 29; a little less than in 2001, although the upward trend of breeding attempts is apparent (Fig. 1). The North Pier had 12 pairs, the Central Pier 14 pairs and the South Pier 3 pairs.

The number of young fledged in 2002 was 25 – a substantial reduction compared with previous years. The traditional site on the North Pier produced 17 fledged young, whilst the Central and South Piers produced four fledged young each.

Not surprisingly, the number of young fledged per pair also varied between the three piers in 2002 (Fig. 2). The North Pier was the most successful with 1.42 young fledged per pair, whilst the Central Pier was the least successful with only 0.29 young fledged per pair. Older, more experienced birds use the North Pier, whilst the South and Central Piers attract the younger, less experienced birds. In addition, the Central Pier is more prone to disturbance than the other two piers.

Fig. 1 Number of breeding pairs of Black Guillemots on the three piers at Bangor in 2002.

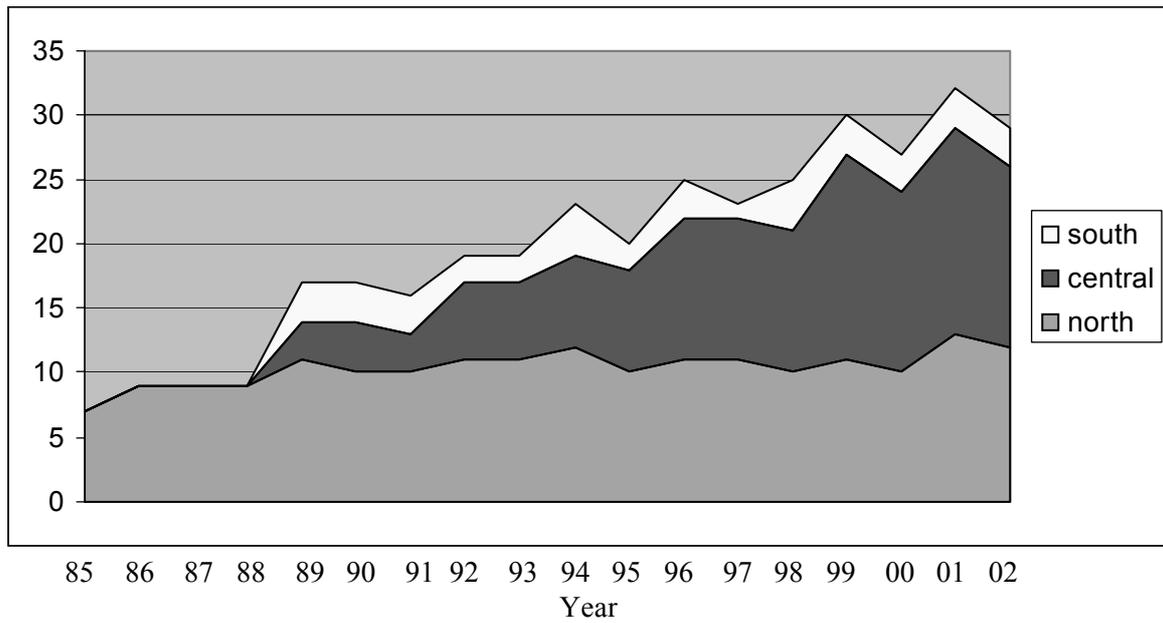
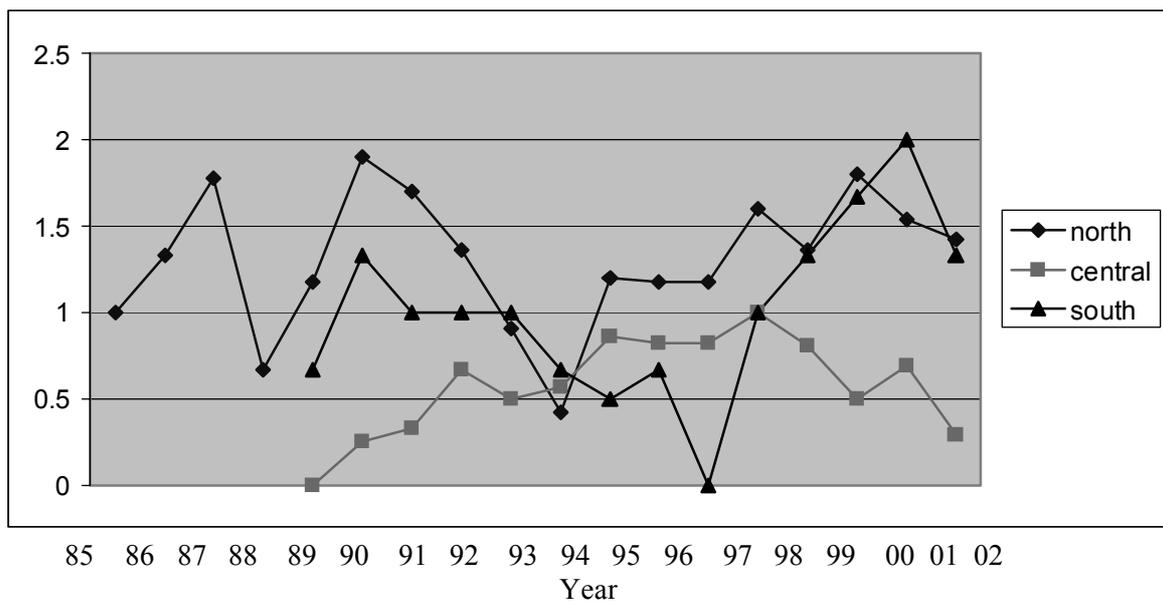


Fig. 2 Number of young fledged per Black Guillemot pair.



Reference:

Greenwood, J.G. 1998. Breeding Biology of Black Guillemots *Cepphus grylle* at Bangor, Co. Down. *Irish Birds* 6: 191 – 200.

Julian G. Greenwood

(j.greenwood@stran.ac.uk)

PROGRESS WITH SEABIRD 2000

All SEABIRD 2000 data has now been received (except some late requested counts from Durham). Despite the ambitious aims of the project - to count not just all coastal nesting Seabirds, but all inland ones also, and to gain accurate estimates of petrels and shearwaters - there have in fact been very few gaps in coverage, which is great news.

The data have now been entered into the SEABIRD 2000 database. This has been modelled on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), a Government initiative aimed at making information on biodiversity available to all. SEABIRD 2000 counts at specific sites will be made available via the internet through the NBN Gateway sometime in early 2003, once all the data have been fully checked and validated. The initial rudimentary publication of data on the internet will be followed up by a more interactive website in which users will be able to obtain summaries of data for areas selected using GIS technology. The database is held at JNCC in Aberdeen and access to the data via the internet will only be possible on application to JNCC.

Work on the SEABIRD 2000 book is now well under-way. The postponement of some fieldwork in 2001 due to foot and mouth has caused inevitable delays in collating and analysing the results. However, it is still hoped that the book will be published in time for a launch at the Seabird Group Conference in Aberdeen on 2-4 April 2004. Much of the analyses are being carried out by JNCC's SEABIRD 2000 project staff, Ian Mitchell and Tim Dunn, with assistance from fellow editors Norman Ratcliffe (RSPB) and Steve Newton (BirdWatch Ireland). The texts for chapters on 25 species are being written by invited experts, with additional contributions from the editorial team. Each chapter will be peer-reviewed by experts from outwith the project and from overseas.

Finally, I would like to thank the 900 or so counters who have taken part in four seasons of fieldwork and to the 40 or so co-ordinators - without their local knowledge and contacts,

SEABIRD 2000 would barely warrant a pamphlet, let alone a major book!

Ian Mitchell
Seabird 2000 Co-ordinator
(ian.mitchell@jncc.gov.uk)
November 2002

DEAD SEABIRDS AVAILABLE

Since 1979, over 55,000 dead seabirds have been collected on the monthly Shetland beached bird surveys. Most of these have gone up in smoke at the Council incinerator at Lerwick (don't tell them, I'm sure there's some rule or other that now forbids it!!). A very few are sent to a professional taxidermist who prepares and sells skeletons to museums and university archaeology departments, and even fewer end up in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland. Just recently, I was told that Mick Marquiss at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Banchory was looking for dead Black Guillemots, and a few days later was able to post him an intact adult and a pair of first-winter wings. If anybody else out there is wanting dead seabirds for research purposes, preferably skeletal or feather material (so much washed ashore here is scavenged very quickly), I'm happy to accept 'wish-lists', although be aware that the occurrence of such corpses is obviously seasonal, and that you may have to wait a while before your number comes up!

Martin Heubeck

Sumburgh Lighthouse
Virkie
Shetland ZE3 9JN
Tel. 01950 460760
(martinheubeck@btinternet.com)

FAIR ISLE BREEDING SEASON 2002

Overview: Seabird studies have been carried out on Fair Isle under contract to JNCC since 1986, as part of the latter's national Seabird Monitoring Programme. The 2002 season turned out to be one that was below average but it was nowhere near as disastrous as the previous year.

Again there appears to have been a dearth of Sandeels in Fair Isle waters (and around Shetland as a whole). However, unlike in 2001, when sandeels suddenly vanished around mid-June resulting in a high mortality of seabird young from starvation, in 2002 the disappearance appears to have happened earlier in the season. This perhaps benefited the birds in one way in that many just did not even attempt to breed, rather than suffer losses midway through the season after inputting huge individual effort. Sandeels did, however, make an appearance from July onwards, which meant that later nesting species were fairly successful.

Analysis of food samples collected and observations during feeding watches suggested that Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins were all feeding chicks on relatively small sandeels, whilst, for the first time, Sprats made up the majority of fish collected from Puffins – it should be noted that all these were collected at the same colony on one day.

A summary of the breeding success of each species is provided in Table 1 below.

Fulmar: Numbers decreased slightly at monitoring plots, continuing the recent trend, but breeding success was the best since 1995 and a big improvement on that of 2001 (0.28 fledged per AOS).

Gannet: The Fair Isle Gannet colony has grown almost every year since it was first colonised in 1975. A whole Isle census revealed a 12.7% increase, from 1,406 AONs in 2001 to 1,585 in 2002 and, with over 1,000 loafing birds also counted, the expansion looks set to continue for years to come. Productivity though was slightly below the recent average at 0.61 chicks fledged per AON (previous ten year average = 0.71).

Table 1
Summary of the breeding success of Fair Isle’s seabirds in 2002 –
as measured at annual monitoring plots.

Species	Productivity	Previous 10-yr mean	Notes
Fulmar	0.45	0.43	A fairly good year and the best since 1995.
Gannet	0.61	0.71	Largest number of AONs on monitoring plots. Seems to be the only species still expanding.
Shag	1.98	1.51	Lowest number of AONs but highest productivity.
Great Skua	0.16	0.89	Disastrous. Many territorial pairs appeared not to have nested at all. Previous lowest productivity was 0.5-0.8 in 1992.
Arctic Skua	0.28	0.65	Another poor year with number of territories down 23% on 2001 to 60.
Kittiwake	0.48	0.91	Lowest number of AONs and poor productivity but vast improvement on 2001 (0.06).
Arctic Tern	0.00	0.38	Down from 2,836 AIAs in 2001 to 114 but same complete failure.
Guillemot	0.72	0.74	This species seems to be consistently successful but fledging weights of chicks suggest post-fledging survival may be poor.
Razorbill	0.63	0.62	Again, an average figure but fledging weights were low.
Puffin	0.74	0.67*	Likely to be an overestimate as late first-checks of burrows meant that early failures will have been missed. *includes 2001 figure of 0.31.

Productivity = number of chicks fledged per AON/AIA/territory; AON=Apparently Occupied Nest; AIA=Apparently Incubating Adult.

Shag: Counts at monitoring plots have declined every year since 1989 (241 AONs) (apart from a large blip in 1996) until just 96 AONs were counted in 1999. 2000 however saw a large increase to 155 AON, but there has been a decline each year since. The count of 135 AONs in 2002 was a 9.4% decrease from the previous year. The productivity plot had the lowest number of AONs recorded but the highest productivity (1.98 chicks fledged per AON). The shortage of sandeels early in the season may have resulted in some birds not attempting to nest, whilst those that did were eventually rewarded with the appearance of plentiful food in July.

Arctic Skua: The number of AOTs decreased from 78 in 2001 to just 60 in 2002, a decline of 23.1% - to the lowest population level since 1957. The lack of sandeels and birds from which to steal food (Arctic Terns in particular) meant that just 17 chicks survived to fledging – a productivity of 0.28 (a very poor figure but a vast improvement on the previous season of 0.17).

Great Skua: The number of territories declined by 7.0% to 133 but many pairs did not even lay eggs. The productivity (of 0.16) was easily the lowest ever recorded and well below the recent ten year average (0.84).

Kittiwake: The population continues to plummet, with numbers of AONs at monitoring plots the lowest recorded, however it was apparent that many pairs, although selecting sites, did not even begin to build a nest – presumably due to the lack of sandeels at this time (early/mid May). Numbers of AONs at plots have declined every year since monitoring began in 1986 and by 69.5% since 1987. Productivity too was predictably low – a figure of 0.48 is less than half the recent ten year average (0.91) but a vast improvement on the almost complete failure of 2001 (0.06).

Arctic Tern: Following a disastrous season in 2001 (four fledged from a record 2,836 AIAs), a much lower return rate was to be expected. A maximum 500 birds was counted at the colonies but, from a total of just 115 AIAs, no chicks fledged in 2002. Most nests failed at the egg stage, and the majority of birds deserted the Isle without nesting at all.

Guillemot: Overall numbers at monitoring plots have decreased by 24.1% since 1987 but have fluctuated widely 1987-2002. In 2002 there was a small (1.8%) increase compared to 2001. Guillemots seem to be consistently successful breeders, with annual productivity since 1986 ranging from 0.63 – 0.85, and 2002 was no exception - a figure of 0.72 was about average. However, it should be remembered that young leave for the sea long before they can fly and become independent. Analysis of chick ‘fledging’ weights has shown that in years of an apparently poor food supply, birds follow their parent to sea at much reduced weights. This may have consequences for their post-fledging survival.

Razorbill: Counts at the monitoring plot showed a very slight (but non-significant) increase compared to 2001 – numbers have remained consistent since counts started here in 1997. As with the previous species, productivity was about average but fledging weights were low.

Black Guillemot: Counts along the monitoring site (along the entire east coast of the Isle) in early spring fell to their lowest level – a total of 124 birds in breeding plumage and the continuation of a worrying recent trend. Due to desertion of the favoured productivity monitoring beaches (possibly because of predation by feral cats), only a few accessible nests could be found – not enough to make any analysis possible.

Puffin: Delayed access to the monitoring site meant that many early failures would have been missed. Thus, a productivity figure of 0.74 may be a generous estimate but the real figure is unlikely to be as low as the 0.31 recorded in 2001 – the lowest ever. Chick weights were fairly healthy however.

Although Fair Isle’s seabirds have come a long way since the sandeel crash and the almost complete breeding failures of the early 1990’s, recent seasons suggest that life is far from rosy! Although breeding success was generally high in the mid-1990’s, things have fluctuated widely since then, with more poor years than good. The trend for most species is one of population decline. The recent erratic availability of sandeels is a cause for concern and may result in

further breeding crashes in the future. It remains to be seen if this is part of a natural cycle of sandeel availability or whether something more sinister is to blame. Further research is urgently required. The importance of such long-term studies as this and elsewhere in Britain cannot be stressed enough if the future of Britain's internationally important populations of seabirds are to be maintained.

Deryk Shaw

Warden, Fair Isle Bird Observatory
(fairisle.birdobs@zetnet.co.uk)

**SEABIRD RINGING SPECIAL
PART I**

**SEABIRD RINGING ON SULE
SKERRY 1975 – 2002**

Sule Skerry is a small island situated about 35 miles north of the nearest point on the Sutherland coast and a similar distance north west of Hoy, Orkney. It has a surface area of about 35 acres, is deeply indented with numerous geos and inlets, and rises to 45 feet at its highest point. In the centre of the island is a lighthouse, which was built in 1892–1894 and used to feature in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the most remote inhabited place in the British Isles until it was automated in 1982. Believe it or not, we now have the use of a wooden hut that was used by the men who built the light in the 1890's. We use this as a mess room and we also have the use of another hut donated to us by the Northern Lighthouse Board. As well as the ringing, census and surveying activities carried out when we make our visits, we also have to undertake renovation work on these two huts on each occasion.

Most of the island is covered with a light peaty soil and here about 30,000 pairs of Puffins nest. Fortunately there is a grassy area near to the lighthouse, which is devoid of Puffin burrows, and this is where we pitch our tents. As well as having to take tents, personal equipment, ringing equipment and food, we also have to take all our fresh water, as the only water on the island is brackish and not suitable for drinking.

Our first visit to the island was in 1975, but a couple of token ringing sessions had been carried out by Orcadian ringers in the late 60's, and I do know that a lighthouse keeper ringed a few birds there in the 30's. Since 1975, we have visited Sule Skerry during 17 of the available 27 years, although our visit in 1999 was during November, to undertake essential maintenance work on our huts. The latter visit, however, was interesting in that it enabled us to see the island at a different time of the year, and we were able to monitor the bird life present during the winter.

Most of our work has involved the ringing and censusing of the large Puffin colony on the island, and the numbers ringed there represent well over 40% of the ringing total for the UK. Other seabird species are well represented (see table below), and we do catch significant numbers of Leach's Petrels, especially in latter years with the onset of good tape recordings. Although this species is reported in the literature as breeding on Sule Skerry, (notably in *The Status of Seabirds in Britain and Ireland* and *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*), we have no evidence to verify this and, furthermore, the old record of an egg in Kirkwall Museum, supposedly collected in the early thirties, is open to question. However, given the relatively large number of birds caught there and the close proximity of the large colony at North Rona, it is highly likely that they do breed, at least sporadically.

With the introduction of IPMR (*Integrated Population Monitoring Reporter*), a free software package for ringers and nest recorders



**Sule Skerry from the air
(Photo © Jez Blackburn)**

Total numbers of birds ringed during expeditions to Sule Skerry 1975-2002.

	1975/79	1980s	1990s	2000	2001	2002	SPECIES/GROUP TOTALS
Fulmar	15	1,119	906	438	8	442	2,928
Storm Petrel	1,451	2,471	988	372	109	113	5,504
Leach's Petrel	19	92	134	53	17	95	410
Gannet	0	0	0	0	0	94	94
Shag	277	4,072	3,033	638	340	372	8,732
Arctic Skua	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Great Skua	0	0	2	1	2	1	6
Lesser Black-backed Gull	0	8	0	0	0	1	9
Herring gull	3	139	63	12	1	21	239
Great Black-backed Gull	5	65	108	30	14	23	245
Kittiwake	192	1,599	880	170	340	6	3,187
Arctic Tern	5	229	21	37	0	0	292
Guillemot	49	2,672	3,280	1,188	1,312	35	8,536
Razorbill	2	187	212	33	58	21	513
Black Guillemot	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Puffin	13,998	39,449	22,356	8,233	7,679	4,713	96,428
Waders	1	5	5	0	0	0	11
Other non-passerines	2	15	6	0	1	0	24
Passerines	6	91	160	18	27	25	327
PERIOD TOTALS	16,025	52,213	32,155	11,223	9,908	5,963	127,487

available from www.bto.org), all the ringing information has recently been entered, and it is hoped to start on analysis of some of the data in the near future. The Puffin data should be well worthy of inspection, as recent years have produced almost 20% retrap rates and each visit yields over 1,000 retraps.

Sule Skerry is the ideal place for people to gain experience of ringing seabirds, without having to walk huge distances to get to the colony and without having to clamber about on steep cliffs. We also have the advantage of a boatman who is very interested in our work on the island, and indeed he managed to land a small party on Sule Stack last year. If anybody is interested in a visit, could they please contact Dave Budworth, Jez Blackburn (jez.blackburn@bto.org) or myself for future details.

Adrian Blackburn
(blackburn@suleska.freeserve.co.uk)

TRESHNISH ISLES AUK RINGING GROUP (TIARG)

In 1971, the late Barry Lawson organised an initial expedition - what has now become an annual pilgrimage to the Treshnish Isles by TIARG. The Treshnish Isles (56°29'N 06°25'W) are a group of eight terraced Tertiary basalt islands (c.128 ha), together with 3 smaller vegetated islets and numerous skerries, situated at their closest 3 km west of Mull, in northwest Scotland. Uninhabited by humans since 1834 and by livestock since the 1980's, the Isles have recently become the property of the Hebridean Trust. They are designated a *Special Protection Area* (SPA, European Community directive) for their importance for breeding seabirds (over 16,900 pairs), including Storm Petrels (5,050+ pairs), large numbers of auks (predominately Guillemot at 8,650+ pairs), Manx Shearwaters (1,280 pairs) and other common breeding seabirds.

To coincide with the most profitable period for seabird monitoring and optimum weather and day length, TIARG generally visit the Treshnish in the third week of June. The expedition's base is set up around a ruined village at the northern end of Lunga. Most of one week of fieldwork is centred upon Lunga and neighbouring Sgeir'a Chaisteil where a now annual full seabird census is undertaken.

The censusing of Lunga, the only island regularly frequented by people, by sector has provided TIARG the opportunity to monitor the effect of disturbance by ecotourism on the breeding seabird distribution (Willis 2000a). With much logistical help from local boatman Iain Morrison and his family, expedition members have also recently been able to census the seabird colonies of the other islands. All data

are annually submitted to the Seabird Colony Register (JNCC).

Once the work of the annual census is largely complete, the 4-7 man TIARG team redirect their effort during the day to the systematic ringing of specific seabird colonies, which includes both ringing pulli and also the retrapping of breeding adult Shags, Fulmars and Kittiwakes in specific sections of the colonies. Unfortunately, as a consequence of our visits to the Treshnish Isles being unavoidably brief, we cannot contribute to the BTO's Retrapping Adults for Survival Programme. However, since 1971, TIARG has ringed over 24,000 seabirds between the years 1971-2002, a substantial proportion of the national ringing totals for some species and years (see Table 1 below from TIARG's Annual Report for 2002).

Table 1: An assessment of the Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group's contribution to the British and Irish Ringing Scheme.

	Juveniles/adults ringed 2000*			Pulli ringed 2000			Ringing totals to (& including) 2000		
	UK & Eire	TIARG	% UK & Eire	UK & Eire	TIARG	% UK & Eire	UK & Eire	TIARG	% UK & Eire
Fulmar	650	12	0.02	1,189	0	0	105,386	266	0.3
Manx Shearwater	1,838	4		1,047	0	0	295,220	53	0.02
Storm Petrel	10,149	814	8.0	50	0	0	376,684	7722	2.1
Shag	340	5	1.5	5,027	54	1.2	191,800	1114	0.6
Herring Gull	839	0	0	4,811	15	0.3	293,512	396	0.1
Great Black-backed Gull	100	0	0	3,343	2	0.1	65,678	265	0.4
Kittiwake	817	13	0.02	1,732	0	0	119,138	155	0.1
Guillemot	2,640	890	33.7	9,369	2	0	257,474	5001	1.9
Razorbill	406	132	32.5	1,933	1	0	94,192	2112	2.2
Puffin	8,799	389	4.4	1,403	0	0	213,415	4203	2.0

* 2000 is the most recent British & Irish annual ringing totals available at the time of compilation.

For the last three or four hours of daylight, most expedition members can be found at the Isles' principal auk colony at Harp Rock, Lunga, fleyging¹ (or 'dip netting') and mist netting adults auks. In the past eight years, this has resulted in an average ringing total of 495 Guillemots, 100 Razorbills and 266 Puffins with in addition 10-30% of each species total catch being between-year retraps. At another Puffin colony, well frequented by the public by day, birds are regularly 'furtled'¹ (captured using an 'auk hook', which is hooked around the bird's leg).

For two or three nights when suitably calm weather occurs, the group engages in mist-netting Storm Petrels at one of several colonies regularly worked. The revelation that census techniques advocated by *Seabird 2000* estimated colony sizes well below seasonal catches at colonies (eg up to 1,200 individuals were caught at a colony estimated to contain only 350 pairs), has spurred TIARG into exploring this disparity more closely. Only 11% of recoveries are of birds later captured elsewhere, this suggestive of the proportion of non-breeding wanderers in catches, and this ratio of breeding/non-breeding

birds is supportive of the samples taken to be representative of the colony's burrow occupying population (Ward 2000). There are few inter-colony retraps to suggest local inter-colony movement (Willis 2000b). Only two to three 18-m four-shelf nets are operated with no tape lure needed (or desired!) and, contrary to the success of most night-time mist-netting operations, the use of head-torches is continual! TIARG ringing activities have produced 400+ Storm Petrel recoveries and a further 230+ relating to other seabird species (Ward 2000).

And finally, TIARG are always open to suggestions of furthering the value of the seabird data we are able to gather within our activity-packed annual one week 'holiday'. For correspondence, suggestions and requests concerning TIARG work, please contact TIARG's leader, Simon Walker (e-mail: simon.walker9@btinternet.com).

References:

- Ward, R.M. (2000) Migration and origins of Treshnish Isles breeding seabirds. In *Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Report for 2000*.
- Willis, S.G. (2000a) Effects of disturbance by ecotourism on breeding distributions of Shag, *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, Puffin *Fratercula arctica* and Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* on the Treshnish Isles, Argyll, UK. In *Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Report for 2000*.
- Willis, S.G. (2000b) The Storm Petrel: population estimates and movement of birds. In *Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Report for 2000*.

Note 1:

For those interested in the capture techniques used, see Bird Trapping and Bird Banding by Hans Bub (1991).

Robin M Ward

Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
Slimbridge
Gloucestershire
GL2 7BT
(robin.ward@wwt.org.uk)

JOURNAL REVIEWS & 'BITS' BY MARK TASKER

From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vols 24(3) & (4)

The Chatham Island Taiko had a record year in 2002, with a total of seven chicks fledging.

Developments planned for Christmas Island (Australia) continue to raise concerns. The first development, of a satellite launch facility, has been approved but worries about several aspects, including risks of introduced species, have only been partially resolved. Regrettably, the second development, for an immigration reception centre have also been approved, but without a full environmental impact statement. This will be built beside a main breeding area for Abbott's Booby. Recovery plans for this species include restoring forest next to breeding sites. Concerns about disturbance appear not have been addressed either.

The largest colony of Black-browed Albatrosses, at Steeple Jason in the Falklands, has been gifted to the Wildlife Conservation Society along with its neighbour, Grand Jason. The breeding birds of these islands amount to about a third of the world population. Although the main threat to the species is from bycatch on long-lines, secure breeding sites are vital too.

Zino's Petrel breeds only in one site on Madeira. There are therefore serious concerns that the Portuguese Ministry of Defence plans to build a new NATO radar station on the summit of the mountain on which the petrels breed. If anyone wishes to express concern, and ask for a full and appropriate assessment to be undertaken, please write to:

- (i) The Prime Minister of Portugal, Dr Durão Barrosa, Rua da Imprensa à Estrela 4, 1200-888 Lisboa, Portugal;
email: gmapm@mapm.gov.pt
- (ii) The NATO Secretary-General, Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, NATO Headquarters, Blvd Leopold III, 1110 Brussels, Belgium;
email: natodoc@hq.nato.int

As reported in the last issue of SGN, the Cahow had very good breeding success in 2002 and the number of breeding pairs continues to climb. The full Cahow story is outlined in a three-page article in vol.24 (4). The next step is to attempt to re-establish them on Nonsuch Island, near their current nesting sites. This island is higher than the existing breeding islands and, if the new colony becomes established, the risks from hurricanes to the population would be considerably reduced.

From *SEEVÖGEL* Vol. 23 (2)

Ansgar Diederichs, Georg Nehls and Ib Krag Petersen surveyed waters off Sylt, Germany, using a standardised method of counting from an aircraft, from January to April 2001. Stefan Garthe, Ommo Hüppop and Tanja Weichler describe the current standard method of counting seabirds at sea. The Northern Gannet colony on Helgoland continues to grow – 138 pairs nested in 2002.

From *SEEVÖGEL* Vol. 23 (3)

Lothar Reimer describes the parasitic worms that occur in seabirds and waterbirds of the Baltic coast of Germany. Some 119 species of helminths were found in 36 species of birds (242 specimens).

From *WWF ARCTIC BULLETIN* Nos 2.02 & 2.03

There is little directly concerning seabirds in issue 2.02. Norway is planning a series of marine protected areas in its seas that will, *inter alia*, help conserve seabirds. Management of these areas will be crucial for their success. Issue 3.02 has another long article on the situation in Greenland. The Government there has come under sustained international pressure to stop over-hunting but, internally, is hampered by the large number of hunters in the electorate. It has therefore established a number of processes that will aim to introduce the concept of sustainability into hunting. It remains to be seen whether such concepts can work in sufficient time to stop the extirpation of some species from substantial parts of Greenland. Bear Island and its surrounding sea has been declared a nature reserve by Norway.

From *PACIFIC SEABIRDS* Vol. 29 (1)

The usual excellent section on conservation news by Craig Harrison includes the bad news that Black Rats have appeared on Kiritimati (the Pacific Ocean Christmas Island). They arrived about three years ago and will, no doubt, increase the rapid decline of the once-huge seabird populations. Plans to control the rats on some of the outlying islets are in hand. Elsewhere, rats have been removed from Helen Atoll, Palau in the Hawaiian archipelago.

Nearly all of the remainder of the issue is devoted to abstracts of papers from the 2002 Annual Meeting.

From *SEA SWALLOW* Vol. 51

This issue has the usual annual article on seabirds seen by RNBWS members but landbird sightings are not included. Other articles include notes from a transit of the Suez Canal, observations from the Galapagos, notes from a pelagic off the Cape of Good Hope, from Tristan da Cunha and from South Georgia. The whole issue is well illustrated, with a set of excellent colour photographs by Sam Alexander being a particular highlight.

From *WATERBIRDS* Vol. 25 (3)

This issue has several seabird articles ranging from reports of the results of flying a model Peregrine over Common Terns, to a summary of the satellite tracking of Great White Pelicans from Israel. The differential use made by seabirds of an area of strong tidal current off British Columbia found variance with tidal cycle, current velocity and water depth. Scott Hatch looks at the tricky problem of monitoring underground-nesting seabirds, in this case Horned Puffins and Parakeet Auklets, while they are outside their nests. He shows that intra-annual variability could be reduced by standardising counting to certain times of day/behaviours but that variability was still so high that these techniques would have limited applicability for long-term monitoring. Another paper shows similar problems for counts of Atlantic Puffins. Surveys have shown that Punta Rasa in southern Argentina is one of the most important wintering sites for Common Terns in South America.

CHRIS MEAD 1940 - 2003

With the passing away in his sleep of Chris Mead on 16 January we have lost one the largest, in all senses of the word, of British ornithologists. Chris was one of the founders of The Seabird Group, having replied, along with a donation of the princely, suggested sum of 5/- (or 25p), to a circular letter from Bill Bourne suggesting the setting up of a formal constitution for the group in 1965. He was our Chairman from 1979 to 1983 and one of the most regular attendees of AGMs. For many years, he was the marine ornithologist on the monitoring committee of SOTEAG, ensuring that an eagle eye was kept open to ensure that any adverse effects of a developing oil industry on Shetland were minimised.



Chris was probably best known as an inspirational bird ringer who, along with Bob Spencer, saw the development of the British (=BTO) ringing scheme, from a basement room in the British Museum to the world renowned organisation that it now is. He personally ringed over 400,000 birds and had detailed personal knowledge and contact with thousands of ringers. With his death at the early age of 62, a truly monumental fund of knowledge has been lost.

He was sometimes tardy in writing up his results, but his 1974 *Bird Study* paper on the results of ringing British and Irish auks was a major milestone in marine ornithology. When Bob Swann and I recently wrote the sections on the Common Guillemot and Atlantic Puffin for the *BTO Migration Atlas*, we were constantly reminded of his sound judgement in reaching

conclusions based on only a tenth of the data now available to us. Such good judgement is the hallmark of a highly competent naturalist on top of his subject.

I have lost a great friend, The Seabird Group a pillar of support, the BTO one of its most eloquent advocates and ornithology one of its best prophets, and the world a fine person. We send our deepest regrets to V and their three daughters.

Mike Harris

THE *PRESTIGE* DISASTER

When the oil tanker *Prestige* finally sank on 19th November 2002, 130 miles WSW off Cape Finisterre, Galicia, Spain, she had been towed around for six days since first fracturing her single hull on 13th November in the same area, but closer to the coast. In a scenario terribly reminiscent of the *Erika* disaster off Brittany almost three years earlier, the Spanish authorities decided to try and shift the problem into the open Atlantic in the middle of winter, instead of taking the more pragmatic course of guiding the stricken vessel into a safe harbour, accepting and coping with a limited amount of pollution, and off-loading her cargo of 76,000 tonnes of heavy bunker fuel oil. Some 4-7,000 tonnes of oil leaked in those six days, an estimated further 11,000 tonnes were released when the ship sank, and there have been estimates of a loss of 125 tonnes per day from the wreck since it settled on the seabed at a depth of 3,500m. This pollution, unsurprisingly, has killed tens of thousands of seabirds, many from colonies in Britain and Ireland, and has now affected coastlines from northern Portugal to southern Brittany.

At the MEDMARAVIS conference in Sardinia in October 2002, there had been discussion on the short-comings of the scientific response to the *Erika* spill, and the need for international co-operation in future to ensure that seabird mortality from such major spills was properly documented. So, once we knew the *Prestige* had sunk, Kees Camphuysen and I offered our services to the Sociedad Espanola de Ornitologica (SEO/BirdLife) in Madrid and arrived in A Coruna late on 20th November. Both of us had been responding to oil spills and

organising systematic beached bird surveys for over 25 years, and thought our experience could help in the collection, recording and examination of the mortality.

The next day we learned that oil from the *Prestige* prior to it sinking had already polluted extensive stretches of the north Galician coast, and that a massive slick had formed offshore at the site of the wreck. Two rehabilitation centres for live seabirds had been established, one at Santa Cruz close to A Coruna, the other a purpose-built facility at Pontevedra in the south of Galicia. SEO were planning to start co-ordinated beach searches using local and imported volunteers that weekend but nobody had planned what to do with dead birds. That afternoon we went to Santa Cruz, where Kees had had time the previous evening to sort out and box some casualties. So we thought we would make a start on data collection. Unfortunately, Kees' boxes had been inadvertently buried in a deep pit by workmen, who then had to find a ladder and dig them up again! After uncovering the birds under a small herd of decomposing Roe Deer, we set to work with post-mortems in a tool shed - conditions that were less than primitive.

In A Coruna that evening, we were greatly relieved to hear that Dr Roberto Bao had made a teaching laboratory available in the University there, but there were other decisions for SEO to make. The office they were running operations from housed a consultancy run by Antonio Sandoval Rey, but was too small to organise a major oil spill from and was in the centre of the city where parking was impossible. Also, who was to replace Kees and I when we left (Kees could stay for five days, myself for ten)? Fortunately an e-mail had arrived from Point Reyes Bird Observatory in California offering two experienced members of staff for two weeks. When Antonio told me they were self-funded, and in the absence of any other offers of help from Europe, I said to tell them to come! SEO was clearly very nervous about expenditure (there was no photocopier in the office, and despite suggesting leasing one, there was still no photocopier when I left). They had no knowledge of ITOPF or the IOPC Fund, and that reasonable expenditure in spill response could be compensated for (well, in principle, at least). After a call to ITOPF's emergency 24-hour

hotline in London, contact was established with one of their representatives in A Coruna, who had already been on site for a week. A van for ferrying birds around was another priority, so we asked for one to be arranged.

During the next two days we picked up the van, met Roberto at the University and planned for work to start there on Sunday. We collected the dead birds being brought to Santa Cruz, helped SEO with their first meeting with ITOPF and along with Sherri Cox, a volunteer who had flown in from Toronto, visited some of the worst oiled beaches in search of stiffs. Some beaches were still clean, and some of the most beautiful I've seen in Europe, others were your worst nightmare, covered in thick, black highly noxious oil to a depth that was difficult to walk through.

On the Sunday morning, Kees, Sherri, Roberto and I began post-mortems at the University and were joined the next day by a team of post-graduate volunteers, who were quickly trained up in procedures into an extremely effective team.



Postgraduate students volunteer to help with post-mortems on the oiled birds in Spain

Each morning us foreigners met downstairs in the Hostal Caribe for a big black coffee and studied the progress of 'La Mancha Grande' in the newspapers - the huge slick of oil that was estimated to cover 500 km² and was closing on the Galician coast at about 20 km per day. The foreboding was a bit like waiting for the killer asteroid to hit the earth. Kees left on Tuesday on the same plane that brought in Diana Humple and Christine Abrahams from California, and

our work continued through the week, the pile of data sheets growing higher and the freezer filling up with bird stomachs and some of the more unusual species found. Initially, first-winter Razorbills, and adult Gannets, Shags and Puffins predominated, but then adult Puffins began to increase in number.

On Sunday 1st December, the day La Mancha Grande began to hit the coastline, there was to be a demonstration in Santiago, the Galician capital, against the Galician and Madrid governments' handling of the spill. Most of the students were going, so Roberto, Diana, Christine, Alicia Pallas and I crammed into Roberto's car, along with some oiled birds in the boot. I have never witnessed such an extraordinary sight. Constant rain did not deter 200,000 people converging on the Plaza del Obradoira in the centre of the city, which could only accommodate a tenth of the crowd at any one time. Our oiled birds were photographed and filmed, some people breaking down in tears at the sight of them, and when our turn came to enter the Plaza, we were pushed to the front of the crowd and I eventually found myself on the stage, holding up a heavily oiled Cormorant to the roar of 20,000 citizens of Galicia. It was a surreal moment.

I began the long journey home next afternoon, leaving behind a dedicated team of students under the capable supervision of Diana and Christine, and also Roberto, 'Mr Fixit'. Needless to say, the numbers of birds increased as more oil hit the coast, the beach search efforts intensified, and the pollution spread into southern Galicia and northern Portugal, east along the north coast of Spain and onto the beaches of western France. Once Diana and Christine had to leave, supervision was undertaken successively by Ricard Gutierrez, David Bigas, and Joan Castello. Bird numbers brought to the Santa Cruz centre peaked at 350 per day in early January, when large numbers of first-winter Guillemots were being found. By 29th January, 1,432 live birds had been received alive at Santa Cruz and 4,658 dead ones (plus those that died at Santa Cruz) had been examined by the students at the University of A Coruna. These included 37 Great Northern Divers, 272 Gannets, 266 Shags, 2,313 Guillemots, 1,290 Razorbills and 1,346 Puffins.

It is difficult to obtain accurate information from southern Galicia, Portugal, and elsewhere in northern Spain but, by late January, a figure of 13,000 oiled birds found along all affected coastlines was being circulated, including 1,226. Of the ringed birds found so far, most auks originated from colonies on the west and north-west coasts of the British Isles (eight Puffins from Sule Skerry alone), but the figures are very provisional and being updated constantly. Locally, there has to be severe concern over the fate of the Galician breeding population of Shags, while their tiny Guillemot population may now be extinct.

If there is one lesson to be learned by seabird biologists and conservation organisations it is that they should prepare for the next incident such as the *Prestige* hitting their coasts. The response to major oil spills should be generic: systematic beach searches, accurate recording and scientific examination of the mortality, close links with rehabilitation centres handling live birds, with local and central government agencies dealing with the spill, and a realisation that money spent in responding should be compensated for by the polluter - that means close links with organisations such as ITOPE and the IOPC Fund. Within Europe, there is now an urgent need for the development of national and regional oil spill plans for wildlife.

This account is a personal one, and reflects only the small part that I played in the *Prestige* disaster, along with Kees, Sherri, Diana and Christine, who dropped everything at home and went to help. The true heroes are, on the scientific side, Roberto Bao and the students of the University of A Coruna who continue their work among the filth, stench and maggots, on the organisational side the people from SEO - Carles, Antonio, Carlota, Maku and Pato, to name just a few - who struggled with Government inertia and a lack of funding, and the people of Galicia and the hundreds of volunteers who came to the region to help manually clean the black muck from beaches.

For further information visit the SEO website - www.seo.org - or that of the local newspaper www.lavozdegalicia.es

Martin Heubeck
(martinheubeck@btinternet.com)

IMPACT OF THE *PRESTIGE* ON BRITISH & IRISH AUKS

In total, over 200km of coast have been directly affected by the *Prestige* spill, and it is estimated that as many as 70,000 birds may have been oiled. Of these, some 10,000 have been collected from beaches, mostly Guillemot, Puffin and Razorbill. Many ringed birds have been found, giving some idea of the spread of the impact of the spill. Of those reported to date, there have been 52 BTO-ringed birds (see Table), a Finnish Black-headed Gull, several local Yellow-legged Gulls and, amazingly, a single Washington-ringed Great Black-backed Gull.

It is interesting to note from these recoveries that virtually all of the birds have come from northern and western colonies, with no recoveries from the colonies around the Firth of Forth, including the Isle of May.

The number of birds found washed up has been rising rapidly in the last week or two, and regular updates can be found at www.seo.org/2002/prestige/graficos-030113.asp (in Spanish but with obvious graphics!). Once the main bulk of the birds have been picked up and reported, we'll provide a further update.

Mark Grantham (mark.grantham@bto.org)
Recoveries Officer, Ringing Unit, BTO

Numbers of British & Irish ringed seabirds recovered during the *Prestige* oil spill (as of 31 January 2003)

Area of origin	England	Northern Isles			Western Isles	Highland			Strathclyde		Wales		Eire
	Orford Ness	Hoy	Fair Isle	Sule Skerry	Shiant	North Sutor	Canna	Helmsdale	Lunga	Sanda Island	Puffin Island	Skomer	Great Saltee
Puffin				7	1				2				
Guillemot						2	5	1	3	5		2	11
Razorbill			1							4	1		1
Gannet				1									2
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1												
Great Skua		2											

AND NOW THE *TRICOLOR* . . .

When the Norwegian cargo ship *Tricolor* sank in the English Channel off Dunkerque on 14th December 2002, after colliding with the container ship *Kariba*, the UK media was most concerned about the fate of the 3,000 luxury cars it was transporting to England, with little consideration for the bunker oil it was carrying in its fuel tanks. The *Tricolor* has since been hit by three other ships as it lay semi-submerged on the seabed (is there not an urgent case for the UK, Netherlands, Belgium and France to co-operate on insisting on compulsory pilotage for vessels over a certain tonnage passing through the English Channel?). Initial reports suggested that sheens seen around the vessel were of gasoline from the cars' fuel tanks but, on 24th

January, an estimated 170 tonnes of the ship's heavy bunker fuel leaked out, and oiled birds started coming ashore in Belgium, mostly live Guillemots.

As of 7th February, some 15,000 oiled birds have been recorded along the coasts of northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands. A massive rehabilitation effort is underway to try and save the live ones, while examination of 1,000 dead birds collected on southern Dutch shorelines found most to be adult Guillemots and Razorbills that were in good body condition before being smothered. The birds were so heavily oiled that external biometrics could be taken on a few only, and a French Guillemot has been the only ringed individual discovered so far. The RSPCA have reported a small number

of oiled auks (*ca50*), also presumed *Tricolor* victims, taken into care in south-east England but the absence of systematic beached bird surveys throughout the winter in the UK will make assessment of mortality on English coasts difficult.

The sinking of the Dutch vessel *Eurolink Assie*, following a collision with a larger Swedish cargo vessel north of the Freisian island of Terschelling on 27th January, did not even make the news in the UK, but oil has leaked from this wreck too and has affected some Common Scoters in the area, although slicks have so far not connected with the main concentration of 30,000 scoters off Terschelling. Further north, the Norwegian tanker *Arendal* was detained in the port of Sullom Voe, Shetland on 6th February and ordered to offload its cargo of 100,000 tonnes of crude oil after 'serious' structural cracks were found over a starboard water ballast tank. Well done the relevant authorities but, had these cracks not been discovered before she sailed, fully laden, into the dark Atlantic seas with a south-westerly gale forecast . . . let your imagination do the rest.

For further information on the *Tricolor* spill see:

<http://www.vliz.be/olieslachtoffers/index.php>

<http://home.planet.nl/~camphuys/TroColore.html>

Martin Heubeck
(martinheubeck@btinternet.com)

7 February 2003

HELP AVAILABLE!

I am a student from Hungary and will be in Britain until the end of summer 2003. I would very much like to take part in some work on breeding seabirds (ringing, monitoring *etc*). I have two weeks available at Easter, one at the end of May and time after 16 July. If you could offer any opportunity, I would very much like to hear from you.

Anna Varga (e-mail: lunda8@freemail.hu)

GROUP NEWS

THE 37th ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SEABIRD GROUP, 2002

There was one change to the Executive Committee during the year with Martin Heubeck being elected as an Ordinary Member.

At the end of October 2002 the Seabird Group had 307 paid up members, up 15, and a further 15 who had not paid for the year, down 4. In addition, *Atlantic Seabirds* and/or the *Newsletter* were sent to 15 statutory institutions, 15 other subscribers (institution and foreign non-member subscribers via subscription services) and 5 other groups in exchange for their own publications. This saw a welcome overall increase in membership totals and efforts are being made to further boost membership by promotions such as the new Web site.

The 36th Annual General Meeting was held at the BTO Annual Conference at Swanwick on 8th December with 18 members in attendance. Only one formal meeting of the Executive Committee was held during the year, all other business being conducted by e-mail.

Three issues of *Atlantic Seabirds* had appeared by the end of October 2002. The first, Volume 3 (2001), No. 4 was a special edition covering papers from the 7th International Seabird Group Conference held at Wilhelmshaven, Germany 17-19th March 2000. This was followed by Volume 4 Nos. 1 and 2 all produced in 2002. *Newsletters* Nos. 90-92 were also produced and sent out with *Atlantic Seabirds* to save on postage.

The final field season of Seabird 2000 was conducted, completing the gaps left by last year's access problems due to the foot and mouth outbreak. The Seabird Group helped with counts by providing grants, particularly for aerial surveys of urban gulls. Progress is now being made on analysis and work on the book has also started. It is hoped to launch its publication at the 2004 conference.

The Chairman wrote several letters supporting Daniel Turners attempts to make Newcastle City Council more sympathetic to the kittiwakes on the Tyne, specifically those nesting on the Tyne Bridge. This problem was highlighted in Newsletter 90. The Chairman was assured that nothing would be done to harm the birds during the breeding season. This appears to have been the case but as far as is known no solution has been found to this problem.

R L Swann (Secretary)



Registered Charity No. 260907

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

E-mail: seabird@bto.org

EDITOR

Chris Wernham (BTO Scotland)

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 1st May (for June edition), 1st September (for October edition) or 1st 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 2003 membership rates are:-

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

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

GROUP NEWS

**CURRENT SEABIRD
GROUP COMMITTEE**

Current retiral 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**)
CEH, Hill of Brathens, Glassel,
Banchory. AB31 4BY
(mph@ceh.ac.uk)

Secretary

Bob Swann (**2003**)
14, St Vincent Road, Tain,
Ross-shire. IV19 1JR
(bob.swann@freeuk.com)

Treasurer

John Davies (**2005**)
31, Easter Warriston,
Edinburgh. EH7 4QX
(johncdavies@blueyonder.co.uk)

Editor, *Atlantic Seabirds*

Jim Reid (**2005**)
JNCC, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle
Place, Aberdeen. Ab10 1UZ
(jim.reid@jncc.gov.uk)

Editor, *Newsletter*

Chris Wernham (**2006**)
01786 466563
(see box)

2004 Conference Organiser

Martin Heubeck (**2005**)
(martinheubeck@btinternet.com)

Other Members:

Steve Hunter (**2003**)
Alan Leitch (**2004**)
Linda Wilson (**2006**)

SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS

Don't forget that the deadline for the second round of Seabird Group grants in 2002/03 is 31 March. Application forms from the Secretary or the website.

NEXT (38th) AGM

Members are given advanced notice that the 38th Seabird Group AGM will take place at 3pm on Saturday 22 November 2003 at the Scottish Ringers' Conference, Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie.

**NEXT SEABIRD GROUP
CONFERENCE**

Our next conference, with the theme of 'North Atlantic Seabird Populations', will be held at Aberdeen University, Scotland, over the weekend of 2-4 April 2004. This will coincide with the launch of the book reporting the results of the SEABIRD 2000 count of British and Irish seabirds. It is hoped to integrate informally this with the International Waterbird Conference to be held in Edinburgh, 3-8 April 2004. Scotland will certainly be the place to be in early April 2004! Further details will be announced and calls for papers made in mid-2003 and posted on our website:

www.seabirdgroup.org.uk

**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 but it is not always possible to check comprehensively every piece of information back to its original source as well as keeping news timely. Please will readers make further checks, at their own discretion, if they have concerns about any of the information or contacts provided, and contact me to allow feedback to other readers if necessary. Views provided in the *Newsletter* are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Seabird Group.

Ed.