



2003 SEASON ROUND-UP

STUDIES ON THE ISLE OF MAY IN 2003

Our first visit of the 2003 season to the Isle of May on 23 March, proved to be well timed, as there were already a few pairs of Shags sitting on eggs. This was to be the (early) start of the best season on record for Shags, with a bumper average of 1.83 chicks fledged per pair (the long term mean from 1986 is 0.9). Guillemots too, seemed to be on form at the start of the season, with the first egg on the island seen on 17 April, almost a week earlier than the previous two years.



Shags and young (©Akinori Takehasi)

However, as the season progressed, it became clear that Guillemots weren't to fair as well as the Shags. With an average success of 0.68 chicks per pair, the Guillemots performed below their long-term average of 0.77. However, unlike the last two years, we hardly saw any chicks neglected by their parents, and most losses occurred during incubation, primarily through eggs being knocked off their sites. Weights of chicks near fledging age were normal, at on average 243g. Razorbills too, performed below their average of 0.68, with a breeding success of 0.59 chicks per pair. Again, it seemed that most losses occurred at the egg stage. In contrast to these two auk species, Puffins appeared to have a good season. The first adult Puffins carrying fish were seen on 24 May and the first young was known to have fledged on the night of 28/29 June, indicating that laying commenced around 8 April, about normal for the Isle of May. The overall success rate (0.77 chicks fledged per egg laid) was close to the long-term mean of 0.76.



Guillemot chick (©Akinori Takehasi)

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Kittiwake (©Akinori Takehasi)

The timing of Kittiwake breeding was unexceptional, with first nest building recorded on 26 April, and the first eggs seen on 9 May. However, it became apparent fairly early on that many birds occupying sites were not completing their nests, and 15% of site holders did not even start nest building. Those pairs that did complete a nest however, went on to produce an average of 0.77 chicks per pair, well above the long-term average of 0.55.

Although Fulmar breeding success was low (0.44 chicks per pair), this was close to the long term average for the Isle of May, and similar to last year. The methodology used to assess success is not designed to determine when breeding attempts fail, but most losses apparently occurred during incubation. However, three medium-sized young (6% of chicks) were seen dead on the nest on 6 August, during a period of exceptionally hot, dry weather. In fact, from the middle of May onwards, weather conditions on the Isle of May, like much of the UK, were generally much warmer and drier than in recent years.

We intensively sampled the diets of Guillemots, Razorbills, Puffins, Shags and Kittiwakes. As in previous years, the Lesser Sandeel *Ammodytes marinus* was the predominant prey species for all species, except for Guillemots, which mainly brought back clupeids for their chicks. Shags, which are inshore foragers relied almost exclusively on older age classes of sandeels, while Kittiwakes, which are offshore surface feeders, targeted 0-group sandeels (this years sandeels). Puffin chicks were also being fed primarily on 0-group sandeels.

2003 marked five years since the last Isle of May all-island Puffin count, and CEH Banchory, under contract to SNH, counted apparently occupied burrows during late April. It took 4 intensive days for a team of 7 to cover the whole island. Our total estimate (corrected for double counting, and other errors) of around 69,000 pairs of Puffins, meant each person was counting a few thousand burrows each day! This is now the largest single group of Puffins in Britain & Ireland.



Field assistant Genevieve Jones with an adult Puffin (©Akinori Takehasi)

During the 2003 season, the Isle of May was also the focus of several collaborative projects, in addition to the long term monitoring work. The fieldwork for the EU “IMPRESS” project (Interactions between the marine environment, predators and prey: implications for sustainable sandeel fisheries) was completed. This project is investigating the effects of oceanography on the availability of prey to seabirds by focussing on environmental factors that potentially affect the growth and life history strategy of sandeels. Given the contrasting weather conditions and breeding success experienced during the project’s 3 years, it will be interesting to see if results from this project can provide some pointers as to why seabird species are responding in different ways. An environmental genomics project, looking at the population structure of a tick-borne pathogen, began its first season. This project involves analysing the genetic variability of a virus carried by seabird ticks. Our role was to coordinate the collecting of ticks from Guillemot colonies, both on the Isle of May and other UK colonies, as well as worldwide, to investigate virus diversity on a

geographical scale. 2003 also saw the final season of one PhD project, while another just began its first season. Maggie Hall of the University of Glasgow visited briefly in early May to collect final data for her PhD looking at senescence in Shags. Dan Wright of the University of Lancaster, spent his first field season establishing rabbit exclosures on the island to look at the effects of grazing on island plant communities, as part of his PhD investigating the role of seabirds in orchestrating island food webs.

There was a real international flavour to our seabird research this year, with collaborators from as far afield as the Galapagos (Hernan Vargas) and Japan (Yutaka Watanuki and Akinori Takehasi). In addition, Genevieve Jones, our summer field assistant, had come all the way from South Africa to get a taste of some northern hemisphere seabirds as a contrast to the albatrosses, White-chinned Petrels and African Penguins on which she had worked previously. Our work also benefited greatly from the huge efforts made by Debbie and Sheila Russell, Sue Lewis, Liz Wickens, Stein Bierman, Dave Stevens, Mark Newell and Tom and Ann Dewdney. We are also grateful to Ian Parkinson and Yvonne Charras of Scottish Natural Heritage for help throughout the season.

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CANNA BREEDING SEASON 2003

Since 1969, the Highland Ringing Group have been annually monitoring seabirds on the Isle of Canna, one of the Small Isles, situated to the south of Skye. In this time, seabird numbers have undergone great changes. During the 1970s and early 1980s, most species showed marked increases in numbers. This was followed by declines during the late 1980s and early 1990s. During the mid 1990s, the numbers of some species like Shags, Kittiwakes and Guillemots showed further increases but there were great variations between sub-colonies on the island. By the late 1990s, some of these sub-colonies began to show major declines in numbers.

The first colony where such changes were noticed was the Nunnery. Here up to 120 pairs of Shags, 90 pairs of Razorbill and 39 pairs of Guillemot nested under boulders on the raised wavecut platform on the south side of Canna. Through the mid 1990s, the auks disappeared from this colony and Shags have steadily declined to only 43 pairs in 2003. 2003 was also remarkable in that for the first time no birds were nesting under boulders. All the remaining shags were nesting on narrow ledges on the present seacliff. The decline in numbers was also associated with very low breeding success.

The large colony at Garrisdale at the west end of the island also lost its few breeding auks in the 1990s and Shag numbers have dropped from 294 in 1997 to only 111 in 2003. Of these 111 nests, most were targeted by predators and failed to rear any chicks. We estimated that only 40 young were reared in the colony, mainly from nests on cliff ledges and one small area of boulders in the core of the colony.

At the east end of the island at Lamasgor, it is a similar story. Shag numbers dropped from 231 in 1998 to only 46 in 2003. Boulder sites along the shore were the first to be abandoned and the surviving nests are now all located under boulders at the top of the tallus slope furthest from the shore.

The largest seabird area on Canna is at Geugasgor at the north of the island. There are ominous signs that this colony is now under threat. There has been a slight drop in Shag numbers from 465 nests in 1997 to 336 in 2003. Breeding success is still fairly high (1.4 chicks per nest in 2003) but changes are happening. Many traditional nesting sites below boulders are being abandoned and the birds are nesting in much more open sites on top of boulders or along the cliff edge. Traditionally, large numbers of Guillemots and Razorbills also nest under boulders in this colony. Many of the Guillemots, like the Shags, are redistributing themselves and are now nesting out on bare rock along the cliff edge. This makes them more vulnerable to predation from gulls and Ravens.

Why are the birds nesting under boulders doing so badly? It appears to be related to high levels of predation and the main culprit appears to be the Brown Rat. The population of rats on Canna

SEABIRD BREEDING ON SKOMER ISLAND – A SUMMARY OF THE 2003 SEASON

appears to have soared throughout the 1990s (possibly as a result of mild winters). Following the loss of most of the breeding Manx Shearwaters in the mid 1990s, the devastation is spreading to other areas of the island. We now regularly see rats, rat droppings and shell remains in the seabird colonies on Canna. The movement away from boulder sites appears to be a response to reduce the effect of this predation. On the adjoining islet of Sanday, Shag numbers have increased from 2 pairs in 1994 to 30 in 2003. These birds are all nesting on cliff edges or in caves and breeding success in these predation-free areas is high.

Other cliff-nesting seabirds are also doing well. The number of nesting Kittiwakes reached an all time high of 1,290 AONs in 2003, and the breeding success of 1.0 chicks per nest was the highest for over 10 years. Fulmar breeding success was also above average in 2003, with 0.46 chicks fledged per AOS. Gulls on the other hand are fairing badly. Herring Gull numbers have dropped from 1,326 pairs in 1994 to only 587 pairs in 2003. Many traditional sub-colonies are now totally abandoned. Breeding success has been very low, with almost complete failures in 2002 and 2003. Great Black-backed Gulls have also declined from 93 pairs in 1997 to 60 pairs in 2003. Their breeding success has dropped from around 1.3 chicks per pair to only 0.1 in 2002 and 0.3 in 2003.

It is not only seabirds that are fairing badly. Eider numbers have dropped from over 50 nesting pairs in the early 1990s to under 20 pairs in 2003. Shelduck and Red-breasted Merganser, though still present, now never produce chicks.

The National Trust for Scotland have now set up a rat eradication group and are appealing for funds to enable this project to go ahead. The eradication of rats from an inhabited 1,500 ha island, which is run as a working farm, is not going to be easy. Canna was declared an SPA on account of its internationally important breeding seabirds numbers, however, so there should be a duty to save these colonies from decimation by an introduced alien species. One cannot but help wonder what is happening at other less well monitored colonies in northwest Scotland.

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A minimum of 206 occupied Storm Petrel sites was estimated by diurnal tape playback in July. This included eleven visits to one colony (North Haven), where there was an average response rate of 40%, although new sites were still being found by the eleventh visit. This gives a minimum 'correction factor' of 2.5 – significantly greater than that used previously (1.37, based on all males and 46% of females responding) – and thus a higher population estimate.

A total of 11,064 apparently occupied Lesser Black-backed Gull nests was estimated. This is 27% down on last year, and the lowest population estimate in the 23 years in which the current census methodology has been employed on the island. This is not wholly surprising in the light of continuously poor breeding success during the past decade, but productivity in 2003 was actually higher than previous years, at 0.41. More than twice the number of fledglings was estimated than in 2002.

Great Black-backed Gulls continue their steady increase (now 84 pairs – the highest figure since 1981), with a breeding success of 1.40, the second highest on record.

Kittiwake numbers remain stable (2,324 occupied nests), but the productivity of 0.53 was below the 15-year mean (0.67). Breeding success at one of the three monitoring sites (High Cliff) was probably suppressed by a resident pair of Peregrines.

Guillemots only increased by 1.7% on last year (now 14,676) – consistent with the apparent slowing down of population growth over the past three years following the species' dramatic expansion. The mean productivity of 0.71 'fledglings' per 'active' and 'regular' site is the highest for five years and close to the 15-year average.

Razorbills were down on the high counts of the past two years, but still above average. The mean productivity of 0.48 'fledged' per 'active'

and 'regular' site was a 41% increase on the low of 2002, but still below the 11-year mean.

Big evening spring gatherings of Puffins were lacking in 2003, and so the maximum spring count of 8,537 individuals is below average (but only by 9%). The breeding success of 0.78 was above average.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much of the seabird monitoring on Skomer Island is carried out by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales and Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology under JNCC contract.

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SHETLAND SEABIRD BREEDING SEASON 2003

As predicted, the 2003 seabird breeding season in Shetland was one of the worst, if not THE worst on record, due to a scarcity of sandeels during spring and early summer. All species that depend on sandeels had a very poor year, those that don't had a good year.

On the cliffs, Guillemots laid late and colony attendance was very low, with extensive taking of eggs and chicks by predatory gulls. At Sumburgh Head, Guillemot breeding success was by far the lowest yet recorded. There is little hard information on breeding success of other auks but Puffins also seemed to have a very poor season on Foula, although Razorbills may have fared better (they were not as late as the Guillemots).

There was extensive non-breeding of Kittiwakes, laying was very late and hatching success was low. Of six monitored colonies, no chicks fledged at three and success at the others ranged from only 0.05-0.10 fledged per AON. Shags did reasonably well at Sumburgh Head but many dead chicks were found in early July on Foula and those surviving were thought to be in poor condition. Fulmar productivity was generally below average. Gannets (as ever) seemed to do OK, and there were no sandeels in

their regurgitates. Cormorants had an early and successful season, also with no sandeels found in their regurgitates.

On the moors, Red-throated Divers laid very late. Some pairs did not lay at all but those that persisted eventually had some success but this was patchy (*eg* only one chick fledged from Hermaness) and, overall, success was no better than average. The breeding success of both Great and Arctic Skuas was low. Many Arctic Tern colonies either failed to materialise, or were occupied by very low numbers of birds. Some chicks fledged in northern Shetland (*eg* success of 0.26/pair at Hermaness) but most colonies failed completely.

Storm Petrels were a good 2-3 weeks later breeding than normal but appeared to have an excellent season, with all of the nest chambers dry after the warm, dry summer.

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PELAGICS IN THE BAY OF BISCAY

In recent years, the Bay of Biscay has become renowned as one of the best places in the world to see whales and dolphins, both for the range of species that it is possible to see and for the sheer number of individuals encountered. Possibly the best, and certainly the most comfortable way to experience this wealth of cetaceans is by taking the P&O ferry *Pride of Bilbao* from Portsmouth to Santurtzi (Bilbao). The route follows the edge of the continental shelf down the west coast of France, which is a rich feeding area for small whales and dolphins, and on the afternoon of the return, the ship follows the famous 'Santander Canyon' north. This deep trench is where the big chaps, such as Sperm, Fin and Blue Whale, are usually met with.

It is easy enough nowadays to book a minicruise (out and back as a foot passenger) privately and do your own whale-watching; there is invariably someone else on board doing the same thing, and P&O pay for a Wildlife Officer to be on every crossing. Various wildlife companies also take organised tours, which can work out a bit

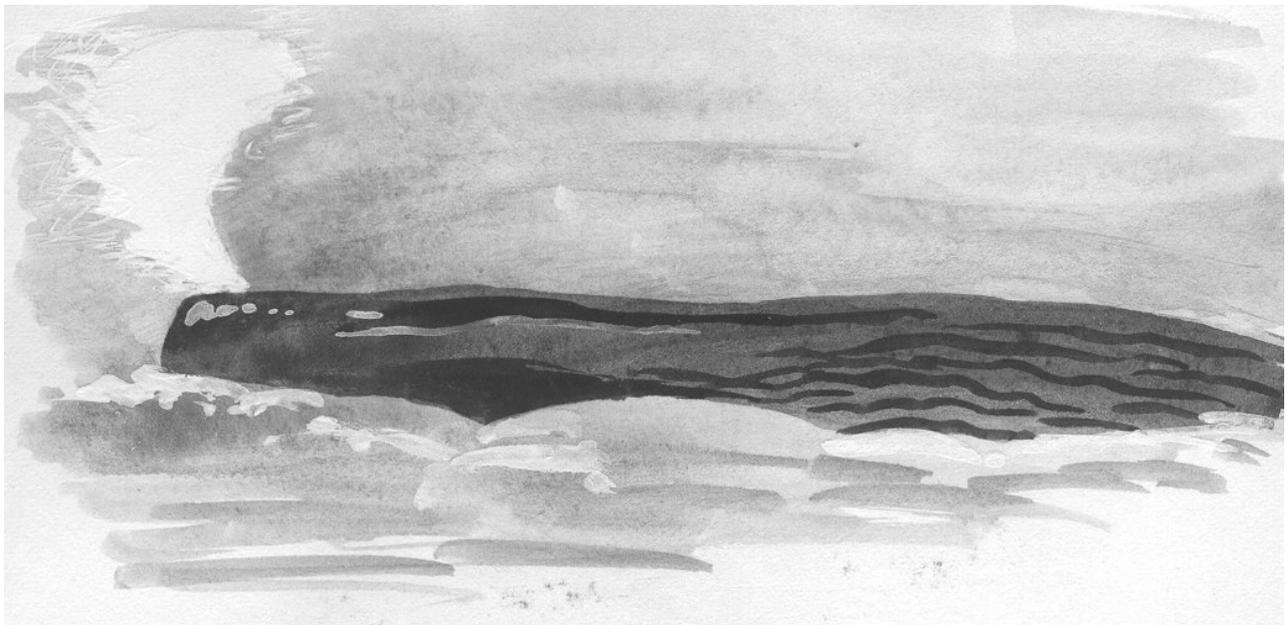
pricey, but you are guaranteed an expert to identify the briefest of glimpses! The earlier crossings (july) are good for huge numbers of smaller whales and dolphins but as the season progresses (late august-september), the bigger whales become more obvious and there is an increasing number of seabirds to be seen as well, although also an ever increasing risk of rough weather.

For the last few years, members of the BTO staff have been on one of the trips each year. Every one has produced surprises and some stunning sightings but, as always with whale/seawatching, there can be long periods of relative boredom followed by amazing adrenalin-filled minutes as a whale surfaces near the ferry!

A typical trip will involve leaving Portsmouth in the late evening, seeing gulls and terns in the Solent before heading down the Channel, overnight. The following morning sees us out on deck as the coast of Brittany sails by. Seabirds are common here but cetacean activity can be limited to a few distant sightings of dolphins at this point. Then, as the continental shelf is

approached, you often encounter large numbers of Pilot Whales (Long-finned), and schools of Common and Bottle-nosed Dolphins come in to the ferry and often play around the bows; as the boat passes they often hurl themselves into the air in the wake.

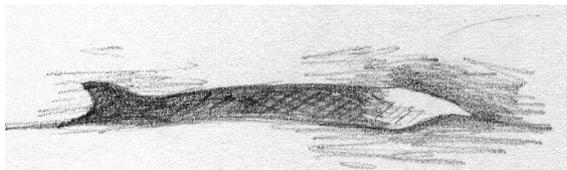
As afternoon progresses, contacts with Striped Dolphins become more frequent: these incredibly acrobatic animals are slightly shy and not exuberant until after the boat has passed, when they suddenly erupt into a frenzy of playfulness. Pilot Whales with calves are frequently seen here (often in large numbers), and if you are really lucky, you may see a pod of Orcas watching and picking out their prey. Late afternoon often brings patches of ‘boiling water’ at the surface, which turn out to be schools of sardines trapped there by predators. Occasionally one of these predators will explode out of the water and reveal itself to be either a Striped Dolphin, or a tuna – these two hunt together, and I was stunned the first time I saw it happen to realise that the tuna are the same size as the dolphins!



A ‘logging’ (resting) Sperm Whale - huge, with corrugated skin and a distinctive, forward ‘blow’ (spout) (© Su Gough)

The next morning, you awake as the ferry approaches Santurtzi, with Bilbao across the river. You do have four hours on land, and the opportunity to bird along the coast (Griffons, Black Kites, Spotless Starlings, Black Redstarts and Mediterranean Gulls were all seen last year.), or maybe decide to have a bit of culture and visit the astonishing Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.

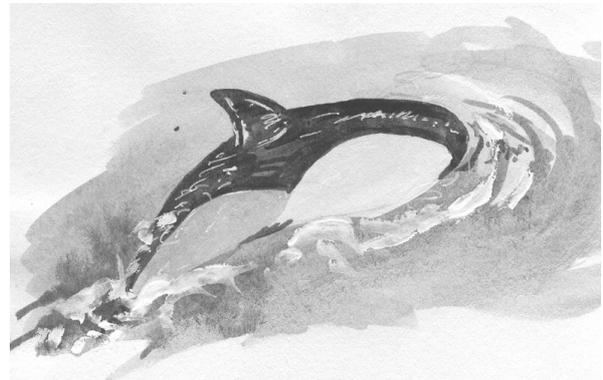
Midday, and the ferry sets off back to the UK. As soon as the coast is out of sight large whales start to appear. Sperm Whales are usually the first, with their distinctive forward blows, and incredibly corrugated skin. Occasionally a playful ‘teenager’ will breach but, generally, the Sperm Whales are lazing on the surface before gearing up for their next deep dive. Fin Whales are the most frequently encountered of the ‘great whales’, and the second largest animal ever to have lived on the planet. They often approach the boat closely, and have enormous, distinctive blows (spouts). Bizarrely, they have asymmetrical throat markings, when seen from one side they are grey, from the other white! Very occasionally Sei Whales are seen, although they are a bit of an ID challenge, and, recently, contacts with the mighty Blue Whale have become more common. Although by no means guaranteed on a trip, there is now a fighting chance of seeing one. And when you do it is quite overwhelming!



Adult male Cuvier's Beaked Whale - one of Biscay's specialities (© Su Gough)

Less well-known species are also frequently met with; Biscay is the best place in the world to see Northern Bottle-nosed Whales – seen on every BTO trip so far, and also the enigmatic Cuvier's Beaked Whale. The sighting this year of a lone adult male with his distinctive white head and scarred back was a particular highlight.

In addition to the cetaceans, there is plenty of other wildlife to watch. Gannets, in particular, often follow the ferry, and later in the season, excellent numbers of other seabirds can be seen, including large numbers of both Great and Cory's Shearwaters. Skuas are abundant, and rarities, such as Little Shearwater, a real possibility. Turtles and sharks (Thresher and Basking Shark) have been seen, and every year we get good numbers of Sunfish, amazing dustbin lid-sized fish that bask on their sides at the surface, lazily flapping their side fins back and forth. There are always unexpected birds sharing our journey too: Marsh Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Collared Doves and a persistent Kestrel have all appeared.



Surfacing Common Dolphin – these are often seen in schools of hundreds or even thousands (© Su Gough)

By the time you wake up on the last morning, you are nearing the English Channel, and here is where you stand the greatest chance of Minke Whales, Basking Sharks and Harbour Porpoises. This time also gives you a final chance to spend money; there are plenty of distractions on board ship for when you are not whale watching, including a 2-screen cinema, swimming pool and nightclub.

Next year's BTO trip is likely to be in mid-late August. We do book early, around February/March, so if you are interested in joining us, please contact me for more details.

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PELAGIC BIRDING OFF NORTH CAROLINA MAY 2003

This May, myself, Ken Shaw, Richard Schofield and Rod Miller visited North Carolina in the last week of May with the prime aim of going on three pelagics off the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Our main quarry were four species of Gadfly (pterodroma) petrel, namely Black-capped, Fea's, Trinidad (Herald) and Bermuda. How would we fare? More later, and also how we only managed to complete two pelagics instead of the three we had planned.

Why off Hatteras Island, North Carolina and why in the last week of May did we plan the trip? It is of course all to do with feeding and timing. The timing because the last week of May offers the best chance in Spring to see the largest numbers of species, the feeding because of the Gulf Stream; this provides habitat for tropical seabirds well north of their nesting areas, where it meets the colder southerly flowing Labrador Current and can cause considerable upwellings of nutrient and prey rich deeper waters,

especially when over the Continental Slope. Off North Carolina, this can be only 20-25 miles offshore *ie* only a 2-hour fast boat journey out of harbour if your starting point is Manteo or Hatteras on the Outer Banks. Off North Carolina, no fewer than 26 species of truly pelagic seabirds are recorded annually. That's the theory, what about the practice.

We arrived in the USA on 23rd May at Washington. By Saturday 24th, we were in North Carolina, being eaten alive by insects at the Great Dismal Swamp but increasing our lists with Louisiana Waterthrush and Prairie Warbler amongst others. Whilst we were road testing our insect repellents, Brian Patteson, who organises the pelagic trips out of North Carolina, was already in action with two boats at sea: *Miss Hatteras* out from Hatteras and the *Country Girl* out from Manteo. Both trips were very successful with all four Gadfly species seen as well as South Polar Skua. We were up for it, our first trip was planned for Sunday 25th on *Miss Hatteras*.



Flock of Wilson's Petrels (© Ken Shaw)

Each pelagic lasts all day, with the first two and last two hours being generally uneventful but the remainder of the time spent scanning with something to look at all of the time. Compared to the Saturday one, our trip was “quieter” but as it was our first effort we were all more than satisfied. With logged totals of 353 Wilson’s Petrels, 52 Black-capped Petrels, 132 Cory’s Shearwaters, 15 Great Shearwaters, 42 Audubon’s Shearwaters, 5 Sooty Shearwaters, 34 Sooty Terns and one Bridled Tern, we had plenty to keep us occupied. The highlights for the “regulars” were probably the pod of Clymene Dolphins that followed the boat, a Roseate Tern and a Blackburnian Warbler that hitched a ride into Hatteras with us on the way back.

The second of our three trips was the next day but this was to end prematurely. We had almost completed our two hour journey out to the interesting areas when smoke was to be seen emanating from below deck. Unfortunately it was serious – an engine fire! What to do, fortunately no panic but lifejackets on and up to the top deck as we bobbed around helplessly with a guard of assembled fishing boats for company waiting for the coastguard to arrive to tow us back into port. The fire was soon put out but the coastguard seemed unconvinced and it was some fast talking by our skipper which saved us from a visit to the drink – the coastguard had apparently been very insistent that everyone get in the water but we managed to stay on board and dry until safely back on dry land.

With the immediate problem, over our next one was that our third planned trip was on this very boat (now completely out of action) on 31st May. Brian Patteson kindly arranged an extra trip out of nearby Manteo the next day for those who fancied it after our unfortunate experience. Having travelled from Scotland, we fancied it. The numbers of birds seen on this trip were much higher than on our previous one with official logged totals of 549 Wilson’s Petrels, 19 Band-rumped (Madeiran) Petrels, 12 Leach’s Petrels, 60+ Cory’s Shearwaters, 27 Great Shearwaters, 35 Audubon’s Shearwaters and 63+ Black-capped Petrels seen.

The undoubted highlights though were the two Fea’s Petrels and two Red-billed Tropicbirds

seen. One of the latter followed us right alongside the boat for some time, with Brian Patteson reckoning it was the best view he had ever got of the species. It really ought to be stated that views of all the species seen are fantastic, with chumming attracting all the tubenoses in, at least for a brief look at what is going on, and the slick formed at the back of the boat having a constant procession of Wilson’s Petrels and Great Shearwaters feeding at it.



Great Shearwater (© Ken Shaw)

Seeing half our Gadfly petrel target list was not too bad, and if we had managed to complete three trips who knows what might have happened. Seeing Fea’s Petrel was certainly something special and something that will linger long in the memory. The waters off North Carolina act as a crossroads for birds from all over the Atlantic and Caribbean basins, and the pelagic trips do offer a unique opportunity to see these species together, an opportunity that cannot be experienced anywhere else in the World. There have been organised pelagic trips for around 30 years now off North Carolina, with exciting discoveries made during that time. Fea’s Petrels have become annual since the early 1990’s, a situation also now established in Britain, and the enigmatic Bermuda Petrel is now seen annually (with now over 60 breeding pairs).

For anyone interested in going on a North Carolina pelagic, all the information required can be obtained from Brian Patteson’s excellent website www.patteson.com. Indeed photos from our trips this spring can be seen on there currently.

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FIRST WORKSHOP ON INTERACTIONS BETWEEN SEABIRDS AND FISHERIES IN ARGENTINEAN SEAS

Mar del Plata, 23-25 April 2003.

The first Workshop on interactions between seabirds and fisheries in Argentinean Seas took place in Mar del Plata on April 23-25 2003. The 30 participants represented governmental organisations, NGOs, seabird and fisheries specialists and other interested parties. The workshop aimed to describe interactions and to recommend and prioritise actions to improve the conservation status of coastal and offshore seabird populations.

The first day of the workshop consisted of oral presentations on the present status of national scientific knowledge, current projects, international agreements, policies and other related information. During the second day, the participants worked on multidisciplinary discussion groups to develop issues and prioritise actions on conservation and research. Finally, on the third day a document was produced with conclusions and recommendations.

This document contains (1) abstracts of the works and projects presented (2) a final statement (the main product of the workshop) (3) a list of current or future research projects, the researchers and institutions involved, and (4) the list of specialists invited to the workshop.

Organising Committee:

- Guillermo Cañete: *FVSA/ Marine Programme – INIDEP*;
- Alejandro Arias: *FVSA/Marine Programme – SAyDS*;
- Fabián Rabuffetti: *Argentine Birds/ AOP*;
- Marco Favero: *National University of Mar del Plata*.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina and Aves Argentinas (AOP) worked together to convene a workshop of different governmental

organisations, NGOs and seabird specialists to examine problems related to the interactions between seabirds and commercial fisheries.

The workshop of 29 people took place at the “*Museo del Mar*”, in the city of Mar del Plata, on 23 – 25 April 2003.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Fishing in Argentine waters is a very important social and economic activity. It has experienced a remarkable growth in the past decade or so, leading to it being an important source of income for Argentine communities from the export of fish and fish products. This workshop facilitated an analysis of the interactions between fishing and seabirds based on the available scientific information and the experience of the specialists. We agreed that there is a very important impact of some fishing activities on the conservation of many seabird species in Argentine waters; that these problems must be recognised; and therefore that we must search for concrete conservation measures allowing the co-existence of fishing and sustainable populations of seabirds in Argentine waters, an ecosystem of high global value.

Available knowledge of seabird conservation problems in relation to fisheries indicates that many fishing activities have a negative effect on both bird communities and the environment upon which they depend. Among the problems are the incidental capture of birds in certain fishing practices; an overlap in fish species caught during fishing and those utilised as food by the birds; the effects of fish discards as alternative source of food for the birds; alterations in the species composition of the marine environment; inorganic waste and other contaminants.

The work of Argentine researchers and institutions has produced detailed knowledge of albatross and petrel mortality in the long-line fisheries in Argentine Seas. This is consistent with the considerable reduction in breeding numbers of at least three species (Black-browed Albatross, Southern Giant Petrel and White-chinned Petrel) found in Argentine water. At global level, 17 of 24 albatross species are included on the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Red List of

threatened species. The problem of seabird mortality in the long-line fisheries of Argentine seas should therefore be addressed immediately.

The development and implementation of solutions to the interaction between fisheries and seabirds requires cooperative work amongst government agencies, the fishing sector, scientists and NGOs. It is important to highlight the positive elements identified by this workshop. A legal framework currently exists that in general terms is adequate to support good fishing practices, though it is insufficiently implemented. There is adequate baseline information available on the biology and ecology of the relevant marine birds. There are many fisheries observer schemes that have collected relevant information over several years, even though not all schemes have been continuous. There is widespread international experience of mitigation measures to reduce the negative effects of long-line fisheries on seabirds. There are examples of joint initiatives between industries and organisations concerned to develop solutions to the problem. Finally, there could be economic benefits from application of such mitigation measures, demonstrating that responsible and efficient fishing is not contradictory with seabird conservation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce the negative impact of some fishing activities on seabird populations, the Workshop has developed a detailed list of recommendations:

- Support the ratification by Argentina of the CMS Albatross and Petrel Conservation Agreement (ACAP) and support its implementation in provincial and national waters.
- Encourage a more active role of competent governmental organisations and their implementing authorities at provincial and national level in implementing the current legal framework more effectively.
- Add to the legal framework with measures that implement a precautionary, multidisciplinary and ecosystem approach to the planning of fisheries management.
- Strengthen the fisheries observer schemes; these need sustainable funding, increased capacity and integrated data collection protocols on both fishing and birds.
- Encourage constructive dialogue between the fishing sector, governmental organisations, the scientific and technological sector and NGOs to search for solutions by consensus.
- Improve the communication of scientific information from the academic sector and NGOs to the government sector and the fishing industry.
- Organise educational campaigns at all school levels and in the media about the need to achieve fishing practices compatible with the conservation of seabirds.
- Produce new scientific and technical information about the design and effect of mitigation measures for application by the fishing sector.
- Study the possibility of establishing incentives for fisheries that adopt the more environmentally sensitive fishing practices.
- Recognise the importance of developing long-term monitoring programmes for seabird communities.
- Emphasise information about the impact of bottom trawlers on seabirds.

Mark Tasker
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JOURNAL REVIEWS & 'BITS' BY MARK TASKER

From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol.s 25(1)-(3)

Four America's Cup teams pledged their support for BirdLife International's Save the Albatross Campaign prior to taking part in the competition last winter. Sadly, none of the four teams: OneWorld (USA), Alinghi (Italy), Team New Zealand or GBR Challenge went on to win the competition.

An aerial survey of an island just off Evangelista at the Pacific entrance of the Straits of Magellan,

Chile, has discovered a new colony of at least 3,000 Black-browed Albatrosses.

Great news from Taiwan, where a Government-funded observer programme on Taiwanese long-line fishing vessels was established in 2002. Six observers were deployed for three months each. All Taiwanese vessels fishing (legally) south of 30°S are required to use bird-scaring lines and to set lines only at night. The line installations are subsidised by the Taiwanese Fisheries Administration. An educational leaflet (in Mandarin) has been distributed and the Tuna Boat-owners Association has assisted in the installation of automatic bait-casting machines and bird-scaring lines. Taiwan has a large fleet that operates worldwide, so effective implementation of mitigation measures on this fleet would be a great step forward. Taiwan is also working with Japanese authorities to reduce illegal fishing practices. A workshop was held in Taiwan in April to further promote seabird by-catch mitigation devices.

A large marine reserve within the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary has been established by the California Fish and Game Commission partly to help conserve Xantus's Murrelet.

News that I am sure that we are all pleased about (and that we will certainly hear more about) comes from Ascension Island where White-tailed Tropicbirds, Brown and Masked Boobies returned to breed on the mainland for the first time in 100 years, thanks to a feral cat eradication programme.

Satellite tracking of Waved Albatrosses has found that they spend much of their feeding time (particularly during chick-rearing) within the Galapagos Marine Reserve, where long-line fishing is banned.

A record 40 Bermuda Petrels (Cahows) fledged from a record (in recent times!) 70 nesting pairs, thanks to the continuing conservation efforts in Bermuda.

BirdLife International's seabird programme has started gathering satellite-tracking information from albatross researchers in order to evaluate it to identify marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Regardless of label, this work will surely help to

identify where particular care with fishing needs to be taken, especially if fishing areas can be overlaid with the albatross locational data.

South Korea seems to be finally coming to its senses in relation to the Saemangeum Wetland – a critical wintering area for many waterbird, species including Saunder's Gull. A court has stopped the construction of a seawall that was to enclose the wetland. International protests may help stop the South Korean government from reversing this decision – please visit www.tve.org/news/doc.cfm?aid=1190 and see a BBC documentary on the project at news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3046368.stm.

From *SEEVÖGEL* Vol. 23 (4) and 24 (1)

A major driver for seabird research in Germany at present is the planned installation of wind farms in many parts of German waters, both in the North Sea and the Baltic. Klaus-Michael Exo, Ommo Hüppop and Stefan Garthe describe work that they are doing to examine potential impacts of the farms. Risks include collision with the turbines, short-term habitat loss during construction, long-term loss of habitat during operation, formation of barriers on migratory routes and disconnection of ecological units, such as the separation of feeding sites from roosting sites. Methods used to examine these issues include transect studies at sea, radar investigations and visual observations/flight call recording to detect passage.

In Vol. 24 (1), Anne-Kathrin Dierschke and Ommo Hüppop describe long-term studies on Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls and examine their population growth in relation to fishery discard levels. David Fleet, Silvia Gaus and Martin Schultze-Dieckhoff report on the results of the German beached bird surveys in 2000-01 and 2001-02 on North Sea coasts, and find a welcome continuing decrease in the proportion of birds found oiled. Proportions oiled appear higher for those birds spending more time offshore and those stranding on Helgoland.

From *WWF ARCTIC BULLETIN*, No.s 4.02, 1.03 and 2.03

Of concern, given the number of recent tanker accidents, is the likely growth of Murmansk in

arctic Russia as a major oil port. A preliminary plan to develop a million barrel-per-day terminal has been signed by four Russian oil companies.

Issue 1.03 describes an approach to try and open up debate in Greenland in order to make hunting more sustainable. To add to the pressures on the Barent's Sea (see above), Norway is considering the future of offshore oil and gas exploration in the area.

Issue 2.03 unfortunately includes the news that the Greenland government has decided to continue to allow hunting of guillemots and eiders during the breeding season, in the face of advice from their own scientists that current hunting is unsustainable. It appears that the hunting lobby in Greenland is still the more powerful.

From *PACIFIC SEABIRDS* Vol 29 (2)

The continuing saga of Caspian Tern predation of salmon smolts in the Columbia River estuary (Oregon) is described by Dan Roby and co-authors. Readers may remember that a large Caspian Tern colony in the estuary was consuming large quantities of protected salmon smolts – a classic conservation dilemma. To resolve the issue, the tern colony has been relocated closer to the sea, causing a change in diet and a lowered proportion of salmon smolt.

Eric Gillman describes a line-setting chute in seas around Hawaii in order to reduce bycatch of seabirds, particularly albatrosses. This chute proved very effective.

The US Congress has decided to exempt the US Defense Department from the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act – presumably in order to improve the military ability to respond to terrorism. Bombing exercises on a northern Mariana island has killed endangered species and Great Frigatebirds, Masked, Red-footed and Brown Boobies.

Better news is that Black Rats have been eradicated from East Anacapa Island in the Channel Islands. This will help Xantus's Murrelets nesting on the island as well as Ashy Storm-petrels. Xantus's Murrelets are presently being considered for listing as Endangered,

which should improve conservation efforts yet further.

From *FALKLANDS CONSERVATION NEWSLETTERS*

The February 2003 newsletter contains a report from Euan Dunn on a small island due to be cleared of rats in order to enhance its bird-life.

A (hopefully) localised problem of albatrosses being caught for food by some fishing vessels in Falklands waters is reported in the May 2003 edition.

The June 2003 issue has several items of interest. Thousands of penguins died in the Falklands in 2002/03. Several tests have been made of dead birds but, unfortunately, there are, as yet, no conclusive causes. A coalition of legal toothfish operators has offered a reward of \$10,000 for information that leads to the conviction of those involved in illegal fishing of toothfish. Finally, an improved bird scaring line is being tested on Falkland Island long-line fisheries.

MEDMARAVIS CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS PUBLISHED

The Proceedings of the last Medmaravis (Mediterranean Marine Avifauna) symposium held in Benidorm in 2000 have been published in a special volume of *Scientia Marina*. The meeting was devoted to the conservation of seabirds in the Mediterranean and two of the plenaries were given by Seabird Group members: Bob Furness and Daniel Oro. PDF files of the whole volume are available free at: <http://www.icm.csic.es/scimar/scimar3.html>

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FROM THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE

This site (www.birdlife.net/news) is well worth a regular check for seabird conservation news. Three recent articles of interest discuss research in Hawaii on three methods for deterring seabirds from taking long-line bait (31-07-2003, source: National Audubon Society), the discovering of a new colony of Zino's Petrels in Madeira (29-08-2003, source: SPEA) and efforts to save the Bermuda Petrel (Cahow) after the worst hurricane damage for more than a century (25-09-2003, source: Bermuda Department of Conservation Services). Here I've provided a quick summary of these three stories but much further information and links to key organisations' websites are available on the BirdLife website.

A team from the Hawaii Longline Association, the National Audubon Society and the US Marine Fisheries Service has been running a cooperative research project to trial new technology for catching tuna and swordfish with minimal risk of seabird by-catch. Three deterrent methods have been tested, including a commercial demonstration, and one, 'side setting' (as opposed to traditional stern setting), has emerged as having most potential. This involves setting the baited hooks close to the side of the boat's hull, where seabirds seem unwilling or unable to chase them. Using this method, once the bait reaches the stern it has sunk deep enough to prevent seabirds from locating it. The technique also has some operational benefits for certain types of fishing vessel and is practical for crews to use.

Setting hooks within an underwater chute also appeared promising but the technique's performance at reducing by-catch was inconsistent and it was inconvenient for crews. The third method that was tested – thawing bait and dyeing it blue – was less effective and proved relatively impractical. The plan is now to promote broad industry trials of side setting both in Hawaii and abroad, including a formal incentives programme.

The new colony of Zino's Petrel (*Pterodroma Madeira*) found by park authorities in the Pico de Areeiro area of Madeira Natural Park

contains at least 9 occupied nests with 20 chicks, making it the largest known colony of this Critically Endangered species. The site has been closed off until the exact size of the colony can be established and the potential risks that may be caused by visitors assessed. The park authorities believe that further colonies may exist and are continuing work to look for them. The new site is some distance from the other known colonies, which are all on inaccessible mountain ledges. The species has been threatened by introduced rats and cats, humans taking eggs and young, and grazing and trampling by goats and sheep.

Luckily, when Hurricane Fabian struck Bermuda in September, the Cahows (*Pterodroma cahow*) were not at their only known nesting grounds on four small islets. The huge historical population decline of this species has been attributed to the usual severe threats: habitat loss, exploitation and predation by introduced mammals. But recent successful conservation management has resulted in an increase from 18 pairs in 1962 to 70 pairs (and a record 40 young) in 2003.

Now, despite the severe destruction of human infrastructure by the 250 km/h winds of the hurricane, the Department of Conservation Services is rebuilding the man-made burrows for the petrels: 10 of the 70 active nests were completely destroyed, large sections of two of the nesting islets were damaged, and around 50 of the concrete chamber lids were washed away. Many volunteers are assisting with the difficult task of rebuilding, which will require relocating the lost burrows to a higher level, and may disrupt the birds' breeding for a few years because of their high fidelity to breeding sites.

Ed.

ATLANTIC SEABIRDS PLEASE NOTE!

Would Members please note that there will be no Volume 4 Part 4 of *Atlantic Seabirds* (2002). In future, we hope to know in advance which numbers are being issued and we will keep Members informed.

Ed.

OTHER RECENTLY PUBLISHED

Rehabilitation of Oiled African Penguins: a Conservation Success Story

(Deon C. Nel & Phil A. Whittington eds).
2003. BirdLife South Africa & Avian
Demography Unit, Cape Town.

This finely-produced, A4-sized 'booklet' is a compilation of the 5 most recent research papers on the results of the high-profile cleaning, rehabilitation and temporary translocation of African Penguins during oil spills (see *Seabird Group Newsletter* 88). The papers deal in turn with:

- The conservation status of the birds and the impacts of oiling on their population (Nel, Crawford & Parsons);
- Post-release survival rates (Whittington);
- Effects of oiling on productivity and the annual cycle (Wolfaardt & Nel);
- Estimation of the demographic benefits of rehabilitation (Ryan);
- The infrastructure that is required in order to continue such rehabilitation efforts during future spills (Underhill).

This publication must be essential reading for anyone involved in seabird rehabilitation and is a very welcome summary of the positive benefits of such large-scale operations with penguins. The publication also highlights some effects that remain with the individual birds even after rehabilitation (such as poorer breeding success than non-rehab birds when feeding conditions are generally poor) and the conclusion that the work of SANCCOB (the South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds) up to 2002 resulted in the penguin population being 19% larger (163,000 more adult penguins) than it would have been without rehabilitation efforts.

Seabird Numbers and Breeding Success in Britain and Ireland, 2002

(Roddy Mavor, Matt Parsons, Martin Heubeck, Georgina Pickerell & Sabine Schmitt eds). 2003. UK Nature Conservation No.27. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

This is the annual (14th) report from the JNCC/RSPB/SOTEAG UK Seabird Monitoring Programme. A number of changes have been made to data presentation this year to aid ease of interpretation and improve readability: (i) each species 'chapter' has a summary section at the start, highlighting important findings in the context of the previous year's data, (ii) there are new tables for some species, showing breeding numbers and breeding success for colonies mentioned in the text, and (iii) the text contains fuller discussion of the annual findings in the context of longer-term variation. The report contains a summary of key changes in 2002: *eg* the breeding success of Manx Shearwaters on Rum was the highest since 1997; Mediterranean Gull bred successfully in Ireland for the first time; Clive Craik's studies have shown that Mink predation on gulls continues on the west coast of Scotland and that the breeding success of Herring Gulls and Mew Gulls has been reduced by a mean of 44% and 57% in the last 6-7 years; several species of seabird in Shetland again had a poor breeding season in 2002.

Ed.

BREEDING ECOLOGY OF GREAT AND ARCTIC SKUAS ON HANDA ISLAND 2003

I have just received a comprehensive report from Trevor Jones on the research that the Seabird Group helped to fund on Handa skuas in 2003 (see *Seabird Group Newsletter* 94 p.11). Due to limited space in this issue, we will provide a full summary in the February *Newsletter* but many thanks to Trevor for sending us the report so quickly.

Ed.



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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

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GROUP NEWS

**CURRENT SEABIRD
GROUP COMMITTEE**

Current retiral dates (at AGM) 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**)
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Jim Reid (**2005**)
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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**)

NEXT (38th) AGM

Remember, this will be held at 3pm on Saturday 22 November 2003 at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie. All Members will have received the agenda separately by post.

**DON'T FORGET!
SEABIRD GROUP
CONFERENCE
2004**

This is to be held in Aberdeen 2-4 April 2004. If you haven't booked already, then please contact Alan Leitch for a booking form:

Alan.Leitch@snh.gov.uk
2, Burgess Terrace
Edinburgh. EH9 2BD
Scotland (UK)

SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS

The next deadline is 31 March 2004 but please submit proposals for next breeding season's fieldwork as early as possible, so that the Committee can make the earliest possible decision for you!

Applications forms are available from the Secretary, or can be downloaded from the 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 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.

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

Ed