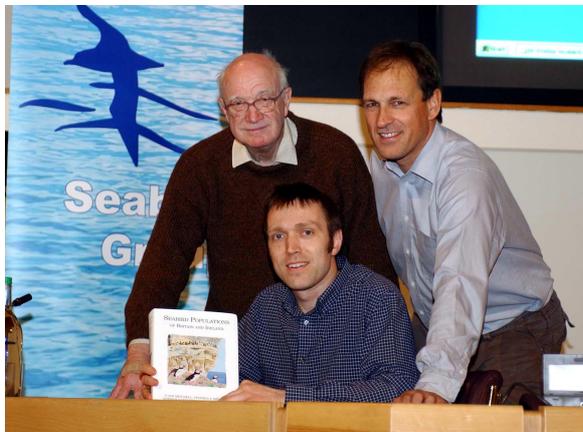




8th INTERNATIONAL SEABIRD GROUP CONFERENCE

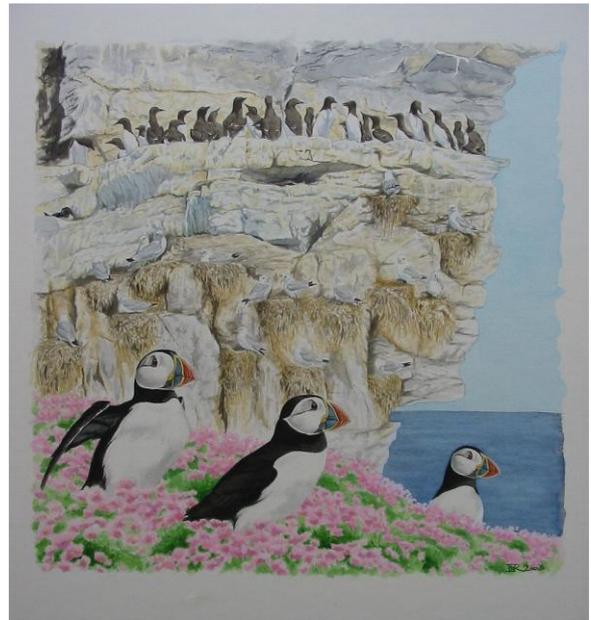
Aberdeen, 2-4 April 2004



Ian Mitchell (leading editor, centre), Bill Bourne (left) and Mark Tasker (right) launch the results of SEABIRD 2000 (© JNCC)

Our 8th International Seabird Group Conference was held during the weekend of 2-4 April 2004 in the grand but comfortable setting of the King's Conference Centre in Old Aberdeen, Scotland. After a welcoming reception on Friday evening, our Chairman, Mark Tasker, welcomed the 176 delegates from 22 countries and introduced Ian Mitchell and Steve Newton

to launch the keenly awaited results of the SEABIRD 2000 census, the book "*Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland*". Ian firstly thanked the sponsors of the project, the 11 partner organisations, the 46 regional organisers, and the 1,000 participants in the fieldwork. The previous census, the 1985-88 Seabird Colony Register, had spawned "*The Status of Seabirds in Britain and Ireland*", the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) for Britain and Ireland, and the "*Seabird Monitoring Handbook*" for Britain and Ireland.



Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Poyser, London): cover illustration by Ian Rendall

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However, things change. Apart from the obvious aims of SEABIRD 2000 of updating estimates of the population sizes and distributions of the 25 breeding species (not least to comply with statutory obligations under EU Directives), here was an opportunity to compare regional trends recorded by the SMP with two national censuses, as well as to improve, or in some cases to provide first estimates for the 'difficult' nocturnal petrels and shearwaters, and obtain blanket coverage of species which may have low site fidelity, such as terns and Great Cormorants. Conversely, some things don't change, and there were amusing images of difficult landings at the same remote colonies 15 years apart. But a series of images of the Bass Rock over the past 30 years dramatically illustrated just how some things (the expansion of the Gannetry) do change. In a light-hearted talk, Mark Tasker and Oscar Merne featured in embarrassing poses! Among the achievements of SEABIRD 2000 were the first comprehensive census of nocturnal petrels in Britain and Ireland, the first estimate of population trend for Black Guillemots in the UK and the first complete Irish census, the first census of inland nesting gulls, and the first thorough census and estimate of trends in urban breeding gulls.

The evening continued with an informative and enjoyable presentation by Tony Gaston (co-authored by Grant Gilchrist) on the potential impacts of global warming on high Arctic seabirds, particularly focussing on year-to-year variations in ice conditions, the relationships between these and seabird breeding biology and, hence, the predicted effects of earlier ice break-up if this occurs in the future. Many delegates then graced the bar with their presence until the early hours!



The conference hall and delegates (© JNCC)

The first session of Saturday morning was given to 'show-casing' the SEABIRD 2000 results in more detail. Ian Mitchell, the lead organiser of the project and senior author of the new book, began with an overview of the results by species, focusing on those groups of seabirds not covered in the following presentations (including the auks, cormorants, terns and Fulmar for example). He also briefly outlined the many factors that may have contributed to the numerous and variable changes across species and highlighted what he saw as future priorities for seabird research in Britain and Ireland: understanding the relationships between sandeel stocks and seabird populations in more detail, quantifying the true extent of the effects of mink predation (following Clive Craik's ground-breaking work), monitoring of shearwater and petrel population size and productivity, development of a Europe-wide seabird colony database, the forthcoming review of the UK Seabird Monitoring Programme, not to mention gearing up for 'Seabird 2015'!!

Stephen Newton followed with an interesting summary of changes in Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull populations, including the increases in urban (roof-nesting) birds and contrasting declines in some areas – the reasons for these changes are probably diverse but largely man-induced, including changes in waste and fishery discard management, changes in culling/control practice, predation by mink and foxes and even changes in practices for rearing free ranging pigs in East Anglia. He finished with the question of whether conservation of these species was required, and made a strong case for more research on Herring Gulls in Ireland.

Tim Dunn reported on the SEABIRD 2000 results of the first full census of petrel populations in Britain and Ireland. He explained the difficulties of monitoring these species and the development and calibration of the play-back technique that is now available for use. For Leach's Petrel, the main colony on St Kilda holds more than 45,000 or the 48,000 AOSs in Britain and Ireland. A total of 128,000 European Storm Petrel AOSs exist, of which there must be more in Ireland than in Britain (the largest colony at Inishtooskert holding *ca* 28,000 AOSs. Tim then mentioned priorities for future conservation: keeping islands predator free and

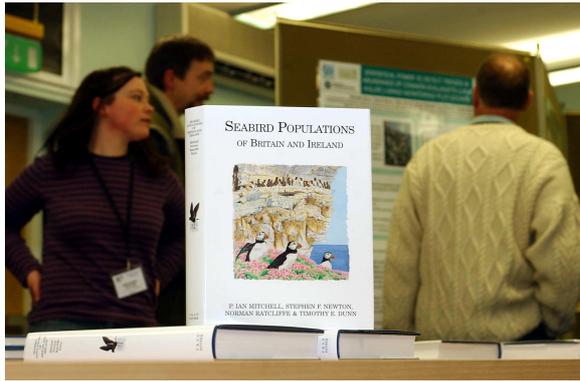
removing predators from others *eg* Lundy, continued monitoring and research into threats to populations, and further work on predation by Bonxies.

In the final presentation of the first session, Norman Ratcliffe shared his expertise on skuas to explain the reasons for the decline of Arctic Skuas in the Northern Isles (of 37% between 1992 and 2002-03). Population modelling using observed productivity rates failed to replicate the decline completely and predation of fledged juvenile Arctic Skuas by Bonxies is the suspected additional cause. Inclusion of rates of post-fledging mortality measured on Handa and Noss caused the model to fit the observed data very closely. Further work is required to measure post-fledging survival more precisely.

I (Chris) had the real privilege of chairing an excellent session after coffee on Saturday morning. Theresa Burg provided an extremely useful review of the studies in which she has been involved comparing genetic and demographic techniques (*eg* ringing) for studying dispersal (metapopulation dynamics) in seabirds. She presented work on Black-browed Albatrosses, frigatebirds, Common Guillemots and Black-legged Kittiwakes, providing examples of the two approaches being entirely complementary and others where patterns are somewhat contradictory. Morten Frederiksen presented population modelling to investigate reasons for the decline in Kittiwake breeding success in the North Sea since 1990 – concluding that a strong relationship between winter sea-surface temperatures and breeding success (and a regime shift in North Sea winter sea-surface temperature since the mid-1980s) is likely to be at least partly to blame. Morten also highlighted the lack of information available for the modelling on juvenile survival rates, age of recruitment and dispersal. Daniel Oro also highlighted the importance of knowledge of dispersal processes when modelling seabird population dynamics, in his presentation on source-sink populations of Audouin's Gulls. A trawling moratorium since 1991 was used as a natural experiment into the effects of changing food availability, using multi-stratum capture-recapture modelling to estimate adult survival and dispersal rates. Sin-Yeon Kim presented an interesting talk, to complement that by Stephen Newton, providing more detailed information

the diets, feeding sites and distances travelled by the declining Herring Gull population on Walney Island, and contrasting these with those of the local Lesser Black-backed Gull population (not showing similar declines). Finally, Mark Grantham gave a presentation contrasting the results of analyses of the origins of seabirds killed in several recent oil spills, reinforcing the information presented in the *BTO Migration Atlas* as to the differing wintering areas of Common Guillemots of varying age class and breeding origin.

The first session on Saturday afternoon focused on recent changes in seabird populations. Rob Barrett (with his co-authors) kicked off the session by describing the status of seabirds breeding in Norway and highlighting how Herring and Capelin are their most important prey. He explained how the decrease in Puffin numbers on Røst, Norway since the 1970s is correlated with changes in Herring stocks (caused by a combination of reduced recruitment and effects from the fishery), while the reduction in guillemot numbers has been caused by drowning in gill nets, with consequences for the social structure of colonies. Kittiwake population declines have been linked to disturbance caused by White-tailed Eagles, which has increased predation opportunities for Ravens. Bergur Olsen described how the reduction in Common Guillemot populations in the Faroes since the 1950s is probably linked to a reduction in primary production on the Faroes Shelf. Fulmars have also started using traditional guillemot breeding sites, so that there is now nest site competition between guillemots and Fulmars. Bernard Cadiou explained how the recent population increase in Brittany's European Storm Petrels, despite heavy predation by gulls, may be linked to a reduction in the Rabbit population, which has increased the availability of nest sites. Veronica Neves (co-authored by Bob Furness) gave a very interesting presentation on the status of Roseate Terns in the Azores, which hold 54% of the European population. She highlighted the possibility of cyclical variation in the numbers of breeding pairs being correlated with the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), with higher numbers during a negative NAO. The main threats to the Azores population are predation (including from Starlings, gulls, cats and rats) and human disturbance.



Delegates at the poster session (© JNCC)

After a well-planned poster session, with plenty of interesting material to peruse and authors present for discussion, the focus of the afternoon session was foraging ecology. Kees Camphuysen presented interesting data collected at sea on the foraging behaviour of Northern Gannets in the North Sea (from southern Shetland south to the Yorkshire coast), showing their interactions with other seabirds, marine mammals and fishing vessels and demonstrating them to be ‘suppressors’ of feeding flocks. Steve Votier (co-authors Jonathan Crane & Bob Furness) presented dietary information for Bonxies from pellets collected by Bob Furness and his team since 1973 to demonstrate seasonal and spatial variations in the quantity of discards consumed. In a further presentation on discard utilization, José Arcos (co-authors Daniel Oro & Xavier Ruiz) modelled the implications of discard consumption for the Ebro Delta seabird community, showing that the total breeding community consumes only *c.*one-sixth of the energy available from discards but that overall (including non-breeders and visiting distant breeders) the community consumes 85% of the total energy available. The theme of at-sea foraging behaviour was returned to by Philipp Schwemmer (co-author Stefan Garthe), who used both general at-sea data and detailed behavioural observations from dedicated surveys to investigate the foraging of Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the German Bight and to show that swimming crabs are of major importance for those birds foraging inshore, while some birds foraged further from the shore on both ‘natural prey’ and discards, thus avoiding competition with other species. In the final contribution of a stimulating session, Sarah Davis (co-authors Bob Furness & Ruedi Nager) presented the

results of an experiment to supplementary feed Arctic Skuas in Shetland, showing that adult birds consumed most of the additional food themselves, rather than feeding it to their young.

On Saturday evening, the Conference Dinner was held in the historic Elphinstone Hall, adjacent to the Conference Centre. After a grand meal with a distinct Scottish flavour, special tribute was paid to Dr Bill Bourne, founding father of the Seabird Group. Mark Tasker outlined Bill’s involvement with the Group and just a handful of his very many achievements, and Bill replied graciously, before being presented with a copy of “*Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland*”. Raffle prizes were then distributed (and some immediately consumed) before tables were cleared for the ceilidh, with dancing to the excellent band *The Flying Piemen*. This was an energetic affair for the commendable number prepared to sweat and lose their shirt-tails. Fortunately, the quantity of beer consumption had been anticipated, and equally fortunately, none of the middle-aged participants in the final marathon Gay Gordons suffered long-term effects, or worse!

The first session on Sunday focussed on human management of seabird colonies. Brian Bell described several situations in which seabirds had recovered after removal of invasive species such as cats and rats, including Little Barrier Island (petrels), Galapagos (Dark-rumped Petrel) and Ascension island (5 species returned). He highlighted that monitoring seabirds after eradication programs is something that has rarely been done. Richard Podolsky described successes and failures to artificially increase seabird numbers by the National Audobon Society’s Seabird Restoration Program. This program has undertaken 66 world-wide projects since 1970 and uses both social attraction and translocation techniques. Colin Beale (co-authored by Pat Monaghan) gave an extremely informative talk about research on the effects of human disturbance on Kittiwakes breeding at St Abbs. He described how, by placing heart rate monitors in dummy eggs, he detected an increase in Kittiwake heart rate when they were approached by humans. This increased heart rate would increase the daily energy requirement sufficiently to explain the observed increase in breeding failures. He also found that there were

only minor changes in parental behaviour (such as spending less time asleep), while there was no change in parental attendance. This highlights how disturbance effects may be more widespread than suggested by behavioural responses.

Our apologies, but none of us managed to report in detail on the talks that were presented in the last two sessions on Sunday. The first of these included talks and interesting mix of topics: seabird population changes and determinants on Johnston Atoll (Betty Anne Schreiber & Gary Schenk), long-term changes in seabird populations in the Gulf of St Lawrence (Gilles Chapdelaine *et al.*), the impact of climate change on Bonxies (Steve Oswald *et al.*), winter movements of Northern Gannets (Ulrike Kubetzki *et al.*) and, Bill Bourne on the gadfly petrels. The final session included talks on Razorbill demography in Labrador (Jennifer Lavers & Ian Jones), the status of breeding seabirds in Svalbard, Franz Josef Land and Novaya Zemlya (Hallvard Strøm), and hormonal and energetic changes in Kittiwakes during chick rearing (Olivier Chastel *et al.*). Linda Wilson and co-workers gave a fascinating talk on ammonia emissions by seabirds, showing that UK seabirds produce <1% of total annual emissions but that 45% of their annual emissions occur in northern Scotland (sufficient to cause local changes in *eg* the species composition of moorlands). Antonio Hernández-Matías (co-author Peter Becker) rounded off the talks programme with a presentation on their ambitious project to investigate and successfully demonstrate food information transfer amongst

seabirds but providing artificial food patches for Common Terns.

On the Monday morning, about 30 delegates boarded the coach for a trip north along the Aberdeenshire coast. Fortunately it remained dry and sunny all day, although with an increasing north-westerly wind. First stop were the cliffs at Bullers o' Buchan, where although all the breeding seabirds were seen well, not even the Shags had built proper nests yet - signs of worse things to come. We then backtracked to the Ythan Estuary where, on a rising tide, some of the North Americans were ticking off new species every few minutes among the early spring waders, waterfowl and passerines of the surrounding farmland. Fortunately, large numbers of Pink-footed Geese were still in the area and gave spectacular and noisy views, before we retired to the Undy Arms Hotel in Newburgh for lunch. In the afternoon, we headed north to the Loch of Strathbeg, the largest coastal lagoon in the UK. We split into two groups, guided by RSPB Warden Scott Patterson and Assistant Warden Katherine Puttick, and had an enjoyable couple of hours, which included yet more geese in big numbers and, for one group, an incredibly close view of a Water Rail. All in all, a fine day out and a fitting close to a stimulating and enjoyable conference weekend.

Chris Wernham, Martin Heubeck, Linda Wilson & Sheila Russell
(Seabird Group Executive Committee)

With thanks to JNCC for photographs!



RECENT GRANT REPORTS

OVER-WINTERING FORAGING DISTRIBUTION OF ADULT AND JUVENILE SHAGS

The Seabird 2000 survey showed that the Shag has declined throughout Britain over the last 15 years. It is therefore imperative that we learn more about the distribution of juvenile and adult birds over winter, when the majority of mortality takes place. The advance and miniaturisation of technology over recent years has opened up a host of new opportunities in this area. For example, by attaching small loggers to birds, which record light intensity and time, we can obtain a daily location. We attached these loggers to 20 adult shags during the 2002 breeding season on the Isle of May, south-east Scotland (see Figure 1), which they carried throughout the winter of 2002-2003. Using these loggers, latitude is estimated from day length. Longitude is derived from the timing of the day in relation to midday. Together, they give a reasonably good estimate of location (apart from during the equinoxes, when day length is the same all the way from the pole to equator). The loggers also contain a saltwater switch, which records whether the bird is in the water or on land.

All 20 birds survived the winter and the loggers were retrieved from them during the 2003 breeding season. 18 of the loggers had functioned correctly and contained data. The birds spent the winter along the east coast of Scotland and northern England, centred around the breeding colony (summary map shown in Figure 2). The saltwater switch confirmed that, as expected with this species, they always spent the night on land, so the birds remained close to the coast. This distribution accords well with what is known about the movements of Isle of May shags from ringing recoveries (see the BTO 'Migration Atlas' by Wernham *et al.*). It is very reassuring to confirm that healthy birds are spending the winter in broadly similar areas to

those birds from the same colony whose rings had been recovered after they died.

The loggers were placed on birds once more for the 2003-2004 season. We are hoping to continue this work for a number of years to see whether there are interannual differences in wintering locations. This will hopefully provide some clues about why the species has been declining in Britain & Ireland.

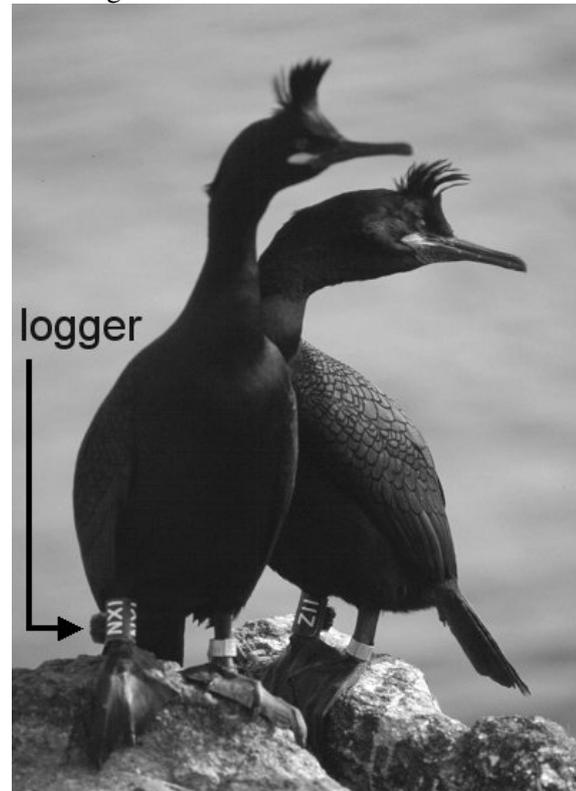


Figure 1: Two adult shags carrying locational loggers (photo © Morten Frederiksen)

A grant from the Seabird Group helped us to expand this work to look at the movements of juvenile Shags. Ringing recovery data have shown that juvenile European Shags disperse over a few hundred kilometres along the coast from the natal colony but will also, on occasion, cross expanses of sea, for example from eastern Scotland to the Netherlands. In 2003, we attached 80 similar loggers to chicks on the Isle of May, all of whom fledged successfully. We are hopeful that the project will provide the first data on the daily movements of juvenile seabirds from fledging to breeding. Mortality during this period is much higher than during adulthood. Therefore, to see whether the decline in Shags is due to environmental factors (*e.g.* weather)

experienced during pre-breeding, we need to know where the young birds are distributed.

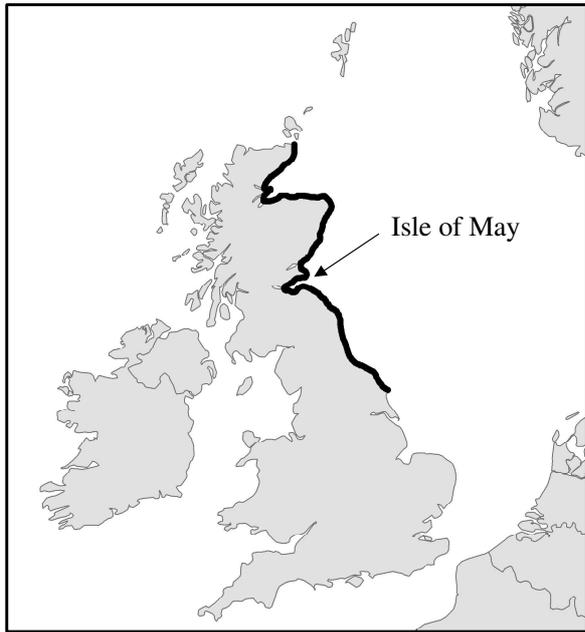


Figure 2: Over-wintering foraging distribution of adult shags breeding on the Isle of May, south-east Scotland.

We hope to retrieve the first loggers from these birds when they return to the Isle of May to breed at the age of two (2005). However, we may also obtain some recoveries sooner than this. We would be especially keen to hear if anyone resights or recovers one of these loggers.



Figure 3: Geolocation logger attached to darvic ring placed on the tarsus of Shags (photo © British Antarctic Survey). Please note that those carried by our Shags have a unique three-letter code on the darvic ring.

If you see or find a bird with a plastic darvic ring with a three-letter code and a logger attached (similar to the one shown in Figure 3), please get in touch with us directly (details below), as well as through the usual channels with BTO. All birds also carry the ordinary BTO metal rings. Many thanks for your help and support. We will put together a further report on our results for the *Newsletter* in the future.

**Francis Daunt, Sarah Wanless & Mike Harris
(CEH Banchory)**

**Vsevolod Afanasyev, Dirk Briggs & Janet Silk
(British Antarctic Survey)**

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Morten Frederiksen, Dave Stevens, Linda Wilson, Debbie Russell and Sue Lewis for help in the field. Thanks to SNH for access to the Isle of May. Once again thanks to the Seabird Group for their generous support.

If you see or find a bird with a logger, please contact:

Francis Daunt
CEH Banchory, Hill of Brathens,
Banchory. AB31 4BW.
Tel: 01330 826 338
E-mail: frada@ceh.ac.uk.

Many thanks!

RECENT SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS AWARDED

The Committee recently agreed to award three further grants, as follows:

(i) *Verónica Neves*: £200 to cover boat expenses for censusing Yellow-legged Gulls in the Azores archipelago, and conducting studies of their feeding ecology. This species is believed to be increasing and therefore raising some conservation concerns, such as possible displacement of Roseate Tern colonies and depredation of tern and other seabird chicks (and even adults). Available data on gull numbers in the Azores is restricted to a census carried out in 1984, when 2,705 breeding pairs were counted.

It is very important to assess how the situation has evolved since then, both in terms of total gull numbers and any new colonies formed;

(ii) *Dr Eduardo Garcia-del-Rey (Sociedad Ornitológica Canaria):* £250 for a project to clarify the status of a number of resident and wintering seabirds in the Canaries by recording during ferry crossings from late November to early January. The grant will be used to cover the costs of travelling for the amateur and professional ornithologists that will be involved. The project will try to cover as many crossings as

possible (*ie* Santa Cruz-Las Palmas; Cirisitanos-San Sebastian, Cristianos-Valverde, Cristianos-Santa Cruz de La Palma, Las Palmas-Morro Jable; Corralejo-Playa Blanca);

(iii) *Trevor Jones:* £300 towards equipment set-up costs (for measuring biometrics and catching birds) for ongoing monitoring of Great Skuas on Handa (see *Newsletter* No.96, p.1-3).

All grant recipients will provide reports on their work, and these will appear in future issues of the *Newsletter* and also on the Group website.

POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF THE SANDEEL FISHING BAN AS SHOWN IN THE GANNET?

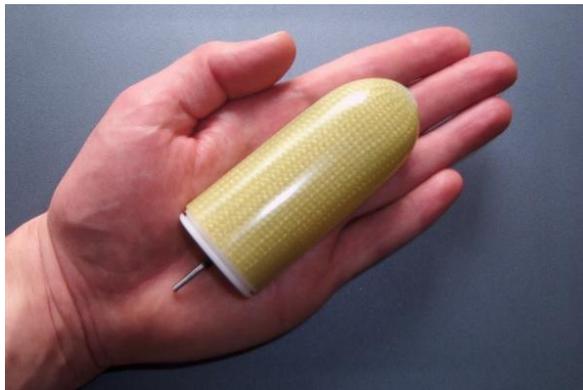


Sandeels are known to be an important prey item for seabirds and marine mammals. In 2000, the EU imposed a sandeel fishing ban over an area of 200,000 km² of the North Sea. This was in response to concerns that since the start of intensive fishing operations at the Wee Bankie and Marr Bank, breeding success of Kittiwakes had declined at a number of colonies in south-east Scotland and north-east England, and an exclusion zone was deemed necessary as a precautionary measure. Any potential negative effects observed on the Kittiwake, which is generally regarded as a bioindicator, might be an

early warning of reduced sandeel stocks and could forewarn of negative effects on other predatory species.

We have been looking at the diet and foraging behaviour of the Northern Gannets breeding on the Bass Rock, which currently is the World's largest single-island gannetry. This work has been carried out as part of an EU-funded project: IMPRESS (*Interactions between the Marine environment, PREDators, and prey: implications for Sustainable Sandeel fisheries*) and the Gannet is one of 4 key seabird species chosen. It had

previously been shown that the most important prey item for Gannets in 1998 (an open fishing year) was Mackerel. In 2002 and 2003, however, we have found that 0-group Lesser Sandeel constituted the most common prey taken by the Gannet (over 50% in terms of biomass). In Shetland, following the collapse of the local sandeel population, Gannets were able to switch from taking mostly sandeels to taking Herring and Mackerel. Given the clear change in preference to sandeels as the main prey species, our work could be taken as evidence that sandeel availability has increased since the implementation of the fishing ban.



GPS logger used on Northern Gannets

We have deployed GPS loggers (see photo) in combination with dive-depth loggers and gastric loggers (manufactured by Earth and Ocean Technologies, Kiel, Germany). We have found that a relatively high proportion (over 30%) of dives are less than 1m deep. Such shallow dives may have been unintentionally overlooked by previous studies on Gannets, which have used devices which were not capable of detecting dives shallower than 1m.

Our preliminary analysis of the gastric data has shown that Gannets are also feeding regularly without dives being recorded, which indicates that they are taking prey from or near to the surface. This latter behaviour fits in with the observations at sea (Kees Camphuysen, pers.comm) of Gannets scooping sandeels from the surface. Our project will now go on to examine spatial patterns in dives of different depths and in feeding events, and what these tell us about the distribution of sandeels and their availability to Gannets.

Liz Humphreys (bgyemh@leeds.ac.uk), Keith Hamer, Janos Hennicke, Stefan Garthe, Gerrit Peters and Sarah Wanless.

Leeds University, Hamburg University, Kiel University, CNRS Strasbourg and CEH Banchory

JOURNAL REVIEWS & 'BITS' BY MARK TASKER

From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vols 25(4) & 26(1)

Following the record 40 Bermuda Petrels (Cahows) fledged from a record 70 nesting pairs in 2003, Hurricane Fabian hit Bermuda, possibly the strongest for the past 100 years. Luckily the birds were away as waves washed over the main nesting islands and large parts collapsed or were washed away. 10 of the 70 active burrows were damaged beyond repair and 50 of the heavy observation lids were swept away. Volunteers in Bermuda were working hard to recover the lids (38 had been found by divers!) and rebuild the burrows. If the 2004 season goes well, there are plans to translocate some near-fledged chicks to another nearby island in order to expand the geographical base of this critically endangered species.

Good news for Zino's Petrels as a new colony containing 19 burrows (15 occupied) has been discovered on Madeira. Meanwhile, the campaign to ensure that a radar station that was planned for a hill top near the main breeding site has been successful, with the Portuguese government agreeing to move it to a less sensitive location.

A double-page spread in issue 25(4) covers a variety of issues for global seabird conservation (it is good to see BirdLife returning to address seabirds in a coherent fashion, rather than by country). Albatross conservation is very high on the world's priority list for birds, so the news that the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, negotiated under the UN Convention on Migratory Species, is to come into force is excellent. This occurred when South Africa ratified its signature towards the end of 2003. The UK has subsequently

ratified the Agreement and it is likely that the first meeting of Parties will be in November 2004. Of course, the Agreement is only worth more than the paper it is written on when countries start taking action. Luckily, many countries are doing just this already. This issue describes a three-week chase by Australian authorities across the southern oceans in pursuit of an illegal Uruguayan fishing vessel. Pirate vessels are plundering Patagonian Toothfish stocks and at the same time killing significant numbers of seabirds.

In the Falkland Islands, National Plans of Action have been drawn up that address all pressures on the important albatross populations breeding there. Research to find where young Black-browed Albatrosses go in the period after the breeding season has involved spray-painting some 16,500 young with a band of orange dye just prior to fledging. Reports of these birds reveal that many head north to Brazilian waters.

The plight of the albatrosses is also illustrated by the “upgrading” of the threat status of six albatross species due to evidence of severe population declines.

In an innovative approach to gaining public interest in albatrosses, scientists in Tasmania have tagged 18 non-breeding Shy Albatrosses and are following them from there to South African waters. The twist is that this is sponsored by Ladbrokes (the bookmakers) and the public can now bet on the first bird to reach South African waters online at ladbrokes.com. In contrast to most horse races though, this race started in March 2004 and is expected to finish five or six months later!

In New Zealand waters, birdwatchers out on pelagic trips off North Island have re-discovered the New Zealand Storm-petrel. This was only known from three specimens collected in the 19th Century and from sub-fossil remains. It looks similar to the Black-bellied Storm-petrel, hence has been over-looked. The priority now is to find where the species has been breeding for the past 150 years, and ensure that any sites are protected.

In the Northern Hemisphere, surveys of Ivory Gulls in Canada have raised alarms that this species is becoming endangered also. Canadian

populations have plummeted from 5,000 some 20 years ago to 500-700 now. It is feared that similar declines may be occurring in Russia. The cause(s) of the decline are not known, but once again, over-harvesting by Greenlanders may be to blame.

From *BIRDLIFE IN EUROPE*

Windfarms are welcomed by many as an important way of reducing human dependency on fossil fuels, but there remains the difficulty of where to site them. Wind is a stronger and more dependable resource at sea, thus there has been a growth in demand for suitable sites relatively near the coast (lower transmission and servicing costs). Unfortunately, it is just these areas that are used by seaduck, divers, terns and other seabirds. Often knowledge of the precise use of these areas (just out of telescope range from land) is poor – thus making a really good case for or against a precise site difficult to make currently. There have consequently been a series of legal actions (both in Germany and UK) and a considerable amount of “emergency” survey effort.

From *SEEVÖGEL* Vol. 24 (4)

The lack of English summaries in this edition has stretched your reviewer! Ommo Hüppop describes and balances up the pressures on North Sea seabirds and identifies priorities. Gerhard Woisin is concerned about the risk of ship collisions with windfarms, leading to oil spills in the Waddensea (this seems to me certain to happen sometime).

From *WWF ARCTIC BULLETIN* No.s 3.03, 4.03 & 1.04

Further protection is to be given to Svalbard’s seabirds with the creation of new national parks encompassing Hopen Island and its surrounding seas.

This protection contrasts with the ongoing tragedy that is Greenland. Further declines in guillemots in western Greenland mean that the island of Sallegg near Uummannaq that used to have 150,000 breeding birds is now deserted. In the area south of this to Disco Bay, populations have plunged from 500,000 to 10,000 in 60 years. Since the 1930s, 16 breeding colonies in

western Greenland have become extinct and the total breeding population has fallen by 50%. Despite this, the local politicians propose to extend the hunting season well into the breeding season in a number of sensitive areas; and this despite their own biological advisors recommending that all guillemot hunting in Greenland should end on 15 February each year. Common Eiders have declined by 80% over the last 40 years. One wonders why Denmark, as the leading nation in the Commonwealth of Denmark, Greenland and the Faeroe Islands is quite so mute on this issue and is not taking responsibility for meeting its international biodiversity obligations.

A one-page article in issue 3.03 by James Burns describes current work on seabirds on Prince Leopold Island. Those at the Seabird Group conference will have heard a description of this work and some of the possible consequences of global warming from Tony Gaston. The article is illustrated with a picture of some Black-legged Murres (sic!) in the snow.

From *PACIFIC SEABIRDS* Vol 30 (1)

Volume 30 (1) indicates that the rat eradication programme on Anacapa Island off California that was completed in autumn 2001 is already bearing fruit. There has been a considerable increase in nesting activity by Xantus's Murrelets and two successful nesting attempts were documented. Ashy Storm-petrels and Cassin's Auklets have also benefited. The rat extermination project was funded by damages from those responsible for the *American Trader* oil spill in 1990. Animal rights groups sued to prevent the extermination plan and PSG supported the US Department of Justice in defending against the law suit.

In an extension of this concept of spending oil spill funds to remove rats, PSG has supported a plan to use funds from a spill off California to remove rats from islands in New Zealand, the breeding area of the second most abundant bird killed in the oil spill.

Meanwhile, the impact of Norway Rats on Kiska Island in the Aleutians has become better known. This large island (70,000 acres) holds some very large Least and Crested Auklet colonies. One colony alone has 3-6 million

birds. Norway Rats arrived during the Japanese occupation in World War II. Rat removal on an island of this size would break all previous records, but PSG consider that this is essential if the colonies are to be saved, and have written to relevant arms of the US Government to advocate action.

Concern about the interaction of windfarms and seabirds has crossed the Atlantic to the eastern seaboard of the USA, where a number of large-scale developments are being mooted. Meanwhile, on Johnston Atoll in the Pacific (800 miles southwest of Hawaii) the military have completed a clean up of their chemical and explosive arsenal on the island. Some 400,000 chemical munitions, 2,000 tons of chemicals and all secondary waste have been destroyed – and shortly the island will be returned to its early 20th Century state, as an integral part of the Johnston Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, one of the more important seabird breeding sites in the Pacific.

Much of the rest of the issue is occupied with abstracts from the 2003 annual PSG meeting in British Columbia. It is very difficult to select individual abstracts from amongst these – as most are interesting! My eye though was caught by Scott Hatch and Verena Gill's study of Northern Fulmars in the North Pacific that indicates that perhaps the *F.g. rogersii* subspecies should be divided into two, between a mostly dark-phase, small-bodied bird and a larger-bodied, light phase form. In addition, they suggest that the North Atlantic's dark-phase fulmars stem from an introgression of dark-phased birds that originally only occurred in the Pacific.

For those of us who spend much time on bycatch issues, a paper by Howard McElderry and Shannon Fitzgerald on the use of video-based electronic monitoring of long-line hauls, looks promising for reducing costs of observation and for increasing sample sizes. If all of the abstracts in PSG meetings were written up into full sized papers, the gain for seabird science would be immense.

From *PACIFIC SEABIRDS* Vol. 30 (2)

Much of the issue is devoted to reports of the activities of members. This issue starts with an

article on the impact of Slaty-backed Gulls on the vegetation of Shelikan Island in the Sea of Okhotsk. Needless to say, plant diversity decreased and sensitive species were lost.

Conservation news in this issue includes more on the interaction with fisheries. A new squid fishery near the Fallaron Islands has raised concerns about the effects on seabirds, both through interference with seabird prey coming to the surface by night (the fishery uses many lights) and through increasing the possibilities of seabird predation. Elsewhere off California, the power of lights on squid boats is limited by law and there are limits as to how close to land such fishing is allowed. Long-lining continues to catch albatrosses (and other endangered species) off California, and a court has now ordered that this impact be assessed and taken into account when any fishery is considered for licensing. Off Alaska, bycatch limits are set for Short-tailed Albatrosses and there are requirements to follow regulations to avoid bycatch in the first place.

A workshop in March 2003 considered how Least and Crested Auklets might be best monitored in Alaska. The monitoring of these abundant species is difficult because they nest in large colonies and mostly in inaccessible crevices. Techniques considered included surface counts, mark-resighting, lichen cover and remote sensing. Lichens are a good indicator of occupancy, but the precision of this technique is unknown. A colony atlas may be developed.

From *FALKLANDS CONSERVATION NEWSLETTERS*

The long-lining plan of action for seabirds in the Falklands was released for public comment in May 2003. This was part of the development of an overall National Plan of Action for Seabirds – which when complete will be one of the first in the World. The June 2003 newsletter reports on the removal of cats from Ascension – coupled with a return to the mainland of three species of seabirds. This issue also includes the welcome news that the Taiwanese government is establishing an observer scheme for seabird bycatch in its long-lining fleet.

The August 2003 edition of the newsletter summarised the 2002-03 seabird monitoring season. This season was an odd one for penguins, with the onset of breeding by Gentoos delayed by up to six weeks and fewer birds deciding to breed, coupled with the second lowest breeding success on record. Other penguin species suffered similar fortunes. Food appears to be the problem, with meal sizes being below average. There are strange similarities between these problems and those in the current (2004) breeding season in Shetland!

The September 2003 issue describes a rat eradication attempt on North East Island. This is the first island that Falklands Conservation has attempted to clear itself, and needed five days of bait-laying to cover 305 hectares using a team of seven. Two tonnes of bait was helpfully delivered by a military Chinook helicopter. It is too early to be sure of success.

The December 2003 issue details dramatic declines in Black-browed Albatrosses on Steeple Jason Island. This holds a huge colony (some 2.5 miles long) but transects across the island showed massive drops in the density of nesting birds, equating to a 28% drop in albatrosses and a 66% drop in penguin numbers. The drop in penguin numbers coincided with many dead birds being found around the islands. Analysis of these birds has shown that paralytic shellfish poisoning appears to have been responsible.

From *SEA SWALLOW* Vol. 52

This issue has the annual summary of seabird sightings sent in by members. An article on birds observed during a brief visit to Diego Garcia notes that rats are very common but also that a rat poisoning and cat eradication programme is under way. Beau Rowlands has two articles on sightings in the Atlantic from ships en route to St Helena and Ascension Island.

From *WATERBIRDS* Vol. 27 (1)

As ever, it is difficult to review all relevant papers in this journal, so I will pick out a few points of interest that I noted. Paul Flint and co-authors studied moulting Long-tailed Duck off northern Alaska and found variable site fidelity. Site choice seemed to be governed mostly by the

degree of shelter from waves. No effect of a nearby seismic survey was found (good to see a negative result being published). Robert Day and Debora Nigro find that Kittlitz's Murrelets are exhibiting reproductive problems in Prince William Sound. Few young were observed in three summers of work, and some Kittlitz's-Marbled Murrelet pairs were observed. A decline in Capelin abundance off eastern Canada and its effect on puffin reproduction was studied by Shauna Baillie and Ian Jones. Puffins were believed to be dependent on Capelin, but sufficient alternate prey was found that the only parameter affected was chick growth rate.

From WATERBIRDS Vol. 27 (2)

Michelle Rome and Julie Ellis found that Great Black-backed Gulls are more aggressive than Herring Gulls and are displacing them from territories in north-eastern USA, possibly adding to the reasons for Herring Gull declines in this area. Julia Ambagis compares census and monitoring techniques for Leach's Petrels. As has been found in Europe (but unreferenced here), tape playback techniques worked well and were least invasive.

**'SEABIRD POPULATIONS OF
BRITAIN AND IRELAND'
ORIGINAL ARTWORK FOR
SALE**

Some of the artwork used in this new book on the results of the SEABIRD 2000 census (see Conference report on page 1) is still available to purchase from the artist.

The illustrations available include:-

Front Cover: £395 (+ P&P) (see page1).

Species Vignettes: £30 each (+ P&P). Some have been sold but remaining for sale are: Manx Shearwater, Leach's Petrel, Gannet, Razorbill, Puffin, Black Guillemot, Guillemot, Roseate Tern, Arctic Tern, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern, Kittiwake, Mediterranean Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Arctic Skua, Shag and Cormorant.



If interested in any of the above, or for further information, please contact:

Ian Rendall
Tele: 01227 277743
E-mail: ian@hirundine.fsnet.co.uk

Many thanks!



SECOND INTERNATIONAL MANX SHEARWATER WORKSHOP

Studies on the Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* and related petrel species

The *Second International Manx Shearwater Workshop*, organised by Copeland Bird Observatory, will take place in Belfast, Northern Ireland on 2nd - 4th August 2005. This workshop follows on from the highly successful Manx Shearwater Workshop that took place in Madeira in 2000. The workshop will cover two main groups of petrels:

1. The Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* and the related small-to-medium sized shearwaters of the genus *Puffinus*.
2. Other breeding petrel species of the North Atlantic region, which have a similar breeding range and ecology to the Manx Shearwater.

A full list of species can be found on our website. Although the focus will be on the Manx Shearwater and related *Puffinus* species, by widening the scope of the workshop slightly we hope to attract workers from a broader range of studies.

There will be four main topics covered by the workshop:

1. Populations and censusing – current population trends, surveys and census methods;
2. Activity at the colony – breeding behaviour and population ecology;
3. Activity away from the colony – at-sea distribution and censusing;
4. Conservation – threats to breeding colonies and conservation measures.

Should you wish to attend, or present a paper or poster, please contact us as soon as possible to register your interest. If you know anyone that may be interested in attending this workshop please ask them to contact us. All the details can be found at our website, www.cbo.org.uk.

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STOP PRESS! DISASTROUS 2004 BREEDING SEASON?

Many of you will be directly aware of, or have seen press coverage regarding, the very poor seabird breeding season in some areas of Britain and Ireland in 2004 (see, for example, *Science* Vol.305, 20 August 2004, p.1090 “Reproductive failure threatens bird colonies on North Sea coast”; BBC News website, 12 July 2004, “Climate warming from the deep” and so on).

Deryk Shaw, Warden of Fair Isle Bird Observatory, reported in early July that Guillemot attendance at the colony was the lowest on record, the first egg was not recorded until 15 May and the first chick not until 19 June (when the first young would normally be fledging). On their monitoring plots, 42% of pairs hatched an egg but half of the chicks had disappeared by 1 July and a further 50% by 5 July. Although the majority (82%) of Razorbills on monitoring plots hatched eggs, less than half the chicks were still alive by early July and none was expected to fledge. Kittiwakes started nest-building more than two weeks late, breeding numbers were only 20% of those in 1997 and by early July only 10% were still attending nests and just a single chick was seen. Kittiwake productivity was expected to be zero for the second year in a row, with Arctic Skua and Bonxie productivity also expected to be nil in 2004. On Fair Isle Puffins might have been fairing slightly better but 30% of burrows known to be occupied (with eggs) in late May were empty in early July. Shag appeared to be doing not too badly and many appeared that they *would* fledge. Also in early July, Martin Heubeck reported that the situation was not just restricted to Fair Isle, with Guillemot colonies deserted (eg. Compass Head, where in a good year 700-900 young would get ringed). At Sumburgh Head, to the south, some chicks were surviving at that stage but with a potential for success of only 0.15 per pair at that stage. Terns and skuas has basically failed completely.

We will have a full round-up of the 2004 breeding season in the October *Newsletter*.

Ed.

NEXT (39th) SEABIRD GROUP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The thirty-ninth Annual General Meeting of the Seabird Group will be held at 15:00 hours on Saturday 20th November, 2004 at The Duke of Gordon's Hotel in Kingussie.

AGENDA

1. *Minutes of the 38th Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 22nd November, 2003 at The Duke of Gordon's Hotel in Kingussie.*
2. Matters arising from 38th AGM.
3. The 39th Annual Report.
4. Accounts and Treasurer's Report.
5. Election of officers. Bob Swann (Secretary) and Alan Leitch, having completed their respective terms of office, are due to retire. Any nominations for these posts from the Membership are welcome and should be submitted to the Chairman, prior to the AGM.
6. Any other business.

Bob Swann, Honorary Secretary

Please note that the decision was taken to hold the AGM in Scotland again this year because many of the Executive Committee and our Members find it easy to meet at the Scottish Ringers' Conference in Kingussie. We always have a larger turnout for the AGM here than if we hold it further south (where we have struggled to get sufficient numbers in recent years). We did not receive much feedback from Members concerning their preferred location for this meeting, following our request for this in previous Newsletters. If you have strong views on this matter (*ie.* you would like to attend the AGM but are unable to do so if it is held in Scotland), please contact the Secretary, as we will use all such correspondence to make decisions on the venue for future years. Many thanks. **Ed.**

EDITORIAL

I must first and foremost apologise for the very late mailing of this Newsletter. I am afraid that I have become increasingly busy with my day job, and this plus some personal matters, meant that my editorial duties and deadlines unfortunately slipped. With the help of the others on the Executive Committee, to whom I am very grateful for much input to this Newsletter, I hope that we will get the publication schedule back on track. The next Newsletter (planned for late October) will contain, among other things, a comprehensive summary of the events of the 2004 breeding season around Britain and Ireland (see page 14).

You will note from page 16 that, due to the great success of our 8th International Conference in Aberdeen in the spring, the decision has been taken to hold the next at the same venue in just two years time (September 2006). More news on the theme of this next conference will follow soon after the New Year. For now, please book the dates in your diaries, as I know how booked up these can get these days (unfortunately even as far ahead as 2006!).

Finally, I would like to make an apology to those contributors at the 8th Conference in Aberdeen to which our article on pages 1-5 hasn't done justice because none of us managed to attend the appropriate sessions (sessions 4, 6 & 7). I had volunteered to report on the whole event but was unfortunately taken ill on Saturday afternoon and had to go home. Once again, I am very grateful to all my fellow Committee members for providing notes on which we were able to base the report in this Newsletter. If your talk isn't mentioned in detail in the report, it doesn't mean it wasn't good!!

Ed.



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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 2004 membership rates are:-

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

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Membership Secretary
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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

Mark Tasker (**2007**)
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Secretary

Bob Swann (**2004**)
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John Davies (**2005**)
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Jim Reid (**2005**)
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Chris Wernham (**2006**)
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2004 Conference Organiser

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

Other Members:

Jez Blackburn (**2007**)
Alan Leitch (**2004**)
Linda Wilson (**2006**)

NEXT (9th) SEABIRD GROUP INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 1-3 September, 2006

After the success of the Aberdeen conference this spring, a decision was taken to hold the next conference at the same venue in 2006. So please book the 1-3 September 2006 in your diaries. More details to follow soon

SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS

The next deadline is 31 October 2004 but please submit proposals as soon 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