

Shiant Isles report on Seabird Group grant 2023

The Shiant Isles are situated in The Minch off the west coast of Scotland. The islands hold more than 150,000 breeding seabirds (RSPB, SNH 2015) with nearly all species bar terns present.

The Shiant Isles Ringing Group has been monitoring the archipelago's seabirds since the early 1970s, and on this year's two-week visit we were anxious to find out what the impacts of HPAI had been on its seabirds. We have a small boat with us to reach the main islands in suitable conditions, but not the more exposed colonies and the 'sharks teeth' outliers Galta Mor & Galta Beag where a substantial number of our seabirds breed.

Support from the Seabird Group enabled us to extend our boat charter and reach these other parts to do additional colony counts and check the entire group close inshore for signs of HPAI.

The Galtas were counted for Kittiwake & Great Skua (see results in Tables 1 & 2). Due to the weather, timing and nature of the Galtas it was only feasible to count Great Skua and Kittiwake, and against national trend the Kittiwakes would appear to be doing okay?

| | 1986 | 1999 | 2015 | 2023 |
|------------|------|------|------|------|
| Galta Beag | 45 | 106 | 136 | 193 |
| Galta Mor | 77 | 36 | 40 | 67 |

In addition, Sophie Bennett (RSPB), was with us and spent some of her time doing full Great Skua breeding surveys on the three main islands (Eilean an Tighe, Eilean Mhuire, Garbh Eilean). She found 12 Great Skua AOTs compared to the RSPB's 39 in 2015 (see Table 2). A decline of 69%. However, no dead birds were found, and we did some pullus that looked healthy enough. Also, there were non-breeders and or failed breeders present with c10 on Garbh Eilean.

| | 1986 | 1999 | 2015 | 2023 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|
| Eilean an Tighe | 1 | 1* | 5 | 3 |
| Eilean Mhuire | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Garbh Eilean | 3 | 24 | 30 | 6 |
| Galta Beag | - | - | 0 | 0 |

Shiant Isles report on Seabird Group grant 2023

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|----|----|----|
| Galta Mor | - | - | 1 | 0 |
| Shiant Isles | 5 | 27 | 39 | 12 |

*1995

Our inshore checks revealed very few dead seabirds and across the fortnight we only had one dead shag and a few auks. There were fewer corpses than usual than usual and this suggests the auks were being preyed on less by the Great Skuas.

Jim Lennon
Shiants Auk Ringing Group
28 September 2023

Acknowledgements

Of course none of this would have been possible without the crew of the Enchanted Isle (SeaHarris). Linda Wilson & Sophie Bennett, RSPB. The Shiants Auk Ringing Group members 2023. The counters – principally Sophie Bennett & Noelia Dominguez Álvarez. Historic data via the Seabird Monitoring Programme.



The Galtas viewed from Eilean an Tighe, Shiant Isles.
©Jim Lennon