

Caithness Bird Group gratefully received an emergency HPAI Seabird Monitoring Grant from the Seabird Group grant to survey the island of Stroma off Caithness. Stroma was surveyed for the recent Seabird Count national census, so there was a baseline for HPAI comparisons. The main aim was to survey the skuas, gulls and terns, but we also counted all other seabird species as we went along. In June, the team crossed the Pentland Firth by boat to Stroma, one of the fastest tidal races in the World.

The data from this trip will be submitted to the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) database to help understand the impact of HPAI on seabird locally and nationally. Reassuringly the numbers of Great Skuas were similar to that recorded in 2017.

Highlights from the trip included a Black-headed Gull nest, where none were recorded during Seabirds Count.

Interestingly, the team also found a Cormorant nest, which appears to be the first pair to nest on the island. With a previous Seabird Group Grant, the Caithness Bird Group were able to confirm the first breeding of European Storm Petrels on Stroma, and although not possible to fully survey them during this trip, they were heard calling from a burrow again during this trip.

Despite the high numbers of dead birds that were found on the Caithness beaches during the HPAI outbreak, it looks like Stroma itself has not been badly affected by HPAI and we hope this continues. Caithness Bird Group are very grateful to Willie Simpson for taking us across to Stroma and allowing us to land on his island.