the Seabird Group

# NEWSLETTER 148

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Contents



## News

### Breeding Storm Petrels on the Isle of May

**Ella-Sophia Benninghaus, Sam Langlois Lopez, Carrie M. Gunn, Marine Quintin, Rebekah Outram, David Steel, Harry Urquart, Margaret Thorne, David Thorne & Mark A. Newell**

The Isle of May, Firth of Forth, is home to thousands of breeding seabirds. The **European Storm Petrel** (*Hydrobates pelagicus*), however, was not thought to be one of these species. Although ringers visiting the Isle of May Bird Observatory have caught Storm Petrels for many years, these were thought to be prospecting non-breeders or migrating individuals. Nonetheless, there have always been suspicions based on a handful of historic records that there may be some breeding pairs on the island, despite no known breeding sites along the east coast of the UK south of Orkney.

A serendipitous midnight wander in July 2019 located several birds in a display flight over a small knoll on the island. This prompted a ringing session in late July 2019, in which we caught 19 Storm Petrels in an hour without using a tape lure – a method that is usually used to attract Storm Petrels away from breeding colonies. Subsequently, systematic surveys were first discussed for 2020. Storm Petrels are commonly surveyed by doing repeated playbacks of their call at possible breeding sites and waiting for a response. Response rates are typically quite low; thus, surveys need to be carried out over several days. As none of us had a lot of experience surveying for Storm Petrels, we sought advice from the wider seabird community. We received a lot of help and advice and are very grateful to everyone who provided input.

Part of the team during a Storm Petrel survey on the Isle of May in 2020. From left to right; Rebekah Outram, Carrie Gunn, David Steel, Mark Newell. Photo by Francis Daunt.

Following a handful of unsuccessful surveys in 2020 over a large area, we decided to concentrate our efforts on a smaller area in July 2021. The area was chosen based on observations of displaying and calling Storm Petrels in early summer (May/June). Four or five of us carried out playback surveys, playing 20 seconds of the Storm Petrel call towards any suitable ground, potential

burrows, and crevices in a stone wall. Despite choosing a small area, the survey took about two hours to complete. Our first day of surveying yielded no positive results. Similarly, we were not able to hear any responses on our second survey day. However, as one of the surveyors was lying down in the sea campion while playing the call, they picked up the lovely scent of Storm Petrel. The rest of the team quickly gathered, and everyone was also able to pick up the distinct scent of petrel. We marked the burrow and on our third day managed to get a response to the playback. The call was incredibly quiet and not audible unless one was lying on the ground with one's head in the burrow entrance. It was a very characteristic hiccup-like noise, leaving no doubt it belonged to a Storm Petrel. Using an endoscope, we were able to confirm that the pair was sitting on an egg. The difficulty of hearing the bird at this burrow, led us to conclude it was easy to miss other active burrows compounded by the cacophony of other seabird calls in the area.

Using thermal imaging cameras, we were able to identify another two active burrows. These were confirmed by doing watches at night, marking where birds had landed and doing endoscope surveys the next day. This led to the discovery of the first Isle of May Storm Petrel chick.

We are extremely pleased to have finally confirmed the presence of breeding Storm Petrels on the Isle of May, adding to the many treasures this island already holds. Hopefully this is just the beginning of more interesting things to come with attempts to establish the size of the colony.

## On Passage: Volunteer Seabirds at Sea

**Danni Thompson, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)**

Seabirds are generally well monitored at breeding colonies, but as they spend most of their lives at sea, it is vital that we monitor them in this environment too. However, at sea surveys can be expensive and logistically challenging and, as a result, they have often been opportunistic with very little, if any, regular monitoring taking place.

VSAS training. Photo: Danni Thompson.

European Seabirds at Sea (ESAS) is a partnership between 10 European countries who all contribute standardised at sea survey data to the ESAS database and, with over three million seabird and cetacean records, it is one of the largest databases of seabird observations in the world.

JNCC has developed an ESAS methods training programme for volunteers, which is coupled with a mentoring scheme that allows surveyors to develop their skills while on survey by working with more experienced mentors. Volunteer Seabirds at Sea (VSAS) surveys are carried out on CalMac passenger ferries on the west coast of Scotland. This means that surveys can also be used to raise awareness of the marine environment among both visitors and locals using the routes. So far, VSAS has trained 60 volunteer mentors and surveyors. In 2019, JNCC ran a total of 13 surveys on three routes, comprising 25 crossings, covering approximately 2,080 km, and 78 hours of surveyor time. During the surveys, 25 species of seabird were recorded along with good numbers of cetaceans and many other interesting bird species.

As standardised ESAS methods are used, high quality data collected by VSAS volunteers can be added to the ESAS database. This not only improves the spatial and temporal coverage of the dataset but will, in future, allow comparisons both within and between years to be made. The nature of boat-based surveys means that, unlike colony-based surveys, data on immature and non-breeding seabirds can also be obtained, as well as behavioural information.

Hundreds of birds can be seen on each survey, so good data management is vital. JNCC have developed a tablet-based app that allows electronic capture of data while on survey, and automatic validation scripts to check and clean the raw data. These ensure that these open-access data can quickly be made available to stakeholders for use in applications such as population monitoring, marine management, and academic research.

After a break due to the pandemic, we're excited to be starting volunteer surveys again this autumn, with routes in the Southern Hebrides and Firth of Clyde. To increase our pool of volunteer surveyors, we're also planning to hold training courses next spring at both surveyor and mentor levels.

If you'd like to learn more about the project, or are interested in joining one of our training courses next spring, please email danni.thompson@jncc.gov.uk

## Indian Ocean Seabird Group: a new platform to enable active networking between seabird researchers and enthusiasts in India

**Sabiya Sheikh, Co-founder of the Indian Seabird Group**

The Indian Seabird Group is a recently formed group with the aim to connect seabird researchers and enthusiasts in India and promote collaboration with their global peers. It's led by volunteers comprising of students and Early Career Researchers with prior experience of working on seabirds.

The broad goals of the Indian Seabird Group are to:

- **Promote seabird research and conservation** in India and the countries bordering the northern Indian Ocean region (Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea).
- **Facilitate knowledge exchange** between researchers, enthusiasts, citizens, and decision makers.
- Generate opportunities for **career development** and **interdisciplinary collaborations** among seabird researchers based in India and abroad.
- **Create awareness** among the general public on seabirds, threats to their populations, habitats and their conservation requirements.
- **Build collaborations** with agencies involved in seabird research, conservation, education, and outreach in India as well as across the globe.
- **Inspire future generations** of seabird researchers and enthusiasts to undertake long-term research on seabirds by providing access to resources and opportunities.

Photo by Naveen Kumar.

We are currently working on building a database of all the seabirds that occur on the Indian sub-continent. We have also recently started a new initiative called 'Sundays for Seabirds' for which, we post a photo, audio and information about Indian seabirds on our social media handles to raise awareness about Indian seabirds. If you would like to get involved with the group, you can visit our website and sign up to our mailing list or drop us an email at indianseabirdgroup@gmail.com.

Twitter: @IndianSeabird

Facebook group

Instagram: @indian_seabird_group

## 7th World Seabird Twitter Conference (#WSTC7) prize winners

**Ravichandra Mondreti, on behalf of the #WSTC7 organising committee**

The **7th World Seabird Twitter Conference #WSTC7** organisers are delighted to announce the conference prize winners. The committee and selected sponsors made the difficult decision of choosing the best among a range of wonderful presentations. Luckily, thanks to our generous sponsors, this year both prize categories and prizes were increased to eight and 12, respectively.

The Early Career Researchers' science communication prize sponsored by **The Seabird Group** was awarded to **Hannah Greetham** (**@MaltaSeabirds**) for her remarkable conservation work on breeding **Yelkouan Shearwaters** (*Puffinus yelkouan*) in the Maltese Islands as part of the five-year project "LIFE Arċipelagu Garnija". Hannah and co-staff joined hands with local stakeholders to carry out a series of conservation actions such as rat control, and reduction of light pollution. They were able to see through the project's success by observing a steady increase in the number of breeding Yelkouan Shearwaters.


The **Pacific Seabird Group's** North Pacific prize was awarded to **Giulia Bambini** (**@GiuBambi**), a PhD student at the Autonomous University of Baja California Sur, for her excellent presentation on the effect of environmental variability on **Black-vented Shearwaters** (*Puffinus opisthomelas*) in Mexico. Giulia showed how changes in body condition and length of flight feathers differed between sexes under variable environments, indicating that females were more sensitive than males, probably due to the former's direct involvement in egg production.

**World Seabird Union's** science communication prize winner was **Emily Runnells** (**@E_Runnells**), a PhD student at the Davoren Lab in the University of Manitoba, Canada. Using excellent graphics, Emily presented on the spatial overlap of three Atlantic alcid species in Newfoundland during the non-breeding period. She intends to carry out diet assessments using stable isotopes in the next phase of her study.

The best student presentation prizes sponsored by the **American Bird Conservancy** were awarded to Olivia Smith, Lauren Lescure and Luke Halpin. **Olivia Smith** (**@livia_smith_**), a marine biology undergraduate student at the University of New Hampshire, U.S.A., studied diet shifts in the **Common Tern** (*Sterna hirundo*) due to climate change. Olivia, along with her team, monitored the diet and survival of chicks feeding on the Atlantic Butterfish (*Peprilus triacanthus)* finding that difficulty in swallowing the relatively large fish led to increased mortality.

**Lauren Lescure** (**@Scure167**) who with her superb sketches looked at the changes in foraging effort and body condition of chick-rearing **Razorbills** (*Alca torda*) along with changes in their prey availability. Lauren is a Masters student at the University of Manitoba, Canada. A major outcome of the study was to highlight the long-term consequences on seabird populations due to high prey variability.

**Luke Halpin** (**@SeabirdResearch**) from Monash University, Australia, presented his tweets through cartoons about the dietary habits of the Phillip Island Centipede (*Cormocephalus coynei*). His team used a combination of stable isotopes and in situ observations to study the seabird predation by centipedes and observed centipedes to be a significant cause of death in **Black-winged Petrel** (*Pterodroma nigripennis*) nestlings.

The best South American presentation prizes sponsored by **Aves Argentinas** were won by Javier Ciancio, Johannes Fischer, and Marianela Beltrán. **Javier Ciancio** (**@JavierCiancio**) from the Centro para el Estudio de Sistemas Marinos (CESIMAR), Argentina, presented a captivating study on the bioenergetics of **Magnellanic Penguin** (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) nestlings. Javier's team was curious to know the differences in parental costs while rearing female and male nestlings, and hence built a bioenergetics model. Interestingly, Javier's results indicated no significant extra costs to bring up a male nestling, concluding that most energy spent by the parents was on other activities such as commuting to the foraging areas, diving and thermoregulation.

**Johannes Fischer** (**@flying_force**) who represents Victoria University of Wellington from New Zealand presented a prediction model on the translocation success and harvest impact of a small seabird population under different translocation scenarios using the **Whenua Hou Diving-petrel** (*Pelecanoides whenuahouensis*) as their model species. Johannes and his team recommended the translocation of small seabird populations, only if uncertainty is duly considered.

**Marianela Beltrán** (**@NelitaBeltran**) from Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia San Juan Bosco, Argentina, presented her excellent biomonitoring work to assess the extent of genomic damage by pollutants in **Antarctic Shag** (*Leucocarbo bransfieldensis*)

using blood samples. The results showed confirmed genomic damage in shags from all localities. However, the damage was much higher in the **South Georgia Shag** (*Leucocarbo georgianus*) population in South Orkney.

*#DigSesh* prize sponsored by **Penguin Watch** was won by **Ellie Bowler** (**@EllieBowler32**) for her compelling study on detecting canopy nesting **Abbott's Boobies** (*Papasula abbotti*) in drone imagery through deep learning techniques. Ellie and her team employed a unique deep learning approach called "Faster-RCNN" to automatically spot nests from the 2D drone images.

Science art prize winner sponsored by **Ella Benninghaus** was awarded to **Ilana Nimz** (**@puffinimz**) of Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge for her enchanting, animated presentation on "The Fallout Season". She chose **Wedge-tailed Shearwaters** (*Ardenna Pacifica*) as the model species to inform and educate the public about seabird fallout; and how to rescue seabirds when they are grounded. She explained that her video will be applicable to anywhere on the globe where seabirds are susceptible to fallout.

**TechnoSmart Europe** awarded **Fransisca Noni Tirtaningtyas** (**@noneeguritno**) of the Indonesia Bird Banding Scheme with the TechnosmartEu prize for her outstanding presentation on the "satellite telemetry of **Greater Crested Terns** (*Thalasseus bergii*) wintering in tropical Austral-Asia". Fransisca and her team captured terns and fitted them with satellite tags, using this species as a surrogate to identify the migration routes of the endangered **Chinese Crested Tern** (*Thalasseus bernsteini*). Through their study they were able to pinpoint Maluku in Eastern Indonesia as an important wintering ground for seabirds breeding in the northern and southern hemispheres. We hope the award will facilitate future work on this critically endangered seabird species.


Congratulations to the winners and thanks to our incredible sponsors for extending their warm support and generosity in making #WSTC7, one of the most successful online conferences in 2021. The #WSTC7 organisers did a commendable effort in putting together the tweets of winning presentations here.

## Breeding Season Reports

### Calf of Man

**Aron Sapsford and Rob Fisher, Manx Wildlife Trust and Manx National Heritage**

Colony counts or population estimates are undertaken on the Calf of Man in most years, using a combination of both land-based observations and boat counts, although complete counts of **Northern Fulmar** (*Fulmarus glacialis*), **European Shag** (*Gulosus aristotelis*), and auks are not possible from land only, so the use of local charter boats is necessary. Little or no information on productivity rates is collected owing to the inability to view many of the seabird colonies from land, as well as a lack of fieldworkers to undertake such intensive and time-consuming studies.

**Fulmar:** Population counts of Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS) are undertaken in most years. The 2021 count of 106 AOS compares favourably with the average of 86 AOS between 2011 – 2020.

**Manx Shearwater** (*Puffinus puffinus*): Following the recolonisation of the Calf by Manx Shearwaters in 2000, the Manx Shearwater Recovery Project was initiated in 2012 resulting in the successful control of Brown Rats *Rattus norvegicus*, which has allowed numbers of breeding shearwaters to increase significantly in the last decade. During both 2019 and 2020 it was estimated that between 600 – 700 Apparently Occupied Burrows (AOB) were active within seven distinct colony locations. During 2021 an eighth colony was discovered and continued burrow occupancy monitoring of the largest colony, South Harbour, would suggest that numbers of breeding pairs is continuing to rise.

**European Storm Petrel**: Not yet proven to breed. Small numbers of birds are recorded regularly at night, attracted to tape-lure, between May – August each year. Circumstantial evidence suggesting potential breeding has been collected in previous years and the species would benefit from dedicated fieldwork aimed at establishing the true status.

**Shag**: A count of 102 Apparently Occupied Nests (AON) was achieved, although access to three colonies on the north-west coast was limited and it is likely that nesting attempts were missed. This represents a 22 AON increase on estimated populations in 2019 and 2020, but mirrors more complete counts of 100 AON in 2018 and 107 AON in 2017. Numbers of Shag breeding on the Calf


Photo by Rob Fisher.

have declined by over two-thirds since the peak of 413 AON in 1979. A colour-ringing project aimed at investigating fledging success and juvenile survival was initiated in 2021 with 50 pullus being marked.

**Herring Gull** (*Larus argentatus*): A complete island count resulted in 702 AON, a 34% increase on 463 AON counted in 2019 and the highest number of AON since 773 in 2000. Productivity was lower than 2019 but thought to be greater than most recent years, with 0.45 – 0.67 young ringed per AON at two main colonies.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** (*Larus fuscus*): 25 AON were counted, a decrease of 10 AON from the complete island-count in 2019 and the lowest number of AON since 2006. Although birds were on territory from March, breeding attempts appeared to be delayed with most pairs not laying-up until well into May and other pairs apparently not attempting to breed.

**Great Black-backed Gull** (*Larus marinus*): A total of 44 AON were counted on the Calf, with an additional 11 AON on Kitterland. This compares to 54 AON in the complete island-count in 2019 and is 20% up on the average count of 46 AON between 2011 – 2020. Breeding numbers on the Calf would appear to have stabilised and have recovered from a low of 23 AON in 2017, whilst numbers of AON on Kitterland continue to decrease, with the 2021 total being 84% below the peak count of 70 AON in 1982.

**Common Guillemot** (*Uria aalge*): Restricted to just two breeding sites on the north-east tip of the Calf, the population was estimated at 202 individuals in 2021, which compares favourably with an average of 168 individuals during the period 2011 – 2020.

**Razorbill** (*Alca torda*): Counts of individual birds ashore provide an estimate of 178 individuals in 2021, which compares to 177 individuals during the period 2011 – 2020.

**Atlantic Puffin** (*Fratercula arctica*): Following an absence of 26 years as a breeding species, several sightings of individuals on land, including one bird carrying nesting material, were made during early June along the east coast of the Calf. Up to 13 adult birds were recorded around the Calf, including birds present near a second site, on the West coast, and at least one other pair present off the north-east coast, which were thought to be breeding on the nearby Spanish Head.

A project to encourage Puffins to return to the Calf has been running since 2016, with porcelain decoy birds sited at three locations, as well as a sound system playing calls at the main site on the East coast.

**Black Guillemot** (*Cepphus grylle*): Up to seven adult birds were seen at two different locations during 2021, with three young seen at one of the sites during early July. Although probable breeding has been suspected since the late 1970's, this is the first occasion that definite breeding evidence has been gained.

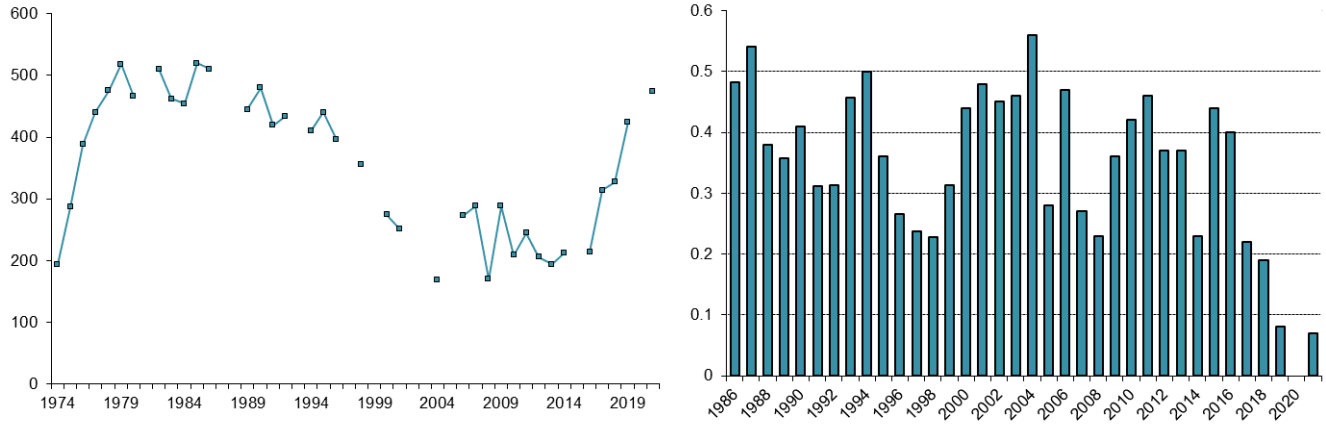
**Great Skua** (*Stercorarius skua*): At least two birds summered; one is thought to have been returning each summer since 2017 and the second bird since 2020. Up to four birds were present on several dates in July, although no evidence of breeding has been found yet.

## Canna

**Bob Swann, Canna Ringing Team**

2021 marked the 52nd season of our seabird monitoring programme on Canna, though unfortunately the run of consecutive visits was broken, as due to COVID-19 restrictions we could not visit the island in 2020.

Although many seabird species on Canna remain at low levels when compared to the peak counts of the 1980s there were some notable increases in numbers in 2021. A count of 2,900 **Puffin** was the highest ever recorded and represents a 150% increase in numbers since the rat eradication in winter 2005-2006. **Great Skua**, which first bred on Canna in 2001, also reached a new record count with 15 territorial pairs. **Black-legged Kittiwakes** (*Rissa tridactyla*) remain at the record high numbers reported in 2019. **Shags** remain at levels not seen since 2004 and **Razorbills** increased to levels not seen since 1990. **Herring Gull** and **Guillemot** numbers remain fairly stable. Only **Fulmar** showed a major decline in numbers reaching a new record low of 75 AOS, down from the 127 reported in 2019 and well below the 600+ recorded in the early 1990s.




Right: Razorbill numbers (individuals) on Canna, 1974 – 2021. Left: Fulmar breeding success on Canna, 1986 – 2021.

Several species had a good breeding season with productivity being above the long-term average. Kittiwake breeding success was 1.0 young/AON (long-term average 0.7), **Great Black-backed Gull** was 1.5 young/AON (average 0.9), Herring Gull was 1.4 young/AON (average 0.9), Great Skua was 1.0 young per Apparently Occupied Territory (AOT, average 0.8) and Shag was 1.9 young/AON (average 1.4). Of the monitored species only Fulmar had well below average productivity with only 0.1 young fledged per AOS, well below the long-term average of 0.4. This is the fifth year running that this species has recorded below average success. Part of this appears to be due to high levels of predation of chicks at nest sites probably by avian predators. Guillemots, which had a late season also suffered high levels of predation apparently from gulls and Ravens (*Corvus corax*), which reduced the overall numbers of chicks produced. The mean weights of adult Guillemots at 856 g (n = 53) was significantly lower than the 2013-19 sample, which had a mean weight of 887 g. This suggests that adult birds were in poorer condition in summer 2021, compared to recent years. Only seven Guillemot chicks with a wing length greater than 60 mm were available for weighing in early July. Their mean weight of 265.4 g was not significantly different from the long term 1981-2018 median weight of 266 g. However, 20 late chicks with a wing length greater than 60 mm weighed in late July were significantly lighter with a mean of only 219.1 g. Fish samples collected from Guillemots were dominated by sandeels (Ammodytidae, 69%), followed by Sprats (*Sprattus sprattus*, 19%) and gadoids. Since 2019 there has been a significant reduction in Sprat numbers.

## Fair Isle

**Alex Penn, Assistant Warden, Fair Isle Bird Observatory**

2021 was a mixed season for Fair Isle's seabirds. The extended cold spring set many species back, with **Arctic Terns** (*Sterna paradisaea*) and **Arctic Skuas** (*Sterocorarius parasiticus*) particularly late to return this year, but most species managed reasonable breeding success after a late start. A notable exception to this was with our Great Skuas, which suffered a major die-off of adults, with avian influenza taking a heavy toll as it swept through the colonies, resulting in very poor productivity this year.

The improved national situation regarding COVID-19 allowed the seasonal team to return on-time, with easier travel to the isle also meaning that cliff access systems could be properly inspected, and extra hands could arrive to help with the peak of the seabird monitoring. This allowed monitoring to be done that was unable to be completed in 2020, as well as whole-island counts for many species that had not been completed for several years, resulting in a very productive season of data collection.

Population counts for most species were similar to 2020, with **Great Skuas** showing the largest increase to 535 AONs, a record count for the isle. After signs of growth in 2020, **Kittiwake** numbers reduced to 35 AONs in the monitoring plots. A whole-island count for this species of just 448 AONs made for grim reading, a further drop since the last count of 859 in 2015. The peak isle count of 19,340 AONs in 1988 seems unimaginable now. The rapid increase in **Fulmar** numbers seems to have now levelled off, with a whole-island count of 32,491 AONs just a slight increase on the previous count of 32,061 in 2016. A first whole-island count of **Black Guillemot** since 1999 also showed the population to be stable, with 285 adults counted around the coast. Arctic Skuas dropped to just 20 AONs this year, with adults reappearing later than usual and taking a long time to settle to breed.

Productivity in most species showed decreases this year but remained generally reasonable. Arctic Skuas fared well despite their low numbers, producing 10 fledged chicks (0.5 per AON). Despite this being a decrease from 2020, when recent years have had just one or two chicks fledging, double figures of fledged chicks is excellent to see. Kittiwake productivity in the monitoring plots

also fell since 2020 but remained fairly successful at 0.51 chicks per AON. Fulmar and **Guillemot** had increases in productivity on 2020, most significantly in Guillemot, rising to 0.51 chicks fledged per Apparently Incubating Adults (AIA) from just 0.26 in 2020.

Top: Skootie (Arctic Skua) chick at the airstrip. Bottom: GLS-tagged Puffin at Buness. Photos: Alex Penn.

A significant outbreak of avian influenza occurred in Great Skuas on Fair Isle this year (the first time that the disease has been found in this species), with dead adults noted in unusual numbers from early July. It quickly became apparent that the disease was having a significant effect on breeding success, with colony areas feeling quiet by late July, and a very poor productivity of just 42 chicks from 535 nests. The spread of disease seemed to be catalysed by sharing bathing areas, with many dead adults found around communal areas. Rings collected from carcasses showed a range of ages of bird to be affected, and the knock-on effect of this die-off will be interesting to see over the next few breeding seasons.

In more positive news, 2021 saw the deployment of leg-mounted GLS tags to 20 of our breeding **Puffins** as part of the SeaTRACK project, mapping wintering distributions of seabirds across Europe. These will be retrieved next year, when we look forward to seeing where our birds have spent their winters.

Thanks must go to our staff and volunteers for their efforts in carrying out seabird monitoring in another difficult year for FIBO, and to JNCC for their crucial support in enabling us to continue carrying out our work as part of the Seabird Monitoring Programme.

## Shetland

**Will Miles and Mick Mellor (SOTEAG), Jennifer Clark, Sally Reay and Mike Pennington (NatureScot), Kevin Kelly (RSPB) and Sheila Gear (Foula Ranger Service)**

Seabird population size and productivity measurements were variable in 2021 compared with 2019, with a combination of decreases, increases and stability observed across the different species and different monitoring sites in Shetland this year (few data for comparison were collected in 2020 due to the COVID-19 lockdown). Overall, it was a mediocre season: not a great year, but not all bad either. However, **Great Skuas** experienced high mortality, very low productivity, and early departure from all Shetland colonies, possibly due to infectious disease (also see Fair Isle article, above).

**Fulmar** numbers at the four annual population monitoring sites across Mainland Shetland and Yell were similar to 2019 (mean change of -2.7%) and numbers also remained stable on Noss. Productivity at these sites had changed little since 2019 (mean change of -2.1%), whereas productivity at Hermaness had increased from 0.11 in 2019 to 0.19 this year, although this was still the second-lowest measurement on record.

**Northern Gannet** (*Morus bassanus*) productivity on Noss remained stable, at 0.69 chicks fledged per AON compared to 0.70 in 2019. Initial results from Hermaness suggest the population continues to grow (estimated at >29,000 AON in 2021, although counts from photographs are still in progress) and that productivity again was high this year.

**Shag** numbers at the population monitoring plots were down this year at Sumburgh Head (94 AON cf. 116 in 2019) and Foula (23 AON cf. 29 in 2020) but had increased at No Ness (162 AON cf. 134 in 2019) and on Noss (95 AON cf. 91 in 2019). The whole-reserve count of AON at Hermaness showed an increase of 31.6%, from 57 AON in 2016 to 75 this year. Shag productivity on Mousa was 1.1 chicks fledged per AON, down from 1.7 in 2019. Productivity was down at Sumburgh Head by 59% (0.68 chicks fledged per incubated nest cf. 1.65 in 2020), on Foula by 24% (0.74 chicks fledged per incubated nest cf. 0.97 in 2020) and on Noss by 51% (1.19 chicks fledged per AON cf. 2.43 in 2019), but had increased slightly at Burravoe, on Yell, by 6.8% (1.15 chicks fledged per incubated nest cf. 1.07 in 2019).

Great Skuas had an extremely poor and unusual season all across Shetland. Many adults were found dead, the colonies were all abandoned early - most adults departed in late July and August rather than at the normal time of early/mid-September - and

productivity was universally very low (e.g. zero at the Hermaness plot and just 0.08 chicks fledged per AOT on Noss). A sample of adult corpses was collected for post-mortem analyses. At the time of writing, these analyses are ongoing and the cause(s) of death and reasons for such a poor season across all colonies have not been conclusively diagnosed. However, evidence of avian bird flu has been found in corpses from Fair Isle, and an infectious disease, such as bird flu, would be a plausible explanation for the events this season. A high proportion of the global population of Great Skuas breeds on Shetland (>40% at the last estimate). In a global context, Great Skua is Shetland's rarest breeding seabird and widespread high mortality is an important conservation consideration.

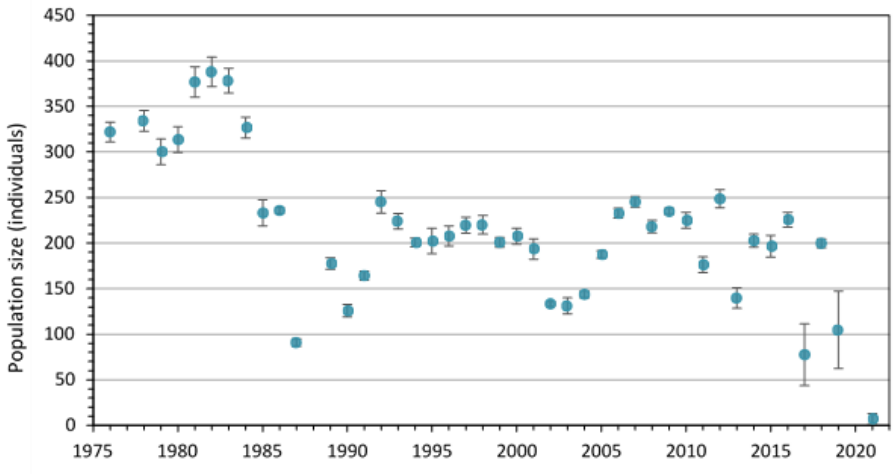
Great Skua, Isle of Noss, Shetland.
Photo: © Jennifer Clark

This year, a single **Arctic Skua** pair nested on Noss but failed to fledge chicks (the same occurred at this site in 2019), while at Hermaness two pairs nested and one fledged two chicks, possibly due to a total lack of harassment from Great Skuas this year. On Foula, there were 22 AOT (cf. 21 in 2020) and productivity was 0.91 chicks fledged per AOT (cf. 0.95 in 2020).

Numbers of **Kittiwakes** generally remained stable at Hermaness (169 AON cf. 171 in 2016) and on Noss (77 AON cf. 76 in 2019) but had decreased at Compass Head (32 AON cf. 39 in 2020). Numbers had increased slightly this year on Foula, with 317 AON recorded compared with 308 in 2020. Kittiwake productivity at Hermaness this year was identical to the measurement in 2020 (0.43 chicks fledged per AON), whereas it had decreased at the five annual monitoring sites on Mainland Shetland and Yell since 2019 (mean change of -50.5%), also on Foula (c.0.60 chicks fledged per AON cf. 0.93 in 2020). Kittiwakes were found to be nesting in only one of the five productivity monitoring plots on Noss this year, with a total of only 6 AON and 3 chicks fledged, compared with 10 AON and 7 chicks fledged in 2019. Across Shetland, many Kittiwake colonies have dramatically decreased in size recently or become extinct; generally, they now only occur in very sheltered and inaccessible locations such as caves.

A count of fledged **Arctic Terns** on Mousa in late July recorded 66 individuals, compared with zero in 2017. On Foula, Arctic Terns mostly bred late and the flush-count of adults in July was slightly down on last year (245 individuals cf. 268 in 2020).

A whole-island census of **Guillemots** on Noss recorded 23,773 individuals, a 2% decrease from the most recent previous count in 2015, while a whole-reserve census of Hermaness recorded 5,850 individuals, similar to the previous count of 5,808 in 2016. Numbers of Guillemots at the annual population monitoring site at Eshaness were up by 24.6% this year. However, at the three other annual monitoring sites on Mainland Shetland and Yell, also at the Hermaness study plot, numbers had decreased in comparison with 2019, dramatically so at Burravoe, on Yell, where the colony had dropped from a mean count of 105 individuals in 2019 to just seven this year, the lowest measurement on record. Annual numbers have regularly fluctuated by over 40% at this site recently though - showing how colony size can change considerably from year to year. Guillemot productivity was 0.68 chicks fledged per laying pair this year at the Sumburgh Head monitoring plot, down from 0.76 in 2019. Chick diet at the Sumburgh plot comprised 70% gadoids (87% in 2020), 28% sandeels (11% in 2020) and 1% clupeids (0% in 2020).




Guillemot population size (mean count of individuals ± SE) at Burravoe, southeast Yell, Shetland, 1976 to 2021. Annual population size has regularly fluctuated by over 40% at this site recently, but the mean count of 7 individuals in 2021 (SE ± 5.62) may indicate imminent extinction of this colony. Seabird colony size can change considerably from year to year.

Population counts of **Razorbills** this year were very similar to those in 2019 at all four of the annual monitoring plots on Mainland Shetland and Yell (mean change of +2.4%). Razorbill productivity was 0.59 chicks fledged per apparently laying pair at Sumburgh Head this year, down from 0.64 in 2019.

A **Puffin** count at Sumburgh Head on 16th April recorded 988 individuals. This was the first count ever done at this site in April - the time of year on Shetland that observed individuals are most likely to be breeders (as it's still too early for many, if any, of the large cohort of subadult non-breeders to be ashore), but also the time

of year on Shetland when most breeders have not yet laid and are generally more visible because they are not yet hidden underground incubating.

Population counts of **Black Guillemots** at the 13 monitored sites across Mainland Shetland recorded a decrease in numbers at every site except three this year in comparison with the most recent previous counts (mean change -13.4%).

Unusual records of seabirds during the Shetland breeding season in 2021 included an adult **Long-tailed Skua** (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) that summered with Arctic Skuas for the second year running at a site in the South Mainland, a pure-white albino **Great Northern Diver** (*Gavia immer*) that summered off Norwick beach in Unst, and a **Wilson's Petrel** (*Oceanites oceanicus*) that was seen offshore to the northwest of Shetland in August – the third record in two years of this species, from just three bespoke pelagics to look for it, suggesting that small numbers summer in Shetland's offshore waters, and this Antarctic-breeder is more common in the far north in summer than previously thought.

## Skokholm

**Richard Brown and Giselle Eagle, Skokholm Wardens**

Although a May storm again took its toll, it proved to be another excellent year for Skokholm's seabirds. The **Manx Shearwater** plots surveyed annually since 1999 suggest that numbers remain stable, whilst 160 hatch-access study burrows contained 127 fledglings; a productivity figure of 0.79 fledglings per pair was the second highest of the last nine years, up on a 2013-2020 mean of 0.71. A mean whole-island count of 225 apparently occupied **Fulmar** sites was a new Skokholm high, up on the 217 of 2018. As of 8th September, there were still two Fulmar chicks left to fledge, these the latest of the last eight years; assuming they survive to fledging size, a 2021 productivity figure of 0.52 fledglings per pair will almost match a 2013-2020 mean of 0.50. The **Storm Petrel** transects again gave the impression that the population is stable, although the breeding status of calling birds remains a mystery in the vast majority of cases. Nevertheless, a small number of visible sites suggest that the Storm Petrels are having a late, but productive season; 80% of pairs still have healthy chicks. Recent searches have found 37 accessible Storm Petrel chicks, this a total which slowly grows from year to year. Late summer mist netting again encountered several birds ringed in the nest previously (along with well over 1,000 other birds), the most exciting of which was ringed in the Petrel Station in 2019 (the first chick to fledge our wall of Storm Petrel nest boxes). Three chicks are currently resident in the Petrel Station, this one more than last year and another step in the (slow) establishment of an accessible colony. A camera in box 11 has provided some fascinating footage which we'll hopefully have time to look at in more detail during the winter.

A Manx Shearwater chick during study burrow checks. Photo by Skokholm team.

**Great Black-backed Gull** numbers dropped to 80 nests, this down on a 2013-2020 mean of 86 and the lowest total since 2013. Productivity was again high, with 1.51 fledglings per pair. Unsurprisingly, given the drop in numbers, there were fewer Manx Shearwaters eaten this year (although 2,417 corpses have been marked so far). The 305 **Herring Gull** nests found this year was up on a 2013-2020 mean of 300 and the third highest total since 2010. Productivity was a minimum of 0.84 fledglings per pair (n=141), this despite a May storm which destroyed multiple nests (the 2013-2020 mean is 0.67, with a high of 0.86 in 2016). **Lesser Black-backed Gull** had an exceptional year by recent standards, although a total of 935 apparently incubating adults was only the second three-figure post-1970 tally (only up on the 880 of last year and well down on historical counts of up to 4,600). Mark release recapture in dense Bracken suggested a productivity figure of 0.96 (n=56), whilst a cliff plot suggested 0.93 fledglings per pair (n=42); this was unexpected given that the 2013-2020 mean is 0.28, indeed it is unclear why productivity was so high this year. Surprisingly the gatherings of post-breeding **Kittiwake**, which have taken to Skokholm's cliffs in recent years, failed to materialise this summer; whereas 1,388 birds, including several ringed in France, were logged last year, only a handful have been seen in 2021.

A mean total of 5,065 **Guillemot** was down on the 5,101 of 2020, but otherwise the second highest to date and up on a 2013-2020 mean of 4,080. It is likely that the number present on the cliffs was impacted by the May storm; three sub-colonies were badly affected, with some ledges being entirely washed of eggs (although there were lots of re-lays, meaning that some were on the

cliffs until 27th July). A total of 3,356 **Razorbill** was down on the 3,517 of 2020, but again the second highest total to date and up on a 2013-2020 mean of 2,540. Boulder field birds produced 0.54 jumplings per pair, on a sheltered cliff it was 0.65 and on an exposed cliff impacted by the storm (where nearly half of pairs had to re-lay) it was 0.24. A combined 114 pairs produced 56 jumplings (0.49), this the lowest estimate since 2017 (the 2013-2020 mean is 0.49, with a high of 0.69 in 2018). A March Puffin raft count of 11,245 was the highest post-War total. Productivity from 71 nests was 0.80 (the 2013-2020 mean is 0.76, with a high of 0.80 in 2017), although this includes several large chicks taken by Great Black-backed Gulls.

## Skomer

**Leighton Newman and Freya Blockley (Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales), Josie Hewitt and Matt Wood (University of Gloucestershire)**

**Fulmar** – 577 pairs of Fulmars were recorded in 2021, a drop of three pairs compared to 2020. Productivity was 0.49 which is higher than the historical average of 0.46.

**Manx Shearwater** – The total island population was estimated as 349,663 pairs which was last surveyed in 2018. The total number of responses in the study plots (n=18) was very similar compared to 2020 with 1,412 responses. Productivity is still being calculated.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** – Visual estimates gave a figure of 3,013 AON/AOTs. After the application of a correction factor, we estimated that there were 7,412 pairs in 2021. Correction factors are no longer annually calculated through ground-truthing, instead we applied an average correction factor from previous years to counts. Productivity was 0.67 which is significantly higher than 2020 (0.24) and what has been consistently low productivity since 1980.

**Herring Gull** – 271 AONs Herring Gulls were counted on Skomer in 2021, this a decrease from 298 pairs counted in 2021. Productivity at the study site was zero, the lowest ever recorded. The long-term average productivity is 0.65, although only three of the previous 10 years have managed to reach this figure.

**Great Black-backed Gull** – Productivity this year was 1.68, which is higher than the historical mean of 1.32.

**Kittiwake** – The total population count of Kittiwake in 2021 is 1,441 AON. This is a drop from 1,681 AONs in 2020. Productivity was 0.79 for Kittiwakes, which is higher than the historical average of 0.69. Unseasonal storms in May washed nests off the cliff, but adults rebuilt quickly, and productivity was still good.

**Guillemot** – Guillemots, along with most other cliff nesting seabirds, were counted in the first three weeks of June. 27,262 individuals were counted which is a decrease from 28,798 individuals counted in 2019. Productivity was 0.60 for Active and Regular sites (0.61 Active only), which is the lowest productivity since 2011 and one of the lowest on record. Birds seemed to fail mainly at the egg stage, and it is thought that this is the result of unseasonable storms in May. The historical mean productivity for Active and Regular sites is 0.70. (0.72 Active only).

Photo by Leighton Newman.

**Razorbill** – 8,165 individuals were counted, an increase from 7,529 counted in 2018. Productivity was 0.5 for Active and Regular sites which is 0.02 above the historical mean of 0.48.

**Puffin** – Puffins were counted in early April which resulted in 34,813 individuals, only 17 more than in 2020. Productivity was 0.63 in 2021, a drop of 0.07 from 2020.

## Bardsey and Ynys Gwylans

**Stuart Cossey, Bardsey Bird Observatory**

**Fulmar**: 21 AOS were counted on the East Side, five above the 2020 total and 15% above the 10-year average (18.27 ± S.D. 5.46). During visits in late July and August 12 chicks were noted, giving a productivity of 0.14 chicks per pair. This was 75% above the 10-year average (0.33 ± S.E. 0.03), although productivity rates have only been calculated in three of the last 10 years.

**European Storm Petrel**: A pair was found nesting in an artificial nest box and a chick was seen on 10th August. It is considered that nesting birds are present in other locations across the East Side.

Fulmars. Photo by Steve Stanstead.

**Cormorant**: Seven AON were counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr, the first time that they have bred on the larger of the two islands since 2013. A trip was made late in the season and only three large chicks were recorded on Ynys Gwylan Bach. The number of AONs is 45% below the 2011-2020 mean (14.45 ± S.D. 4.26). Sixteen juveniles were found. The productivity of 2.00 was 77% higher than the 2011-2020 mean (1.13 ± S.E. 0.27).

**Shag**: Bardsey held 59 AON, the third highest count since 1953; 45% above the 2011-2020 mean (39.00 ± S.D. 4.97). From these nests, 133 young fledged. The productivity of 2.25 was 26% above the 2011-2020 mean (1.79 ± S.E. 0.13). Thirty-nine AON were found on Ynys Gwylan Fawr, with a further six seen across on Ynys Gwylan Bach. Forty-five AON was a 21% increase on the previous 10-year mean (37.20 ± S.D. 21.70). Seventy-one young were found on Ynys Gwylan Fawr. The productivity of 1.82 was 55% above the 10-year mean (1.18 ± S.E. 0.28).

**Lesser Black-backed Gull**: This year, 69 AON were counted, which was a 61% decrease on the 2011-2020 mean (175.10 ± S.D. 70.70). A minimum of 37 juveniles fledged, meaning the productivity of 0.70 was 105% above the 2011-2020 mean (0.34 ± S.E. 0.07).

**Herring Gull**: Bardsey held 337 AON, 12% below the 10-year mean (380.80 ± S.D. 35.6). A sample count of the main North End colony of 248 AON produced a minimum of 119 juveniles. This productivity of 0.48 was 26% below the 2011-2020 mean (0.65 ± S.E. 0.04). On the single visit in June, 57 AONs were counted on the Gwylans, which was 25% below the 2011-2020 mean (76 ± S.D. 63.10). Fifty-four chicks were counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr meaning a productivity of 0.95 can be calculated, a 105% increase on the 2011-2020 mean (0.46 ± S.E. 0.14).

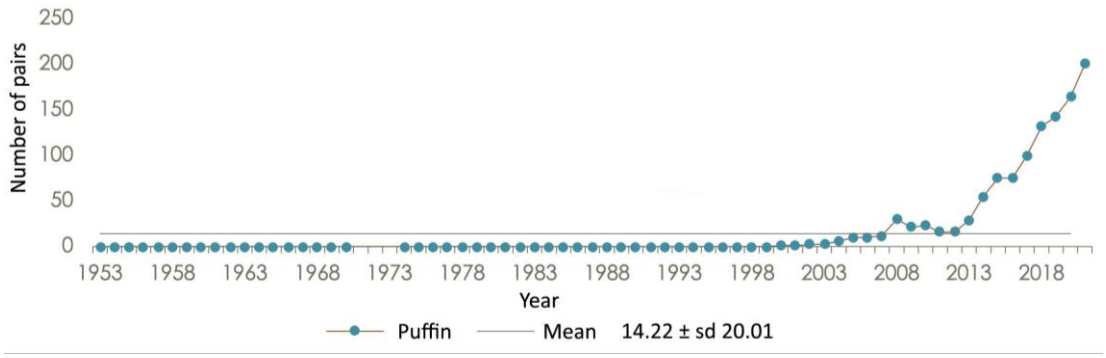
**Great Black-backed Gull:** Bardsey held two pairs, 56% below the 10-year mean (4.50 ± S.D. 1.90). There was a minimum of two young fledged. The productivity of 1.00 is 25% above the 2011-2020 mean (0.80 ± S.E. 0.15). There were 83 adults with 28 juveniles on Ynys Gwylan Fawr and nine AONs on Ynys Gwylan Bach. The total number of pairs or AONs was 19% higher than the 2011-2020 mean (42.20 ± S.D. 33.73). A combined productivity of 0.56 was 9% above the 10-year mean (0.52 ± S.E. 0.12).

**Kittiwake**: This year, 181 AON were counted, 57% above the 2011-2020 mean (115.60 ± S.D. 35.70). On 27th July, 268 young were counted, including a few fledged juveniles but mostly very large-almost fledged chicks. The productivity of 1.48 is 151% above the 10-year average (0.59 ± S.E. 0.09).

**Guillemot**: The count of 1,432 Apparently Occupied Ledges (AOL) was 16% above the 2011-2020 mean (1,234.40 ± S.D. 1,174.59). There were 27 chicks in sample plot of 270 AOL at Bae Felen, though the lower down nests were severely impacted by May storms. The productivity of 0.1 was 86% below the 2011- 2020 mean (0.33 ± S.E. 0.04). Sixteen chicks and five eggs were counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr and 82 AOL were counted on Ynys Gwylan Bach. This combined total of 70 pairs was 75% above the 2011-2020 mean (40.10 ± S.E. 31.38).

**Razorbill**: A flush count of 1,220 individuals was taken on 15th June, and this was 35% below the 10-year average. A minimum of 79 young were counted at Seal Cave, a sample plot productivity of 0.75, 124% increase on the 10-year mean (0.33 ± S.E. 0.04). Twelve AOL were counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr, with only one chick recorded.

**Puffin**: Between May and July, a maximum of 400 individuals counted ashore or just offshore. If this is converted into c200 pairs then it is 104% above the 2011-2020 mean (80.5 ± S.D. 53.33). In addition, 349 Apparently Occupied Burrows (AOB) were counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr, with a flush count of 578 individuals. This was a 34% decrease in AOB on the 2011-2010 mean (525.20 ± S.D. 371.02).

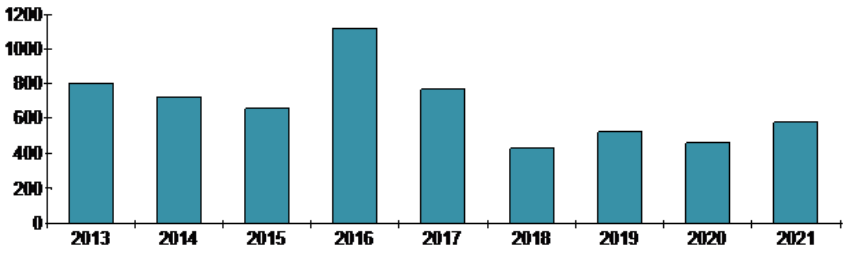



Estimated number of Puffin pairs on Bardsey, based in counts of individuals on land and close to shore.

## Kittiwakes, Seaford, East Sussex

**David H Howey, Sussex Ornithological Society**

The first sign of re-occupancy at the colony on the cliffs at Splash Point, Seaford in East Sussex was of 100 birds on the sea just offshore on the morning of 4th February. These birds had departed by mid-afternoon. Storm Darcy impacted on 6th and 7th February and there were no birds present on either the 6th or 12th. COVID-19 restrictions limited the number of site visits and it was not until 21st February that the site was revisited when over 200 birds were recorded on the cliffs but, once again they had departed by the afternoon. This pattern was repeated throughout the first half of March. Numbers at the colony slowly built up during April and May with a boat-based survey on 2nd June recording 580 AON – an increase on the 2020 figure and the highest count for four years. A second boat-based survey on 12th July recorded a productivity level of 0.82 with which marginally up on the 2020 figure of 0.78.




Plot of Kittiwake AON at Seaford, East Sussex from 2013 to 2021.

# Grant Reports

## North Sutherland Seabird Count, and the first confirmed breeding European Storm Petrels for Caithness

**Caithness Bird Group**

Last year the Caithness Bird Group gratefully received a Seabird Group grant to visit a group of islands off the north Sutherland coast, including Eilean nan Ron, Eilean Iosal, Neave/Coomb Island and the Rabbit Islands, by boat to survey breeding seabirds. These are all locations that were yet to be counted as part of the current national seabird census (Seabirds Count). From a deferred 2020 COVID postponed trip, Jean Maclean kindly took us out on her boat from Skerray and gave us a fascinating history of the islands as we travelled around them.

During the first trip we circumnavigated Eilean nan Ron, Eilean Iosal and Neave/Coombes. A flock of mixed **Arctic** and **Common Terns** lifted off one of the skerries, which was a nice surprise, presumably moved in to breed from another site since Seabird 2000. Another surprise was seeing that the **Cormorant** colony had expanded on Eilean Iosal from 20 AON to 55. **Shags** also seem to be doing well with 110 AON recorded during our visit, a 224% increase on the 34 AON recorded during Seabird 2000! The same could not be said for the **Fulmars**, with a 61% decline from 1,309 to 509 AOS.

Caithness Bird Group returning happy from Stroma after confirming breeding of European Storm Petrels for the first time in the county. Photo by Julian Smith.

On the second day we surveyed the Rabbit Islands, three small uninhabited islands in Tongue Bay. Whilst waiting at the Skerray harbour, Risso's Dolphins (*Grampus griseus*) fed offshore with **Gannets** plunging nearby. Shortly after leaving, a Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) swam past the boat. As with the previous islands, the Rabbit Island's Shag population has increased since the Seabird 2000 count of 9 AONs to 23. Interestingly, one of the first-summer Shags roosting on the rocks had a white Darvic, which turned out to have been ringed on the Isle of May by Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH) in 2020 and was the first sighting away from the May. The **Great Black-backed Gull** appears to have remained stable, however, as with the other islands, the Fulmar population has declined by 75% from 657 to 164 AOS.

The second part of the grant money was used by the group to visit Stroma, an island off the north Caithness coast, to search for breeding **European Storm Petrels**. It has long been suspected that Storm Petrels breed on the island but has never been proven. They breed on many of the other small surrounding islands in the Pentland Firth including Muckle Skerry, Switha and Swona, so why not Stroma? Seven of us, armed with playback tapes each loaded with a standardised Storm Petrel song/call headed off to Stroma from Gill's Bay. With Stroma having plenty of disused buildings, old walls, bolder beaches and cairns there was a lot of habitat to cover, but we divided the island into three sections and began our search. After an hour, it was exciting, and a relief, to hear the first Storm Petrel responding to a tape in a disused quarry area on the east of the island. Shortly afterwards another responded from a crag on a nearby cliff, and once we had an indication of their rough habitat 'preferences', we concentrated our efforts on the coastal locations, with no 'inland' responses heard from the walls and buildings. By the end of the day, we elicited 10 responses from different occupied burrows, much to the delight of some members that had not heard a Storm Petrel calling before. Given the habitat around the island, and many good petrel smelling burrows and crevices, it is suspected that many more are breeding on the island.

Caithness Bird Group are very grateful to Jean Maclean for taking us out to the north Sutherland islands and to Willie Simpson for taking us to Stroma. None of this would have been possible without the support of the Seabird Group.

## Seabirder Spotlight

**Seabirder Spotlight** is a recent addition to The Seabird Group newsletter, initiated by our Early Career Representative **Zoe Deakin**, which aims to illuminate the variety of career paths and roles available to aspiring seabirders. Contributors are asked a range of standard questions about their careers, for example on what their current job involves, what aspects they love about their work and what skills have been important to cultivate on their journey. In particular, we hope that the contributions from members of the seabird community will inspire and motivate people in their early careers to work with seabirds.

### Akiko Shoji – Behavioural Ecologist, University of Tsukuba, Japan

First of all, I would like to thank the committee for giving me an opportunity to share my experience and thoughts, and reach everyone who may read this.

My first seabird research experience was about two decades ago, as an MSc student in Biology at the University of Ottawa, Canada. I was under the supervision of Dr Tony Gaston, a Research Scientist at Environment Canada, and the person who introduced me to the seabird world, which was one of the best things to happen in my life. I spent three summers on Reef Island, Haida Gwaii (British Columbia) and worked on incubation strategies of **Ancient Murrelets** (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*), with lots of heavy rain, joy, and many failures! I really enjoyed it and loved to be in the wild. Then, I was lucky enough to become a DPhil candidate in the Oxford Navigation Group, under the supervision of Prof Tim Guilford, who introduced me to biologging and state of the art analytical techniques. This led me to work on Skomer Island and other beautiful islands in the UK. During my study, I met lots of wonderful lab mates and mentors. Being surrounded by nice people is really the key to enjoying your work. I was never confident in my talents as a researcher, but I continue, not only because I like seabirds and research but because of help from others.

Since 2019 I have been working as a faculty member at the University of Tsukuba, Japan. Although supervising students can be challenging, I very much enjoy it and I feel that my job is really to motivate and encourage them to believe they are capable of conducting research. I often feel I learn from students more than I teach them. Being a faculty member means being super busy. There is a lot more admin than I expected, and I would like more time for research. This becomes even harder when you gain a family member. I have a five-year old boy now, and I love spending time with him. However, this means that I have to complete everything during working hours and run to childcare even if there is important work left unfinished. Time management is definitely an essential skill for faculty members.

Photo by Kohei Oshima.

The great thing about working as a university researcher is that I can do research on any topic I want. It's never easy to secure funding, but with effort it's possible. I have secured research grants on ecological carry-over effects and contaminant biotransport by seabirds in the Pacific Ocean. I have also recently started to collaborate with palaeontologists to examine the evolution of senescence in birds (or perhaps we should call them dinosaurs!) at the geologic time scale.

My career as a biologist and mentor has just started and I am still learning every day. Despite the difficulties, I would like to continue as long as I can. My main advice is to not compare yourself to anyone else, especially those who look smarter and happier. I hope you will find something you want to do and do your best at it!

## Seabird Group Notices

### The Seabird Group – is the name still appropriate in today's world?

**Liz Humphreys, Chair of The Seabird Group**

The origins of **The Seabird Group** back in 1966 are down to the foresight and determination of a group of dedicated volunteers who recognised and wanted to champion the importance of the UK's seabird populations. At this time, it was probably the first of its kind and the name wasn't meant to be considered in a global context.

Since then, a number of other seabird groups have come into existence - Pacific Seabird Group, Indian Ocean Seabird Group, Dutch Seabird Group, Australasian Seabird Group, most of whom reflect the geographic coverage of the oceans of interest in their name. The Seabird Group, whilst largely UK-based does have members across Europe and grants can cover work in the Overseas Territories.

At the next AGM we would like to discuss whether a name change would be appropriate. It has become apparent that organisations across the world are already referring to us as the UK Seabird Group. We would like to consider this issue with our members and consider alternatives such as such as the Atlantic or North Atlantic Seabird Group. We really do welcome your views. If you can't make the AGM then please contact chair@seabirdgroup.org.uk and we can share your opinions at the meeting. No final decision will be made at the AGM but there may be a vote in the future.

### The Newsletter Archive - historical newsletters now available online

**Katherine Booth Jones, Seabird Group Newsletter Editor**

The Seabird Group Newsletter is one of our key membership benefits, allowing the Seabird Group to share and promote the excellent work of seabird researchers and volunteers in the UK and further afield. With three issues a year, there is plenty of material to look back upon, and this year the Executive Committee took the decision to release historical newsletters, those over a year old, to the general public via our website. While our members will still receive the latest newsletters via email or in print, newsletters will now be added to this online archive a year after their initial publication.

Thanks to our Web Officer **Jeff Stratford**, newsletters from 1996 to 2020 can now be viewed here. Historical newsletters before this date will be added once we can digitise hard copies. Watch this space!

## Seabird Group membership benefits

**Zoe Deakin and Kirsty Franklin, Seabird Group ExCom**

We're pleased to have secured some additional benefits for Seabird Group members. Please contact Seabird Group Executive Committee member **Zoe Deakin** (deakinz@cardiff.ac.uk) if you have any problems using the discount codes or if you have suggestions for additional member benefits.

| COMPANY | DISCOUNT | DISCOUNT CODE | WEBSITE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Pelagic Publishing** | 30% | SEABIRDG30 | https://pelagicpublishing.com/ |
| **Poyser Monographs** | 20% off RRP | WW2EX | https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/series/poyser-monographs/ |
| **Cotswold Outdoor** | 10% | AF-LG-AF or present flyer (attached with newsletter) in-store. | https://www.cotswoldoutdoor.com/ |
| **Scottish Seabird Centre** | 20% discount for entry to the Discovery Experience<br>20% discount towards adoptions | SGTWENTY21 | https://www.seabird.org/ |
| **Mooncup** | 20% off online (until 31st May 2022; not valid in conjunction with any other discount codes) | Seabird20 | https://www.mooncup.co.uk/ |

# Events

## Seabird Annual General Meeting

The Seabird Group AGM will occur online this year on the meeting platform Zoom on **Saturday 20th November 1-3pm (GMT).** Instructions about how to join the meeting will be emailed to all members one week before the AGM. **You do not have to hold a Zoom account in order to be able to participate in the meeting**.

### UPCOMING POSITIONS ON THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

We have one position opening on the Executive Committee: **Ordinary member (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion).** We are now accepting nominations for this position, elections will be held by online vote shortly before the AGM. To learn more about the position email edi@seabirdgroup.org.uk. If you are at all interested in helping The Seabird Group continue to fulfil its aims, we would be happy to have you on the committee! Email secretary@seabirdgroup.org.uk with a short statement of interest to be added to the candidates list. Nominations will close on 8th November 2021.

### DOCUMENTS FOR THE AGM

All members will be emailed the following documents one week prior to the AGM: the agenda for the AGM, the 56th Annual Report, the 2020-2021 Accounts & Treasurer's Report and the minutes of the previous AGM. These documents will also be shared at the beginning of the online AGM via Dropbox. This year, to allow all members to vote even if they cannot attend the AGM, we will trial an online voting system so that all the votes will take place online in the week leading to the AGM. More information will be provided closer to the time.

Please direct any enquiries to either the Secretary (**Annette Fayet**, secretary@seabirdgroup.org.uk) or the Chair (**Liz Humphreys**, chair@seabirdgroup.org.uk). We look forward to seeing you online!

## Meet the Scientist – Seabirds living in a wormy world (online talk)

**Scottish Seabird Centre**

The Scottish Seabird Centre are excited to be hosting a suitably creepy, crawly topic for the Meet the Scientist event on **Tuesday 26th October at 7pm** during Halloween week.

Beyond the nose-wrinkling idea of parasitic worms, their presence is actually a really important indicator of the health of wild seabirds. **Dr Sarah Burthe,** Animal Population Ecologist from the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, is currently researching this fascinating topic and is delighted to tell us more: "Parasites are very common in wild animals. Most people will be aware of parasites if they have pet animals or livestock and will know the importance of treating animals to prevent infections. However, perhaps you are not so familiar with the effects parasites can have on wild animals. Parasites, including bacteria, viruses, fungi, ecto-parasites such as fleas and ticks, and larger parasites such as worms, form an important, though rather maligned, part of food webs and can have important and large impacts on wild animal hosts. In this talk I will present some of our long-term research investigating how nematode worms affect the energetics, behaviour and survival of wild seabirds on the Isle of May, Scotland. I will talk about how some individuals have more parasites than others and how parasites can also interact with human-driven changes in the environment such as contaminants and climate-change".

The event is free and can be booked via our website.

## 15th International Seabird Group Conference – save the date!

The 15th International Seabird Group Conference will be hosted by University College Cork on the **22nd – 25th August in Cork, Ireland**. Please save this date in your diaries; we would love to see as many of you as possible there.

15TH INTERNATIONAL
Seabird Group Conference
CORK, IRELAND

Website: **www.seabirdgroup.org.uk**

Facebook: **www.facebook.com/pages/TheSeabirdGroup/**

Twitter: **www.twitter.com/TheSeabirdGroup (@TheSeabirdGroup)**

**Registered charity No. 260907**

The Seabird Group promotes and helps co-ordinate the study and conservation of seabirds. Members also receive the journal *Seabird*. The Group organises regular conferences and provides small grants towards research.

## CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

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| Chair | Liz Humphreys (2023) | chair@seabirdgroup.org.uk |
| Secretary | Annette Fayet (2023) | secretary@seabirdgroup.org.uk |
| Treasurer | Ian Cleasby (2022) | Ian.Cleasby@rspb.org.uk |
| Membership Secretary | Danni Thompson (2022) | membership@seabirdgroup.org.uk |
| Seabird Editor | Viola Ross-Smith (2023) | journal@seabirdgroup.org.uk |
| Newsletter Editor | Katherine Booth Jones (2022) | newsletter@seabirdgroup.org.uk |
| Website Officer | Jeff Stratford (2021) | jeff.stratford@pms.ac.uk |

**Ordinary Members:**

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| Assistant Newsletter Editor | Kirsty Franklin (2024) | kirsty.franklin@uea.ac.uk |
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| ECR Representative | Zoe Deakin (2022) | DeakinZ@cardiff.ac.uk |
| Social Media Manager | Ruth Dunn (2022) | rudunn@fiu.edu |
| EDI Officer | Lila Buckingham (2021) | libuck51@ceh.ac.uk |

**Current membership rates**

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| Standing Order | £20 |
| Concession | £15 |
| Institution | £35 |
| International: | £21 |
| Life | £300 |

The Newsletter is published three times a year. The Editor welcomes articles from both members and non-members on issues relating to seabird research and conservation. We aim to provide a forum for readers' views so that those provided in the Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or Seabird Group.

Submissions for the newsletter should be emailed to the newsletter editor: newsletter@seabirdgroup.org.uk. We recommend a maximum of 1500 words and ask that photographs and figures are sent as separate files and with full credits, where appropriate. **Deadlines are: 15th January (February edition); 15th May (June edition); and, 15th September (October edition).** Every effort is made to check the content of the material that we publish. It is not, however, always possible to check thoroughly every piece of information back to its original source as well as keeping news timely. If you have any concerns about any of the information or contacts provided, please contact the Newsletter Editor.