



NEWSLETTER 151

October 2022

Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| News | 1 |
| Seabird Group Conference | 1 |
| Seabird School | 2 |
| Petrels By Night | 3 |
| Breeding Season Reports | 5 |
| Calf of Man | 5 |
| Canna | 6 |
| Fair Isle | 7 |
| Shetland | 8 |
| Isle of May | 10 |
| Skomer | 11 |
| Bardsey and Ynys Gwylans | 12 |
| Seaford | 13 |
| Training Grant Reports | 14 |
| Seabirder Spotlight | 15 |
| Seabird Group Notices | 16 |

News

Report from the 15th International Seabird Group Conference, 22nd - 26th August 2022

Katherine Booth Jones, Seabird Group Newsletter Editor

Finally, the agonising wait was over! Our last Seabird Group Conference in Liverpool back in 2018 felt like a lifetime ago, shrouded in the pre-COVID past, but after two postponements, the seabirder community was finally unleashed upon the beautiful city of Cork, Ireland, hosted by **University College Cork (UCC)**. For many, myself included, this was the first in-person conference in years, and the atmosphere was fizzing with excitement.

The conference kicked-off on Monday 22nd August with a suite of workshops on bioacoustics monitoring, offshore windfarm development and the surveillance and monitoring of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, followed by a welcoming address by **Francis Daunt** showcasing the staggering 50-year legacy of seabird research to have fledged from the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth.



Poster session, Cork 2022. Photo: Ingrid Pollet.

On Tuesday, we began with a superb plenary on the effects of wind on seabirds by **Emily Shepard**. This talk beautifully illustrated that while we often think of seabirds in terms of their association with the ocean, the majority of species are just as much creatures of the air, with windscares providing opportunities and risks that shape their behaviour throughout their lives. We were also treated to an important talk by UCC's Director of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Avril Hutch, highlighting why the marine ornithology community should work bring a greater diversity of voices to the field, what we are doing right, and how we can improve in the future. After a busy day gripped by a programme of fresh new seabird science we flocked to the evening poster session, which was pleasingly intimate and animated. The standard of posters was exceptional, and conversations flowed along with the drinks.

Alex Bond's Wednesday morning plenary was a masterpiece of story-telling; weaving together chilling research into the threat of plastic pollution with the sobering realities of prejudice against queer communities in science, but delivering a message of hope, humour and compassion that fuelled coffee- and lunch-break conversations for the remainder of the conference and beyond. The following sessions covered a huge diversity of topics in seabird science, including pollution, foraging, urbanisation and climate change to name but a few, so after this second day of guzzling down as much new seabird knowledge as could be absorbed, it was time to let loose a little (or a lot in some cases). The conference dinner at the Bodega Bar in central Cork was a great opportunity to engage with the day's speakers, old pals and new acquaintances, and as the trad band arrived to provide the soundtrack, it inevitably evolved into a bit of a knees-up. I can only apologise to anyone who had to witness my dancing.

Our Seabird Group Secretary **Annette Fayet** had the tough gig of the plenary-after-the-night-before, but testament to her reputation as a world-class researcher and speaker, the audience turned out in full force. Her talk on the study of seabird movements took us from temperate systems in the North Atlantic to the tropics, touching on a huge body of research into understanding how migration and individual fitness are intertwined, explaining why this is important to seabird population dynamics, and highlighting that there is more to learn on how changing environmental conditions may impact these interactions in the future.

The programme of excellent talks continued into the afternoon of the final day, and it was with huge regret that I had to tear myself away from Cork and my fellow seabirders. I left with that glowy post-conference buzz of inspiration and connectivity that is not quite reached through online conference formats, which for me really emphasised the value of in-person interactions in scientific communities. I hope that those who couldn't make it were able to engage in conversations online through the conference hashtag on Twitter, #CorkSeabirds, and through The Seabird Group's live tweeting via @TheSeabirdGroup. You can also watch and re-watch the conference talks on YouTube, with links to the programme and talks available on [The Seabird Group website](#).

Congratulations to **Mark Jessop** and his team at UCC for organising and hosting such a fantastic celebration of seabird research, and to members of The Seabird Group Executive Committee for their support of the event. We will wait in eager anticipation for the next conference, which is to be hosted by the [University of Coimbra in Portugal in 2024](#). Vejo você lá!

Seabird School

Bethany Wilson, trainee ringer

In mid-July I had the exciting opportunity to help out at Bardsey Lodge and Bird Observatory on Bardsey Island as part of my Year 10 work experience. Working at the Observatory had a lot to offer, from seabird monitoring, running the moth trap, logging the wildlife sightings to hands on jobs around the Obs, all giving me an insight to what a career in conservation could look like. My favourite task was helping with the seabird monitoring and ringing.

During the week, I shadowed Ollie King, one of the Assistant Wardens, who showed me what his job incorporates and his main focuses in terms of seabird monitoring. Ollie spends a lot of time monitoring the **Manx Shearwater** (*Puffinus puffinus*) burrow occupancy and chick growth rate in c75 burrows that are monitored each year. It was a privilege to help him with this. I learnt so many new skills, getting the chicks out of burrows carefully was quite difficult as every burrow is shaped differently, and chicks vary in how far in the burrow they are. However, weighing them was significantly easier as they just sit on the scales, and measuring their wings was quite similar to what I have done before during my ringing experiences. It was interesting to see the growth rate monitoring data as you could see that the chicks increase in size but then reach a point where there is a sudden drop in weight, I learnt that this was because the adults feed them up to a point where they can't physically get out of the burrow so they stop feeding them, so they reduce in size, which is pretty cool!



[Bethany learning to ring Manx Shearwater pulli.](#)

One of the highlights for me was ringing the Manx Shearwater chicks, they are just unlike anything I have ringed before. They are just warm fluff balls

that are quite easy to handle, they have very flat legs so Steve Stansfield, the warden, helped a lot with shaping the ring and guiding me through the process so it fitted the bird perfectly. I was astonished at their burrows, some a metre or more deep into a low stone bank along the edge of fields. To think they spend the start of their lives knowing nothing else but the soil around them, eventually to then leave the burrow into a place they have never even seen before is quite mind-blowing.

The seabird work doesn't just stop at the chicks though; ringing Manx Shearwater adults was a whole other experience in itself. Unlike the soft and patient chicks, the adults are feisty with very sharp beaks and feet that you keep carefully under control while ringing them, adding a whole level of difficulty. The adults were incredible to see and ring. I also had a few night-time experiences with Manx Shearwaters, watching them come tumbling to the ground, not in the most elegant manor, then waddling to their burrows, making them quite easy to pick them up off the ground to ring. They are quite large birds and very strong so holding them requires skill as you have to put them under one arm and carefully hold the leg in place for ringing. Incredibly, we picked up one bird that had not been handled since it was originally ringed as a chick on the south end of the island on 6th September 1986 – that's 35 years, 10 months and 8 days since ringing! Hearing them around the island is very surreal, their call is very eerie and a joy to hear when we were out and from the bedroom at night.

As if Manx Shearwater adults and chicks wasn't enough, I even got to ring **European Storm Petrels** (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) on several occasions! We caught them in mist nets using a sound system with a speaker. I was amazed at how quickly they found the net and seeing the first one is something I will never forget. I hadn't realised how small they were! They had small tube-noses which could be quite oily, a lovely white rump and an incredible smell. They were quite difficult to extract from the net, but I had expert tuition from Steve and we made sure we checked the net regularly and extracted them quickly. I could use my past experience of ringing small passerines as they were similar to extract, hold and ring. However, Storm Petrels are far easier to weigh as they just sit on the scales! All Storm Petrel and Manx Shearwater adult ringing was done at night which was an amazing experience, being in pitch black hearing the Manxies above you, one night we got a great view of the Milky Way which was spectacular!

One morning we went on a boat trip around the cliffs on the East side to count the number of juvenile **Black-legged Kittiwakes** (*Rissa tridactyla*) and other seabirds and to make sure they were healthy. It was amazing to see them so close and see what else the island holds.

Along with all the seabird work I got stuck in lots of different jobs such as going through the moth trap, where I quickly picked up on some species I had never seen before. I also helped moving collected rainwater around the site, cutting grass for the compost toilets and cleaning them! I helped Ollie on the census, guided walks and general jobs around the Observatory. I really enjoyed the guided walks and showing people the ringing process of Manx Shearwaters, Storm Petrels, Manxie chick monitoring and general wildlife walks.

Staying on an island was an unforgettable experience, the freedom and safety that comes with it is really special and the opportunities Bardsey has to offer was fantastic. A huge thank you to Steve, Emma and Connor Stansfield for making my stay possible and for showing me the ropes, and to Ollie King for teaching me so much and allowing me to get stuck in! My work experience showed me that a career in conservation is a huge possibility, and I really loved my time on Bardsey. I can't wait to go back and volunteer when I am older!

Petrels By Night

Bart Vercruyse

At the end of September 2021, thanks to a permit and logistical support kindly provided by IFCN Madeira, I had the unique opportunity to spend a week on Deserta Grande, about 20 miles southeast of Madeira. Weather permitting, we would try to land for one or two nights on the island of Bugio, the only place in the world where the **Desertas Petrel** (*Pterodroma deserta*) breeds in a small colony estimated at only between 160 and 180 breeding pairs.

On Monday 4th October 2021, the weather had finally improved, allowing us to land on Bugio. Wardens Mauricio Pereira and Avelino Teixeira helped me to bring my equipment to the plateau on Bugio and then returned to Deserta Grande with the promise to pick us up the next day. The third warden, Isamberto Silva, prepared our stay at the small shelter. I had one night to take photos,

but where would I start? A short discussion with Isamberto, who had been on Bugio countless times, gave me several options. I had to decide ...

From now on, I let you look into my field notes from behind my shoulder:

19h45: I have installed my equipment and I wait for the night to arrive. No noise. The descending sun touches the surface of the ocean. A great sunset!

19h49: The sun has disappeared behind the horizon. Very light wind, still from the north. My cameras are looking to the south. The birds should fly into my cameras ... Should ... Wait and hope ...

20h20: Silence, apart from the noise of the waves breaking on the rocky shore, some 320 m lower. No birds.

20h27: Lonely **Cory's Shearwater** (*Calonectris borealis*) crying in the air. A flying silent shape comes in for a close inspection. I switch on my head torch: a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba schmitzi*)! The owl lands on a big rock some meters away and disappears in the night.

20h30: First calling cool-season **Band-rumped Storm Petrel** (*Oceanodroma* sp.) in the air.

20h32: I start both cameras and switch on flashes & triggering equipment. I am ready.

20h45: There they come! I don't see anything but hear their low, very soft and distant moaning flight calls "Mau-au-au-au-wik". By far the strangest bird sound I have ever heard. Fascinating and intimidating at the same time. More birds come in. They are around me. All around me ... I am sitting on the ground some 10 m behind my cameras in complete darkness.

20h50: Flashes are triggered. I switch on my soft red head torch and run to the nearest camera. I check the rear screen. Incredible! First shot and first sharp image. A Desertas Petrel during its nocturnal flight above its breeding territory!

22h36: The dream picture; a Desertas Petrel in full flight with stretched wings, just above the ground, almost touching the vegetation.



A Desertas Petrel comes flying out of the night, straight at the camera. Photo: Bart Vercruyse.

23h32: A photo of two Desertas Petrels in chasing flight. Not completely sharp and the birds are too close to the camera, but impressive anyhow. So close to each other! Walking back to the shelter with only my red head torch, twice I have to duck to avoid low flying noisy petrels. When the birds are so close, I can clearly hear the vibration in their calls which seems to be flattened out when they are further away.

Tuesday the 5th October 2021. 00h00: It's a cool cloudy night (pullover and rain jacket). On the ocean, there is only one very distant white light, a fishing vessel. I am alone on the plateau with the moaning Desertas Petrels: "Mau-au-au-au-wik" or "Mau-au-au-au-whak". Their lamenting calls roll over the plateau. For hours! No, not with only the Desertas Petrels but also with nervously calling cool-season Band-rumped Storm Petrels (although a bit less intensely calling than an hour ago) and now and then a Cory's Shearwater. And noisy crickets...

01h00: the Desertas Petrels are still calling. This primal sound echoes through the night and even when the birds stop calling, I have the impression I hear them still.

01h05: A close-up shot of a Desertas Petrel flying head-on to one of the cameras!

02h30: Sitting on the ground, still in the same place where I started the night some hours ago, I am falling asleep. Time to go to the shelter and to lay down a bit. I leave the cameras in full automatic mode. Should work.

04h15: Back to the cameras. The camera on the left is no longer making exposures! The remote-control connector has come loose and the camera has stopped working at 02h4. Luckily it is an easy problem to solve.

07h00: A few moments ago, a Desertas Petrel left one of the burrow nests around me. All night long, I have heard overflying calling birds but the birds which landed around me and then shuffled over the ground to their nests, were silent. The leaving bird did not make a sound either. Desertas Petrels however also seem to have a very different call when they are on the ground or in their tunnel nests. That is a loud, high and fresh-sounding call, resembling "Poo-oo-oo".

07h08: The night is no longer black and I can see the tripods against the sky. All of a sudden, the calling of both the Desertas Petrels and the Storm Petrels ceases. After just over 10 hours of continuous operation, I stop the cameras and the flashes.

More nocturnal infrared images at www.bartphotovercruysse.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: A huge thank you to Carolina Santos at IFCN Madeira who provided the permit and with whom I prepared the trip, IFCN wardens Isamberto Silva, Mauricio Pereira and Avelino Teixeira and to Catia Gouveia and Elisa Teixeira at SPEA Madeira and Isabel Fagundes at SPEA Portugal.

Breeding Season Reports

Calf of Man

Aron Sapsford (Ornithological Warden), Eleanor Grover, Chloe Hurst, Emma Caulfield, Phoebe Grzeskowiak (Assistant fieldworkers), Manx Wildlife Trust & Manx National Heritage

Colony counts or population estimates are undertaken in most years, using a combination of both land-based observations and boat counts; complete counts of **Northern Fulmar** (*Fulmarus glacialis*), **European Shag** (*Gulosus aristotelis*) and auks are not possible from land only and 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 are undertaken in most years. It was not possible to undertake a complete Island count but based on separate counts of different parts of the coastline there were a minimum of 73 Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS).

Manx Shearwater: Population estimates for 2021 gave a range between 1,000 – 1,200 Apparently Occupied Burrows (AOB). Burrow occupancy surveying during 2022 suggests that similar numbers were present.

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.

Shag: A total of 107 Apparently Occupied Nests (AON) were recorded, an increase of five AON on 2021 figures. A colour-ringing project aimed at investigating fledging success and juvenile survival, initiated in 2021, was continued with 39 pulli marked.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*): Complete island counts found in excess of 600 AON, a decrease from 702 counted in 2021. Productivity was very poor at two colonies on the south-west coast of the Calf, which suffered losses during summer storms. Other colonies fared better, with reasonably high numbers of young fledging.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*): Breeding numbers remained in the region of 25 - 30 AON with better breeding success than in 2021.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*): A total of 45 AON were counted on the Calf, with an additional 20 AON on Kitterland. This compares to 56 AON in 2021 and compares favourably to the average count of 46 AON between 2011 – 2020.

Common Guillemot (*Uria aalge*): Restricted to just two breeding sites on the north-east tip of the Calf, the population was estimated at 237 Individuals (IND) in 2022, which compares favourably with an average of 168 IND during the period 2011 – 2020 and 202 recorded in 2021.

Razorbill (*Alca torda*): Counts of individual birds ashore provide an estimate of 154 in 2022, a decrease from 178 IND in 2021 and an average of 177 IND 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 2021. Small numbers, up to 15 birds, were again seen in association with two potential breeding locations on the Calf, although no birds were seen ashore. 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 (*Cephus grylle*): One or two pairs were again seen to frequent a couple of sites along the north-west Coast of the Calf.

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.

Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*): Having colonised the Calf in 1992, the species was thought to have a breeding population of approximately 60 – 70 pairs; this was based on locating up to 40 nests annually during 2018 – 2021. A greater level of searching for nests in 2022 resulted in 87 active nests being found. Several areas of the Calf that appear suitable for nesting Eiders were not searched and it is therefore likely that the populations true number is more than 100 breeding pairs.

Canna

Bob Swann, Canna Ringing Team

Data collected in 2022 indicated that it was generally another good year for Canna seabirds with **Kittiwake** numbers at a record high and **Shag** numbers likely at their highest since 2004 (Table 1). We strongly suspect that auk numbers were also at very high levels, but unfortunately due to the NatureScot access restrictions to colonies during the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak we could not confirm this. Even the number of occupied **Great Skua** territories was only one down on the previous record high. **Fulmars**, however, continue their dramatic decline.

Table 1. Counts of breeding seabirds on Isle of Canna 2017-2022. Units used are as follows: 1. Apparently Occupied Site, 2. Apparently Occupied Nest, 4. Apparently Occupied Territory, 5. Egg or chick in study plot. A – no complete count due to the ban on accessing colonies. B – no complete count due to the ban on accessing colonies. However, counts done pre-ban (all colonies excluding Geugasgor) totalled 229 AONs a 15% increase on the 200 AONs in comparable colonies in 2021 and suggesting highest count since 2004.

| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2021 | 2022 | Peak (year) |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-----------------|
| Black-legged Kittiwake ² | 1260 | 1060 | 1457 | 1421 | 1551 | 1,551 (2022) |
| Common Gull ⁴ | 23 | 28 | 28 | 23 | 22 | 33 (2014) |
| Great Black-backed Gull ⁴ | 18 | 16 | 18 | 12 | 14 | 93 (1997) |
| Herring Gull ⁴ | 79 | 63 | 99 | 87 | 66 | 1,525 (1988) |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull ⁴ | 8 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 69 (1975) |
| Great Skua ⁴ | 13 | 11 | 13 | 15 | 14 | 15 (2021) |
| Common Guillemot ⁵ | 520 | 587 | 602 | 547 | A | 1,249 (2001) |
| Razorbill ⁵ | 314 | 327 | 425 | 474 | A | 520 (1985) |
| Norther Fulmar ¹ | 180 | 151 | 127 | 75 | 59 | 669 (1977) |
| European Shag ² | 301 | 280 | 440 | 437 | B | 1,753 (1984) |

Due to the NatureScot HPAI visit ban no follow up visits were made to our plots so there is no productivity data for Canna seabirds for 2022. Four adult Great Skua were found dead in late May (almost certainly HPAI victims) despite this the number of territorial pairs was normal and observations in late June suggested most of these appeared to be producing young.

During our limited late June visits there was no indication at all of HPAI affecting seabird on Canna, with no dead or dying birds seen in colonies or on surrounding beaches. However, in July there was a dramatic change indicating that Canna **Guillemots** had been hit by HPAI. As there were no observers on the island this information was as a result of reports of ringed birds. The first of these were reported from beaches on Skye on 7th July, numbers reached a peak 10-14 days later and birds were still being reported into early August. In total 143 dead ringed Guillemots were reported. All were breeding age adults and all were from the Cave, the largest sub-colony on Canna. Since 1990, 64% of the 53,168 Guillemots we have ringed have been Cave birds. The lack of recoveries from other sub-colonies on Canna suggests that they were not affected by HPAI, showing how localised outbreaks can be. It is likely that many Guillemot chicks would have fledged prior to the start of this outbreak. Very few dead chicks were reported amongst the masses of dead adults. Two adult Kittiwakes were also reported. Photographs taken in late July showed lots of Kittiwake nests containing large young on the north side of the island, suggesting most birds were unaffected by the outbreak. No other dead seabirds were reported on Canna in summer 2022.

Fair Isle

Alex Penn, Acting Warden, Fair Isle Bird Observatory

2022 was another mixed season for Fair Isle's seabirds, and a mixed one for monitoring effort. With the exception of Great skuas, whose numbers were down after significant mortality in 2021, all of our seabirds returned in good numbers, and the breeding season got off to a good start. However, as in many other colonies, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) was a major feature of the breeding season here, and this time not just in our **Bonxies (Great Skua)**, affecting **Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*)** and **Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*)** as well. However, our auks, **Arctic skuas (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)**, **Fulmars** and **Shags** appear to have avoided the virus this year, and we can only hope that it does not return again with our seabirds in 2023.

Monitoring effort was reduced for many species this year, partly due to a busy programme of counts completed in 2021, but also in response to the suspension of seabird handling across Scotland, and in efforts to further minimise transmission risk of the virus by not entering colony areas. However, much of the monitoring work was still able to be undertaken, and the breeding season overall has been a reasonable one.

Fulmars showed a slight decrease in numbers in the monitoring plots this year, dropping 5.7% to 383 AOS, with their productivity remaining stable at 0.51 fledged per AOS. Fulmar productivity has been remarkably consistent on Fair Isle in the last decade, remaining between 0.46 and 0.59.

A whole-isle count of Gannets was not possible this year, with poor weather in late June thwarting efforts to survey our colonies. A continuing die-off of Gannets, with new corpses of predominately breeding-age adults washing up daily, suggests that we will see a significant reduction in the population in 2023, presumed to be due to HPAI. Productivity monitoring is ongoing, but it looks set to be a poor year, with chicks disappearing from many nests.

Numbers of Shags in the productivity monitoring plots remained stable, but visits to the west coast population plots were again unable to be undertaken, both due to concerns over HPAI and issues with our boat. Productivity monitoring is ongoing, and this year has been a particularly protracted season, with many pairs failing early and relaying, meaning several pairs still have small to medium chicks at time of writing.

Arctic skuas have had a good year, with 22 Apparently Occupied Territories (AOT, up 10% on 2021) producing 17 fledged young – a productivity rate of 0.77, their second highest in the last 15 years. A reduction in Bonxie numbers may have helped with large chick survival, but equally it is clear that food has not been a limiting factor for most of our seabirds this year. In contrast, Great skuas have again had a very poor year on Fair Isle. It was clear from not long after their return that HPAI was still present in the population, and their close congregations at bathing sites has likely again made transmission of the virus rapid. No population counts were undertaken, but numbers were clearly down on 2021, and the colony areas are now distinctly quiet, with corpses of

adults scattered in large numbers across the isle’s moorland areas. Some pairs still remain - birds that are either resistant to the virus, or simply lucky, and it will not be a complete failure, with the first fledged chicks seen in recent days.

In better news, Kittiwakes have had a much-needed excellent year in the monitoring plots. After a dip in 2021, numbers rose in the plots again by 29%, and productivity was the highest since 1999, with 1.13 chicks fledged per AON. A recovery in numbers would be most welcome after their huge population crash.



Arctic Tern chick. Photo: Alex Penn.

Arctic Terns were not closely monitored this year, in efforts to avoid entering the colony. Adults returned in good numbers, with the colony size estimated to be similar to the last couple of years – around 150-200 nests. Productivity was also reasonable, with good numbers of fledged young seen at the colony, though the protracted nature of fledging and the speed at which young then move on make accurate assessments of numbers fledged difficult. HPAI affected the terns this year, with 48 dead adults counted in the colony after the birds had departed, but despite this they still managed a reasonable year.

Auk monitoring has been most affected by HPAI restrictions, with **Puffin** and **Razorbill** productivity monitoring not possible without handling. **Black Guillemot** numbers fell slightly, with the east coast plot down 14.5% to 174 individuals, while **Guillemot** numbers rose 6% in

the population plots to 1,243 individuals. Guillemot productivity was also good in 2022, with 0.66 chicks per AOS their best result since 2002. A 24hr feed-watch of the Guillemots showed a slight drop in the number of feeds per chick (8.44 in 2021 to 8.0 in 2022), with the majority of fish brought in being sandeels. A similar feed-watch of our Puffins showed a much-reduced feeding frequency (9.48 feeds/burrow in 2021 to 5.57 feeds/burrow in 2022) though fish being brought in (majority rockling and sandeels) were of a good size and in large number. Puffin food sampling was not possible in 2022 due to handling restrictions, and our GLS-tagged birds could not be recaptured for the same reason.

Shetland

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

Extreme mortality in **Great Skuas** and **Gannets** due to the widespread pandemic of HPAI dominated the 2022 Shetland breeding season. Dead Great Skuas were first reported in late April, immediately after the species returned to land, and by mid-July well over a thousand corpses had been found on Foula, plus hundreds on Hermaness and Noss. Gannet corpses were first discovered in early May, on and floating below the breeding cliffs. By August, over a thousand had been seen at Hermaness and the same at Noss, the vast majority adults. The monthly, systematic, Shetland beached bird survey also recorded unprecedented numbers of corpses of these two species, washed up on beaches everywhere from early May onwards (e.g., Figure 1). Many more Gannets and Bonxies likely died though than were seen, since many probably died at sea, sank, or washed away out of sight. So far, the species where at least one

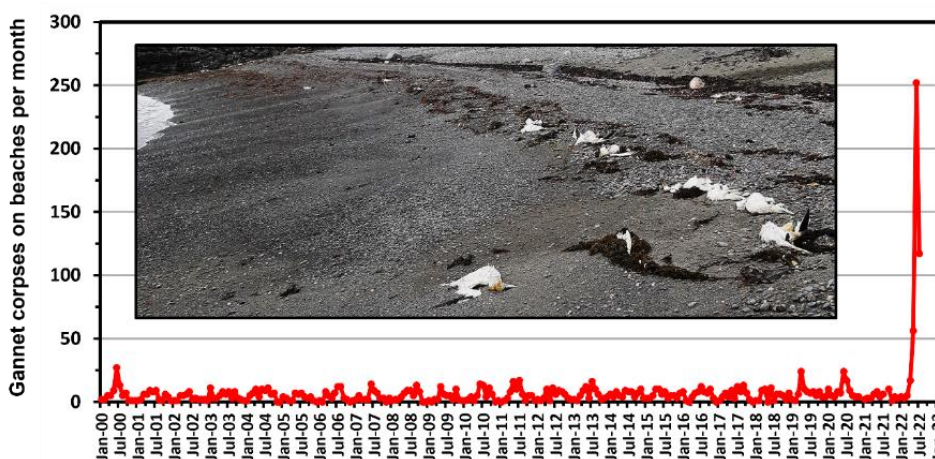


Figure 1: Total Gannet corpses found per month during the systematic Shetland beached bird survey, January 2000 to July 2022. Unprecedented numbers were found during the May (56), June (252), and July (117) surveys in 2022. INSET: fresh adult Gannet corpses abundant in the tideline - a common and disturbing sight around Shetland this season (Eswick South beach, 27th June 2022).

corpse has been sampled from Shetland and has tested positive for HPAI are **Common Eider** in late winter, Great Skua, Gannet, **Arctic Tern**, **Herring Gull**, **Great Black-backed Gull** and **Long-tailed Skua** (*Stercorarius longicaudus*). However, although slightly more Arctic Terns, **Kittiwakes** and large gulls were reported dead than normal, to date this year no species has been observed dead in extreme numbers except for Gannet, Great Skua and Eider.

Systematic population monitoring and corpse surveys are now essential in order to measure the impacts of HPAI on affected seabirds. This work is highly necessary and its value could not be clearer. This year on Noss for example, an unscheduled whole-island census of breeding Gannets was undertaken and recorded 11,472 AON, down by 16.6% on the last count of 13,765 AON in 2019 (and at striking odds to the prior trend of c.2.5% population increase per year). Also, an unscheduled whole-island census of breeding Great Skuas was done on Noss and recorded 103 AOT, down by 78% since the last full count in 2018 (476 AOT). Similarly, on Mousa, an unscheduled full-island census of Great Skuas recorded 36 AOT, down by 40% in comparison with the most recent count of 60 in 2017. Facilitation and planning of large-scale seabird monitoring in 2023 and 2024 to quantify the impacts of HPAI, in Shetland and elsewhere in the UK, must start now.

Population and productivity monitoring of other species in Shetland in 2022 indicated no significant impacts of HPAI and some species even had a good year. **Fulmar** numbers at Hermaness and the four monitoring sites across Mainland Shetland and Yell had hardly changed in comparison with last year. Productivity at these sites was also very similar to 2021, whereas at Noss productivity had increased from 0.33 in 2021 to 0.50. **Guillemot** numbers at Hermaness, Burravoe, and Sumburgh were virtually identical to 2021, but at Esha Ness and Troswick numbers had increased. Guillemot productivity at the Sumburgh monitoring plot was 0.65 (cf. 0.67 in 2021) and chick diet comprised 82% gadoids (70% in 2021), 16% sandeels (28% in 2021) and 1% clupeids (1% in 2021). **Razorbill** population counts at the four annual monitoring sites in Mainland Shetland and Yell were mostly very similar to 2021, although at Troswick numbers had increased by 34%. Razorbill productivity at Sumburgh was the highest on record at 0.70, up from 0.59 in 2021. The winter of 2021/22 was extremely stormy and returning numbers of **Shags** were low at many sites, as has occurred before after winters of prolonged harsh weather and sea conditions. However, the Shag population on Noss remained stable, with 95 AON counted during the full island census (cf. 95 in 2021), and productivity was 1.71 chicks fledged per AON, up from 1.19 in 2021.

Kittiwakes and Arctic Terns appeared to have an excellent breeding season. There were 77 Arctic Tern AON on Noss (13 in 2021), which was the highest count on record, and productivity was 1.09 (0.77 in 2021), also a record high (although several birds were found dead in July/August of suspected HPAI). On Mousa, the count of adult Arctic



Figure 2: Throughout July and August in Shetland, it was widely feared that HPAI would affect many new species, as well as Gannets and Bonxies, and many new outbreaks of extreme mortality would be seen among both adults and chicks. Fortunately, however, there was no evidence of this, and Kittiwakes for example had an unusually good year with many chicks fledging successfully.

Terns (individuals) at the breeding colonies was 400 this year, up from 211 in 2021, and the annual fledged chick count numbered 160 (cf. 66 in 2021). Kittiwake numbers were slightly up on Foula, with 360 well-built nests counted (317 in 2021). Numbers of Kittiwake AON had decreased along the southeast Yell transect (38 cf. 51 in 2021) but had increased on Fetlar (64 cf. 57 in 2021), also on Noss (118 cf. 77 in 2021), also along the southeast Mainland transect (221 cf. 199 in 2021). Kittiwake productivity at Hermaness this year was 0.91, the highest record for 30 years. Similarly, productivity was extremely high across the five monitored sites on Mainland Shetland and Yell (mean of 1.10 cf. 0.31 in 2021, the highest record since 1992) and was also high on Noss at 0.9 (0.5 in 2021).

Isle of May

Mark Newell, Mike Harris, Ella Benninghaus, Samuel Langlois Lopez, Sophie Bennett, Sarah Burthe, Sarah Wanless and Francis Daunt (UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology)



Puffin with prey.

Photo: Samuel Langlois Lopez

From late summer 2021 it was clear that abnormal conditions at sea were having a serious impact on seabirds with auks in particular affected with widespread observations of aberrant behaviour and high mortality. The late winter period was fairly benign and the commencement of breeding in 2022 was at a normal date for most species. However, it was clear that **Common Guillemot** and **Atlantic Puffin** had been severely hit with return rate of individually marked birds at the lowest point since the poor years in the mid 2000's.

During the breeding season, fieldwork on the Isle of May was able to commence on time and using usual protocols without the COVID-19 impacts of 2020 and 2021. However, from mid-June when the spread of HPAI was reaching East Scotland all hands-on fieldwork ceased and access to some study areas was restricted, impacting data collection for some projects. Compared to many colonies, mortality on the Isle of May was only observed to be above normal levels for **Black-legged Kittiwakes**, HPAI was later confirmed to be present in a test individual, although this did not appear to affect their breeding performance. Fortunately, all observational fieldwork could continue with some inventive deviations from some normal methodology to maintain data collection. However, much diet data was not collected, and Puffin breeding success was impossible to obtain.

The 2022 season proved a fairly productive year amongst the main study species despite the HPAI outbreak. With UKCEH researchers present on the island continuously for 3 and a half months, the cliff-nesting seabirds could be monitored on a daily basis allowing the exact timing of any failures and effects of extreme weather to be recorded. Light winds dominated the season, and it was exceptionally dry meaning breeding attempts were unaffected by the weather.

Breeding success of Northern Fulmars, **European Shags** and Black-legged Kittiwakes were above the long-term average, whereas Common Guillemots were slightly above average, and **Razorbills** had a below-average breeding season. Return rates were above the long-term average for European Shags, Black-legged Kittiwakes, and Razorbills while Common Guillemots and Atlantic Puffin were below average. The main species-specific results were:

Fulmar breeding success (0.55 chicks per incubating pair) was the third highest ever.

European Shags had a successful season with the joint second highest breeding success on record (2.04 chicks per pair). Adult return rate at 87.1% was above average.

Black-legged Kittiwakes had a successful season with the second highest breeding success on record (1.38 chicks per completed nest). Adult return rate (84.3%) was above average.

Common Guillemots had an average breeding season (0.74 chicks leaving per pair laying). Return rate of adults (79.4%) was the third lowest ever.

Razorbills had a slightly below average breeding season (0.56 chicks leaving per pair laying) but the adult return rate (86.7%) was average.

Atlantic Puffin breeding success was not monitored this year due to HPAI preventing access to the burrows during the fledging period. The return rate for adults (64%) was poor with only three lower years.

As the winter approaches, we will be delighted to receive sightings of any colour ringed Shags along the east coast. Please send sightings to shags@ceh.ac.uk

For more information check out: www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/isle-may-long-term-study

Twitter: @CEHseabirds

Skomer

Leighton Newman, Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales

2022 was a relatively settled season (certainly when compared to 2021) with no big storms impacting the breeding birds in the middle of the season. Auk counts continued to increase rapidly with productivity also good. Gull counts were a mixed bag with some increases and some small decreases. Thankfully, HPAI did not reach Pembrokeshire until many of the breeding seabirds had left the island. Manx Shearwaters are still in their burrows (September) and seemingly more vulnerable whilst here, but they are in the middle of peak fledging as I write this, with all observations and burrow checks indicating that there has been no impact or any sign of HPAI on the island.

Fulmar: There were 538 AOS counted during June, down from 576 in 2021 and below the 10-year average of 550 AOS. The productivity was 0.39 which is identical to the five-year average.

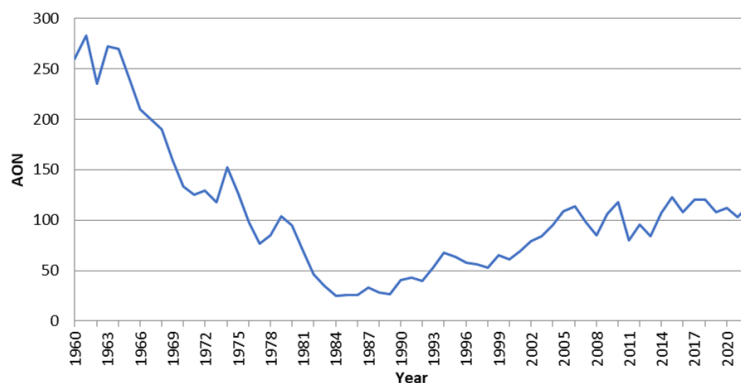
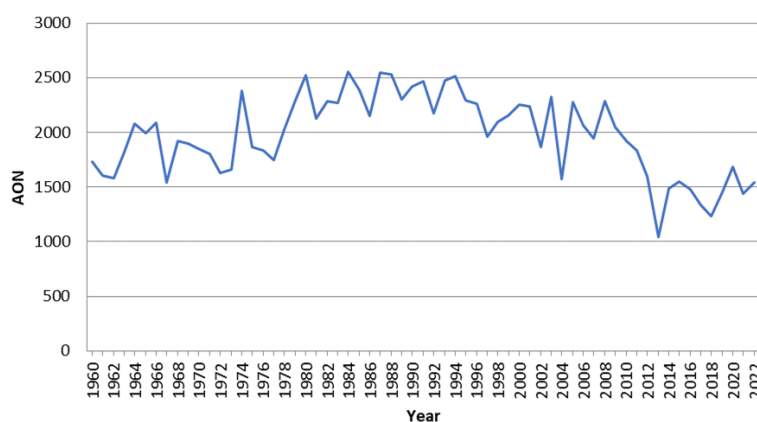
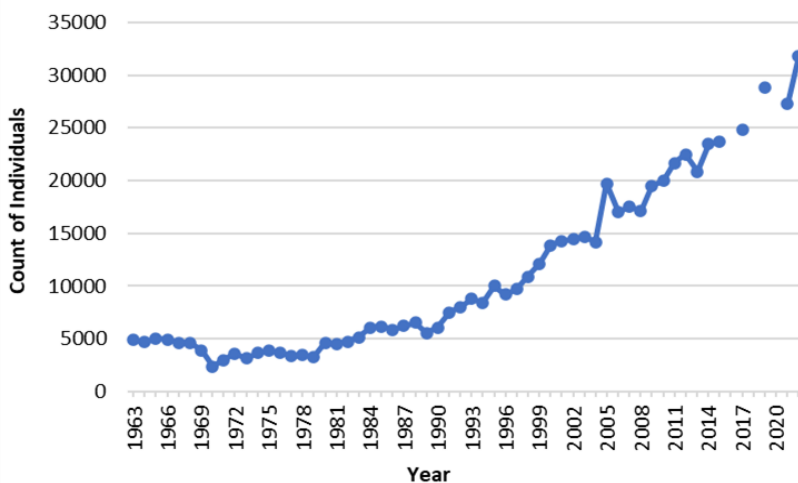
Puffin: Our first Puffins of the season were seen on the water on 10th March (n = 40) with the first birds seen on land on 15th March. Our full island counts were conducted on 23rd and 24th March. The highest count from these two days was 38,896 individuals: 4,083 more than 2021 and breaking records for the highest Puffin count in modern history.

Razorbill: There were 10,192 individuals, 2,024 more than 2021 and the first time the Razorbill population has surpassed 10,000 individuals. The productivity was 0.47 which is just below the historical average of 0.48 (1993 – 2021) and below the five-year average of 0.53.

Guillemot: A large increase compared to 2021 with 31,790 individuals recorded and the first time since modern recording that the population had surpassed 30,000 individuals. The population is thought to have been somewhere around 100,000 individuals in the 1930s (Birkhead, 2016). The productivity was also good at 0.72.

Kittiwake: A slight recovery in the population from last year with 1,544 AON recorded. This is 105 more than 2021. The productivity was 0.63 which is slightly above the 5yr average but a drop of 0.16 on 2021.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Population counts in May resulted in 7,262 AON, down from 7,412 in 2022 and down from a peak count in 1993 of 20,200 AON.



Top: Guillemot population (individuals) on Skomer since 1963. Middle: Kittiwake population (Apparently Occupied Nests) on Skomer since 1960. Bottom: Great Black-backed Gull population (Apparently Occupied Nests) on Skomer since 1960.

Herring Gull: Population counts conducted in May resulted in 266 AOS down from 271 in 2021 and below the 10-year average of 348 AOS. Although the population continues to decline, the rate of decline appears to be slowing. Productivity has recovered from 0 in 2021 to 0.79 this year. This is above the five-year average of 0.32

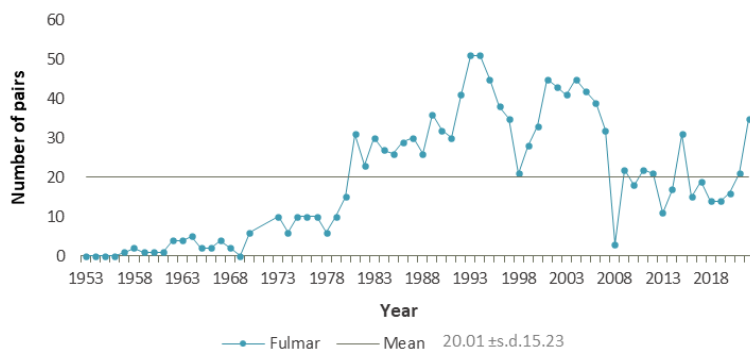
Great Black-backed Gull: Population counts resulted in 114 AON, up from 103 in 2022. The productivity was 1.64 which is almost identical to the five-year average of 1.66.

Shag: Four pairs bred on Skomer, up on two pairs in 2021, with the main Shag colony nesting on nearby Middleholm. Seven chicks fledged from four nests.

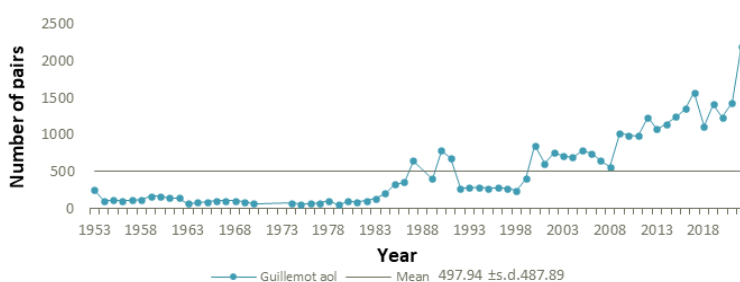
Bardsey and Ynys Gwylans

Ollie King, Bardsey Bird Observatory

Fulmar: 35 Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS) were counted across the East Side, which was the highest count since 2006. The total was 14 higher than in 2021, as well as being 81% above the 10-year mean ($19.30 \pm \text{s.d.}7.79$) and 75% higher than the long-term average from 1953-2022 ($20.01 \pm \text{s.d.}15.23$). Productivity rates were not calculated due to restrictions imposed on monitoring activities as a result of HPAI.



Storm Petrel: A pair was found nesting in an artificial nest box and an egg was seen on 29th June. It is considered that nesting birds are present in other locations across the East Side from previous censuses. The first evidence of breeding on Ynys Gwylan Fawr was recorded when one was heard calling on a visit on 21st June.



Fulmar pairs (Apparently Occupied Sites, top) and Guillemot pairs (Apparently Occupied Ledges, bottom) on Bardsey Island.

Cormorant: Five Apparently Occupied Nests (AON) were counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr. This is the second year in a row they have bred on the larger of the two islands after an eight-year absence since 2013. A trip was made late in the season and only three large chicks were recorded on Ynys Gwylan Bach. The number of AON is 56% below the 2013-2022 mean ($13.78 \pm \text{s.d.} 9.28$). 12 juveniles were found. The productivity of 2.40 was 48% higher than the 2013-2022 mean ($1.62 \pm \text{s.e.}0.19$).

Shag: Bardsey held 65 AON, the second highest count since 1953. This was 45% above the 2013-2022 mean ($39.00 \pm \text{s.d.} 4.97$). 133 young fledged. The productivity of 2.25 was 26% above the 2011-2020 mean ($1.79 \pm \text{s.e.} 0.13$). 23 AON were found on Ynys Gwylan Fawr with a further six seen across on Ynys Gwylan Bach. The combined total of 29 AON is 34% lower than the 10-year mean ($43.89 \pm \text{s.d.}12.26$). From a sample of 23 nests, a total of 38 young was counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr giving a productivity of 1.31, 22.14% lower than the 2013-2022 mean ($1.68 \pm \text{s.e.}0.11$).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: 159 AON were counted, 12% lower than the 2013-2022 mean ($180.60 \pm \text{s.d.}54.36$). From a sample plot of 117 AON, a minimum of 40 juveniles fledged, giving a productivity figure of 0.37 chicks per pair, 31% lower than the previous year and 19% lower than the 10-year mean ($0.42 \pm \text{s.e.}0.05$). A single pair were recorded breeding on Ynys Gwylan Fawr, producing a single chick.

Herring Gull: A total of 378 AON was counted, 41 (12%) greater than the 2021 total and 1% above the 10-year mean ($373.00 \pm \text{s.d.}36.86$) A sample count at the North End colony of 124 AON produced a minimum of 78 juveniles, giving a productivity of 0.60, which is 3% lower than the 10-year mean ($0.65 \pm \text{s.e.}0.03$). On a single visit in June, 42 AON were counted on the Gwylans, 54%

below the 2013-2022 mean ($90.50 \pm \text{s.d.}46.07$). A minimum of 40 chicks were counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr, giving a productivity, giving a productivity figure of 0.95, 10% above the 10-year mean ($0.87 \pm \text{s.e.}0.06$).

Great Black-backed Gull: Bardsey held two pairs, 56% below the 10-year mean ($4.50 \pm \text{s.d.} 1.90$). There was a minimum of two young fledged. The productivity of 1.00 is 25% above the 2011-2020 mean ($0.80 \pm \text{s.e.} 0.15$). There were 83 adults with 28 juveniles on Ynys Gwylan Fawr and nine AON on Ynys Gwylan Bach. The total number of pairs/AON was 19% higher than the 2011-2020 mean ($42.2 \pm \text{s.d.} 33.73$). A combined productivity of 0.56 was 9% above the 10-year average ($0.52 \pm \text{s.e.} 0.12$). An estimated 39 pairs nested producing a minimum of 38 juveniles on Ynys Gwylan Fawr, and a further two AON with two juveniles were recorded on Ynys Gwylan Bach. This was 30% lower than the 10-year mean ($58.75 \pm \text{s.d.}19.94$). The productivity figure calculated from numbers on Ynys Gwylan Fawr was 1.00 was 36% above the 10-year average ($0.74 \pm \text{s.e.}0.04$).

Kittiwake: 230 AON were counted, 77% above the 2013-2022 mean ($130.30 \pm \text{s.d.}46.98$). On 22nd July, 158 large juveniles were counted and believed to have fledged, giving a productivity of 0.69, 2% lower than the 10-year mean ($0.70 \pm \text{s.e.}0.12$).

Guillemot: A count of 2,193 Apparently Occupied Ledges (AOL) was the highest recorded on the Island to date, 56% above the 2013-2022 mean ($1,369.30 \pm \text{s.d.} 311.43$). In a sample plot of 95 AOL at Bae Felen, 35 chicks were recorded, resulting in a productivity of 0.37, which was 1% lower than the 10-year mean ($0.37 \pm \text{s.e.} 0.04$). 38 AOL with 17 chicks were counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr, while 52 AOL with 38 chicks and 40 eggs were counted on Ynys Gwylan Bach. The combined total of 90 AOL was 40% above the 2013-2022 average ($64.63 \pm \text{s.d.}24.81$), and the productivity figure of 0.61 was 92% higher than the 10-year mean ($0.32 \pm \text{s.e.}0.09$).

Razorbill: A count of 1,937 birds from the whole of the East Side was made in June, resulting 1,298 pairs with the 0.67 times conversion-factor applied. This was 37% higher than the 10-year mean ($947.43 \pm \text{s.d.}496.62$) and 1% higher than the long-term 1953-2022 average ($1,287.90 \pm \text{s.d.}223.87$). A minimum of 211 young and eggs was counted, 18% lower than the 10-year mean ($257.60 \pm \text{s.d.}67.62$). On Ynys Gwylan Fawr, 31 AOL were counted, alongside a single AOL on Ynys Gwylan Bach. Four chicks and an egg were recorded, 70% lower than the 2013 to 2022 average ($16.43 \pm \text{s.d.}13.77$).

Puffin: 319 individuals (c. 160 pairs) were counted ashore and on the sea, 41% above the 2013-2022 mean ($113.30 \pm \text{s.d.} 54.89$) but a decrease in 40 pairs from 2021. 741 Apparently Occupied Burrows (AOB) were counted on Ynys Gwylan Fawr with a flush count of 457 individuals, alongside a minimum of 47 AOB on Ynys Gwylan Bach. This was a 13% increase on the 2013-2022 mean ($695.33 \pm \text{s.d.}187.57$).

Kittiwakes, Seaford, East Sussex

David H Howey, Sussex Ornithological Society

The presence of some 200 birds just offshore on 28th January was the first sign of re-occupation of the colony on the cliffs at Splash Point, Seaford in East Sussex. Typically, these birds had departed by midday – a pattern which was repeated on several occasions in April and May. A boat-based survey in June recorded only 383 AON which is the lowest number since the colony became fully established in 2011.

There is no obvious reason for this drastic reduction in numbers. Although there were reports of twelve Herring Gulls dying as a result of Avian Flu within 10 km of the colony, studies did not reveal any Kittiwakes showing signs of distress.

A further survey recorded a productivity level of 0.79 giving a mean figure of just 0.73 over the past six years.

The Kittiwakes in East Sussex are now an isolated colony. The closest other colonies in southern England are in Devon west of Torquay and at Lowestoft, Suffolk both of which are some 280km distant. This gives little optimism of recruitment. It is hoped that young birds from previous years return to Seaford in order that the colony may recover.

Training Grant Reports

Earlier this year, The Seabird Group launched a new training grant for individuals to use towards travel, accommodation, and subsistence in order to undertake an unpaid voluntary activity focussing on seabirds. We hoped that this grant would enable people to undertake such activities who may not otherwise have the opportunity. For the first grant round, we had three successful applicants. Read on to hear what they got up to over the summer months:

LUCY WILLIAMSON

In April, I received the exciting news that I had been selected for a Seabird Group training grant. This provided me with the funding to commence a long-term volunteering position on **Skokholm Bird Observatory** where I lived and worked for three months over the Spring. It was my first experience of a seabird colony and what an initiation it was!

Arriving as a novice to seabird monitoring, by the end I had experience monitoring all the seabirds that live on Skokholm - from playing calls into drystone walls to survey for **Storm Petrels**, to watching **Puffins** deliver sand eels to burrows in two-hour shifts for daylight productivity surveys, and extracting **Manx Shearwaters** from burrows to monitor their survival and productivity. There were a few lows (a particularly painful Manx Shearwater interaction comes to mind) but many, many highs. I feel really privileged to have spent so long on the island, watching it transform over the Spring as migrants passed through and the breeding birds settled, until it was exploding with noise and life. Particular highlights include scrambling down to survey boulder nesting **Razorbills** with thousands of auks flying around us, tensely watching as the **Guillemot** and Razorbill 'jumplings' leapt into the sea at dusk, and intimately getting to know the Manx Shearwaters occupying the decade-old study plots. I learnt so much, gained lots of ringing experience, and have become a firm seabird lover.

In a season so affected by HPAI, and also witnessing the impact of climate change-driven storms on breeding efforts, I feel passionate about working to conserve seabirds in the future. Thank you to The Seabird Group for helping me have this amazing opportunity, and thanks to the wardens, Rich and Gis, for making the experience so incredible.

LIRAYEN VALENCIA

For the past two months I have been living on the beautiful **Skomer Island** as a long-term volunteer. Very different from where I am from - London! I applied for this role as I wanted to gain hands-on experience in seabird conservation. With Skomer Island being home to over 800 thousand seabirds during the breeding season, including the famous **Atlantic Puffin**, I couldn't think of a better place for getting my foot into the seabird world. From the beginning, I've been lucky enough to get stuck right into assisting with research, with one of my first nights involving the ringing of **Storm Petrels** - Skomer's smallest seabird visitor. Never knew a bird could smell so good!



As Skomer holds the largest population of the **Manx Shearwater** in the world, there has also been plenty of opportunity to assist with the research done around these fascinating creatures. This involves the weighing and ringing of shearwater chicks across various study plots. As Manx Shearwaters are burrow-nesting birds and with around 700 thousand of them coming to breed on Skomer, the island is essentially like a piece of fragile honeycomb. Due to this, burrow-walking is a skill I had to learn early on and is essential for anyone wanting to study these birds.

Unfortunately, with the restrictions of bird handling due to HPAI, the second half of my stay here has been less hands-on but nevertheless still exciting! I've been involved in regular seabird surveys, beach clean-ups, visitor engagement and practical conservation work around the island. Coming from a low-socioeconomic background, none of this would have been possible without the help of The Seabird Group grant as I would not have been able to fund this experience on my own. Grants like this are incredibly helpful and important for people like myself trying to break into the conservation sector, who struggle to fund voluntary roles and therefore struggle to gain experience in conservation. So, a massive thank you to The Seabird Group and everyone who has taken the time to read about my experience!



The main goal of my trip to the **Calf of Man Bird Observatory** was to census the two colonies of **Manx Shearwaters** (also known as 'Manxies') present on the island. The Calf of Man was once a hub for breeding Manxies during the summer months, evident by the deep and twisting burrows present all around the island. However, the population suffered in the past due to rats (known as long-tails to the superstitious). A successful eradication programme in recent years has seen a recovery in the population and ongoing monitoring programmes are in place.

I censused the Manx Shearwaters through call-back surveys. Manxies nest in burrows underground. To ensure nesting birds are not disturbed they will respond to other's calls to let them know a burrow has been claimed. This is taken advantage of to make population estimates. I marked 50 random burrows at each of the colonies, South Harbour and Kione ny Halby, with painted bamboo poles. I visited each burrow every day for three consecutive weeks and played a recording of a male and female duet call for about 15 seconds. I then listened for a response. There was a daily response rate of about 20%, over the three weeks around 50% of the burrows had responded at least once. At the end of the survey period, the whole team performed a colony wide call-back survey at South Harbour where we sectioned off and counted each burrow and their responses. We can use this data to create an island wide estimate of the Manx Shearwater population and compare to past years to plot their recovery.



I had the opportunity to assist with other colony monitoring efforts involving **Shags**, **Razorbills**, **Herring Gulls** and Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*). I also assisted with cetacean and seal surveys by walking the entire parameter of the island and counting every living thing in sight. Each day was filled with fun and exploration. My new experiences with handling and ringing birds will be invaluable in the future.

I would love to say a huge thank you to Aron Sapsford, Warden and walking encyclopaedia of the Calf. I learned more than I could have imagined about small island ecology and management and am extremely grateful. Also, I extend a massive thank you to The Seabird Group for the opportunity and support with my trip.

Seabirder Spotlight

Seabirder Spotlight 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.

Dr Rich Howells

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB?

I'm a Marine Ornithologist at Marine Scotland Science, part of the Scottish Government.

WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE?

My role predominately relates to the provision of advice on the potential impacts of marine renewable developments on marine birds, but I also contribute to a wide range of seabird research and conservation within Scotland.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE JOB?

Playing a direct role in helping maintain Scotland's internationally important seabird populations is important for me, while being at the coalface (pun intended) of the rapidly evolving marine renewables landscape in Scotland means I'm doing my small part to help combat the Climate Emergency. I'm also very active within a wide range of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion networks and initiatives within Scottish Government, which I really enjoy.



ARE THERE PARTS THAT ARE PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING?

The complexity of the job is the thing I find the most challenging. For example, the sheer length and complexity of the documents I review is sometimes mind boggling, while more generally the suite of projects, research and casework can be challenging to navigate. These difficulties are undoubtedly compounded by the fact that I have Multiple Sclerosis, which affects my cognition (and mobility), but my employer is extremely supportive.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS OR ATTRIBUTES FOR SOMEONE IN YOUR ROLE?

A comprehensive understanding of seabird biology and ecology is essential, as is a sound knowledge of the potential impacts of renewable (and other) developments on seabirds and how these can be assessed. However, more general skills are also key, in particular effective communication. This might range from writing/editing scientific reports, chairing steering groups with a range of viewpoints, or maintaining productive networks with key stakeholders.

WHAT WAS YOUR CAREER PATHWAY TO THIS POINT?

Despite not getting my A-level grades, I read Ecology at Cardiff University, including a placement year at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, in Edinburgh. I graduated with a First-class Degree but had no idea what to do next! For the next ~4 years I flip-flopped between travelling, volunteering and working. This included: two summers as an Ecologist within a consultancy (mostly bat/bird surveys), a year as a volunteer coordinator for an environmental charity (living in a yurt), and a year travelling around Australia in a van (working as a chef). I returned to undertake a PhD in Edinburgh (UKCEH/University of Liverpool), studying long-term trends in and drivers of European Shag diet and demography over half a century. I started at Marine Scotland Science project immediately after my PhD.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE CAREER GOALS?

This is a challenging question for me, since my future career prospects are uncertain due to Multiple Sclerosis. Indeed, I can no longer handle seabirds due to being immunocompromised. However, I hope to continue working and progressing within marine ornithology for as long as I can, although I'll also be able to move into other roles within Scottish Government should my abilities change. Ultimately, my only real goal in life now is to live it to the full!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE WORKING TOWARDS A SIMILAR CAREER?

For me there wasn't a clear route that led me to marine ornithology, with both effort and luck playing their fair share. As such, my advice would be:

1. Put yourself out there: Whenever possible talk to people, utilise social media, attend conferences, and get your hands (and everything else) dirty through fieldwork.
2. Failure is normal, common and part of the learning process: I've been unsuccessful for many PhDs and jobs – try and learn something from all your experiences, good and bad.
3. Remember that not everything has to be directly related to seabirds: project management, writing and communications are all key skills that will help with future employment – whatever you eventually do!

Seabird Group Notices

October Research Grant Call Open

The Seabird Group has the facility to award small grants each year to help with costs associated with research projects, or with survey projects for the UK national seabird census. Grants can cover travel, subsistence, and equipment, but staff costs are excluded. Priority is given to Seabird Group members working on Atlantic seabirds. We also award training grants to help support people to undertake voluntary seabird activities

More information can be found on the Research Grants guidelines (link below). Applications should be submitted, preferably in electronic form, to the Secretary using the official application form available below.

The deadline for the next round of grants is 31st October. All applications will be circulated round the Committee and decisions taken. We aim to inform applicants of the outcome of their application within six weeks of these dates.

Details & application forms here: <http://seabirdgroup.org.uk/grants>

The Seabird Group Annual General Meeting

The Seabird Group AGM will take place online again this year on **Saturday 12th November 2-4pm (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 five positions opening on the Executive Committee:

- Newsletter Editor
- Membership Secretary
- Ordinary Member – Social Media Manager
- Ordinary Member – Early-career Representative
- Ordinary Member – Journal Assistant Editor

We are now accepting nominations for these positions and elections will be held by online vote during the week prior to the AGM. The descriptions of these roles are attached. 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! **Nominations will close on 29th October 2022.**

DOCUMENTS FOR THE AGM

All members will be emailed the following documents one week prior to the AGM: the 57th Annual Report, the 2021-2022 Accounts & Treasurer's Report, the list of proposed amendments to the constitution, the minutes of the previous AGM, and the nominations to the positions described above. These documents will also be shared at the beginning of the online AGM via Dropbox.

Please direct any enquiries and nominations 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!



Website: www.seabirdgroup.org.uk
 Facebook:
www.facebook.com/pages/TheSeabirdGroup/
 Twitter: [@TheSeabirdGroup](https://www.twitter.com/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

| | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 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) | jeffstratford@gmail.com |

Ordinary Members:

| | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Assistant Newsletter Editor | Kirsty Franklin (2024) | kirsty.franklin@uea.ac.uk |
| Seabird Census | Will Miles (2023) | willtsmiles@hotmail.com |
| ECR Representative | Zoe Deakin (2022) | zoe.deakin@rspb.org.uk |
| Social Media Manager | Ruth Dunn (2022) | socialmedia@seabirdgroup.org.uk |
| EDI Officer | Lila Buckingham (2025) | edi@seabirdgroup.org.uk |

| Current membership rates | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Ordinary | £30 |
| Concession | £15 |
| Institution | £50 |
| Individual Life | £300 |
| Institution Life | £500 |

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.



COTSWOLD
outdoor



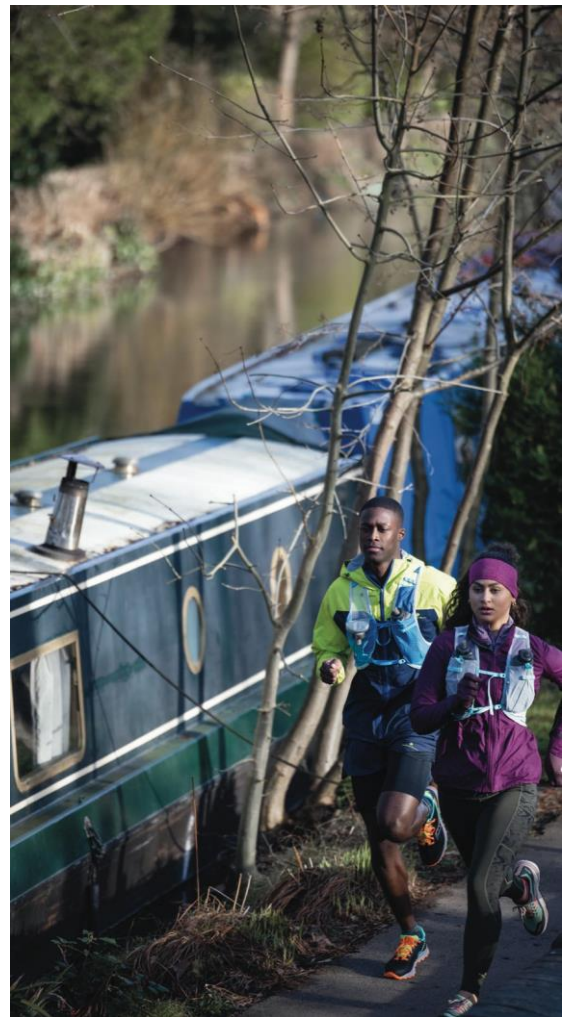
**12.5%
discount**

for members of the Seabird Group

How to claim:

Please present this flyer in-store, or use code
AF-OUTDOOR-12 online.

Full T&Cs apply. Not to be used in conjunction with any other offer or discount. Selected lines are exempt. Excludes electronics. Partnership discount is only valid for Explore More members upon production of membership identification or use of valid discount code online. Offer expires 31.12.22.



You can also use your discount with: