



and 0.95 birds/km respectively. Two interesting winter breeders were also recorded at sea in small numbers: Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis* - 0.95 birds/100km) and Madeiran Storm-petrel (*Oceanodroma castro* - 0.76 birds/100km)]. Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus cachinnans atlantis*), a resident breeder, was commonly seen (55.9 birds/100km) on every crossing and movement of individuals between the islands was observed.



**Lesser Black-backed Gull (© Chris Wernham). A regular winter visitor in Canarian waters, these were encountered in very low numbers by the survey.**

## WINTER SEABIRDS IN THE CANARIAN COASTAL WATERS

The Canary Islands are well known for their interesting seabird breeding colonies (Bannerman, 1963) and a good number of species do visit the Canarian waters on passage and during the winter period (Garcia-del-Rey, 2001; Martín and Lorenzo, 2001). However, the winter status of some of these is unclear (see Table 1). This is due mainly to the lack of reliable pelagic surveys during the winter time in the Canary Islands (e.g. Paterson, 2002). The main aim of this pilot study was to survey pelagic seabirds at sea in Canarian coastal waters in order to try to clarify their winter status.

During the Canarian winters (i.e. December & January) of 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, censuses of birds at sea (as in Buckland et al., 2001) involving a total of 528 km of transects were undertaken from slow moving ferries between the islands (see Fig. 1), one observer at each side of the ferry.

From the target species list (Table 1), only two regular winter visitors were contacted and in very low numbers, thus not allowing density estimates to be calculated. These were Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) and Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), for which indices of abundance were calculated as 1.14 birds/100km

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From an examination of the results, it would appear that it is difficult, at this stage, to consider Leach's Storm-petrel, Northern Gannet, Great Skua and Atlantic Puffin as regular winter visitors to the Canary Islands (as suggested by several authors, Table 1) until more data is gathered. For Leach's Storm-petrel, Martin & Lorenzo (2001) provided 3 winter records from 1996-2001, 7 for Northern Gannet (1981-2001), 5 for Great Skua (1960-2001) and 3 for Atlantic Puffin (1979-2001, none at sea). According to Wernham et al. (2002) all recoveries in the Canaries of Northern Gannet (3 records), Great Skua (2 records) and Atlantic Puffin (2 records) correspond to immature birds. Wernham et al. (2002) suggest that there are many Leach's Storm-petrels in the tropics north of the Equator in the eastern Atlantic between October and January and this is also supported by Beaman & Madge (1998), who consider the Cape Verde islands as the only wintering grounds for this species in the Western Palearctic.

From a number of gulls and terns, all considered as scarce and irregular winter visitors by Martin & Lorenzo (2001) (i.e. Mediterranean Gull, Little Gull, Audouin's Gull, Mew Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Black-legged Gull, Gull-billed Tern and Black Tern) no records were obtained on this study and the status of Slender-billed Gull is far from being clear, possibly due to their fragmented Western Palearctic distribution [see Beaman & Madge (1998)].

The winter status of Grey Phalarope (pelagic in winter), as suggested by Paterson (2002) and Garcia-del-Rey (2001), will need to be clarified by long term pelagic census work in the Canaries. Beaman & Madge (1998) suggest, for the Western Palearctic, that the wintering quarters are close to the Canaries but mainly at tropical Atlantic, whereas Martin & Lorenzo (2001) consider this seabird as accidental to the Canaries. The same applies to Pomarine Skua and Arctic Skua (both pelagic in winter), considered as scarce and irregular winter visitors by Martin & Lorenzo (2001) but not wintering in the Canaries according to Beaman & Madge (1998) for the Western Palearctic.

Despite the need to increase the coverage of the surveys around these islands [lack of slow ferries prevented survey on several routes, e.g. Tenerife-Gran Canaria, a route where Madeiran

Storm-petrel are seen regularly during the Canarian winter (M.B. Lancaster pers. comm.)], it is concluded that the Canaries are a poor wintering ground for pelagic seabirds, and this might be related to the lack of feeding sites during this time of the year and the oceanic aspect of the archipelago.

### **Acknowledgements**

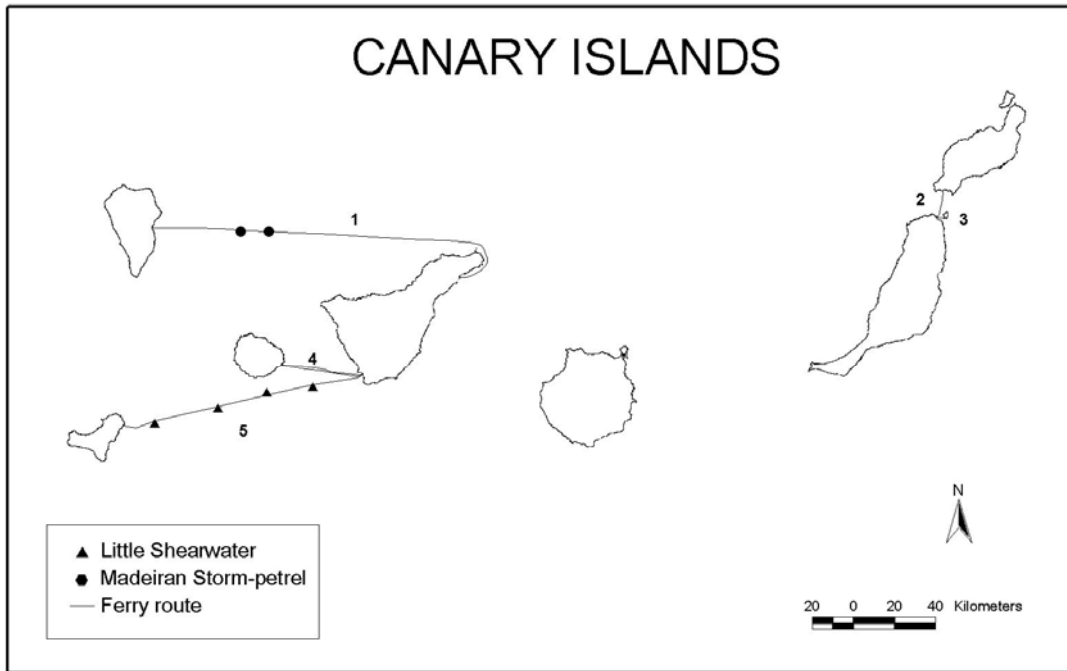
I would like to thank all members of the Canarian Society of Ornithology (Sociedad Ornitológica Canaria-SOC) and particularly Michael Barry Lancaster for helping during the course of this study. Special thanks go to the Seabird Group for partially funding the project during 2004-2005.

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**Figure 1. Ferry routes undertaken in this pilot study (1 = S/C de La Palma-S/C de Tenerife, 2 = Playa Blanca-Corralejo, 3 = Corralejo-Lobos islet-Corralejo, 4 = Cristianos-San Sebastian-Cristianos, 5 = Cristianos-Valverde-Cristianos) and distribution of contacts with Madeiran Storm-petrel (●) and Little Shearwater (▲).**

**Table 1. Bird species targeted during the at-sea winter surveys (2003-04 & 2004-05). Present status and reference also included.**

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH NAME	STATUS	REFERENCE
Leach's Storm-petrel	<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>	Regular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Scarce winter visitor	Paterson 1997
		Occasional or irregular winter visitor	Paterson 2002
		Accidental	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Regular in winter	Paterson 1997
		Regular winter visitor (eastern Canaries), occasional or irregular winter visitor (western Canaries)	Paterson 2002
		Uncommon, scarce or localized winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Grey Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>	Accidental	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Rare and irregular passage migrant	Paterson 1997
		Occasional or irregular winter visitor	Paterson 2002
		Rare or very localised winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001

Pomarine Skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Rare and irregular on passage (need to be census at sea during the winter)	Paterson 1997, 2002
		Uncommon, scarce and localized on passage	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Regular on passage (but need to be census at sea during the winter)	Paterson 2002
		Irregular on passage	Paterson 1997
		Rare on passage	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Great Skua	<i>Catharacta skua</i>	Scarce and regular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Regular (at sea) winter visitor	Paterson 1997
		Occasional or irregular winter visitor	Paterson 2002
		Rare or very localised winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Irregular winter visitor	Paterson 1997
		Occasional winter visitor with few records	Paterson 2002
		Rare or very localised winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Occasional winter visitor	Paterson 2002
		Accidental	Paterson 1997, Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Regular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Regular winter visitor	Paterson 1997, 2002
		Uncommon, scarce or localized winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>	Possible resident breeder	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Accidental in winter	Paterson 1997, 2002
		Uncommon, scarce or localized winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Accidental winter visitor	Paterson 1997
		Occasional winter visitor with few records	Paterson 2002
		Rare or very localised winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001

Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Very rare and irregular winter visitor	Paterson 1997
		Rare and irregular winter visitor	Paterson 2002
		Accidental	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Regular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Regular winter visitor to all islands	Paterson 1997, 2002
		Fairly common winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Rare and irregular winter visitor Rare and regular to Tenerife	Paterson 1997
		Rare & occasional winter visitor	Paterson 2002
		Rare or very localised winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	Irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Rare and irregular winter visitor	Paterson 1997
		Occasional or irregular winter visitor	Paterson 2002
		Uncommon, scarce or localized winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	Passage migrant	Paterson 2002
		Accidental	Paterson 1997
		Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Rare on passage	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>	Regular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Regular winter visitor	Paterson 1997
		Common and abundant winter visitor. Regular winter visitor (eastern Canarias), occasional or irregular winter visitor (western Canarias)	Paterson 2002
		Common winter visitor	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Rare passage migrant	Garcia-del-Rey 2001
		Accidental	Paterson 2002
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	Scarce and irregular winter visitor	Martin & Lorenzo 2001
		Rare but regular winter visitor	Paterson 1997, 2002
		Accidental	Garcia-del-Rey 2001

## 2005 BREEDING SEASON – THE LATEST NEWS!

## SOTEAG MONITORING IN SHETLAND

### ISLE OF MAY

The breeding of many of the seabirds on the Isle of May has been very late in 2005. This was particularly marked for the Kittiwake where the first egg was not seen until 30 May, five days later than the previous latest year. This continues the recent trend for later laying which is now about three weeks later than it had been in the 1980s. The first Guillemot and Razorbill eggs were laid on 4 May, 12 and 8 days later than normal. All the signs are that Puffins were also late. At least in the auks, breeding seems more highly synchronised than normal so that the overall breeding seasons for the various species will be less delayed than suggested by the first egg dates. In contrast, Fulmars and Eiders were slightly early.

To date the most striking thing about 2005 is the shortage of Shags. Some females are still laying but there are unlikely to be more than 200-300 pairs that compares with 700 in 2004 (and almost 2000 in 1987). This latest decline was expected following the wreck of Shags in northeast Britain in the late winter during which almost 140 Shags that had been ringed on the Isle of May were reported dead, at least half of which were of breeding age. There is a suggestion that numbers of Guillemots that lay might be slightly less than in 2004 but it is still unclear whether this was because some pairs are not breeding this year or to some exceptional mortality. Usually the male Guillemot remains at the nest-site while the female is away, presumably spending most time feeding, the few days prior to the egg being laid and hence is present at laying. Unusual numbers of females laid unattended in 2005, suggesting the possibility that food might have been short so that males too had to spend longer feeding. It is too early to assess population changes let alone breeding success for most species.

**Mike Harris, Mark Newell, Francis Daunt & Sue Lewis** (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Banchory), 13 June 2005.  
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Another late season and a very hesitant start. The Fulmar pre-laying exodus seemed both extensive and extended, while early Shag nests often went "backwards", i.e. from AON to trace or disappeared completely. Guillemot attendance at Sumburgh Head through April and early May was either erratic or non-existent; the first egg seen was found predated on 10th May and the first was laid in the breeding success plot on 11th (13th last year). For the next two weeks 30-40% of pairs laid but losses were heavy (over 50%), being predated by gulls or just disappearing, especially during strong easterlies on 19-20th May.

Things changed dramatically for the better around 26-27th May, when Kittiwakes started frantically gathering nest material. Weather over the next two was atrocious with north-east gales and heavy rain and I expected the Guillemot plot to be virtually wiped out. Not so. The birds stuck it out and since then laying has continued to date with higher colony attendance than last year, few egg losses and good numbers of re-lays; first chicks are due to hatch around 15th June.

This upturn was reflected in Shag and Kittiwake success plots. Shags have now mostly settled down and most Kittiwakes are incubating, in similar numbers to 2004 and with few early failures. The first counts of Guillemots and Razorbills in population plots show a marked increase in attendance since 2004, but changes in Fulmar numbers are variable. Although not monitored, Puffins have been around Sumburgh Head in large numbers this past week and the first was seen carrying 0-group sandeels this morning (Guillemots have also been using tiny sandeels as display fish this past week).

This all points to a scarcity of 1-group or older sandeels during April and May leading to late breeding, but a flush of 0-group becoming available at the end of May that really kicked things off. This scenario is similar to that observed in 1991. Despite the weather (very much a woolly hat and survival suit "summer"

so far), things are holding in there at the moment, so fingers crossed.

**Martin Heubeck**

University of Aberdeen, 12th May 2005  
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## **MORE FROM SHETLAND**

Red-throated Divers were all very late starting. In fact some pairs have still not laid - will they now? They are on territory but just loafing about as though it was early April - which it feels like most days. I have heard of a couple of pairs with small chicks in the last two days but these are the very first. The various downpours of rain have not helped - one nest I was watching was flooded out yesterday after very heavy rain on Wednesday night.

Common Gull and Black-headed Gulls seem to be doing OK but it is not an early season. Terns - again very late but some have laid, one or two reasonable sized colonies in the south Mainland but too early to say what will happen. A couple of small colonies on Burra, in which birds were sitting, have disappeared.

I've not been able to get into any Cormorant colonies yet due to the weather - we need a couple of dry days and little swell to get onto the stacks from the boat - but scoping from a distance, all seems well, and they seem to be getting on with it OK.

**Dave Okill** (17 June 2005)

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## **FOULA SEABIRD PROGRESS REPORT TO MID-JUNE 2005**

On Foula, the early season was looking very gloomy but June is showing signs of auks in particular returning in greater numbers. Arctic Skuas and Shags are still well below strength however.

April counts in the study plots showed a slight increase in Tysties on 2004 numbers (up from 252 to 278) but numbers were still below those in the 1990s.

Numbers of Shags present in Foula remain abnormally low. Breeding on the sample plots along the south east is still virtually non-existent,

with only 7 attempts so far, 2 of which have already failed, and only 2 birds are definitely incubating. Adults have been seen present at only 9 other potential sites (normally there are over 100). The first nest building was observed on 15th May. Shags at the north end of the island appear to have fared slightly better but even here there were only 7 nests compared to about 40 in the late 1990's. The large colonies on the west side of the island also look very depleted.

On 13th May, at the productivity plots in under the Stee, low numbers of Kittiwakes were seen attending what appeared to be the remains of nests from last year. Nest building with new material was not observed until the end of May. 83 well built nests were seen on 5th June, but it was difficult to tell how many had eggs, as the birds were incubating very poorly. Of the nests that could be looked into without too much disturbance, 6 had single eggs and the others were empty. Very few Arctic Terns arrived and only a few have attempted to lay with almost immediate failure.

By 1st May, good numbers of Razorbills were seen sitting up and things appeared normal. 5 birds had laid by 13th May. 46 eggs had been laid by 5th June, only slightly below normal, and only one of the first laid ones had been lost. However the pattern of nest sites was unusual with 2 of the plots having nearly double the normal number and another 2 of the plots having a total of only 2 nests. The 2 near empty plots are more open and exposed to the north and more accessible to predators, although no predated eggs were found there. 11 predated eggs were found on the other plots. Guillemots were late returning and early signs indicated poor laying rates but by mid June attendance at ledges was much better though whether this translates into fledged young remains to be seen. Puffins also returned late and in fewer numbers than "normal" but by mid-June good numbers were again present though it is not possible to say what the egg laying situation might be.

The first Arctic Skua was seen 20th April, which was unusually late. Very few were around during the first three weeks of May, with none being seen on some days. Numbers increased during the last week of May with 46 colour-ringed birds identified by 1st June, but very few

signs of intention to breed were seen. 5 pairs were found to have laid by 4th June, 4 with single eggs and one with two, but the birds were not defending their territories. By 14th June 86 colour ringed birds had been identified but a number of those identified previously appeared to have left. A further 5 pairs had laid (including one with two eggs), giving a total of 10 pairs laid, but, by 14th June, 7 of them had already lost their eggs. Bonxies were late in starting to lay and attendance was low compared to 2003. The number of nests in one section of study plot on 16<sup>th</sup> June was slightly up on the 15<sup>th</sup> June in 2004 so things are certainly no worse than the same stage last year. There is now substantially more territory defence than there was a week or two ago (thanks to Jon Crane of Glasgow University for this news).

Red-throated divers had laid (or probably laid) at 7 sites while 3 other sites were occupied but had not laid by mid-June and two others were not occupied.

Fulmars appear to have laid in good numbers and seem to be doing well so far. No assessment of the Gannets has been made yet

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## FAIR ISLE

A similar picture on Fair Isle to that reported on mainland Shetland by Martin Heubeck.

Attendance by Guillemots in April and most of May was erratic at best. First egg was seen mid-afternoon on 13th May (same date as in 2004) but there were no birds present on the two monitoring plots then. By mid-day on the 16th, one lone bird sat on an egg at Pietron. A week later, attendance was 50-60% but only 6% had laid.

Kittiwakes too were present in reasonable numbers on the breeding success plots but were doing virtually nothing. Suddenly in late May however things suddenly went crazy. Every Kittiwake was seen flying around with nest material. Numbers of AON are slightly up on 2004 at all plots (but still well below average) and 95% are now incubating. Guillemot numbers on the plots also increased and lots of

eggs being laid - losses have been minimal since and attendance at the population plots has been 30-40% higher than in 2004.

Razorbill numbers too have been high and numbers of eggs laid slightly above average. Following a two week mass clear-out from mid-May, Fulmars have returned in force but numbers of AOS are low.

Both Arctic and Great Skuas are well up (88% and 43% respectively) on 2004 and numbers of AOT are now comparable to those in 2002. Around 65% of Arctics and 50% of Bonxies have now laid eggs.

Only a small number (c40prs) of Arctic Terns have (eventually) bothered to nest - hardly surprising following four years of complete breeding failure. Shags however are at their lowest level - 32% lower than in 2004 (itself the lowest on record) and after some chaos at the start of the season (nests being built then dismantled, full clutches being abandoned) things have settled down and 90% of clutches had two eggs and 50% had hatched by mid-June.



**Puffin with sandeels (© Jez Blackburn).  
Perhaps one of the few species that will do  
well in Shetland this summer?**

Puffins have been seen bringing in Sandeels so hopefully.....

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## SEABIRD COLONY NEWS, REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

**Overview:** A strange year, no consistent trends!

The colonies covered by this report consist of three on the west coast (Downpatrick Head, Mayo; Cliffs of Moher, Clare; Magharae Islands, Kerry) and seven on the east coast (Rockabill, N. Dublin; Lambay, N. Dublin; Ireland's Eye, N. Dublin; Dublin Port; Dalkey, S. Dublin; Kilcoole, Wicklow; Cahore, Wexford; Lady's Island Lake, Wexford).

**Fulmar:** On the east coast the density of AOS looks normal but those nests checked on Lambay had very fresh looking eggs (31 May) indicating a late-ish season. At the Cliffs of Moher the population has apparently increased substantially (to 4709 AOS) since Seabird 2000 count of 3560 AOS in 1999.

**Gannet:** Numbers on Ireland's Eye have, predictably, increased to 313 AOS.



**Gannets (© Jez Blackburn). Increases on Ireland's Eye have taken place this year.**

**Cormorant:** Only 352 AON on Lambay, with 11% of these still yet to lay on 31 May. Only 4% of nests inspected had hatched chicks and mean clutch/brood size was 2.8 (n=243), well under the 'normal' for this site which is usually >3. The Ireland's Eye colony appears stable (556 AON) but is also late. On 19 May, mean clutch/brood size was 2.55 (n=347), 67 % of nests checked had one or more chicks and 11% of nests were still without eggs.

**Shag:** Not censused on Lambay though density seemed normal. As with Cormorants, a late season with many empty freshly-constructed nests and only one brood of small chicks seen. A small sample of 29 nests yielded a mean clutch size of 2.45.



**Kittiwake and young (© Jez Blackburn). The species may still be faring OK in some parts of Ireland this year.**

**Kittiwake:** No consistent pattern in Kittiwakes; the Downpatrick Head colony has perhaps increased slightly (just over 1000 AON) and seems well advanced with most pairs sitting tight; a full survey at the Cliffs of Moher shows a dramatic decline of 50% since 1999 with only 3865 AON (versus 7698). In the east only a few eggs had been laid at Rockabill by the end of the usual clutch count 'census window' (11 June) and none had been laid a week earlier on Lambay. Thus, a possible explanation for the lack of birds/nests in Clare may have something to do with a very late season and a later re-census of some sections may be warranted.

**Small gulls:** At Lady's Island, 1041 Black-headed Gull (AON) nesting with six pairs of Mediterranean Gull.

**Large gulls:** Lambay was surveyed comprehensively for the three large gulls (31 May-1 June). Numbers continue to stay at a very low level overall, though Lesser Blacks appear to have recovered from a poor year in 2004 (133 AON/T) to 260 AON/T, Herring Gulls have stayed about the same at 359 AON/T (311 in 2004), and Great Blacks likewise at 132 (145 in 2004). The gull nesting season seems fairly

advanced with plenty of chicks already on the run (31 May-1 June).

**Auks (Guillemot & Razorbill):** All colonies checked on the east coast seem up to strength with plenty of eggs on the ledges, but numbers very low at the Cliffs of Moher where only 7250 Guillemots (19962 in 1999) and 3547 Razobill (7700) were recorded.

**Sandwich Terns:** Nothing unusual detected at our main colony on Lady's Island with 1122 AON recorded and the first chicks hatched on 26 May.

**Roseate Tern:** Rockabill doing fine with about 638 nests recorded during the first census (8-9 June); the first eggs were laid at Lady's Island on 11 May and currently there are 71 AON with 90 chicks already ringed by 17 June. At Dalkey up to four pairs were prospecting at the end of May but so far only two have laid.

**Common Tern:** The first census on Rockabill produced 964 AON and the final total will certainly exceed 1000. Dublin Port has a record breaking 260 pairs with 270 chick hatched already (17 June). The Dalkey colony is somewhat less advanced with 73 Common and Arctic nests marked by 15 June. At least 11 pairs nesting on the Magharee Islands are the first confirmed breeding record for Kerry for quite some time.

**Little Tern:** Numbers at the Magharees have nearly doubled since 2004 with 55 AON located. At Kilcoole 96 pairs have laid despite the loss of about 20 early nests to Rooks. The first 30 chicks were ringed on 16 June. A 'new' colony has been discovered in the dunes at Cahore, north Wexford. These may be birds displaced from Wexford Harbour colonies by the ground-nesting Peregrines that have occupied one of the sand-bank islands for the last few years!

**With thanks to: Dave Suddaby, John Murphy, Congella McGuire, Michael O'Clery, Dave Daly, Oscar Merne, Joe Adamson, BWI wardens.**

**Steve Newton**

BirdWatch Ireland (20 June 2005)

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## CLEANER SEAS AROUND THE NORTHERN ISLES

After the gloom of last summer's breeding failures of seabirds, it's a relief to be able to report some good news from Orkney and Shetland.

Monthly beached bird surveys have been running continuously throughout the year in both island groups since 1976 (Orkney) and 1979 (Shetland) and the results for 2004 indicate extremely low levels of chronic oiling in the area. In Shetland, only 22 oiled corpses were found during the year (2.6% of the total of 1,498), of which half were Northern Fulmars (1.9% of the total). Only four Common Guillemots were found oiled, a rate of just 0.8% (n = 485). This was the sixth successive year of very low oiling rates (<4.0% of all corpses) for seabirds washing ashore in Shetland, and what was noticeable this past winter was that plastic debris (which probably drifts further than a dead seabird), was also largely free of oil contamination.



**Guillemots (© Jez Blackburn). Good news that oiling rates around Shetland are remaining low.**

The reporting period for the Orkney survey runs from March to February instead of the calendar year, and oil rates for 2004/05 were similarly low at 1.2% for all corpses (n = 1,386), and just 2.1% for Common Guillemots (n = 561).

While the local relaxing of an anthropogenic cause of mortality can only be welcomed at a time when seabird populations in the islands are

under such pressure during the breeding season, Common Guillemots from the Northern Isles and eastern Britain range the North Sea widely in winter. Although in long-term decline, winter oiling rates for the species in the south-eastern North Sea remain stubbornly at around 30-50% however.

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## **NEWS & 'BITS' BY MARK TASKER**

### **From *WORLD BIRDWATCH* Vol. 27(1)**

A sighting of a petrel off the coast of Pentecost Island, Vanuatu in November 2004 looked very like a Vanuatu petrel – a species first described in 2001 based on specimens taken at sea off Vanuatu in 1927 and a dead bird found on a beach in Australia. The species may however be a race of the White-necked Petrel.

The British Antarctic Survey has been putting loggers and satellite tags on albatrosses for a number of years. In their latest study, Grey-headed Albatrosses were found to range much more widely than previously thought. Regular feeding sites from South Georgia were in the south-west Indian Ocean, but some birds returned home by circumnavigating the southern oceans. The record for the scenic route is 46 days.

Avian cholera is the latest threat to South African seabirds. Around 8,000 Cape Cormorants were killed following an outbreak of the disease on Dyer Island.

Readers may remember the plan to 'reclaim' a large section of mudflats at Saemangeum in South Korea that would have removed the feeding area of a large number of Saunders' gull. A court ruling has now halted the work as no economic benefits could be seen for the area, instead losses were much more likely. The

South Korean government is expected to appeal in higher courts.

### **From *Bird Life in Europe* Vol. 9(3)**

The third largest Dalmatian pelican colony in Europe is on a small island sandbank in Lake Sinoie in the Danube Delta. It is eroding rapidly and the BirdLife partner in Romania plans to install wooden support walls to protect the island from further erosion.

Meanwhile in Belgium, an estimated 2% of the world population of Sandwich Terns have moved onto a specially-constructed peninsula off Zeebrugge. Previously these terns, along with two other species of terns had been nesting in areas scheduled for development within Zeebrugge harbour.

The (global) controversy over offshore wind farms is highlighted by plans to construct nine off the Ebro delta in Spain. This delta is home to many Audouin's Gulls and this species and Balearic Shearwaters both use the area proposed for the wind farms for feeding by night.

### **From *SEEVÖGEL* Vol. 25 (4) and 26 (1)**

Harro Müller visited Branco and Raso islands in the Cape Verde group in March 2004. Their report depicts islands under severe pressure from humans. Both Brown Boobies and Red-billed Tropicbirds are being taken by fishermen for food and the colonies of these species appear to have shrunk considerably. The remains of other seabird species were also found. Heavy pollution by garbage and some oil pollution were noted.

Jochen Dierschke, Volker Dierschke and Thorsten Krüger describe seawatching off Germany. This includes a long description of standard methods, suitable identification literature and a catalogue of sites. Patterns of occurrence of some species are also illustrated. The literature list runs to 3 sides – providing a very useful collation of sources for information on bird movement at sea off Germany.

### **From *PACIFIC SEABIRDS* Vol. 31 (2)**

Brad Keitt and Alfonso Aguirre describe the potential effects of the liquefied natural gas

offshore terminal on seabirds of the Coronado Islands off the coast of Baja California. The islands support ten species of seabirds and the plan by ChevronTexaco is to build a large platform (115 inhabitants) just 600m off the islands. The cormorants and pelicans nesting on the islands are extremely susceptible to disturbance, while light pollution is liable to affect the auks and petrels that attend their colonies by night. A number of ways to protest the plan and to stop it from being built are being pursued by local non-governmental organisations and by the Pacific Seabird Group.

Joelle Buffa and Jesse Irwin examined the effects of introduced house mice on the seabirds of Southeast Farallon Island. It appears that the house mice have an annual cycle that peaks in abundance when migratory owls are passing through. This encourages the birds to stay. Shortly afterwards, the mouse population crashes, and those owls that have taken up residence then switch to preying upon ashy storm-petrels. Removal of the mice could result in preventing the predation of approximately 100 ashy storm-petrels per year.

Cats on Wake Atoll have been removed, leading to the expected upswing in seabird populations and the return of a number of species not seen nesting for many years. There has also been an increase in the Polynesian rat population and the relevant authorities are now planning on a rat eradication programme. This is hampered by the bait being consumed by crabs, to whom the rat poison is non-toxic.

In a continuation of the long-running saga of Caspian Terns on the Columbia River, the Pacific Seabird Group has submitted comments on an environmental impact statement on plans to 'manage' the Caspian Tern population. It appears that several of the underlying assumptions of the EIS are not correct – salmon returns to the river have been increasing during the period that Caspian terns were allegedly 'devastating' salmon populations. The main nesting island of the terns is an important seabird colony in its own right (for more than just the terns) and remains totally unprotected – in fact it is the largest unprotected seabird site in North America. PSG is strongly opposed to any lethal control proposals.

Marbled murrelets in the USA may receive less protection in future due to a ruling that they are not distinct from those occurring in Canada. This ruling paves the way for re-assessment as to whether they should be covered by the Endangered Species Act or not. If de-listed this may open up nesting areas in old growth forests in western USA to further logging. The decision on the species status was made in Washington and was counter to the recommendations of locally-based wildlife officers.

### **From *FALKLANDS CONSERVATION NEWSLETTERS***

The Falkland Islands have introduced regulations requiring the use of streamer or 'Tori' lines on all finfish and ray trawlers licensed to operate in Falklands waters and for Falklands registered trawlers operating elsewhere. This follows the discovery that around 1500 albatrosses were being killed per season in collision with trawl warps. The use of Tori lines appears to reduce the risk of collision substantially.

UK readers will remember the days when straw fires were allowed – subsequently banned both due to air pollution and the number of times such fires went out of control. The Falklands have a similar law against grass burning, but this unfortunately does not apply to controlled explosions by the bomb disposal services. This resulted several years ago in the burning of Steeple Jason, a major seabird colony and more recently in other fires. The issues are now being addressed with the military authorities with the objective of ensuring that there is some institutional memory within the services where there is a fast turn-over in staff.

All is not bad on the breeding seabird front: following several poor breeding years, Falklands seabird monitoring programme reported the highest number of chicks per breeding pair of Gentoo Penguins since records began in 1986. In addition there was a 12% increase in breeding adults compared to last year. Rockhopper penguins also did well with 0.8 chicks per breeding pair and an increase in penguin numbers since last year also. Finally, Magellanic Penguins recorded their second best breeding year ever and an increase in densities within monitored sites.

**From *SEA SWALLOW Vol. 53***

The usual list of seabird sightings starts this issue. Then there is a brief review of bird sightings by Gary Lewis made while in Iraq. Needless to say, most records were made at high speed from convoys on the move, although seabird records were all from the Shatt al 'Arab waterway adjacent to Gary's accommodation in Saddam's Basra palace. Anand Prasad provides a very useful review of the occurrence of pomarine and arctic skuas in the eastern Arabian Sea. Past texts on the status of these birds were both contradictory and often just copied earlier ideas. It appears that both species are present in good numbers during the southward migration with perhaps arctic skuas being commoner. The same author also reviews the occurrence of some all red-billed Roseate Terns off India and seawatching off Goa in this volume.

**From *ARCTIC BULLETIN Issue 1/05***

Seabird bycatch in long-liners working from Russian ports on the Bering Sea is being addressed. Local studies in Russia indicate that a problem exists – not only for the seabirds but also for the fishermen through bait loss. WWF has funded the introduction of Tori lines to the fishery and results are now awaited.

This issue also describes the Selendang Ayu spill in the Aleutians that occurred in December 2004. Some 320,000 gallons of oil spilled in a remote area of the Aleutian chain off Alaska, along with the ship's cargo of soybeans; these latter formed layers more than four feet thick on some beaches. The total casualty figures will probably never be known, but at least 1500, seabirds have been found dead and oiled.

**From *WATERBIRDS Vol. 27 (3)***

Catherine Devlin and co-workers describe a morphometric separation function for separating male and female Arctic Terns. Males generally have a larger head-bill and bill depth than females.

Julia Tims and co-authors compared old with new-founded Common Tern colonies in the same bay in Massachusetts. New colonies contained younger birds, laid later and had higher chick growth rates and productivity

compared with the old colony. Feeding rates were highest and trip times shortest at the new colony. The birds at the new colony were mostly immigrants to the area, rather than adults and chicks from the old colony.

Jens Nyeland analyses available (patchy) information on the status and trends of Black-legged Kittiwakes in Greenland between 1920 and 1999. Of 50 colonies counted at least twice during this period, 35 had declined between 50% and 100%. Only five colonies increased, with the remainder staying approximately stable or fluctuated with no clear trend. Overall there has been a dramatic decline – but the reasons behind this decline are not clear.

Fabrice Helfenstein and co-authors examined assortative mating and sexual size dimorphism in Black-legged Kittiwakes. Males are larger and the French population under study differed significantly in size from previously studied populations in England and Alaska. It appears that larger kittiwakes chose larger kittiwakes as mates.

Thomas Mattern and colleagues visited Isla Chañaral off Chile in 2002 and found more than the entire known world population of Humboldt Penguins were nesting on the island. This implies that both censuses of the species on the island and elsewhere are likely to be underestimates.

**From *WATERBIRDS Vol. 27 (4)***

Helen Otley and colleagues in the Falklands describe the breeding biology of Magellanic penguins in the 2001/02 season on the islands. As noted above, this was a poor breeding season compared to others.

Scott Hall and Stephen Kress compared the reproductive performance of four 'restored' colonies of common terns – restoration consisting mostly of removing predators (though it seemed unclear how many of these predators occurred naturally on the islands). Colonies on inshore island did much better than those further offshore in most years – but experienced a few very poor years.

Little Tern breeding biology in the Ebro delta is described from a two-year study by Daniel Oro and colleagues.

Iain Stenhouse and colleagues describe results from ringing Ivory Gulls in Canada. This showed that most recoveries are from birds shot in Greenland with a few shot in Canada. With a strongly declining local population of this species in Canada, education to reduce such killing seems essential.

## **MARINE ORNITHOLOGY – CALL FOR PAPERS**

While *Atlantic Seabirds* is the official journal of the Seabird Group and the Dutch Seabird Group, both groups also support *Marine Ornithology: an International Journal of Seabird Science and Conservation*. *Marine Ornithology* is managed and published biannually through a partnership between global seabird societies including the African Seabird Group, the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), the Australasian Seabird Group, the Seabird Group (U.K.), and the Dutch Seabird Group.

The journal publishes full-length papers, short communications (usually less than three printed pages long), and book, website and software reviews on all aspects of seabirds and marine ornithology. Contributions dealing with coastal or inland birds such as gulls, terns, cormorants and pelicans are also considered. Review papers or Commentaries on important or emerging topics in marine ornithology are also encouraged.

Since 2001, *Marine Ornithology* has been published both in hard copy and in electronic form at the journal's website: <http://www.marineornithology.org> where further details of the journal and instructions to authors are also posted. Authors do not have to be members of the sponsoring seabird societies and all contributions (except for book reviews) are fully peer reviewed.

At present, most papers being published are from studies in southern waters or the New World. As European editor, I would like to see more from this part of the world. So please

submit (preferably electronically) any European material suitable for *Marine Ornithology* to me.

**Rob Barrett**

E-mail: [robb@tmu.uit.no](mailto:robb@tmu.uit.no).

Hard copy submissions should be sent to:

Rob Barrett, Editor,  
Zoology Department,  
Trømsø University Museum,  
University of Tromsø,  
NO-9037 Tromsø,  
Norway.

**Many thanks!**

## **LE COURRIER DE LA NATURE 200, MAY 2005: SPÉCIAL OISEAUX DE MER**

**Société nationale de protection de la nature et d'acclimatation de France, 9 rue Ceis, 75014 Paris; pp. 82; [snpn@wanadoo.fr](mailto:snpn@wanadoo.fr); 5 Euros;**

This is a special number of the leading French nature conservation journal devoted to their work on seabirds, including a good deal of useful information (notably from France and Antarctica) and short bibliographies. There are articles by: Pierre Jouventin on whether seabirds are well adapted to their environment or poorly adapted for the activities of humans; Yvon le Maho and Christian Jouanin on their behaviour at sea; Charles-André Bost and Henri Weimerskirch on whether they are influenced by climatic change; Georges Hémery *et al.* on the impact of marine pollution; Jean-Marc Pons on how gulls are moving inland; Pierre Yésou on the situation of the Balearic Shearwater; and Bernard Cadiou *et al.* on the status and numbers of French nesting seabirds. There are also a number of short communications on, among other things, conservation on the southern French islands, Reunion, Saint Perre and Miquelen, and New Caledonia.

**W.R.P. Bourne**

## THE HISTORY OF THE OIL INDUSTRY ON DVD

The complete history of the oil and gas industry is now available on one single DVD. Every paper ever presented at World Petroleum Congresses (WPC) from 1933 to 2002 is available on a single DVD disk. A major project for digitizing the whole of the WPC Historical archive has just been completed. Every paper ever presented from 1933 to Rio in 2002 has been scanned and is compressed onto a single DVD. It is also possible to carry out multi language searches within the text of every single paper. We hope that this valuable tool will open up the WPC archive for future generations.

To give you an idea of the size of this project, we have scanned over 50,000 pages, containing (and recognizing) over half a million words, over 5000 tables and charts, and also incorporated large seismic charts from the earlier volumes. All text is searchable and a high speed search engine has been written with unique algorithms for language (in some of the earlier volumes some papers are in German and French), it is Boolean searching enabled, allows phrases to be searched for, contains automatic categorization and can be transferred to run on the Internet without having to start from scratch. If you have a whole wall full of thick heavy volumes, then they can all be replaced by this single DVD.

The DVD comes with full instructions. Minimum specification required, IBM PC, Windows 95/98/2000/Me/XP, Screen resolution of 800x600 or higher and a DVD ROM Drive.

This DVD containing the searchable content of 17 Congresses is now available for purchase at the special online order price of £500 pounds sterling (post free worldwide). Please use the link below to obtain your copy on-line. Major credit cards accepted:

<http://www.world-petroleum.org/publications/arch1.htm>

If you experience any difficulties in ordering please email:

[arch1@world-petroleum.org](mailto:arch1@world-petroleum.org)

## GROUP NEWS

### 40<sup>th</sup> AGM AT THE SCOTTISH RINGERS' CONFERENCE

Advance notice that the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Seabird Group will be held at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie, Speyside on Saturday 29th November 2005 (during the Scottish Ringers' Conference). Further details will appear in the next Newsletter. Please put this date and venue in your diaries, as we would very much like to see more of you at the meeting.

The Scottish Ringers' Conference is a lively and informative event, with plenty of time to socialise and renew contacts, as well as a programme of interesting talks. Further details of the whole conference can be obtained from Mark Cubbitt ([src@cubes.f9.co.uk](mailto:src@cubes.f9.co.uk)).

### YOUR NEWSLETTER!

I am receiving very little unsolicited material for this Newsletter and would very much like to receive more articles and suggestions for material from Seabird Group Members. Even if you do not have time to write an article yourself, I would welcome suggestions for information that you would like to see in this Newsletter, so that I can approach appropriate authors. If you are carrying out survey or research work relating to seabirds and have a story to offer, then do not hesitate to get in touch. Please help me, and the rest of the Executive Committee, to provide you an interesting and timely publication by offering your ideas. I hope to hear from more of you in future!

**Ed**



**Registered Charity No. 260907**

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**EDITOR**

Chris Wernham (BTO Scotland)

**JOURNAL REVIEWER**

Mark Tasker

The Newsletter is published three times a year. The editor welcomes articles from members and others on issues relating to seabird research and conservation. These should be received by 1st May (for June edition), 1st September (for October edition) or 1st January (for February edition).

The Seabird Group promotes and helps co-ordinate the study and conservation of seabirds. Members also receive the journal *Atlantic Seabirds*, containing papers on current research. The Group organises regular conferences and also provides small grants towards seabird research. Current 2005 membership rates are:-

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

Sheila Russell  
Membership Secretary  
Clobber Farm  
Milngavie  
Glasgow G62 7HW  
Scotland, UK.

**GROUP NEWS**

**CURRENT SEABIRD  
GROUP COMMITTEE**

Current retiral dates (at AGM) are shown in bold after the name of each member. Nominations (which should be submitted to the Secretary) from Group members for replacements on the committee are always very welcome.

**Chairman**

Mark Tasker (**2007**)  
c/o JNCC, Dunnet House,  
7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen. AB10  
1UZ  
(mark.tasker@jncc.gov.uk)

**Secretary**

Alan Leitch (**2008**)  
2 Burgess Terrace,  
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(alan.leitch@snh.gov.uk))

**Treasurer**

John Davies (**2005**)  
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Jim Reid (**2005**)  
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Environmental Sciences,  
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**2004 Conference Organiser**

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

**Other Members:**

Jez Blackburn (**2007**)  
Linda Wilson (**2006**)  
Juan Brown (**2008**)

**NEXT (9<sup>th</sup>)  
SEABIRD GROUP  
INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE  
1-3 September, 2006**

The theme has been agreed as "Seabird Populations under pressure" and the first call for papers will be made soon.

The 2006 AGM of the Seabird Group will be held during the conference

**SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS**

The next deadline is 31 October 2005 but do please submit any proposals as soon as possible, so that the Committee can make the earliest possible decision for you!

Application forms are available from the Secretary, or can be downloaded from the website:

**'[www.seabirdgroup.org.uk](http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk)'**

**CONTENTS OF THE  
NEWSLETTER**

As Editor of the *Newsletter*, I make every effort to check the content of the material that we publish but it is not always possible to check comprehensively every piece of information back to its original source, as well as keeping news timely. Please will readers make further checks, at their own discretion, if they have concerns about any of the information or contacts provided, and contact me to allow feedback to other readers if necessary.

We also try to provide a forum for readers' views, so that those provided in the *Newsletter* are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Seabird Group.

**Ed**