



NEWSLETTER 146

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News

Seabirds Count: an update on progress and plans

Daisy Burnell, Joint Nature Conservation Committee

The year 2020 did not go to plan for the Seabirds Count census; with the pandemic and subsequent restrictions abruptly halting surveys for the season. Due to this, the Seabirds Count steering group opted to push back the final year of surveys to 2021. The only significant progress made for the census in 2020, were the surveys of urban gull 1 km squares in England. These surveys, jointly funded by Natural England and Defra, managed to cover an impressive 3,796 squares in a period of six weeks. However, there are still a few squares needing to be surveyed in England and a significant number in Scotland. If you would like to volunteer for the urban gull surveys, please email me (details at the end) for more information.



Common Guillemot ©Danni Thompson

Although there remains some uncertainty around how COVID-19 may influence survey coverage this year, it's important we are well prepared for the final season of Seabirds Count. Part of our preparation is ensuring all data that could be in the online [Seabird Monitoring Programme database](#), are entered in good time before the start of the season. This will give us a clear picture of what is left to do and will allow for effective survey planning and efficient coverage. For the census, we only need a single count from within the census period 2015-2020 (inclusive) for each species present at a site. Nil returns, for species historically present at a site, or for the whole site are also extremely important to capture. They ensure statements of "no-longer breeding" or "site abandoned" aren't made on the assumption of zero, when data is missing. They also tell us that a site has been visited, allowing efforts to be focused elsewhere.

If you have been involved in conducting surveys for the census, regularly survey a site with breeding seabirds (including inland sites) or collect data for county reports that you would be willing to share, please get in touch using the details below, or register on the online database and request to "volunteer" at the appropriate site(s). Please don't be put off if the site already looks to be allocated (green on the map), this does not indicate the coverage for the site for Seabirds Count. We deal with allocations on a case by case basis and can check to make sure effort isn't being duplicated.

If you have any queries; want to know what data gaps remain in your area; or would like to volunteer for surveys please drop an email to me, Daisy, I will be happy to help. SeabirdsCountCoordinator@jncc.gov.uk.

Help count Round Island Petrels at Seabird Watch

Kirsty Franklin, University of East Anglia

Automated time-lapse cameras can facilitate reliable and consistent monitoring of breeding seabirds. Cameras are often programmed to capture images every hour and are particularly valuable in difficult-to-access locations and where disturbance to seabirds may be high. These cameras generate an enormous number of images, and the biggest challenge is turning those images into usable data. This is where we need you – the citizen scientists – to help by clicking on seabirds.



Seabird Watch is an initiative led by Tom Hart (University of Oxford) and Mark Jessopp (University College Cork) that examines the reasons for declines in our seafaring seabirds. Time-lapse cameras are set up at various locations around the North Atlantic, including Iceland, Svalbard and the Faroe Islands, in order to monitor some of our well-known seabirds – **Black-legged Kittiwakes** (*Rissa tridactyla*), and **Common** and **Brünnichs Guillemots** (*Uria aalge*, *U. lomvia*). Recently, this project has spread its wings and expanded south to include a more tropical focus with images now focusing on the **Round Island Petrel** (*Pterodroma* spp.) population in Mauritius.

Images from these various locations are uploaded on to the [Seabird Watch website](#) and we need volunteers to click on adult seabirds, eggs and chicks, to extract data on timing of breeding and nest survival. In the Round Island Petrel section, there is the possibility of seeing many of the other island's inhabitants, such as giant tortoises and Telfair's Skinks (*Leiolopisma telfairii*)!

It is incredibly easy for the public to get involved – you can find a two-minute tutorial showing you what to do on the website. If you get stuck, there is also an online support and FAQ section. Every click counts!

Award winning documentary on Rockabill's Roseate success story

Andrew Power, CrowCrag Productions

The Rockabill Island Tern conservation project is one of Ireland's great conservation success stories. **Roseate Terns** (*Sterna dougallii*) are the star attraction, over half of the European population comes to this tiny, lighthouse island to breed. **Black Guillemots** (*Cephus grylle*), **Kittiwakes**, **Common** and **Arctic Terns** (*S. hirundo*, *S. paradisaea*) also breed here. A conservation project has been running on the island for 30 years which has allowed the seabird population to grow significantly. A newly released award-winning documentary on this incredible project is now free to watch online. Directed and filmed by one of the Rockabill wardens, this documentary gives unique access to an island that is not open to the public and showcases why this project has been so successful by following the successes and failures of one season on the Rock. The story of how the documentary came about is told here by the film's director, and Rockabill warden, Andrew Power.



Common Tern sitting on Rockabill warden Andrew Power's head.
Photo: Andrew Power

I have spent a large part of the last 10 years or so working with terns. In 2009 I surveyed **Little Terns** (*Sternula albifrons*) for my undergraduate thesis in Zoology. I volunteered at a Little Tern colony in 2010 and 2011. I lived in a caravan for two summers in 2013 and 2014, working for BirdWatch Ireland as a warden, helping conserve Little Terns on a beach on the east coast of Ireland. In 2015 I worked on Rockabill Island as a warden where I helped make this documentary! For the past four years I've been studying for a PhD on toxic pollutants in seabirds and one of my study species, yep you've guessed it, is a tern. Working with seabirds is a privilege as it can take you to some breath-taking places. Rockabill Island stands apart for me as one of the most unique, truly wild places that I have ever been to.

In addition to my work with seabirds I am also part of small production company (CrowCrag) that makes videos related to natural history and heritage. I knew working on Rockabill was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I was determined to make the most of it. We wanted to tell the story of this amazing project, show people how beautiful the birds and island are and highlight what makes the project such a success. It is a magical place and the closest to nature I have ever felt in Ireland, I won't give too much away about my experience and the project as you can see it all in the documentary!

First and foremost, my job on Rockabill was to be a warden which was tough work but rewarding. I spent all my free time filming every aspect of the project. I had never met the other warden before so I was a little nervous that he wouldn't want to be filmed or to be a part of the documentary; luckily he was on board from day one! As we don't leave the island for the whole summer, I was able to capture everything we needed for the documentary. Peter Cuter, a professional videographer and the most important person at CrowCrag was able to come out a couple of times as a volunteer to film us and the terns, aided by our producer, Dr Féaron Cassidy, a fellow zoologist and narrator. There are two great benefits to having visitors to the island 1) fresh food 2) you get pecked and pooped on less by Common Terns as they have more targets to aim for!

I really enjoyed combining my love of nature with conservation and photography on Rockabill. I've been able to return to the island multiple times in the last few years as a researcher, a real privilege. I'm currently writing a paper on toxic pollutants in Common Terns from Rockabill Island, I have also published a small piece of opportunistic research in the [Seabird Group journal](#). We noticed quite a few Common Terns on Rockabill incubating empty Garden Snail shells along with their eggs!

I left Rockabill in 2015 with a couple of hard-drives filled with hundreds of hours of footage. Over the next three years we started putting it together. I'd write the script, Peter would do the hard-work and edit and Féaron would narrate. It took us a while but we eventually put together a full length documentary, all done in our spare time and for no money. A passion project for sure. It was definitely worth it; the documentary was selected for numerous international Films Festivals such as the prestigious Wildlife Conservation Film Festival in New York. We also picked up our first ever award by winning best Environmental Film at the Disappear Hear Film Festival.

We've finished entering the documentary into Film Festivals and now it is [available online for anyone to see](#). You can now watch it for free but we encourage you to make a small donation via the donation link. Most of this will go to BirdWatch Ireland who have done fantastic work on Rockabill, perhaps Ireland's greatest conservation success story.

Inishtrahull – a very old seabird island with a brand new Bird Observatory

Kendrew Colhoun, Mícheál Casey, Trevor Fisher, Alan Lauder & Daniel Moloney

Lying about seven miles off the Donegal coast, **Inishtrahull's** stand-out features are that the rocks are, by a very long way, the oldest in Ireland (1.7 billion years old gneiss) and that the island is Ireland's most northerly point. Inhabited by a surprisingly large community of around 80 people until 1929 (the lighthouse keepers stayed on until the late 1980s), it was famed as a site for Turbot (*Scophthalmus maximus*) fishing and this was the mainstay of the islanders.



Its ornithological interests include its function as a migration observation station, the presence of some scarce breeding birds (Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* and breeding waders) and, not least for its important seabird colony. Addressing these, and in conjunction with the island's owners (The Commissioners of Irish Lights) and the statutory conservation body (NPWS), we have recently (September 2020) established a bird observatory and associated BTO ringing group. Our aspiration is to have accreditation from the Bird Observatories Council within two years. These are rare establishments in Ireland as we only currently have two observatories – Cape Clear in the south west and Copeland in the north Irish Sea. This new observatory thus lies in the midst of a 1,700 km gap between the observatories on Cape Clear and North Ronaldsay.

The island is not outstanding for cliff-nesting seabirds as it is small and has only low cliffs. However, it has a very respectable mix of other species, including two pairs of **Great Skua** (also known as Bonxies, *Stercorarius skua*); of fewer than ca. 30 Irish breeding pairs), **European Storm Petrels** (*Hydrobates pelagicus*; unsurveyed, certainly >1,000 breeding pairs), **Northern Fulmars** (*Fulmarus glacialis*; 100 + breeding pairs) and all three large gull species (c.400 pairs combined). There are also small breeding populations of **Manx Shearwater** (*Puffinus puffinus*; just discovered in 2020), **Arctic Terns**, **Common Gulls** (*Larus canus*; <20 breeding pairs) and healthy populations of **European Shags** (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*; 300 breeding pairs) and **Black Guillemots** (< 50 breeding pairs). The European Union INTERREG VA Marine Protected Areas Management Monitoring (MarPAMM) project has been undertaking some detailed research on the island and this is set to continue in 2021. Alongside this we will also be undertaking a very detailed study of the entire seabird breeding population in 2021, establishing long-term monitoring (Apparently Occupied Nests (AON) & productivity, especially for petrels and shearwaters) which will form a core element of the scientific and educational work of the Bird Observatory.



View looking west on Inishtrahull from the eastern peak where the old lighthouse sits (new light on western promontory). Storm Petrels nest in the walls around the old light and elsewhere. Photo: Kendrew Colhoun

The current establishment committee comprises Kendrew Colhoun, Alan Lauder, Mícheál Casey, Daniel Moloney and Trevor Fisher. Amongst other things in early 2021, we will increase the committee size (and gender balance!) and continue to consolidate our activities on the island. The website is www.inishtrahullbirdobs.ie and parties interested in visiting or helping, should register their interest (see contacts page). The group would welcome Seabird Group members there and folk can keep abreast of developments through a mailing list and/or the website.

New research into preventing disturbance to breeding Gannets on Great Saltee Island

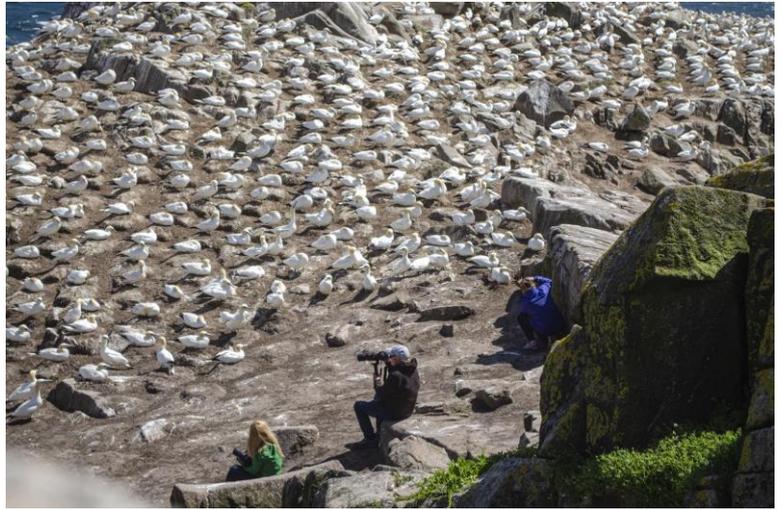
Debs Allbrook, Marine Biologist, University College Cork

One of the first things that struck me when I moved to Ireland in 2016 was the amount and variety of wildlife to be seen. Coastal wildlife is my favourite, and it was the first (hopefully not last!) time that my “from-my-living-room-window” list included Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), dolphins, seals, Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*), **Black Guillemot** and **Northern Gannet** (*Morus bassanus*). Due to COVID-19 circumstances and travel restrictions this year I have been somewhat landlocked in rural Hertfordshire and missing long days and nights spent surrounded by seabirds and sea life. In the UK, seabird colonies are usually managed by an organisation that protects them, this is often not the case in Ireland, with much of the country still owned privately. The Saltee Isles (although part of a Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area) are one such place. Hearing lots of discussion within my university about how much disturbance went on there, I decided to visit and see for myself.

When I landed, the excitement was immediate. **Atlantic Puffins** (*Fratercula arctica*) were perched on a grassy knoll by the edge of a small cliff, **Shags** were peering out of the rocky walkway, **Razorbills** (*Alca torda*) and **Guillemots** took up whole sides of rock, and if you were lucky enough to stay late, you might even catch a glimpse of a **Manx Shearwater** or ‘Manxie’ emerging from its burrow. And then there were the Gannets. Arriving at the southern end of the island, I was immediately met with the overpowering sounds and smells. In prime position on the headland were 4,700 breeding pairs.

Alas, clamouring on all sides of the colony, towering over birds sat on nests and shoving long lenses in their faces, were the people. Over the course of the day we watched endless streams making their way in to get selfies with the birds. A photographer dropped his lens which rolled down into the colony. He didn’t waste a second in running through in pursuit, scattering birds from their nests and who knows, crushing eggs in the chaos. It didn’t take the gulls long to spot the opportunity either, and that day alone we watched 10 separate incidents of opportunistic scavenging while tourists were present. This therefore became the subject of my thesis research.

I decided to try to quantify the disturbance and look at how this affected breeding success across Great Saltee Island. Secondly, I decided to devise a sign to guide tourists to better choices and tested the effect this had on both visitor and bird behaviour. Briefly, I selected 100 nesting pairs from two areas - the central “disturbed” area where visitors were approaching, and a more protected “undisturbed” area which was impossible to access. Having a camera-obsessed boyfriend finally came into its own as I was able to map the nests and monitor their progress throughout the season using long lens photo and videography, without becoming part of the problem. Fifteen-minute sample periods were carried out, recording visitor approaches, and bird reactions; and visitors were split into categories (photographer, tourist, birdwatcher) depending on their objective and gear. I also included control periods where no people were present. Next, I erected a sign at the entrance to the colony and carried out the same observations, noting again both visitor and bird behaviour.



Visitors to the Great Saltee Island Gannet colony. Photo: Debs Allbrook.

Unsurprisingly, nests in closest proximity to human disturbance were more likely to fail. Even in the disturbed area, the nests that were built towards the back were less likely to succumb to egg or chick predation. There is some literature that says established breeders tend to secure the best locations for nest building, partly due to experience and partly due to arriving back earliest each season¹, however the overall nesting success was still lower on Great Saltee than the British and Irish average. The average chicks fledged per occupied nest is 0.7², while my undisturbed section was 0.5, and disturbed section 0.3. Looking at average approach distances, it was photographers who ventured the closest to the birds (2.55 m). Tourists were at 4.46 m, and birdwatchers were the most respectful, remaining 8 m away. Again, as expected, the closer people came, the more birds were displaced from their nests.

Since there aren't many studies that quantify how effective signs can be in wildlife management, it was heartening that the results of this study showed a significant change in both human and bird behaviour when the sign was in place. The majority of visitors in these periods chose to remain much further away from the birds, most at least 5 m. There were only 11 people that still chose to head straight down to within a metre of the birds, and all of these were classed as photographers, who seemed intent on capturing the perfect image. Looking at the results for bird displacement, although prospecting birds did not show a significant change in behaviour, breeding birds were far less disturbed in the presence of the sign. In fact, displacement rates with the sign were far lower, and actually comparable to control periods, which suggests that having a sign in place could reduce disturbance effects to that of a completely undisturbed colony. I do not need to elaborate on the positive impacts of less flushing from nests for breeding birds.

Although Gannets themselves are currently categorised as a Least Concern species (IUCN³), we know that seabirds in general are suffering. If a cost-effective and accessible management tool like a sign can have such a positive impact, the effects are likely to be applicable across locations and species. The signs usually work in one of three ways: alerting people to a consequence they were unaware of, setting a guideline/boundary, or even by equipping bystanders with an understanding of what's expected by their fellow wildlife watchers.

A while after the end of my project, the owners of the island were convinced into allowing a permanent sign to be put up on the island to help protect the Gannets going forward, and there are even discussions about putting wardens over there in the future. Of course I haven't been able to visit the island this year, but I hear from my colleagues in Cork that the Gannets have had a fantastic year, and have taken the opportunity presented by the empty pathways to nest further out and in a wider area than ever before. A big positive to come from the pandemic.

You can read the full paper in the [Journal for Nature Conservation](#). Twitter handle: @DoftheAllbrooks

¹ Nelson, J. B. 1963. The Breeding Biology of the Gannet (*Sula bassana*) with particular inference to behaviour. PhD thesis. Oxford University.

² Mavor, R. A., et al. 2006. Seabird numbers and breeding success in Britain and Ireland. Peterborough: Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

³ IUCN. 2020. Red List: Northern Gannet [online]. Available at <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/22696657/132587285> (Accessed 04 Jan, 2021).

Tristan da Cunha: one of the world's biggest wildlife sanctuaries

UK Overseas Territories Unit, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Tristan da Cunha is a UK Overseas Territory in the South Atlantic; an archipelago located 2,400 km from the nearest land and one of the most geographically isolated island groups in the world. The most remote inhabited island on Earth is home to around 250 islanders, as well as tens of millions of seabirds including albatross and penguins, plus whales, sharks, dolphins and seals. The waters that surround this remote UK Overseas Territory are some of the richest in the world.

On Friday 13th November 2020, the community of Tristan da Cunha declared that 687,247 km² of its waters will join the UK's Blue Belt of marine protection, becoming the largest 'no-take zone' in the Atlantic and the fourth largest on the planet. This means that no fishing or other extractive activities are permitted across the whole area.

Tristan da Cunha Chief Islander, James Glass, said: "Our life on Tristan da Cunha has always been based around our relationship with the sea, and that continues today. The Tristan community is deeply committed to conservation: on land, we've already declared protected status for more

than half our territory. But the sea is our vital resource, for our economy and ultimately for our long-term survival. That's why we're fully protecting 90% of our waters — and we're proud that we can play a key role in preserving the health of the oceans. The Blue Belt Programme, RSPB and many others have been valuable partners in helping Tristan da Cunha develop its marine protection strategy."



Becky Speight, the RSPB's chief executive, said: "In 2020 the importance of having nature in our lives has never been clearer. While Tristan da Cunha may be far away in distance it is still close to our hearts and protecting it is still the UK's responsibility. Closer to home, the crisis facing nature is also huge. So huge that our wellbeing, our economic future, and our very survival depend on the choices we make now about the natural world. We need politicians to emulate the leadership of this small community to help us build the world we all want to live in. We hope today's fantastic announcement is the first of many more that help revive our world."

The creation of the Marine Protection Zone is only possible thanks to the far-sighted leadership of the Tristan da Cunha Government and the support of an international partnership. The RSPB-led work on the ground with the local community to enable their visionary decision-making, working with the UK Government Blue Belt Programme, National Geographic Pristine Seas and the Great British Oceans coalition. British Antarctic Survey, University of Plymouth and the Natural History Museum also provided key scientific support to the Tristan da Cunha Government.

We can all look to Tristan for inspiration as the world commences a decade of work to protect 30% of the global ocean by 2030.

You can find a video with footage of Tristan's incredible wildlife [here](#).

Roseate Tern LIFE Recovery Project

Chantal Macleod-Nolan, Project Assistant - EU LIFE Roseate Tern Recovery Project, RSPB

The EU funded Roseate Tern LIFE Recovery Project, which is a partnership between the RSPB, North Wales Wildlife Trust and BirdWatch Ireland, is in its final year and although it has been an unprecedented year with COVID-19, it has had a successful breeding season for **Roseate Terns**.

Within the UK, Coquet Island is the only viable breeding colony, breaking another record this summer with 130 pairs, which is an increase of 26 pairs over the five years of the LIFE Programme. The two remaining sites are found in Ireland with Rockabill being the stronghold for the NW European metapopulation. This season the site supported 1,624 breeding pairs which is an increase of

60 pairs from last year and is the second highest on record for the site, beaten only in 2018 when 1642 pairs were recorded. At Lady's Island Lake there was a really productive season with a record of 273 pairs and productivity of 1.5 chicks per pair.

Roseate Terns almost went extinct back in the 19th Century because of the demand for their feathers in ladies' hats. The introduction of legal protection resulted in the recovery of up to 3,304 pairs in the late 1960s, only to decline drastically throughout 1970-80s. In 1989, there were still only 467 pairs in the UK and Ireland, whereas now the population has slowly recovered to 2,028 pairs in 2020. This is a direct result of dedicated conservation management at these sites such as the introduction terraces and nest boxes, predation mitigation techniques and vegetation management.



Top: Roseate Tern. Photo by Brian Burke.
Bottom: Roseate Tern LIFE project sites.

Additional success of the LIFE project was the restoration of five historical sites to increase the prospects of the Roseate Tern recolonisation through improving nesting conditions for the already present **Common**, **Little**, **Sandwich** (*Sterna sandvicensis*) and **Arctic Terns**. This work has been important in the light of the density dependent regulations observed at Rockabill and the anticipated increase of dispersion rates from this site. The restoration of an artificial island in Northern Ireland has stopped the erosion caused by flooding and increased nesting area for a large assemble of Sandwich and Common Terns. This important island also supports the country's single pair of Roseate Terns. Other habitat projects undertaken included deploying rafts and restoring shingle islands benefitting both tern and wader species.

Our long-term aspiration is to restore the Roseate Tern's distribution to its historic range through regional and international cooperation on site restoration and colony management. Previously, the colonies were in every country of the UK, Ireland and France. As part of this work, we have engaged and shared best practice with fellow conservationists in France, Portugal (the Azores) and the Netherlands. We organised several regional tern conservation meetings and numerous site exchange visits. These discussions and site visits have helped shape our respective management practices as well as input into the East Atlantic Roseate Tern Action Plan.

Research into the Roseate Tern demography and foraging range and ecology have improved our understanding of how we should choose the target areas and sites for the potential sites for future colonisation. This has been underpinned by policy work to make

sure these sites are afforded the highest level of protection. We also studied Roseate Tern migration patterns using geolocators and gained a greater understanding of important staging, stopover and wintering locations. The plan is to work with other organisations within the East Atlantic Flyway to ensure high survival rates outside of the breeding season.

To highlight these achievements, we have recently organised a two-day Roseate Tern Momentum Webinar covering all the above topics and outcomes. For those interested, a recording of these presentations will be made available on the Project Website (www.roseatetern.org/momentum-webinar). The website will continue to be active after the project ends in December 2020, hosting a wealth of resources, including best practice guidance for tern colony management and monitoring.

Although this LIFE project is ending, it has laid the foundation for the Roseate Tern recovery and future metapopulation expansion. A key legacy is that the partner organisations will continue to collaborate and share best practice on tern management, which will benefit all tern species breeding in these countries.

Refurbishment of European Storm Petrel nest boxes on Mousa, Shetland

Zoe Deakin, Cardiff University

Nocturnal, burrow-nesting seabirds are difficult to monitor as they are active at colonies only during darkness and visual inspection of natural nest sites is usually not possible. The smallest Atlantic seabird, the **European Storm Petrel** (hereafter 'Storm Petrel'), nests in deep crevices on remote islands, returns to the colony only at night and is sensitive to disturbance^{4,5,6}. The largest UK Storm Petrel colony is on Mousa (60°00'N 01°11'W), a 180-hectare island lying 1 km off the southeast coast of the Shetland mainland. Mousa holds approximately 11,800 breeding pairs of Storm Petrel⁶ and is designated under the EU Birds Directive as a Special Protection Area (SPA) due to its internationally important breeding numbers of the species.

To aid the study and monitoring of Storm Petrels on Mousa, 81 specially designed nest boxes were installed by staff from Glasgow University in 1992⁷, with a further 29 added in later years. These boxes were designed to minimise disturbance to breeding Storm Petrels during research activities and have enabled detailed studies of Storm Petrel breeding biology and behaviour^{7,8,9}. All the nest boxes are accessible from above and this enables an observer to check the status of the nest site without disturbing any birds inside. Hatching and fledging success rates for pairs breeding in nest boxes do not differ from those in natural sites⁷. Since 1994, the nest boxes have been used as part of annual Storm Petrel chick-ringing carried out by Shetland Ringing Group, but little maintenance of the nest boxes has been carried out in that time. This is currently one of very few studies to ring Storm Petrels of known age and provides important information on demographic rates¹⁰. Since 2014, the Mousa nest boxes have been used in the first GPS tracking study of Storm Petrels in the UK¹¹.

Although they are constructed of durable PVC plastic, after 25 years of use, the condition of Mousa's Storm Petrel nest boxes had deteriorated and many were leaking, providing poor conditions for nesting. Observation windows had become obscured with dirt, meaning nests could not be observed without removing the lids and risking additional disturbance to breeding birds.

During 23rd–30th May 2018, Mark Bolton (RSPB) and I carried out an audit of the nest boxes on Mousa and performed the necessary maintenance. Twenty-two boxes required major repairs, including re-gluing sections and waterproofing with silicone sealant (Fig. 1). Twenty-one boxes were found to be damp and two were very wet. One of these wet boxes was removed as the section of wall it was located in had become completely waterlogged. Ventilation holes were added to some boxes to reduce condensation. Three boxes were completely full of sand and these were emptied. All observation windows were cleaned.



Fig 1. A Storm-petrel nest box (A) before repair, (B) after repair, and (C) in situ. A large stone would then cover the nest box in (C) to ensure it was out of sight and protected from the weather.

⁴ Scott, D. A. 1970. The breeding biology of the Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*. DPhil thesis, University of Oxford.

⁵ Brooke, M. 2004. Albatrosses and Petrels Across the World. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Bolton, M. et al. 2010. Playback re-survey and demographic modelling indicate a substantial increase in breeding European Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* at the largest UK colony, Mousa, Shetland. *Seabird* 23: 14–24.

⁷ Bolton, M. 1996. Energy expenditure, body-weight and foraging performance of Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* breeding in artificial nesting chambers. *Ibis* 138: 405–409.

⁸ Bolton, M. 1995a. Experimental evidence for regulation of food delivery to Storm Petrel, *Hydrobates pelagicus*, nestlings: the role of chick body condition. *Animal Behaviour* 50: 231–236.

⁹ Bolton, M. 1995b. Food delivery to nestling Storm Petrels: limitation or regulation? *Functional Ecology* 9: 161–170.

¹⁰ Okill, D. J. and Bolton, M. 2005. Ages of Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* prospecting potential breeding colonies. *Ringing and Migration* 22: 205–208.

¹¹ Bolton, M. 2020. GPS tracking reveals highly consistent use of restricted foraging areas by European Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* breeding at the largest UK colony: implications for conservation management. *Bird Conservation International*: 1–18.

We returned to Mousa in July and August 2018 to continue the GPS tracking study of breeding Storm Petrels. We deployed nine GPS tags on Storm Petrels in nest boxes with small chicks. All nine GPS tags were successfully retrieved, and all adults continued to feed their chicks. Further tracking was planned for 2020, although the COVID-19 pandemic prevented this work from taking place. Having been refurbished, we expect the Mousa nest boxes to continue to be used in Storm Petrel research and monitoring in the years to come.

I am incredibly grateful to the Seabird Group for awarding me a grant, which enabled the trip to Mousa in May 2018 for the nest box refurbishment work. During this trip we were also able to carry out a night of Storm Petrel ringing and collected 28 Storm Petrel diet samples, at a time of year when researchers are not normally present on the island. I would also like to thank Rodney and Darron of the Mousa Boat, for transport to the island.



Storm Petrel chick in nest box.
Photo: Zoe Deakin.

What do Yelkouan Shearwaters get up to during the non-breeding period?

Hannah Greetham, University of Glasgow



Yelkouan Shearwater at its breeding colony in Malta, visiting the cliffs during the hours of darkness. Photo: LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija.

Where seabirds go after the breeding season has always been of interest to scientists. The non-breeding season is a critical period of the annual cycle, where individuals migrate to areas of seasonal peak resource abundance, balancing the energetic cost of travelling and the increased availability of food¹². They often also moult flight feathers during the non-breeding period, and the growth of these feathers and the change in flight performance are other costs for migrating seabirds to consider and schedule in order to minimise overlap between energetically costly activities. Recent advances in biologging technology has increased the knowledge about the non-breeding period of seabirds¹³. Several Procellariiformes (Order including shearwaters and albatrosses) show intraspecific variation in non-breeding destinations and behaviours^{14,15}. These differences can occur between sexes, known as sexual segregation^{16,17}. Sexual segregation in the non-breeding period can lead to

the sexes being exposed to different levels of threats, such as bycatch¹⁸. Therefore, one sex could be more vulnerable and cause a skew in adult mortality, which has been recorded in declining seabird species¹⁹.

Yelkouan Shearwaters (*Puffinus yelkouan*) are a Mediterranean endemic seabird, classified as 'Vulnerable' to extinction by the IUCN due to low adult survival^{20,21}. Yelkouan Shearwaters breed in burrows between February and July and are presumed to moult at the beginning of the non-breeding period. Two non-breeding strategies have been documented so far: either birds stay in the central Mediterranean or they head further east to the Black Sea^{22,23}. The aim of my study, in collaboration with University of

¹² Newton I. 2008. The migration ecology of birds. Academic Press, Amsterdam.

¹³ Yoda K. 2019. Advances in bio-logging techniques and their application to study navigation in wild seabirds. *Adv Robot* 33:108–117.

¹⁴ Chérel Y., Quillfeldt P., Delord K., Weimerskirch H. (2016) Combination of At-Sea Activity, Geolocation and Feather Stable Isotopes Documents Where and When Seabirds Molt. *Front Ecol Evol* 4:3.

¹⁵ Fayet A.L., Freeman R., Anker-Nilssen T., et al. 2017. Ocean-wide Drivers of Migration Strategies and Their Influence on Population Breeding Performance in a Declining Seabird. *Curr Biol* 27:3871-3878.e3.

¹⁶ Catry P., Phillips R.A., Croxall J.P. 2006. Sexual segregation in birds: Patterns, processes and implications for conservation. Cambridge University Press., Cambridge

¹⁷ Hedd A., Montevecchi W.A., Phillips R.A., Fifiield D.A. 2014. Seasonal Sexual Segregation by Monomorphic Sooty Shearwaters *Puffinus griseus* Reflects Different Reproductive Roles during the Pre-Laying Period. *PLoS One* 9:85572.

¹⁸ Cortés V., García-Barcelona S., González-Solís J. 2018. Sex-And age-biased mortality of three shearwater species in longline fisheries of the Mediterranean. *Mar Ecol Prog Ser* 588:229–241.

¹⁹ Gownaris N.J., Boersma P.D. 2019. Sex-biased survival contributes to population decline in a long-lived seabird, the Magellanic Penguin. *Ecol Appl* 29:1–17.

²⁰ Oppel S., Raine A.F., Borg J.J., et al. 2011. Is the Yelkouan shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* threatened by low adult survival probabilities? *Biol Conserv* 144:2255–2263.

²¹ BirdLife International. 2018. *Puffinus yelkouan*, The IUCN red list of threatened species 2016.

²² Raine A.F., Borg J.J., Raine H., Phillips R.A. 2012. Migration strategies of the Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*. *J Ornithol* 154:411–422.

²³ Péron C., Grémillet D., Prudor A., et al. 2013. Importance of coastal Marine Protected Areas for the conservation of pelagic seabirds: The case of Vulnerable yelkouan shearwaters in the Mediterranean Sea. *Biol Conserv* 168:210–221.

Glasgow and BirdLife Malta, was to better understand the migratory strategies of Yelkouan Shearwaters, the schedule of migration and moult, and the location of the non-breeding and moult areas. In addition, to see if there are differences between the sexes in these strategies.

METHODS

Malta holds around 10% of the global breeding population distributed across a number of colonies around the archipelago. I studied Maltese Yelkouan Shearwaters in 2019 and 2020 in collaboration with the long-term monitoring study conducted by LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija. We captured 27 breeding Yelkouan Shearwaters from accessible nests in Malta in 2019 and equipped them with geolocator-immersion loggers (Fig. 1), which the Seabird Group partly funded to increase the sample size.

In 2020, a season constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic and spells of unfavourable weather conditions, 44% of the loggers deployed were retrieved. From these loggers, I estimated locations from the light curves with the R package FlightR²⁴ and removed locations around the equinoxes as latitude is unreliable during this period²⁵. Immersion data was categorised into wet (sitting on water), dry (flight or on land) and mixed activity (reflecting active foraging). Moulting birds are expected to show prolonged periods of high wet activity, due to the high cost of flight when replacing flight feathers^{14,26}. The proportion of time spent sitting on the water was modelled as a Generalised Additive Model with serial autocorrelation, from which the peak was taken as the mid date of flight feather moult.



Fig 1. Deployment and retrieval of geolocators on the breeding Yelkouan Shearwaters. Squeezing into caves in the middle of the night to wait for them to return and feed their chick. Photos: Hannah Greetham.

WHEN DID THEY MIGRATE AND MOULT?

Yelkouan Shearwaters breeding on Maltese islands either stayed in the central Mediterranean or migrated east. Moult occurred between August and October but varied between individuals. The first birds returned to the colony in October but others returned only in January (Fig 2). Inter-individual variation did not appear to be related to either sex or destination.

WHAT IS THEIR BEHAVIOUR?

Yelkouan Shearwaters increased their time spent on the water's surface during the non-breeding period compared with the breeding period due to relatively low energetic requirements while free from central-place constraints and chick provisioning²⁷. Within the non-breeding period they spent more time sitting on the water during the night than during the day and then declined from November onwards as they returned to the colony.

WHERE DID THEY GO?

All Yelkouan Shearwaters spent the non-breeding period either in the central Mediterranean or they

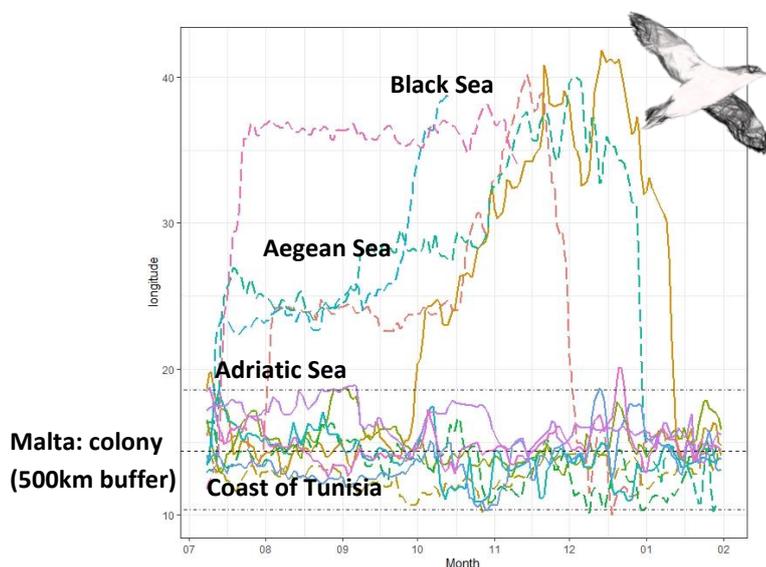


Fig 2. Longitudinal movements (unaffected by equinoxes) of the tracked Maltese Yelkouan Shearwater (n=12), demonstrating the West - East movements during the non-breeding period 2019-2020. Colours are individually tracked birds, with sex represented by line type (males = dashed line, females = solid line). The colony of Malta their 500km of known breeding foraging areas²².

²⁴ Rakhimberdiev E, Saveliev A, Piersma T, Karagicheva J (2017) FLIGHTR: an r package for reconstructing animal paths from solar geolocation loggers. *Methods Ecol. Evol.* 8:1482–1487

²⁵ Phillips RA, Silk JRD, Croxall JP, et al (2004) Accuracy of geolocation estimates for flying seabirds. *Mar Ecol Prog Ser* 266:265–272

²⁶ Gutowsky SE, Gutowsky LFFG, Jonsen ID, et al (2014) Daily activity budgets reveal a quasi-flightless stage during non-breeding in Hawaiian albatrosses. *Mov Ecol* 2, 23.

²⁷ Mackley EK, Phillips RA, Silk JRD, et al (2010) Free as a bird? Activity patterns of albatrosses during the nonbreeding period. *Mar Ecol Prog Ser* 406:291–303.

travelled east to Aegean and Black Sea. Birds generally moulted on their way to their wintering grounds. No differences between sexes were discovered in either the moult locations or the entire non-breeding period. Further analyses of the data are underway to test whether the areas used during the non-breeding period have certain environmental characteristics that correspond to favourable prey species.

FURTHER STUDY

The areas utilised by Yelkouan Shearwaters during the non-breeding period, especially those that appear to contain a high density of individuals need to be considered as potential areas for protection. Though a larger sample size is needed, future research should investigate the potential threats such as bycatch in the areas identified in this study. Loggers that have been retrieved this year have been redeployed on new birds and an effort will be made to recapture birds deployed in 2019 and 2020 in order to increase the sample size - fingers crossed for 2021!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work would not have been possible without BirdLife Malta and LIFE Arcipelagu Garnija for manpower, equipment, and expertise, with special thanks to Martin Austad and James Crymble. Thank you to my supervisors Ruedi Nager and Ewan Wakefield and all other members of staff from the University of Glasgow that supported my research. I am grateful to University of Glasgow and the Seabird Group for funding this study.

Pelagodroma marina: Testing raven-proof artificial nests on Laje Branca Islet, Cabo Verde

Andreia Adrião and Sara Ratão, Fundação Maio Biodiversidade

BACKGROUND

Cabo Verde (Cape Verde) is globally recognized as both a terrestrial and marine biodiversity hotspot. The whole archipelago consists of an Important Bird Area (IBA), providing nesting and feeding areas for several seabird species including the **White-faced Storm Petrel** (*Pelagodroma marina*). On Maio Island there is only one known place where this species nests, which is Laje Branca. This is a small (~0.3 ha) and uninhabited islet situated in the north of Maio, located within the natural park “Parque Natural do Norte da Ilha do Maio – PNNM”, 400 m from the coast (Fig 1). Laje Branca is also a Fully Protected Zone due to its conservation importance to the reproduction of this species. Fundação Maio Biodiversidade (from here on “FMB”) has been studying this population since 2016.

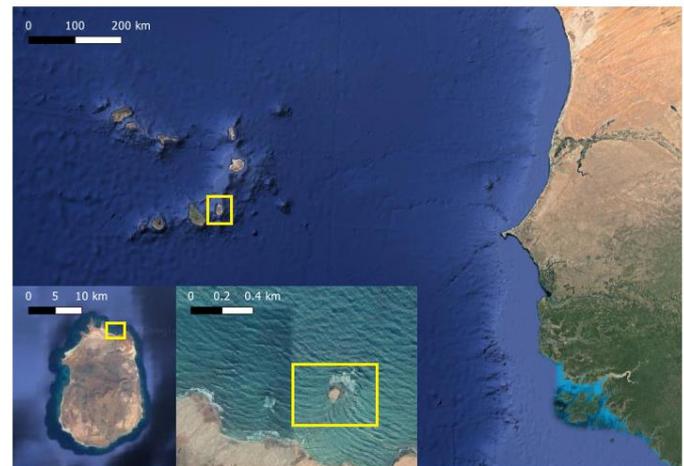


Fig 1. Cabo Verde off Dakar, Senegal; Maio island, and Laje Branca islet 400 m from the coast of the North of Maio.

METHODS

In 2020, we captured petrels during the night, monitored nests, petrel activity and predation throughout the breeding season. Night captures were carried out once a month during the new moon when there seems to be a higher abundance of animals. The methodology was the same as used by the Parque Natural do Fogo (Cabo Verde) and the University of Barcelona who do other seabird studies in Cabo Verde. Metal rings were provided by the University of Barcelona. In addition to collecting ringing data, blood and feather samples were also taken following the University of Barcelona’s protocol.

Fifty-one artificial nests were installed on the islet. Artificial nests were made of wood with a hole in one of the walls where a metal ventilation tube was attached. The main difference between previous nests and 2020 nests was that we added an extra thin wood board to the top of the lid that runs along most of the tube, so that it would provide some protection from the Brown-necked Ravens (*Corvus ruficollis*). In addition, these thin wooden boards were fixed with a screw-in hook to the nest so they would not be moved around as easily by the ravens (Fig 2). The nest was installed during the non-breeding season, in places where there were already nests from the previous year. In addition, natural nests within six transects were marked with a flat stone with an alphabetic letter if found to be occupied (adult, adult and egg, egg, or chick), and be checked from then on.

Population estimates were carried out once a week, using three different techniques: 1) checking the proportion of occupancy and density of active burrows vs all burrows found per transect; 2) using the artificial and natural nests; and 3) capture/recapture data from night captures.

Predation was studied by recording how many birds were killed by Brown-necked Ravens per week, and pictures were also taken. In addition, detection tunnels were used occasionally to check for invasive species (mice) on the islet.

RESULTS

A total of 291 White-faced Storm Petrels were ringed in 2020, from both four-night capture events (186; 145 new captures) and artificial nests (105; 52 new captures). In the artificial nests, 30 out of 51 were occupied, in which one was occupied by a new species, the **Cape Verde Storm Petrel** (*Oceanodroma jabejabe*). Twenty-one chicks hatched from the 30 occupied artificial nests, including a Cape Verde Storm Petrel chick.

Within the six transects, 18 natural nests were occupied, of which 16 had laid eggs: eight hatched and five chicks successfully left the nest. The remaining eggs and hatchlings were either predated, buried with collapse of the natural nests or of unknown destiny. The population has been estimated at 648 breeding pairs, and around 1,296 individual White-faced Storm Petrels (Gemma Charles, MSc Thesis 2017). The latest data revision reveals that FMB has ringed a total of 851 birds from both night captures and monitoring of artificial nests. According to this estimate we have currently ringed ~66% of the population in the last four breeding seasons.

This year, this population continued to suffer predation by Brown-necked Ravens. This resulted in the predation of 146 adult White-faced Storm Petrels, 35 chicks and eight eggs (a total of 189 predation events). The ravens were also able to destroy 13 out of the 51 artificial nests (11 partly destroyed tubes and two nests with completely destroyed tubes).

DISCUSSION

Overall, in 2020 fieldwork went well. However, COVID-19 had the whole country in quarantine for one month in April, which resulted in closed schools and other prevention measures after quarantine, thus most educational activities were cancelled. We replaced some of these with informative infographics on our social media. Before and after quarantine, FMB was still able to collect further data on the breeding ecology of this species, monitor families, chicks and also ring another sample of the population and collect further morphometric data, feathers and blood samples for future analysis.

The new artificial nest design seemed to work slightly better than the previous simpler design, however ravens were still able to destroy 13 out of the 51 artificial nests. We would strongly recommend the addition of yet another piece to the new nests against ravens: one or two U-shaped thin iron rods to keep the wood board in place, instead of just one screw-in hook. These would fit on top of the tube, one at the beginning of the wood board, close to the end of the tube, and one closer to the nest entrance, the ends of which would be stuck in the ground.

The very high level of predation by ravens has now resulted in at least 30% of the petrel population killed in two seasons (if the population estimate is correct). This is of great conservation concern because if it continues, it means that the population could become extinct in the next five to seven years, having in mind that 205 birds were killed by only two ravens in 2019, and this year we had a total of 189 birds and eggs predated by ravens. Ravens have also become a problem for other bird species such as the Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and the Cream-coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor exsul*) on Maio, and are also an issue for breeding bird species on other islands such as Boavista. FMB will soon be asking for a permit to control ravens under extreme



Fig 2. Top: Similar artificial nests for 2020 season however a thin wood board was added to be placed on top of the tube and fixed with a screw-in hook to check whether it could work against ravens. Bottom: Ravens were able to pierce through the tube by moving the wood board to the side, even though it was screwed in.

circumstances during the breeding season of certain bird species, as part of an activity within the Management Plan of the Protected Areas of Maio Island. FMB is also contacting several partners and funders to start a possible collaboration to carry on a study on raven population and sustainable control measures.

The research at Laje Branca in 2020 was funded by the Seabird Group, the MAVA Foundation and Fundo do Ambiente.

Contact details: Email: andrea.adriao@fmb-maio.org, sara.ratao@fmb-maio.org. Facebook: Maio Conservation

Lewis and Harris Tern Census 2018

Robin Reid, Senior Conservation Officer, RSPB Scotland

BACKGROUND

As part of 'Seabirds Count', the fourth seabird census across Britain and Ireland, the RSPB sought to prioritise tern and gull colony counts in 2018. It was seen as important that a complete or near complete survey was undertaken in 2018 due to the tendency for tern numbers to fluctuate between years and move between sites. There are a large number of known tern breeding sites occupied by **Arctic**, **Common** and **Little Terns** on the Outer Hebrides. However, many of these sites are difficult to access as most colonies are located on widely dispersed offshore islands. Surveying of these sites necessitates the hire of commercial charter boats with appropriate skippering crew, boat coding and H&S equipment. The RSPB and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH, now NatureScot) provided staff resources for counts and a grant was sought from the Seabird Group for £1,800 to cover the boat hire costs for the survey. The RSPB is grateful to the Seabird Group for this grant support which enabled the survey to go ahead.

METHODS



Overlooking Shillay Arctic Tern colony in the Sound of Harris with Pabbay in the distance. Photo: Robin Reid.

A search of Seabird Monitoring Programme data, historical RSPB data and ad hoc RSPB and SNH records was undertaken to identify sites for tern counts and these were split into sites that could be surveyed from land and those requiring boat work. The areas identified requiring boat survey were Loch Roag in West Lewis, Loch Erisort in South East Lewis and the Sound of Harris.

The methodology for counting followed Seabirds Count census instructions with a single flush count undertaken for terns in early June where possible. The preferred method of three repeat counts mid-May – early June would not have been possible due to limitations in staff availability, budget for boats, weather constraints and local boat operator availability.

Tern and gull counts were prioritised and at most sites these were the only species present but where other seabird species were present they were also counted for entry into the Seabird Monitoring Programme database using standard Seabirds Count census methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 71 tern and gull colonies were visited and counted on Lewis by RSPB and SNH staff between 26th May 2018 and 21st June 2018. This included 23 sites where terns and gulls had not been counted in earlier national seabird surveys. Thirty-eight sites required boat access which was funded through the Seabird Group Census Grant. The majority of the sites requiring boat access were in the Sound of Harris (Fig 1). The number of terns and gulls present ranged from zero to a colony of 400 Arctic Terns near Ness in North Lewis. Breeding tern species present included Little, Arctic and Common Terns and gull species included **Herring Gulls** (*Larus argentatus*), **Common**, **Black-headed** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*), **Great Black-backed** (*L. marinus*), **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** (*L. fuscus*) and **Kittiwake**. Other seabird species counted where present included **Fulmar**, **Shag**, **Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), **Arctic Skua** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) and **Great Skua**.

Analysis of SMP data is required to establish trends in the numbers of terns and gulls breeding on Lewis and Harris and it is likely that annual counts at a sample of colonies would also be required to provide robust data due to the tendency for tern numbers in particular to fluctuate between years and sites. However, it is of note and encouraging that in 2018 breeding terns and gulls were located at 23 sites where counts were not undertaken in any of the previous three national seabird surveys. Some of these

colonies may have been present but not known about during earlier national seabird surveys. However, it is likely that a number of the ‘new sites’ have become established since Seabird 2000 as it is unlikely that this number of sites would have been overlooked in earlier surveys.

One possible explanation for the increase in the number of sites is the reduction in American Mink (*Neovison vison*) population on the islands as a result of systematic trapping by the Hebridean Mink Project. Mink arrived on Lewis in the 1950s when fur farms were established, and feral animals were recorded on Lewis by 1969. Mink spread throughout the Outer Hebrides archipelago, becoming widespread across all main islands by 2001. The Hebridean Mink Project commenced in 2001 with the aim of eradicating mink from the island group. The first phase started on Uist with trapping commencing across Lewis and Harris in 2006. Whilst this project has not yet achieved eradication, mink numbers have been dramatically reduced and densities have been very low since 2016.

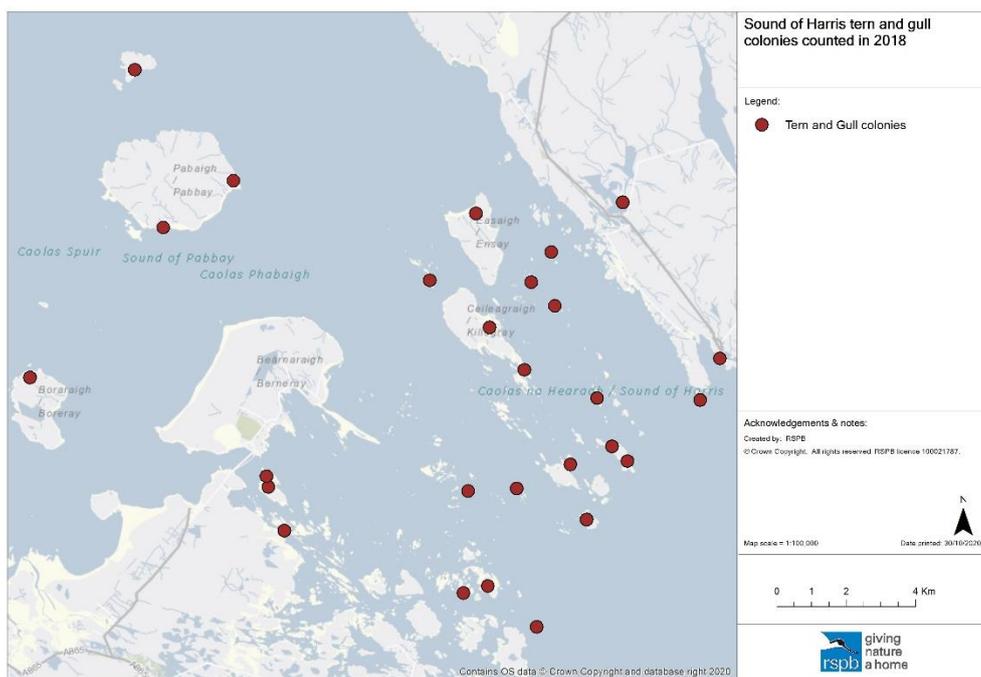


Fig 1. The location of tern and gull colonies visited in the Sound of Harris, a complex group of islands where shallow water and strong tidal currents can make access challenging.

There was evidence of mink predation at several tern colonies in the early 2000s and at that time Arctic Terns on Lewis were concentrated in a few large colonies including one colony near Stornoway with peak counts of up to 700 Arctic Terns. However, in 2018 this colony was no longer present, and terns appear to have dispersed with larger number of small colonies located.

It is possible that the concentration into a few large colonies seen in the early 2000s was a behavioural response to the threat of mink predation and that the subsequent dispersal has occurred following the reduction in the mink predation threat and/or as a result of improved breeding success following a reduction in mink numbers. However, terns are known for their tendency to move and fluctuate in numbers between years and sites so there may be other explanations for changes in distribution such as food availability or human disturbance.

Seabird Group Notices

New committee members

We are really pleased to welcome new faces to the Seabird Group Executive Committee. Our Social Media Manager and Assistant Newsletter Editor, Beth Clark and Viv Booth were both outgoing at our AGM in December, and we would like to thank them for their invaluable contributions to the Seabird Group during their time on the committee. Newly voted in to succeed them are Ruth Dunn and Kirsty Franklin. Our Assistant Membership Secretary Zoe Deakin has taken over as Early Career Researcher (ECR) Representative, and has already introduced an excellent new feature to the Seabird Group Newsletter - **Seabirder Spotlight** (see below). In addition, due to the pressing need to diversify the marine ornithology field, The Seabird Group has co-opted our first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer. Lila Buckingham will take on this important role until a vote at our next AGM in December 2021. Below, our new committee members introduce themselves.

Ruth Dunn - Social Media Manager (Ordinary Member)

My name is Ruth Dunn and I am currently a Postdoctoral Associate at Florida International University, having recently completed my PhD at the Seabird Ecology Group at the University of Liverpool (SEGUL). I have really valued being part of the marine ornithology community over the past five years and have taken on the role of Social Media Manager in order to contribute back to this community.

My new role is focussed on investigating the ecological importance of sharks, but in taking on the Social Media Manager position I will enjoy maintaining and developing the connections that I have built across the seabird world to date. By working closely with the Seabird Group I will have a good excuse to keep up to date with seabird research and conservation news, communicating this via Twitter and also by potentially creating a Seabird Group Instagram profile. This role is a key opportunity to promote inclusivity and diversity, aiming to amplify the voices of those who might currently be underrepresented within seabird research and conservation.

I have successfully managed the SEGUL website, blog (<https://seguliverpool.wixsite.com/home>), and Twitter page (https://twitter.com/SEG_UL) over the past four years, including live-tweeting whilst we hosted The 14th International Seabird Group Conference in 2018. Previous to this, I contributed to building up the Capturing Our Coast Project's Twitter following, from less than 100 to more than 3,000 followers during a one-year period (<https://twitter.com/CapturingRCoast>). I am pleased to have the opportunity to continue to develop these communication skills as Social Media Manager of the Seabird Group.



Kirsty Franklin - Assistant Newsletter Editor & Social Media Support (Ordinary Member)

I am a third year PhD student at the University of East Anglia investigating the factors influencing individual variation in ocean movement patterns of a tropical seabird, the Round Island Petrel. I'm delighted to take on the role of Assistant Newsletter Editor and Social Media Support and be of assistance to Ruth (above) and Katherine (Newsletter Editor).

With my PhD having a very tropical focus, I look forward to using my new role as a means of staying up to date and sharing seabird news closer to home via both Facebook and the newsletter, as well as developing connections with the seabird world. Having been involved with the World Seabird Twitter Conferences (including being Chair for #WSTC6) for the past three years, I believe social media and science outreach to not only be incredibly powerful tools in disseminating seabird research but to promote diversity and inclusivity in the field too. I'm therefore excited to start my new role and help promote and share all your wonderful seabird stories and events over the next few years to our growing Seabird Group community.



Lila Buckingham - Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Officer (Ordinary Member)

I am a PhD student studying the non-breeding movements, behaviour and energetics of Common Guillemots and Razorbills, based at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH) in Edinburgh. I became involved with the Seabird Group's equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) when they invited discussions focussing on LGBTQ+ issues over the summer. I really appreciated that they were opening the door to these sorts of conversations and was subsequently thrilled when the new EDI role on the Seabird Group's Executive Committee was unanimously voted in. I am happy to have been co-opted to this role until there can be a formal election at the next AGM.



I am a passionate advocate for EDI and am also a member of UKCEH's EDI working group. As a white cis-gendered woman, I clearly cannot bring experience from every viewpoint to the Seabird Group, and I acknowledge that. The Seabird Group have made an excellent start towards increasing their EDI, however it is clear that there are issues within the group that mirror those within the seabirding and conservation communities more generally. In particular, we have very low representation from People of Colour, and this will be a key focus of the Group's EDI work over the next few years. I aim to help the Seabird Group understand the barriers facing People of Colour, along with all other under-represented communities, and take actions to increase the diversity of our membership, whilst ensuring that our members face no discrimination within the group.

New online membership platform

Danni Thompson and Zoe Deakin, Membership Secretaries, The Seabird Group

Our new membership platform is now live! You can now sign in to our membership page to check the status of your membership and amend any of your details. Simply click 'sign in' at the top right of the membership form and enter the email address which you used when joining us. You will then be given the option to set a password for your account or you can sign in using just your email address. If you select the latter, you will be sent a link to allow you to access your account. In order to check that the system works for you, we recommend signing in and making sure your details are up to date (including Gift Aid if applicable).

When your membership is due for renewal you will receive an email from noreply.seabirdgroup@membermojo.co.uk with instructions on how to renew your membership, so please add this email address to your contacts list and make sure to check your spam folder just in case! Whilst we prefer online payments, we still accept cheques, but please make sure to follow the instructions in the email as the postal address for these has now changed. If you are a life member or pay via standing order, you will not receive renewal reminders, but you can check the status of your membership and amend your details as outlined above. This change also means you can join and renew at any time of the year.

Newsletters and other emails such as those relating to AGMs or conferences will be sent via mailer.seabirdgroup@membermojo.co.uk so please add this email address to your contact list too. As always, if you have any problems or questions about your membership then please feel free to contact us at membership@seabirdgroup.org.uk.

We may still need to make some minor changes as we all settle into the new system, so please bear with us. But we're excited to be making joining and renewing your membership a quicker and easier process for all.

Seabirder Spotlight

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

Zoe aims to champion the interests of early career seabirders, so if you are an ECR please get in touch (DeakinZ@cardiff.ac.uk) with any comments, concerns, ideas or questions about how The Seabird Group can best support you.

Ellie Owen, Conservation Scientist, RSPB

Thank you for inviting me to write a few words about my career. I'm really happy to support the great work that the early career Seabird Group is doing. Since 2010 I have been working as a Conservation Scientist at the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science. On paper I can work on conservation problems for any species but in reality, I work on marine species (pew, my woodpecker knowledge is severely lacking!). My work can cover anything, but I have mainly focussed on seabird tracking through the FAME and STAR GPS tracking projects and on Puffin conservation through Project Puffin UK and the Puffarazzi. I incorporate a variety of techniques into my work from data analysis, to citizen science, to innovating with field techniques (even if that is just working out the exact right tools for catching a seabird, actually that might be the bit I love most). I work within a team at RSPB where we are lucky to have wide expertise. One of the best things about working for RSPB is that the organisation also has policy and advocacy experts who can take the information we are finding and turn it into an effective conservation tool or argument. We also have communications experts to take the stories we generate from our work and use them to inspire wider societal involvement in biodiversity conservation, which is something I feel is a responsibility of someone in my role.



Photo: Mathilde Saljougui

The topics we work on are prioritised by our organisational strategy to make sure we are working on the most relevant conservation problems. This is both a blessing and a curse; a blessing because it means we are putting our efforts in the right places but a curse in that we aren't free to follow our own curiosity (although most of the time these things overlap). The time I spend indoors versus in the field waxes and wanes with a project lifecycle. I quite like this variety; some years I have been away from home at seabird colonies for four months continuously and other years I have been more focussed on writing work up into papers and getting new projects funded. I have managed to tie these cycles of field and office time in somewhat with having two children, though I also have overlap there, with my family sometimes accompanying me in the field or to conferences. It is worth thinking at the start of your career how you might factor in the other things which are important to you, whether it be family or something else, because a career with seabirds has traditionally meant a big commitment of time to being in seabird colonies, or at your computer. I have a list of things I have foregone because I chose to study seabirds and while I would do it all again it's worth being forewarned about potential tough decisions.

I am mid-career now. There is no magic answer to how to work in seabird conservation. Having spoken to lots of seabird professionals, most people think it is a combination of luck, persistence and at some point having a wonderful mentor. I certainly have had more than my fair share of both. From a baseline of being interested in nature and being outdoors, I did a BSc in Ecology at the University of East Anglia and I did a PhD studying seabird diet through molecular techniques, but I deliberately planned quite long gaps between these things so I could work to pick up skills (and have fun!). For example, I picked up powerboat skills driving a boat for whale photo ID project, I learnt how important protocols were working for long-term research projects in California and I learnt animal handling skills and marking/ringing techniques (seabirds and seals) and that animal welfare should be foremost in my study designs in colonies around the world. One of the best jobs I took was the least interesting on paper, I managed a new database created from decades of paper records for elephant seals. Once you have managed data like this your own data collection will always be futureproof!

If I could offer one bit of advice it would be to be a sponge and absorb information from people, be it experienced people showing you how they work at their remote colonies, a colleague explaining a better way to analyse a complex dataset, or a volunteer giving you a different perspective on your work. I don't have a plan for my future career and have not had a plan at any point, I have just kept taking jobs I thought sounded varied and interesting with people who I respected so hopefully I will continue to do that. Good luck with your careers!

Events

The 7th World Seabird Twitter Conference

WSTC Organising Committee

We're excited to announce that the 7th instalment of the World Seabird Twitter Conference **#WSTC7** will be returning to your screens on **4th- 6th May 2021**! This WSTC is a great opportunity to promote your seabird research, conservation success stories (or lessons learnt!), and seabird art, to a global audience, particularly this year. All you need is a Twitter account and a device to tweet from, meaning you can join us from your favourite chair, your sofa, or anywhere in the world.

Last year, the #WSTC6 hashtag was used 9000 times by over 1800 contributors and potentially reached more than 3.8 million users! The thematic sessions were a huge hit, and so this year will see the return of our #SciArt session, plus new dedicated sessions to be announced soon. #WSTC7 is delighted to have support from many wonderful sponsors, and as usual, lots of exciting (and new!) prizes will be up for grabs. Keep your eyes peeled for more updates on our social media accounts, and if you fancy joining the flock, then abstract submission will be open **14th February – 5th March 2021** via our website: <https://blackbawks.shinyapps.io/WSTC7/>.

Twitter: @Seabirders (<https://twitter.com/Seabirders>)

Facebook: @World.Seabird.Union (<https://www.facebook.com/World.Seabird.Union>)





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

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

Ordinary Members:

Assistant Newsletter Editor	Kirsty Franklin (2024)	kirsty.franklin@uea.ac.uk
Seabird Census	Will Miles (2023)	willtsmiles@hotmail.com
ECR Representative	Zoe Deakin (2022)	DeakinZ@cardiff.ac.uk
Social Media Manager	Ruth Dunn (2022)	rudunn@fiu.edu
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Current membership rates	
Standing Order	£20
Concession	£15
Institution	£35
International:	£21
Life	£300

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

Submissions for the newsletter should be emailed to the newsletter editor: newsletter@seabirdgroup.org.uk. We recommend a maximum of 1500 words and ask that photographs and figures are sent as separate files and with full credits, where appropriate. **Deadlines are: 15th January (February edition); 15th May (June edition); and, 15th September (October edition).** Every effort is made to check the

content of the material that we publish. It is not, however, always possible to check thoroughly every piece of information back to its original source as well as keeping news timely. If you have any concerns about any of the information or contacts provided, please contact the Newsletter Editor.