

# **NEWSLETTER 64**

## **FEBRUARY 1993**

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## **EDITORIAL**

This newsletter should have been issued in December, my apologies for its late arrival. The beginning of 1993 has been dominated for those of us concerned with seabirds and oil by the wreck of the Braer and the subsequent pollution of the Shetland coastline and its fauna and flora. There have been pages and pages of press coverage of the incident, and I see little point in repeating

much of it here. We are left with a few key questions though: Why did the wreck happen? Can similar circumstances be avoided in the future? Do we know enough about the effects of the pollution? What lessons can we learn to apply elsewhere? There are several official inquiries under way, several of which may produce interesting findings and results. We may finally get some progress in removing oil tankers and other hazardous cargoes from those vulnerable areas of the sea that they do not have to be in. We may also see some progress in improving the standard of maintenance and seaworthiness of these large ships (although from first impressions the Braer looks to have been well founded). If progress is made in these areas, then the wreck may eventually come to be recognised as having some good points to it as well. I would personally like to congratulate Martin Heubeck and Peter Evans on the great efforts they put into sorting order from potential chaos in documenting casualties from the Braer spill.

This newsletter has a short item on the Braer, Martin Heubeck has promised another for the next issue. I repeat my usual refrain that I would be extremely pleased to hear from any of you, with any item of news, views or announcements.

Mark Tasker

## **SHETLAND OIL SPILL, IMPACT ON BIRDS**

At about 1100 on 5 January 1993 the MV Braer, an oil tanker, hit the rocks at Garths Ness in south Shetland, having been drifting without power for several hours. The Braer was carrying about 85,000 tonnes of light Norwegian crude oil and at least 800 tonnes of bunkers. The weather at the time was stormy (and remained so for the following three weeks), and the ship stuck fast. Oil began to spill immediately, and the well rehearsed oil spill contingency plan for Shetland swung into action. There were immediate fears for the birds in the area, and a wildlife response co-ordination centre was established. Work on collecting seabirds and other oiled wildlife from the beaches was co-ordinated from this centre by Martin Heubeck, soon joined by Peter Evans (both long time member of the Seabird Group, and present and past Hon. Secretaries).

There was, of course, a vast media interest and a great many words were written. There was a great deal of ill-informed speculation reported. It was thus gratifying to see, at the end of each day, a factual tally of oiled birds

Numbers of birds recovered alive and dead from beaches in Shetland by end January 1993, thought to be attributable to the Braer oil spill.

Species	Dead	Live	Species	Dead	Live
Fulmar	32	0	Herring gull	16	3
Great northern diver	13	2	Glaucous gull	1	0
Black-throated diver	1	0	Great black-backed gull	45	0
Gannet	2	0	Kittiwake	133	3
Long-tailed duck	96	21	Iceland gull	1	0
Eider	73	48	Common gull	2	0
King eider	1	0	Black-headed gull	2	0
Red-breasted merganser	1	0	Guillemot	16	5
Shag	855	118	Tystie	202	16
Cormorant	3	0	Razorbill	4	0
Purple sandpiper	1	0	Puffin	15	0
Curlew	2	0	Little auk	9	2

recovered from the beaches. This report was kept up for about three weeks, in fact until the number of apparent storm victims became proportionately large in comparison to oiled corpses. It was also obvious by this stage that the oil was not staying on the water surface for very long; it was either dispersing into the water column, evaporating or blowing onto the land; a survey of the wreck after three weeks also found all cargo and bunker tanks were ruptured and very little oil remaining on board. This "disappearance" of the oil was one of the more unexpected features of the spill, and was undoubtedly related to the storms, the exposed nature of the Shetland coast and the lightness of the crude oil.

It will be difficult to assess how many birds were killed; we do know the number picked up off accessible beaches - a further unquantified proportion will have been killed and not been found. In addition, the effects of the storms will have added to the effects of the oil spill and caused a large wreck of kittiwakes and Iceland gulls in their own right. The figures below are totals killed by about the end of January.

Mark Tasker and Martin Heubeck

No doubt these figures may be further refined once the corpses have been examined, and once planned monitoring studies have been implemented. These will be reported in a future newsletter.

## SEABIRD BREEDING SUCCESS IN 1992

As usual, breeding output of many species was monitored at a range of British and Irish colonies in 1992. Full results will be presented in the annual JNCC / RSPB / SOTEAG report on seabird numbers and breeding success, due out in April. A preliminary summary of results is given

below, although not all figures have been collated yet.

Overall, breeding success of fulmars, shags, guillemots, puffins and kittiwakes was at least as high as in 1991, with some improvement for kittiwake (Table 1). Productivity continued to be very variable for terns, but some overall improvement was noted for little tern at least.

Table 1 Breeding output (chicks fledged per pair) of selected seabird species in 1992.

<sup>N</sup> = no. of colonies sampled. + or - indicates at least 10% change in average success compared to 1991 (++ or -- at least 50% change); = indicates little change. x = no data.

Region	Fulmar	Shag	Kittiwake	Guillemot
W Scotland	0.40 <sup>4</sup> =	1.36 <sup>2</sup> -	0.70 <sup>4</sup> -	(0.76 <sup>1</sup> ) +
Shetland	0.52 <sup>7</sup> +	1.47 <sup>5</sup> +	0.85 <sup>8</sup> +	0.76 <sup>2</sup> +
Orkney	0.48 <sup>8</sup> -	x	1.14 <sup>6</sup> +	(0.80 <sup>1</sup> ) +
E Scotland	0.45 <sup>4</sup> +	1.22 <sup>2</sup> -	1.12 <sup>7</sup> ++	(0.85 <sup>1</sup> ) =
NE England	(0.66 <sup>1</sup> ) =	(1.56 <sup>1</sup> ) ++	1.08 <sup>4</sup> +	0.75 <sup>2</sup> +
SE England	x	x =	0.93 <sup>3</sup> =	x
SW Eng./C. Isds	x	(1.60 <sup>1</sup> ) -	0.25 <sup>1</sup> +	(0.84 <sup>1</sup> ) +
Wales/NW England/I.o.Man	0.30 <sup>6</sup> =	(1.77 <sup>1</sup> )	0.39 <sup>5</sup> -	(0.72 <sup>1</sup> ) =
SE/W Ireland	x	x	0.56 <sup>7</sup> +	x
Total	0.44 <sup>30</sup> =	1.45 <sup>12</sup> =	0.74 <sup>54</sup> +	0.78 <sup>9</sup> =

Units: Regularly-occupied sites (fulmar, guillemot); nests with eggs (shag); well-built nests (kittiwake).

Once again, most species had a successful season in Shetland (after the major breeding failures noted up to 1990). This undoubtedly reflected improved availability of sandeels in these waters. Arctic terns averaged about 0.7 fledglings per pair, fewer than in 1991 figure, but still well up on 1984-90 levels. Arctic skuas produced about 1.1 fledglings per pair, a further improvement over 1991, though bonxie productivity was down on 1991 (partly because of cannibalism of chicks). On the cliffs, fulmars, shags, kittiwakes and guillemots all showed further improvements in success. As in 1991, kittiwake figures would have been higher but for large-scale predation at some colonies.

Puffins had another good season, although some predation of chicks occurred.

Cliff-breeding species in Orkney also had a successful season, with kittiwakes here rearing more chicks per pair on average than in any other region. Kittiwakes on the west coast of Scotland were the least successful (fewer chicks reared than in 1991), and shag success was also down. On the east coast, kittiwake success was almost as high as in Orkney, and twice as high overall as in 1991, results for other cliff species and auks were also good. Terns around the Moray Firth were more successful than in 1991, averaging 0.65 fledglings per pair for common tern and 0.7 for arctic.

In northeast England, cliff-breeding species also had a good season. Little tern success here was again rather low, however, and also on the south coast of England (where predation and high tides caused problems). In the southwest, tern colonies in Scilly did badly, with only 4 out of 12 common tern colonies fledging any chicks. Predation by rats and feral cats appeared to be a major factor in Scilly and also contributed to low productivity of kittiwakes (average 0.12 fledglings/nest). Kittiwakes in southwest England as a whole reared fewer chicks than in any other region of Britain and Ireland (average 0.25/nest), although there was a slight improvement on 1991.

Kittiwake colonies from south Wales to the Isle of Man also reared fewer chicks than in 1991. Tern success in this region was more variable, but little terns had a very successful season at the main Welsh colony (1.9 fledglings/pair). Elsewhere in the Irish Sea/Celtic Sea, the large colony of roseate terns on Rockabill of Dublin (378 pairs this year) again reared lots of chicks, as did the colony in Wexford. Kittiwake colonies on the southeast and west coasts of Ireland continued to rear only moderate numbers of chicks.

Thanks again to all the organisations and individuals who contributed data in 1992 (full acknowledgements in the 1992 report). Anyone with relevant information not already submitted should contact Dr Jane Sears at RSPB, Sandy (terns and skuas) or PMW ('cliff species'). Likewise, anyone who may be able to contribute next season is urged to get in touch - coverage of colonies has continued to improve in 1992, but there are still gaps to be filled.

Paul M Walsh, co-ordinator Seabird Monitoring Programme, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE

## **AVOIDING DOUBLE-COUNTING IN A GULL COLONY**

The three large colonies of black-headed gull *Larus ridibundus* in Hampshire saltmarshes were counted in 1991. The largest of these, at Needs Ore (Beaulieu estuary), is entirely within the North Solent National Nature Reserve, part is an Area of Special Protection, and is in private ownership. The other two sites, Lymington and Keyhaven marshes are local nature reserves, both with

restricted access and are managed and wardened jointly by the Hampshire Wildlife Trust and Hampshire County Recreation department.

An attempt was made not only to count these colonies but also to assess the accuracy of the counts themselves. We succeeded in the former but failed in the latter for reasons described later.

Only a single counting visit was made to each part of each colony in order to minimise disturbance and in order to comply with access permission to the AOSP at Needs Ore and in order not to 'start a trend' at the other two sites which are prone to illegal landings. We needed to avoid counting the same area twice, double-counting nests within an area or undercounting. It is difficult to always recognise new areas or areas already counted in a uniform saltmarsh. Eliminating possible sources of error would rely on clearly marking areas already covered (which was done with 2m coppiced poles) and by marking individual nests. Each 'active' nest encountered was to be marked with a conspicuous marker and since there was no prospect of these being retrieved subsequently they would have to be environmentally friendly, non-toxic and biodegradable. Also they should be cheap and lightweight so that each person could carry two thousand or more. What is cheap, obvious in a nest, lightweight and environmentally friendly? Answer: Pasta.

Supermarkets spoil you for choice, but some market research was done. 'Own brands' were predictably better value than leading market brands, for example Buitoni. Packets of conchiglie (shells), eliche (twists) and farfalle (butterflies) were purchased at Safeway. All were the same price, but you got more eliche (mean 529 pieces SE 3.6) compared to conchiglie (mean 487 pieces SE 4.2) and fewest farfalle per 500 g packet. All appeared to be equally obvious in the nest in field-tests, although farfalle may have had the edge. Conchiglie had a tendency to clump together in the bag like over-sexed slipper limpets *Crepidula fornicata* which increased handling time. Farfalle were rather delicate and like conchiglie they were caught by the wind and frequently missed the target nest. A direct hit by the farfalle could have serious consequences since they are sharp-toothed. The robust and aerodynamically stable

eliche, which was also best value, was therefore adopted. However, other shapes had to be used in the end after we bought out much of south-west Hampshire's stock of farfalle.

The pasta was counted into 500s into carrier bags (no holes!) before entering the colony and from here on it was plain sailing. Teams of counters walked line abreast through the colony as best allowed by the convoluted and often impassable saltmarsh creeks and marked every active nest with a piece of pasta. Any left at the end was subtracted from the known starting number.

This method is assumed to virtually eliminate over-counting, but under-counting could still occur. Our idea was to have a second team following up behind finding nests missed (in order to judge our accuracy and therefore provide a correction factor). This failed because some gulls dropped down and lifted off again with the pasta (even the shells!). For this technique to work a second team would have to follow within about 50 m of the first to prevent the gulls from landing.

This method is recommended in all seriousness for anyone interested in counting large numbers of gull or tern nests (assuming of course that they possess the appropriate license and access permission). In Hampshire 14,656 nests were counted in this way (fully documented of course in the JNCC/ Seabird Group Seabird Colony Register). These counts are designed only to provide a single swift one-off count with minimal disturbance. They could thus only be used to show gross or large scale changes in numbers and distribution between years. Differences in laying chronology or proportion of adults breeding each year are not monitored in this way, and would require considerable further study.

P.S. Buy more pasta than you think you need because there are probably more gulls than you think, and you want some left over for dinner.

Simon Aspinall  
JNCC Seabirds Team

## **LYME DISEASE AND SEABIRDS**

The following is abstracted from the proceedings of a recent Colonial Waterbird Society conference. The paper was by Bjorn

Olsen (Dept of Infectious diseases, RIUM 90 185, Umeå, Sweden) and David Duffy (Lyme Disease Res. Project, Box 1095, Shelter Island Heights, NY 11965, USA).

"*Borelio burgdorferi*, the spirochete that causes Lyme Disease in humans, has recently been isolated from the seabird tick *Ixodes uriae* in Sweden and Britain. *I. uriae* is found in both hemispheres. Seabird researchers working in colonies where this tick is present may be at risk of acquiring Lyme Disease. Seabirds may play a role in transporting the disease between countries or even hemispheres."

As someone who has a friend and colleague who has been seriously affected by this debilitating disease, I feel we should all be now paying great attention to the risk from seabird ticks. Lyme Disease is not well known and there is still much to be learned about it. It is thought that it takes some time (possibly 24 hours) for the spirochete to transfer from the tick to a new host, so the message is to remove ticks from your body as soon as possible. If you get a red annular rash around the bite and flu like symptoms, it is important that you get medication immediately. The red annular rash does not always occur. Lyme Disease can be controlled easily with antibiotics, but needs to be treated promptly. Many doctors are unaware of the risks or even of the disease. Lyme Disease, when it takes hold, can cripple in a similar fashion to arthritis - please take care.

Mark Tasker

## THE SEPT-ISLES, BRITTANY

### Location

The Sept-Isles consist of six islands, the seventh one being a rocky islet without any vegetation. They are located 4 km from Perros-Guirec harbour, Côtes d'Armor, Brittany, and at 90 km south-west of the Channel Islands. The Sept-Isles is a Natural Reserve: the owner is the French State, the manager is a private association, the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO), since 1912. The Natural Reserve represents 40 hectares of land at high tide and 280 hectares at low tide. Landing is forbidden with the exception of one island (where there are no breeding seabirds). Around the

Natural Reserve is a 4000 hectares buffer zone where hunting is forbidden.

### Fauna and flora

There are 13 seabird species breeding on the Sept-Isles. The list below gives an idea of the avifauna. Other breeding species: oystercatcher (20 pairs); shelduck (3 pairs); raven (1 pair). The Sept-Isles is also the second breeding place in France of the grey seal, with regular breeding each year since 1988. The vegetation is interesting because there has been no grazing or human habitation on two of the islands. The underwater flora and fauna are amongst the most diverse on the French side of La Manche.

Species	Number of pairs in 1992	Trend in population (+ increase/ - decrease, = stable/ ? uncertain)	% of French Atlantic coast population (from 1981 data)
Manx shearwater	77 to 150	= (?)	80%
Storm petrel	2	?	0.5%
Fulmar	79	+	20%
Gannet	9254	+	100%
Shag	321	+	10%
Lesser black-backed gull	700	+	5%
Herring gull	3800	+	5%
Great black-backed gull	120	+	12%
Kittiwake	51	+	2%
Common tern	last bred 1987	-	
Guillemot	16	=	6%
Razorbill	17	=	24%
Puffin	284	= (?)	90%

### Management

A management plan will be written in 1993. There are four main areas of interest, and possible action:

- there has been a great increase in the gannet colony, which could be beginning to compete for space with Manx shearwaters and puffins breeding nearby.
- what impact has the avifauna had on the terrestrial vegetation?
- what are the impacts of the brown rat (which colonised one of the most interesting islands in 1992) on the Manx shearwater,

storm petrel and puffin populations? Can we and must we eradicate rats over 40 hectares of island? (Yes - Ed.)

d) each year we have 60,000 to 80,000 tourists landing on the only accessible island. How can we manage all of these people in the interests of the public and nature?

Our aims can be summarised easily: To preserve the faunal and floral diversity of the islands. We will achieve these aims with a hard-working army of volunteers. We will keep you informed of developments in future newsletters. Thanks to Bob Furness and Mark Tasker for improving my English.

François Siorat, Site Manager, Ile Grande, 22560 Pleumeur Bodou, France.

## **LOW-FLYING AIRCRAFT AND SEABIRDS ON AILSA CRAIG**

Recent bulletins have highlighted the effort to improve the lot of breeding seabirds on Ailsa Craig, in the Firth of Clyde, by removing brown rats. This has proved very successful. Many species enjoyed fruitful breeding seasons following this action. Those which did not, such as kittiwakes, have failed through problems at sea rather than on land. However, it is now clear that low-flying aircraft can and do cause the mass mortality of certain seabird species.

Ailsa Craig is unique amongst gannetries in that there is a boulder-beach surrounding the island. At virtually every other colony the birds nest directly above the sea. When species like razorbill and guillemot fledge, they have to time their leap to the sea, and the waiting parent, to coincide with tidal conditions. When young gannets fledge, they are able to flutter and glide sufficiently well to ensure a sea landing. Gannets fledge independently of the adults. The timing of fledging is therefore critical and premature fledging usually leads to death.

Birds breeding on islands such as Ailsa Craig are susceptible to disturbance by low-flying aircraft. There are airfields at Prestwick, Machrihanish (Kintyre) and on the Solway. Adults of species such as gannet react to low-flying aircraft by flying off the nest leaving the egg or small chick exposed and unprotected and at the mercy of gulls which seem more conditioned to accepting such events. Normally one adult gannet always remains with the chick, and only a very few specialist gulls manage to steal eggs. Auks usually react to aircraft by pouring from the ledges, knocking eggs and young alike to the rocks below. Where young are near to fledging they become excited and agitated and simply are panicked from their ledges to their deaths.

Disturbance from American F111 jet fighters based in England has caused such seabird mortality often in the past few years. The Marquess of Ailsa, who owns the island,

petitioned the Royal Air Force, on my behalf, to have Ailsa designated an exclusion zone for low-flying aircraft. The RAF readily agreed to this proposal and decreed that aircraft must not come closer than half a nautical mile and 2000 ft of the summit, which in turn is 1114 ft above sea level.. The Isle of May, Fife has also been added to the RAF flying manual as an area to be avoided.

Breaches of the RAF regulations occurred during 1992 which had catastrophic effects on gannets and auks. The first happened on 17 June, when a giant Hercules transport aircraft (its number clearly visible) made no fewer than eight successive flights directly above the island at an altitude of about 200 ft above the summit. This resulted in scattering the entire gannet colony for about an hour in total, allowing mass predation by gulls. I estimated some 2,000 or more gannets lost their egg or small chick during the episode. The RAF Air Police investigated the incident and traced the American crew to a German airbase. Apologies have been proffered and it is hoped that such an incident will never happen again.

The second major incident happened when a light aircraft from a training school at Prestwick made a single low pass on 22 July. On this occasion at least 123 young auks, mainly guillemots, were panicked from the ledges to their death. I collected 40 corpses for examination, and all had head or body injuries, but otherwise were in good condition. the flying school promised to keep clear of the island in future.

Ailsa appears to act as a magnet for sightseeing pilots, most of whom are probably unaware of the damage they cause. While it is possible to document such events on Ailsa Craig there must be many other colonies where chicks and eggs simply fall into the sea and are never noticed.

Seabird workers witnessing such events should make them more widely known. Low-flying over remote islands has been going on for years. The damage such episodes cause, not only to seabirds, requires more documentation.

Bernard Zonfrillo

## **FERRETS IN A SEABIRD COLONY**

The appearance of a group of ferrets *Mustela furo* in mid-July in the puffin colony at Sumburgh Head on the southern tip of the Shetland Mainland caused some alarm among local ornithologists. At least four, possibly five different animals could be seen poking their heads out of burrows at the top of a puffin slope on the west side of the head, and occasionally running around in the open.

Both Scottish Natural Heritage and the Shetland Crofting, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (SCFWAG) hold stocks of cage traps which are lent to crofters who have suffered losses, and Chris Donald or SCFWAG quickly sited a trap at the top of the Puffin slope. He caught four (they trap very easily) but suspected a fifth animal escaped. At about 2,500 pairs, the Sumburgh Head puffin colony is modest by Shetland standards but is probably the largest accessible to ferrets on the Shetland Mainland and is certainly the puffin colony most visited by tourists.

The incident at Sumburgh Head was not unexpected, for numbers of feral ferrets have increased dramatically on the Shetland Mainland in recent years. While ferret density is likely to be closely linked to that of rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, their main prey, there have been many reports of losses among domestic poultry and nothing is known of their impact on wild birds. Dr Johnny Birks of English Nature recently submitted a report to the SCFWAG in which he emphasised the need to ensure ferrets do not spread to other islands and the need for data to be gathered on the ecology of ferrets in Shetland, as a basis for devising future control measures. Subsequently, a proposal for such a study has been submitted to Oxford University.

## **MASSIVE SKUA PASSAGE OFF SHETLAND**

There can be few more enthralling sights than a movement of north-bound skuas in Spring. Balranald, Outer Hebrides, is often thought to be Britain's premier watching point to be Britain's premier watching point to witness this spectacle, but this year's passage of Pomarine skuas off Watsness, Shetland will surely remain hard to beat. Sea

watching between 8th - 10th and 16th - 17th May produced a total of 2625 Pomarine and 47 long-tailed skuas, including 2093 of the former on the 9th alone! It was always thought that passage occurred off Shetland (it was not until 1987 that any major movements were recorded) given the right weather conditions - this year it occurred with compound interest!

A north westerly force 4-5, gusting 6-7 during the frequent snow and hail showers provided the recipe for a superb sea watch on the 9th. Birds started to head north just before 0700 BST, continuing steadily into the early evening with pronounced waves between 0900 - 1100 and 1445 - 1600 (the latter period recording over a 1000 birds). The vast majority of flocks could be seen several kilometres away, following the West Mainland coastline, their composition involving a nucleus of birds at the front with stragglers behind. On reaching Watsness a high proportion of flocks would rise, like thermalling raptors, allow the stragglers to join the nucleus, before dropping back down to sea-level and continuing north, presumably having sighted their route. During showers, the reaction of the birds was incredible: no matter what altitude flocks were at, on sighting an incoming shower they would settle on the sea, waiting for the shower to pass. However, there was one exception - one flock of 72, on sighting a shower, immediately climbed at a 70 degree angle over the shower reaching an incredible altitude, above the squall. An estimated 5-8% of all birds on the 9th were dark phase individuals whilst scrutiny of birds passing close showed quite a few 3rd or 4th year birds.

All in all it was an incredible day - I'm sure it will be etched in the minds of the few folk that were there - Mick Mellor's expletives as a flock of 300 flew over the two of us will certainly remain etched in mine! Let's hope for a belt of North Westerlies next May .....

Hugh Harrop  
Mew House, Bigton, Shetland, ZE2 9JA

A full account of this passage is in prep. by Hugh Harrop, Mick Mellor and Dave Suddaby.

## **SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1993**



Subscriptions for Seabird Group membership in 1993 remain at the same level as in 1991 and 1992: £10 for Ordinary Members, £9 if paid by standing order, £5 for Student Members, £15 for Institutional Members. Subscriptions are due by 1 February 1993. Members who have NOT been paying by Standing Order will find a Subscription Form enclosed with this Newsletter. On the back of this form is a Standing Order form and we urge you to complete and return this as it makes our jobs of Membership Secretary and Treasurer much easier. If you are unable or do not wish to pay by Standing Order, (it is probably not convenient for overseas members) can you please return the Subscription Form together with £10 payment by cheque or by VISA/Mastercard authorisation. Standing Orders and Subscriptions should be sent to Sheila Russell, Clober Farm, Milngavie, Glasgow, G62 7HW. Please help us with our paperwork by doing this today. Many thanks.

Sheila Russell and Bob Furness

### **HONORARY TREASURER**

For 5 years I have been Hon. Treasurer for the Seabird Group, with the dubious honour of being the only office bearer in the Group who is permitted by the constitution to remain in office indefinitely. I would be delighted to hand over the Treasurer's post to any able and willing volunteer! It is only sensible at this point to indicate that it is important for the Treasurer to be able to meet regularly with the Membership Secretary and that it would be very desirable to keep the Group's account at the Bank of Scotland in Glasgow. In addition to the obvious responsibilities of the Treasurer, I have had the role of keeping and updating the computer files listing members addresses, the task of copying/printing the Newsletters, photocopying forms, and have shared with Sheila Russell the chore of packing and mailing Newsletters and the journal. If any member would seriously like to take on this responsibility, can they contact me about this.

Bob Furness, Zoology Dept. Glasgow University, Glasgow, G12 8QQ

### **COLONIAL WATERBIRD SOCIETY MEETING**

The next meeting of the Colonial Waterbird Society is to held at Arles, France from 6 - 10 October 1993. The meeting promises to have a wide international attendance, will feature a number of special symposia on the conservation and ecology of colonial waterbirds and is set in the Camargue region of southern France. A workshop on the conservation of the roseate tern will take place during the meeting. Further information is available from Dr Frank Cézilly, Le Sambuc, 13200 Arles, France.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AT AN OIL TERMINAL: THE SHETLAND EXPERIENCE**

A two-day conference of the Royal Society of Edinburgh

Environmental management and monitoring at Europe's largest oil loading terminal in Sullom Voe, Shetland, is one of the functions of the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group (SOTEAG), a unique collaboration between the oil industry, the local authority, central government, environmental agencies and local interests. SOTEAG will present the results of its independent, integrated monitoring programmes from 1974 to the present day, in a series of papers covering chemical and biological monitoring in the marine environment. Emphasis will be on the interpretation of the results and assessment of the effects of the oil industry operations on the environment of Sullom Voe. An expert panel discussion on the principles, concepts and requirements of monitoring will conclude the meeting.

The conference will be held 21-22 September, Wolfson Theatre, 22-24 George Street, Edinburgh. The draft programme includes the following speakers: George Dunnet on the background, George Dunnet and Martin Heubeck on seabird and eider monitoring, Martin Heubeck on the Shetland beached bird survey and Paul Foxton and Martin Heubeck on the response to the Esso Bernicia oil spill. As the draft was written before the Braer oil spill, maybe the effects of this will be included also.

Further details can be obtained from: The Meetings Secretary, Royal Society of Edinburgh, 22-24 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 2PQ.

## **FIRST ISSUE OF THE SOVIET SEABIRD GROUP NEWSLETTER.**

As previously announced a first issue of a Soviet seabird group newsletter was published in 1990, prior to the major political changes in the Soviet Union. Obviously the changes there will have altered ideas for the composition of the group, however, I thought it useful for seabird group members to be able to read translations of the more

interesting items from the newsletter. I thank my colleagues in BP for arranging for the translations.

Mark L Tasker

Dear Colleague

Working groups on cranes, falcons, owls, snipes, and some other groups of birds have been active for several years within the All-Union Ornithological Society. We believe it is high time we formed a working group on colonial seabirds. We don't need to substantiate the need for this group. It is clear to any ornithologist who know the research on seabirds in this country and can compare level and activity between Soviet and foreign programmes. In 1988 the All-Union Ornithological Society (HOS), together with the national section of the International Council for Bird Preservation began its work on an international project: "Colonial Seabird Register". But the absence of an organised structure - a special working group - has meant that the work has not been focused when the importance of the international project demands that the work be really intensive and co-ordinated. We see this publication as being the first step to the formation of the working group on colonial seabirds.

By publishing this newsletter, we can let Soviet and foreign colleagues know the main work directions and professional interest of researchers working on seabirds. The next and main task is to demonstrate the necessity of collaboration on internal and on external levels. Unfortunately we have not been able to reflect all of the problems and variety of themes of our research work in this publication. We hope the next issue will have more authors with a variety of new topics.

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Study of colonial seabirds in the USSR  
Newsletter. Institute of biological problems of  
the North of the Far East Section of the  
Academy of Sciences of the USSR.  
Magadan, 1990. 57 pages.

The first issue of the Newsletter on studies of colonial seabirds in the USSR has information about the current aspects of research done by marine ornithologists of the USSR and about the main events of the international life. It identifies the priorities for work on seabirds. We hope this publication will be the first step to the formation of a working group on the study of colonial seabirds in the USSR and that this will be of some help to professional zoologists and to all people who enjoy nature.

### **A MASS MORTALITY OF SEABIRDS ON THE COAST OF SOUTH SAKHALIN**

There was a mass mortality of seabirds in Anita Bay (South Sakhalin) in the summer of 1989. Common guillemots were the most frequently found species: (90-95% of dead birds of different days): then fulmars (about 5%); then rhinoceros auklet and Brunnich's guillemot, (less than 5%). The auks were both young birds still with down and adult birds in different stages of moult in approximately equal numbers.

The first corpses were found in the middle of July on the coast of Anita Bay between the village Ozersk and Busse lake. Seven to eight corpses were found in 10 km of coast. 20 dead birds were found on 18-20 July. Numbers of dead birds then increased and from the 20 July to the 2 August an average of 10 corpses per km per day were found. A total of 55 dead common guillemots, 3 dead fulmars, one rhinoceros auklet and one Brunnich's guillemot were found on the 27 July on the coast about 7 km north of Lutoja river estuary.

During the second half of July, southerly winds brought dead and half-dead birds to the southern part of the bay. These were in different stages of decomposition. It seems likely that the birds had died 5-7 days previously, perhaps in Lapurez Strait or in the Northern part of the sea off Japan. Usually 10-20% of the beached birds were half dead and very weak. Some auks were emaciated and some were well-fed; some of them even had stomachs full of food. Therefore it seems unlikely that they had all starved to death.

The reasons for the deaths has not been determined yet. Bacteriological and viral tests were negative.

V.A. Nevhaev

In: Zubakin, V.A. & Kondratjev (eds) 1990. Study of Colonial Seabirds in the USSR newsletter. Institute of biological problems of North of the far east section of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Magadan. pp 47-48.

### **GREAT SKUA (*STERCORARIUS SKUA*) NESTING IN THE USSR**

Before 1988, the great skua was considered a vagrant to the Soviet Union. Recently though, they have been seen regularly on the Murmansk coast. In 1988, a nest of a great skua was found on one of the islands (Bolshoi Zelenets) of Semi Ostropov archipelago. The nest had one egg, 72.8 x 49.5 mm. in size. A 3-5 day old chick was found near the nest when the island was visited on 8 July. The fate of this nestling is not known. Not far from the nest they found remains of a dead female eider.

On 7 June 1989, a nest with 3 eggs, perhaps of the same birds, were found there. When visited on 16 June, it had apparently been destroyed by large gulls. Another pair of birds with a nest was found on the island Bolshoi Litzsky. The distance between the first and second nest site is about 15 km. One feathered nestling was discovered here on 15 July, and the nestling fledged on 4 August. This chick regurgitated fish. On one occasion this was a mixture of sandeel (*Ammodytidae*) and capelin (*Mallotus villotus*); on another occasion gobies (*Gobiidae*). Nearby were many remains of young gulls and adult female eiders. Both great skua territories were located on the flat tundra parts of the islands, in places typically used for nesting by arctic skuas. Single adult non-nesting birds were often observed not far from the nesting ones.

T.V. Krasnov

### **SULA 6, NO 4**

Clive Craig writes on the July 1985 die-off of auks, terns and kittiwakes on the west coast of Scotland. There appears to have been a severe local shortage of sandeels and sprats,

but no reason for this shortage could be established. Kees Camphuysen reviews the biometrics and condition of Pomarine skuas found dead on Dutch beaches following the autumn 1985 influx to the North Sea. Most birds appear to have starved to death, and probably entered the North Sea in a poor condition. Maarten Platteeuw and Kees Woutersen , using a combination of seawatches from 1976, 1977 and 1984 and at-sea observations, demonstrate that Manx shearwaters from the large Co. Kerry colonies move to feed off south Cork. A note of the first record of a soft-plumaged petrel off the Netherlands and a note on little tern movements in the Wadden Sea complete this issue.

## **COLONIAL WATERBIRDS VOL. 15, NO. 2**

Papers on seabirds in this issue include: nest habitat selection by eight synoptic species of Mediterranean gulls and tern; Notes on the at-sea identification of Pacific gadfly petrels (Genus *Pterodroma*); Use of fencing to limit terrestrial predator movements into least tern colonies; Winter diet of Atlantic puffin in the northeast Atlantic; High mortality of Cape cormorants off western South Africa caused by *Pasteurella multocida*; Interspecific nest-site competition among cavity-nesting alcids on South-east Farallon Island, California; Diving behaviour of black guillemots in northeastern Hudson Bay; Turbidity as an ecological solution to reduce the impact of fish-eating colonial waterbirds on fish farms; Predation by common ravens on cliff-nesting black-legged kittiwakes on Baccalieu Island, Newfoundland; and an extremely useful review and commentary on the laws and treaties of North Pacific Rim nations that protect seabirds on land and at sea.

## **PHOTOGRAPHS OF KNOWN AGE SEABIRD CHICKS**

We need photographs of known-age seabird chicks (and 1st-summer tysties) for possible inclusion in a manual on counting and monitoring methods. Priorities include:

Kittiwake chicks : 'large' (wingtips same length/protruding beyond tail, little or no down) and 'medium' (wingtips shorter than tail, well developed black & grey upperwing pattern, some down. Guillemot & razorbill: 15-day old chicks. Gannet chicks: especially 10, 11, & 12 weeks old. Fulmar: downy chick of adult size (with adult, if possible); chick 1 week from fledging. Shag: well-feathered chick ca. 4 weeks old. Cormorant: well-feathered chick ca. 5-6 weeks old. Herring and lesser black-backed gull: recently-fledged juveniles (standing); 3-week old chicks; any well-feathered chicks showing primaries and primary coverts spread, in closeup if possible. Terns and small gulls: 2- /3- week old chicks. Tystie: 1 year old in summer plumage.

Please let us know if you may be able to help (but don't send us any slides yet). Any slides provided or used will of course be fully acknowledged.

Duncan Halley & Paul Walsh, JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen AB1 1XE (tel. 0224-642863).

## **APPROVED MINUTES OF 26TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SEABIRD GROUP**

held in the Kelvin Conference Centre, Glasgow at 1930 on 27 March 1992. Kenny Taylor was in the chair and a total of 20 members registered their attendance, though more were present. Apologies were received from Bryan Nelson. The meeting closed at 2010.

### **1. Minutes of the 25th Annual General Meeting**

The minutes of the 25th AGM were adopted without change, proposed by Mike Harris, seconded Andy Webb.

### **2. Matters arising**

Problems had been reported at the 25th AGM over the speed of communication through the central Seabird Group address. The secretary had now solved this problem by providing RSPB with a set of sticky labels.

### **3. 26th Annual Report**

The 26th Annual Report was read and adopted, proposed by Tim Birkhead, seconded Chris Mead.

### **4. Treasurers Report**

The Treasurers Report was presented by Bob Furness. The present high balance in the main account was due to income having been received for the conference, but rather few out-goings as yet. The level of subscription income had increased due the hard work of the Membership Secretary in chasing defaulters. The surplus on the census fund was being transferred to the general fund to cover the group's administrative costs in organising seabird monitoring for the JNCC contract. There had been an increase in postage costs due to increased number of newsletters being produced and an increase in their size. The accounts were adopted after discussion, proposed John Croxall, seconded Bernie Zonfrillo.

### **5. Auditors**

M Robinson was re-elected as the Seabird Group's auditor, proposed Mark Tasker, seconded Sarah Wanless.

### **6. Elections**

Pat Monaghan, Bob Furness and Bernie Zonfrillo were thanked for their hard work over the last few years. Bob Furness agreed to continue as Treasurer, but asked for a volunteer to take over the role. With there being no other nominations, the executive committee's proposals to elect Mike Harris and Jane Sears to the vacant posts were accepted.

### **7. Constitutional changes**

Mark Tasker introduced the executive's proposals for constitutional changes. The main change was to add nature conservation to the Seabird Group's remit. Other changes were to make the Newsletter Editor an executive post and to tidy up one or two other inconsistencies. The proposed changes were divided into ten parts for discussion and adoption, with all but one change being agreed. Mark Tasker agreed to provide an updated constitution to the next AGM, and it would also be sent out with the newsletter.

### **8. Any other business**

Chris Mead announced that the Seabird Group had expressed concern over JNCC's proposals to remove the subsidy on seabird ring costs. However, he was pleased to say that following negotiation, it was likely that some subsidies would be re-instated under the aegis of JNCC's Seabird Monitoring Programme.

**DRAFT MINUTES OF 27TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SEABIRD GROUP** held in the New Hall, Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick at 1715 on 9 January 1993. Kenny Taylor was in the chair and a total of 16 members were present. Apologies were received from Bob Furness, Jeremy Greenwood, Dave Okill, Martin Heubeck and Jim Fowler. The meeting closed at 1740.

#### 1. Minutes of the 26th Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the 26th AGM were read by Mark Tasker and adopted without change, proposed by Chris Mead, seconded Sarah Wanless.

#### 2. Matters arising

Copies of the revised constitution were distributed to all present. Further copies would go out with the next newsletter. The problem with the RSPB forwarding address still remained, and the executive committee were examining further options.

#### 3. 27th Annual Report

The 27th Annual Report was read by Kenny Taylor and adopted, proposed by Sheila Russel, seconded Peter Robinson.

#### 4. Treasurers Report

The Treasurers Report was presented by Kenny Taylor in the absence of Bob Furness. There were no questions. The accounts were adopted, proposed Steve Sutcliffe, seconded Chris Mead.

#### 5. Auditors

M Robinson was re-elected as the Seabird Group's auditor, proposed Oscar Merne, seconded Sarah Wanless.

#### 6. Elections

Bob Furness agreed to continue as Treasurer, but is still looking for a volunteer to take over the role. He was re-elected as Treasurer unopposed.

#### 7. Any other business

Adrian Blackburn raised the subject of the desire to have more amateurs on the executive committee. Kenny Taylor explained that there was already some amateur presence on the committee, and certainly several would not regard themselves as working primarily on seabirds. He encouraged more amateurs to put their names forward for election. Adrian Blackburn also raised the subject of the timing of the Annual General Meeting, both within the Ringing and Migration Conference, and in terms of whether another conference would be a better venue. No-one present could think of a better conference for the meeting to be held at in the absence of a Seabird Group conference. Mark Tasker and Chris Mead apologised for the unfortunate clash of timing of the conference lectures and the AGM. This had come about for a variety of reasons, and in spite of good original scheduling. Mark and Chris agreed to try and schedule two seabird talks on the Saturday afternoon of the 1994 Ringing and Migration conference, to be immediately followed by the Seabird Group AGM

## THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SEABIRD GROUP

Agreed at the Inaugural Meeting at New College, Oxford, 8 January 1966, last revised at the 26th Annual General Meeting, Glasgow, 27 March 1992.

- 1. Terms of reference.** The Seabird Group is a body devoted to the promotion of study and conservation of seabirds. The Group aims to (1) increase the amount and quality of research on seabirds, particularly in Europe and its waters, (2) educate Group members and others of the importance of seabirds and their environment, and (3) advocate the conservation of seabirds.
- 2. Membership.** Membership is open to all on payment of an annual subscription, due on 1 February, to be approved at a General Meeting of the Group. Members are entitled to participate in all Group activities, to attend meetings, and to receive Newsletters and the Group's journal *Seabird* when published.
- 3. Government.** The business of the Group will be conducted by an Executive Committee of nine members, comprising the officers (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Editor of *Seabird* and Editor of the Newsletter) and four ordinary members. The officers and ordinary members shall be elected by the Annual General Meeting and shall normally serve for four year terms. Officers and ordinary members are not eligible for re-election to the Executive Committee until the Annual General Meeting following that at which their term of office expires, except for the Treasurer and both Editors who may be eligible for immediate re-election. Ordinary members are eligible during or at the end of their term of office for election as officers of the Group, but they shall not normally serve on the Executive Committee for more than a total of seven consecutive years. In exceptional circumstances, e.g. when many of the Executive Committee reach the end of their terms of membership together, some officers or ordinary members may be proposed for re-election by the Annual General Meeting for a single one-year term. Should any vacancies occur during the year the Executive Committee may fill them by co-option. Co-opted members shall serve until the next Annual General Meeting. Other Group members may be invited to attend Executive Committee meetings by the Chair, but shall not be entitled to vote.
- 6. Resolution of disputes.** Decisions may be taken by a majority vote of all the members of the Executive Committee, but in the event of disagreement any member of the Executive Committee shall have the right to demand postponement of the decision for fourteen days, and then a postal vote of all members of the Executive Committee shall be taken, whereupon a majority decision is binding.
- 5. Organisation.** It shall be the duty of the Officers and the Executive Committee to organise the activities of the Group. Wherever convenient, such activities can be carried out in co-operation with other groups or organisations. The Executive Committee shall approve any proposed activity of the Group, ensuring that any activity carried out in the name of the Group is properly planned and carried out with adequate resources and support. The Executive Committee shall ensure that the results of any activities are used effectively and where possible published.
- 6. Annual General Meeting.** An Annual General Meeting of the Members of the Group will be held at some convenient place during the winter months, preferably during the course of a large, relevant conference. Twelve shall form the quorum. The Executive Committee shall report on progress during the previous calendar year and present a summary of accounts. Elections shall be made to fill vacancies on the Executive Committee. The Secretary shall send a notice of the Annual General Meeting to all paid-up Members of the Group at least six weeks in advance, which shall include nominations to the Executive Committee and a provisional agenda. Any Member wishing to make additional nominations or to have any other competent business placed on the agenda shall send notification to reach the Secretary not later than four weeks before the meeting.

7. **Additional General Meetings.** Additional General Meetings may be called by the Executive Committee or on the written request of not less than twelve members of the Group to the Secretary, to discuss urgent business. The Secretary shall convene the Meeting as soon as is practicable with at least two weeks' notice to the Membership. At such Meetings the quorum shall be twenty-five members.
8. **Refusal of Membership.** The Executive Committee shall have the right to refuse or terminate the membership of any person who is deemed to have acted in a way contrary to the interests of the Group.
9. **Use of Funds.** All funds of the Group are to be used for the purpose stated in Clause 1 (including such forms of publicity, publication etc. as are required for this), and for no other purpose. No Officer may receive payment in any way, directly or indirectly, except for reimbursement of reasonable expenses. In the event of the dissolution of the Group, any assets remaining after settlement of debts will not be disbursed to the Executive Committee or Members of the Group, but will be used for a purpose similar to that of the Group.
10. **Dissolution of the Group.** The Group may only be dissolved by a two-thirds vote in favour at a properly advertised General Meeting.
11. **Amendment of Constitution.** This constitution may be amended only by a resolution carried by a two-thirds majority at a properly advertised General Meeting.