

NEWSLETTER 70

JANUARY 1995

RATS ERADICATED FROM THE SEPT-ISLES, BRITTANY ?

We have been attempting to eradicate rats *Rattus norvegicus* from three islands (île aux Moines - 11ha, île Plate - 9ha, île Bono - 21ha) of the Archipelago of Sept-Iles, Brittany, France. The archipelago is a National Nature Reserve managed by the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO). Landing is prohibited on the five islands of this Archipelago except the île aux Moines where two lighthouse men are resident. The rat-removal experiment was under the scientific control of the Wildlife Fauna Laboratory (Laboratoire de la Faune Sauvage) of the National Institute of Agronomy Researches (INRA).

The islands probably used to hold Manx shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* and storm petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* colonies, and there was evidence of damage to the puffin *Fratercula arctica* population caused by rats. Rat eradication was therefore attempted in order to restore these populations. The islands are between 4.5 km and 7.5 km offshore, and surrounded by strong tidal streams. This water barrier, coupled with the landing prohibition, minimises the risk of re-invasion of the islands by rats.

We wanted to minimise damage to non target species, so we divided the operation into two phases. During the first one (8 days), 396 live-traps were set in a 30m x 30m grid pattern, and all animals except the rats were released. During the

second phase, the traps remained in place and 445 plastic tubes (45cm length, 9cm diameter) each filled with 500g of a bait comprising wheat soaked in an anticoagulant toxic, chlorophacinone, were set near the traps.

Between the beginning (19 September) and the end (15 October) of the operation, 656 rats were captured and only 60kg of bait among the 250kg spread on the islands disappeared, indicating that the first step of the operation minimised the quantity of toxic chemicals potentially getting into the food chain. After 13 days of trapping, no further rats were captured. After 8 days of poisoning, further bait remained untouched. Between 15 October and 23 November, not a rat was captured in the traps remaining on two of the three islands.

Have we been successful? Are there really no more rats on the Sept-Iles Archipelago? We think that a rat who both didn't enter a baited rat-trap and disliked wheat would be unusual. But, why not? We hope that the winter might destroy such an atypical rat. The definitive answer to these questions will come in September 1995, when the same trapping pressure will again be applied to the islands. Rat eradication from Sept-Iles Archipelago is a part of a large programme dealing with the consequences of disappearances of

species in the insular ecosystems. The project "Rodents, Biodiversity and Islands", managed by the laboratory of INRA, and involving several partners, will run on several islands along the Brittany coast.

The project received financial support from the French Ministry of Environment and the anticoagulant was given by the firm Lypha. Many thanks to volunteers who helped us during the hard field operations. Special thanks also to Bernie Zonfrillo. His programme of rat eradication on Ailsa Craig inspired us.

François Siorat, Station ornithologique Ile Grande, F22560 - Pleumeur Bodou, France
 M. Pascal, Laboratoire de la Faune Sauvage du Centre de Rennes Campus de Beaulieu, F35042 - Rennes Cedex, France.

SEABIRD GROUP CONFERENCE

The programme for the forthcoming Seabird Group conference is now more or less settled, and is attached to the end of this Newsletter. The poster programme is not full, so further offers of posters will be gratefully received. There will be specific times set aside to review posters. Please send abstracts of any offers to Mark Tasker, JNCC, 17 Rubislaw Terrace, Aberdeen, AB1 1XE, Scotland; fax: +44 1224 621488.

Registrations are coming in steadily, but there are still places available. If you want to attend what should be a particularly good conference please send in your registration form as soon as possible.

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SUSTAINABLE EXPLOITATION OF SOOTY TERN EGGS IN THE SEYCHELLES

The Seabird Group has supported work to provide guidelines on the harvesting of sooty tern eggs in the Seychelles in order to ensure sustainability and to improve the harvesting strategy to avoid wastage. Chris Feare and Elaine Gill again visited the Seychelles in 1994. Systematic searching of the Bird Island sooty tern colony revealed that most birds marked in 1993 returned to breed in 1994. No

chicks ringed in 1993 were found. A further 3000 adults were marked, and training of local personnel enabled 826 birds to be ringed in September. Sooty terns prefer certain vegetation types over others for nest sites. Management of colony vegetation could thus maximise egg production. Recommendations were made for vegetation management to increase the potential productivity of the tern colonies. Research on the ticks infesting the terns on Bird Island revealed that tick life cycles were closely related to seabird breeding cycles.

AERIAL SURVEY OF THE ST KILDA GANNETRY IN 1994

As part of the 1994-95 gannet census, Stuart Murray and colleagues carried out an aerial survey of the world's largest colony on St Kilda. The survey was supported by a grant from the Seabird Group and the following is an account of his experiences.

'What happens if we hit one?' A reasonable question if your imagination conjures up gannet behaving like an air-to-air missile. Fortunately gannets do not seem to have a death wish and keep well away from aircraft. However my confidence began to evaporate as we took off from Benbecula - after all St Kilda is the biggest gannetry and in among 100,000-150,000 birds there might be one which is curious or just careless!!

Morbid speculation was soon overtaken by the practicalities of organising the count. For a start I was seriously doubting the wisdom of opting to photograph out of the open rear door of the plane. The headset intercom did not reach that far back and the noise of the slipstream and the engines made shouted instructions impossible. The main idea was to get pictures of higher quality than was possible through the perspex windows. As the only photographer who was familiar with the gannetry I thought it best to maximise my chances of good shots. Too late to realise anyone could take the

pictures - the real skill was telling the pilot exactly where to go.

Still wondering if it would all go horribly wrong before we even got there, a nudge from Kenny Taylor made me look ahead. There were the east cliffs of Boreray and Alan Mossman, the pilot, shouting was this OK? A slow turn to the right and the sea slid away and black and green cliffs came into view. The tiny isolated groups of gannets on Creagan Fharspeig and then the massive gannet-clad walls of Creagan na Rubhaig Bana and Mullach an Tuamail. No time to take in details. Impossible cliffs sliding past at incredible angles. Just keep the camera pointed down and shoot off film as fast as possible. As we passed over the puffin greens of Sunadal a steep run took us away from the cliffs and out to sea to reload cameras and check on what we had taken.

The gannets breed from sea level to near the summit of the island at 1200 feet. To achieve complete aerial coverage requires several runs along the east and west cliffs at different altitudes. Where these faces converge there is a fantastic vertical maze of pinnacles, buttresses and overhangs. Scattered among these soaring slopes are major concentrations of gannets. As we lined up for one last run over the north east corner, the whole fantastic mountainscape of Boreray and its two satellite stacs made an unforgettable and nerve-tingling sight.

One last breathtaking descent to 600 feet along the west wall and out to sea south of the axe blade of Stac Lee. The sheer verticality of this rock makes it easy to photograph; then on to Stac an Armin shaped like a three sided pyramid. A combination of circuits and one high vertical finished off a memorable experience.

The release of tension when the count was over made me suddenly aware of how cold I had got. Ungloved fingers were numb and eyes and nose streamed from the bitter wind - but we had done it!! What I had glimpsed through the view-

finder convinced me we had the coverage but it was another two nail-biting weeks before the developed films confirmed that we had been successful. Between us we had taken over 500 colour slides, many were out-of-focus, over-exposed or too distant, but from the remainder we salvaged enough to give us 100% coverage of the stacs and 98% coverage of Boreray.

It took three days to sort out the slides and another four mind-boggling days to count all the 'little white dots'. And the total? We estimated that the St Kilda gannetry now holds 60428 apparently occupied sites. This represents a 20% increase over the last count in 1985 and reaffirms the importance of this colony.

The survey was a partnership project and in addition to support from the Seabird Group, financial assistance was given by SNH, SOC, JNCC, BTO and RSPB. The success of the survey was largely due to the flying skills of Alan Mossman of Air Alba. We are also grateful to Mary Harman who navigated, Digger Jackson, Kenny Taylor and Jim Vaughan for back-up photography.

Stuart Murray.

BREEDING SEABIRD ON UK OIL PLATFORM

Those of us who go offshore for seabirds in UK waters have long speculated as to which seabird would be the first to nest on offshore oil platforms in this area. Some have favoured herring gull, while others favoured kittiwake. The competition was resolved in 1993 when a herring gull was proved nesting on Morecambe Central platform in the Irish Sea. A nest containing three eggs was found in late May, but it seems that due to flooding and egg predation by other gulls, the attempt was unsuccessful. Nesting material comprised locally common items: frayed ends of nylon string, a piece of bubble-wrap, pieces of seaweed, small pieces of wood and straw.

From *Fulmar* 76, the bulletin of the North Sea Bird Club

REVIVAL OF THE AUSTRALASIAN SEABIRD GROUP

From 1987 to December 1993, the Australasian Seabird Group was inactive. It is particularly pleasing to see its revival with the issue of No. 27 the Australasian Seabird Group Newsletter. The original objectives of the Group included investigating and mapping offshore seabird colonies, organising beached bird surveys, investigating seabirds at sea and maintaining contact between those in Australasia interested in seabirds. The group will be reviewing these objectives in the light of changing priorities and the achievements of others. The newsletter contains short papers on the taxonomy of the blue-grey noddy group, extralimital records of seabirds (black-headed gull and light-mantled sooty albatross), and observations of birds at sea. Abstracts from the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union congress on "Seabirds from coasts and beyond" are reproduced. Papers included description of the results of satellite tagging wandering albatrosses near Australia, foraging of Adélie penguins, results from two seabird at sea atlas projects from the southern oceans near Australia, extra-pair fertilisation in short-tailed shearwaters (about 10% of nestlings were not related to the male feeding them), breeding of penguins, terns and gulls in Australia, plastic ingestion by seabirds, visitor impact on seabirds of the Great Barrier Reef, vulnerability of Australian seabirds to oil pollution, and community (=volunteer) participation in seabird conservation.

Details on the Australasian Seabird Group are available from the convenor: Peter Dann, Penguin Reserve Committee of Management, PO Box 97, Cowes, Phillip Island, Victoria 3922, Australia. The newsletter editor: Eric Woehler, Dept of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of California, Irvine, California 92717, USA would welcome any contributions.

CONFERENCE ON COASTAL AND MARINE BIODIVERSITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Notice of a conference to be held at Alghero, Sardinia from 19-22 January 1995 arrived with your newsletter editor on 20 December. There are sessions and papers on seabirds among many other topics. Those interested should contact Ms Maria Cau, Coop. Silt arl, Via Petrarca 14, 07041 Alghero, Sardinia, Italy. Tel. and fax: + 39 79 980750.

PENGUIN CONFERENCE, 2 - 6 SEPTEMBER 1996

Following the success of the first two International Penguin Conferences (Dunedin, New Zealand and Phillip Island, Australia in 1988 and 1992 respectively), the Third International Penguin Conference will be held at the Breakwater Lodge, Cape Town, South Africa from 2-6 September 1996.

The conference is being organised by the African Seabird Group, with the support of local organisations and societies, under the broad theme of "Penguins: science and management". It is intended that there will be four days of formal talks and poster sessions, all in plenary, broken in the middle by an excursion to historic Robben Island in Table Bay, home of an expanding population of Jackass or African Penguins *Spheniscus demersus*. Pre- and post-conference excursions are planned to seabird colonies in the West Coast National Park and to a mainland penguin colony on the Cape peninsula. The proceedings of the conference will be published as a special issue of *Marine Ornithology*.

Those interested in attending should write to the Organising Committee, Third International Penguin Conference, African Seabird Group, PO Box 34113, Rhodes Gift 7707, South Africa. You will be sent the second circular on the conference in mid-1995. The second circular will give

full details of registration fee, accommodation, excursions, publications plans, etc. Offers of papers or presentations may be made immediately. When replying, please also include full postal and electronic mail addresses and an international fax number.

Further information may be obtained from John Cooper, Chairperson of the Organising Committee, at the above address, or by electronic mail (jcooper@botzoo.uct.ac.za), fax (+27-21-650-3295) or phone (+27-21-650-3294).

COLONIAL WATERBIRD SOCIETY and PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP MEETING 1995

The Colonial Waterbird Society and Pacific Seabird Group will hold a joint meeting in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada 8-12 November 1995. The scientific meetings will be held in the new conference centre in downtown Victoria. The theme will be "Behavioural mechanisms of population regulation". Invited plenary speakers, workshops, paper and poster sessions are planned for three days. Special symposia can be arranged. Victoria is located in one of the best areas for birds in Canada and November is one of the best months to see them. Seabirds, seaducks and marine mammals abound along the shores of Victoria. Field trips to see wildlife and take in the scenery are planned. For more information regarding the scientific program contact James Kushlan, Department of Biology, University of Mississippi, MS 38677, USA; tel: + 1 601 232 203, fax: + 1 601 232 5144 or William Everett, Department of Birds and Mammals, San Diego Natural History Museum, San Diego, CA 92112, USA; tel: + 1 619 589 0480. For information on other matters contact local committee chairpersons: Rob Butler, Pacific Wildlife Research Centre, Canadian Wildlife Service, PO Box 340, Delta, BC V4K 3Y3 Canada; tel: + 1 604 946 8546; fax: + 1 604 946-7022, e-mail butlerr@cwsvan.dots.doe.ca or Ron Ydenberg, Department of Biosciences,

Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC V5A
1S6 Canada; tel: + 1 604 291 4282.

NEWS FROM BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

As an associate organisation to BirdLife International, the Seabird Group receives regular copies of their Network News. There is little seabird news in the latest edition (Vol 2, no. 3). From the Philippines is news that a seabird conservation workshop as held in Palawan, that will be followed up with the development of a management plan for Tubbataha Reef by the Haribon Foundation and the Danish Ornithological Society. A review is also under way to identify priority areas for conservation in the Arabian Sea region. Undertaken by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and funded by the world Bank, BirdLife International has provided data on all of the IBAs in the Arabian Sea.

PENGUIN APPEAL

Falkland's Conservation has launched Penguin Appeal in order to raise £750,000 to protect wildlife in the South Atlantic. A video on the Falkland Islands accompanies the appeal. If you would like more information, contact Penguin Appeal, PO Box 2040, London W12 0ZJ, England.

PENGUIN CONSERVATION

This is the new name for *SPN: Spheniscus Penguin Newsletter*. Subscription is free to those with a serious interest in penguin conservation and study, although contributions towards printing costs will be gratefully received. The Seabird Group receives copies which will be abstracted for the Newsletter. If you are interested in copies of, or wish to contribute to, *Penguin Conservation*, contact Cythia Cheney, Editor Penguin Conservation, Metro Washington Park Zoo, 4001 SW Canyon Road, Portland, Oregon 97221, USA. Tel: + 1 503 226 1561, fax: + 1 503 226 6836.

FROM PENGUIN CONSERVATION Vol. 7, No. 1

The longest paper in this issue is devoted to a comparison of medical treatments for aspergillosis in captive tufted puffins by Allen Monroe, Peter Noah and Steven Brown. A combination of two drugs (itraconazole and enilconazole) with supportive nutrition was the most effective treatment; other drugs proved useless. The authors think it possible that other drugs may be even more effective. A further paper by Beth Ann Breitweiser deals with fluid therapy in penguins. Intravenous drips are not as easy as in mammals. Literature abstracts span all aspects of penguin biology.

Vol. 7, No. 2

The first part of this issue is concerned with penguin studbooks and numbers held in the world's zoos. A item by Alison Dehrmann details the oil spill that affected thousands of Jackass penguins around Cape Town in June 1994. The oil came from a sunken ore carrier. About 8000 oiled penguins were rounded up on Dassen Island and air-freighted to the mainland, where they joined a further 2000 birds caught elsewhere at a cleaning and rehabilitation facility. At the time of writing (July) about 1300 penguins had died during rehabilitation, and few had been released due to continuing oil pollution in the capture area (see below). The following article describes the organisation responsible for much of the clean-up and rehabilitation work, and its techniques and methods. The remainder of the issue abstracts the contents of Volume 91, part 5 of *Emu*, an issue devoted to little penguins.

Vol. 7, No. 3

A directory of all institutions known to be holding penguins was included with this issue. The first paper gives details of some research on Humboldt penguins in Chile. John Croxall then gives details of a process currently under way to prepare

conservation and management plans for wild penguins (an article in an earlier issue of Penguin Conservation had apparently given early stages of this process rather too much prominence). Alison Dehrmann continues the story of the oil spill off South Africa. Official figures indicate that 7200 penguins were taken for rehabilitation, and about 4600 were released. Rather few of these returned to their colony immediately after release, but it is too early to determine the overall effect of the spill on populations. The penultimate item of the issue is a direct reprint of Norman, Cullen and Dann's paper on little penguins in Victoria, that was first published in *Emu* Vol. 91, part 5.

**FROM MARINE ORNITHOLOGY, Vol. 20
No. 1/2**

This issue, dated 1992, arrived in September 1994. Frere and co-authors report that nest type and location influenced egg and chick survival of Magellanic penguins. Despite differences in thermal environments and predation rates, reproductive success was similar in bush and burrow nests. Rory Wilson and co-authors discuss why some diving birds leap slightly before descending underwater; most foot propelled species, when descending deeply, need to set off vertically - the leap before plunging gets their feet into the correct position. B.W. Rowlands describes seabird observations in the central South Atlantic. John Cooper and A.L. Plös provide a very useful summary of publications and these on southern ocean seabirds in 1991, while a paper by the Biomass working party on bird ecology describes methods used to count birds at sea in the southern ocean.

FROM SEA SWALLOW, Vol. 43

This is a bumper edition, running to 87 pages. The usual summary of land- and seabird reports from contributors around the world comprise about one-third of the issue. A series of articles describe birding observations from areas that few get to: Franz Josef Land, Cambodia Papua New

Guinea, Tristan da Cunha, outer Falkland Islands etc. The problem of acceptance of records of rare seabirds onto British (and other) national lists continues; Bill Bourne and Andy Patterson have found older (probable) records of McCormick's skua off Europe. It seems likely that these and other sight records of rare seabirds not already on national lists are likely to remain in limbo until national rarities committees change their standards required for sightings, or make more use of experts from other parts of the world.

**FROM CORELLA
Vol. 18, No. 2**

This issue contains a wide variety of papers about southern seabirds, including a description of a rapidly expanding bridled tern colony in Western Australia, the breeding biology of McCormick's skua at a colony in eastern Antarctica and the early results from satellite tags attached to royal albatrosses off New Zealand (it appears that these albatrosses do not range as far as the wandering albatrosses of South Georgia). The issue contains a useful roundup of other literature on Australasian seabirds and descriptions of two further Australian seabird islands.

Vol. 18, No. 4

This is virtually a Western Australian issue. A long paper reviews the seabird population of the Houtman Abrolhos off Geraldton, and two papers deal with breeding and migration of seabirds in this area. Four seabird islands off the Pilbara are described. The issue contains the usual useful roundup of other literature on Australasian seabirds.

**FROM BERINGIAN SEABIRD BULLETIN
No. 2**

This second issue announces an international programme for seabird monitoring in the North Pacific, a goal that several, lead particularly by Scott Hatch have been working towards for a number of years. An initial analysis has been

made of available information on breeding numbers and performance in the area. Several papers expand on this for individual colonies. V.P. Shuntov indicates that large scale changes have occurred in seabird distribution in the northwestern Pacific over the past 90 years, probably related to oceanographic changes. Two papers review spectacled guillemots in the northwestern Pacific. Haney and co-authors review their studies of the seabird ecosystem around the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. John Piatt and co-authors provide observations on nest site selection in Kittlitz's murrelet. Zubakin and Konyukhov reveal that, in contrast to most small auks, whiskered auklet's return to their nest site after their breeding season - but by night; surprisingly enough juveniles also do this. It was thought that this might be because sleeping on land was safer than at sea, particularly in relation to avian predators.

FROM CIRCUMPOLAR SEABIRD BULLETIN No. 1

This bulletin has been bought out under the auspices of the Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment: conservation of arctic flora and fauna (CAFF). Its aim is to improve communication and the exchange of seabird information between scientists and managers interested in northern seabirds. Tony Gaston reviews research projects in the eastern Canadian Arctic. The late Martti Hario reviews the Finnish population of common guillemots (crashed to 35 pairs in 1993). The population in this area appears to be almost entirely supported by immigration, and the crash seems to be caused by paralytic shellfish poisoning. Ævar Petersen reviews potential mortality factors, population changes and studies on auks in Iceland. Changes in the food base, bycatch, hunting and introduced mammal predation appear to be the greatest threats. Vidar Bakken reviews studies in northern Norway and Svalbard. Beverly Agler describes the status of seabirds in the Lower Cook Inlet and in the Prince William Sound. Edgar Bailey reviews progress in

removing introduced foxes and rats from Alaskan Islands.

Jean Cochrane describes threatened and endangered seabirds and seaducks in Alaska. Further papers describe some of the post Exxon Valdez studies. The last part of the Bulletin is a summary of the first meeting of the Circumpolar Seabird Working Group.

FROM MEDMARAVIS NEWS No. 15

The 4th Medmaravis symposium occurs in Tunisia from 11-16 April 1995, shortly after the Seabird Group conference. The symposium includes two sessions on seabirds. It is unclear whether a proposal for a "world seabird" meeting that was proposed to be added to this symposium will occur. Further details may be obtained from John Walmsley, Medmaravis, BP.2, 83470 saint Maximin, France; tel: + 33 9459 4069, fax: + 33 9459 4738. Papers summarised in the newsletter include those that use DNA sequencing to support the specific status of yellow-legged herring gull and Mediterranean shearwater (Wink *et al.* 1994, *J. Orn.* 135: 72-80 and Wink *et al.* 1993, *Die Vogelwelt* 114: 226-232 respectively). This issue also gives details of the French Important Bird Areas book, which may be obtained from LPO, La Corderie Royale, BP 263, 17305 Rochefort, France; tel: +33 4682 1234, fax: + 33 4683 9586 for 100 FF each + 30 FF for postage and packing.

FROM WORLD BIRDWATCH, Vol. 16, No. 3

This is the first issue after BirdLife International's 21st conference in Rosenheim. Three pages are devoted to reviewing this event. News that Hakata Bay, Kyushu, Japan is being partially reclaimed is no good news for the 60 Saunder's gulls that use the area. Inaccessible Island in the Tristan da Cunha group has also been declared a nature reserve. Inaccessible is one of the most intact oceanic ecosystems in the

world, with no introduced mammals and only a few plants and invertebrates. It is a very important seabird breeding site. The issue also reviews the recently published Birds in Europe. This large volume in BirdLife's technical publication series reviews all species, including a number of seabirds believed to be at risk in Europe. It is available from BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, UK, price £28.00 + £3 postage and packing.

FROM BUTLLETÍ DEL GRUP CATALÀ D'ANELLAMENT Vol. 10.

Only one paper, by Cantos, Fernández and Hernández, is on seabirds in this issue. This reports on the large increase in black-headed gulls wintering around Madrid over the past decade or more. The increase, with numbers reaching more than 70,000 in 1993, is attributed to food supplied from rubbish tips. Studies at the tip indicate that it is used mainly by adult female birds. There was a strong diurnal rhythm of tip usage.

FROM OMAN BIRD NEWS No. 16.

This issue contains a fascinating account of traditional Socotra cormorant hunting at their winter roosts by Miranda Morris. Most were harvested during the southwest monsoon when there are few other foods available. The hunters lowered themselves over the cliffs on hand-spun ropes and, as quietly as possible, rung the necks of those birds they could reach. After hauling them to the top of the cliff, the carcasses were often cooked and eaten secretly on the spot after removal of the feathers, gall bladder, claws and eyes. Cooking was either boiling or roasting. Many local songs recount the hunters adventures. Some hunts also used lines with weighted hooks that were hooked around cormorant necks by night. It seems that eggs and young were not harvested. Subsidised alternative foods are now available, and cormorants can now roost without fear of being taken for food.

FROM BUTLLETÍ DEL PARC NATURAL DEL DELTA DE L'EBRE, No 7

The only paper in this related to seabirds is about the increase in wintering Mediterranean gulls in the Sant Jordi gulf in Tarragona. First year birds arrived in October and November, with most apparently moving through to southern Spain. Adults arrived later. Nearly all birds depart by March.