



seabird survey, Caithness held 5-10% of the British and Irish total breeding population for Fulmar, Shag, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Kittiwake, Razorbill and Black Guillemot, and 1-5% for Cormorant and Guillemot. Despite this wealth of seabirds, Caithness has attracted comparatively little attention from either amateur or professional ornithologists (with one or two notable exceptions). One reason for this is the relative inaccessibility of the cliffs, especially for the purposes of ringing. It was not until the early 1980s that seabird ringing in Caithness was really put on a firm footing, and our own project can trace its origins to the pioneering efforts of Hugh Clark and his team of ringers, especially Stuart Mackay, who found most of the access points to the colonies we use today.

SEABIRD RINGING SPECIAL II

Continuing our 'ringing special', in this issue we feature two further articles offering exciting seabird ringing activities, both in spectacular locations. Robin Sellers and Alan Lauder describe their annual 'expedition' to ring in the Caithness colonies, while Chris Redfern explains the history of ringing on the islands off Northumberland and the valuable contribution it makes to seabird studies.

SEABIRD STUDIES IN CAITHNESS

Caithness is one of those forgotten corners of Britain, and is probably best known as the home of John O'Groats, ostensibly the most northerly point on the British mainland. It is something of a tourist honey pot, and, like many such places, it is not a very good advertisement for area in which it is located. Appropriately perhaps, John O'Groats is located on one of the few stretches of coast in Caithness that is more or less devoid of seabirds. Much of the remainder of Caithness' extensive coast is excellent seabird breeding habitat, however, and the fifty odd kilometres of cliff on the east coast from Wick south to the county boundary at the Ord of Caithness are effectively one extended seabird colony. Caithness as a whole has very substantial numbers of several seabird species; according to the results of the 1985-87 national



Colour-ringing a Great Black-backed Gull chick © Andy Wilson

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Beginning in the early 1990s, we set out to put seabird studies in Caithness on a more formal footing, initially with two main objectives in mind:

- (a) to generate a set of ringing recoveries for Caithness seabirds to find out where they spent the winter months (very few of any species remain in Caithness) and to establish a reservoir of recoveries to aid the interpretation of population changes should any future rapid changes in breeding numbers take place, and
- (b) to undertake annual monitoring of numbers of breeding Cormorants at all Caithness colonies and of productivity at those where the birds can be observed reasonably easily.

In practice, only four species (Cormorant, Shag, Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull) can be ringed in sufficient numbers to make (a) a realistic objective (Caithness Guillemots also fall into this category but are covered in a separate project currently being organised by Mick Canham). We are able to ring small numbers of Fulmars, Black Guillemots, Razorbills and Kittiwakes but, to date, only a handful of recoveries have been generated for these species.



Great Black-backed Gull chicks at a Caithness colony © Andy Wilson

The Cormorant was chosen for special study (objective (b)) because it was clear that breeding numbers were declining. The Operation Seafarer Survey (1969/70) found some 852 pairs in 12 colonies but this had fallen to 235 pairs in

6 colonies by the time of the Seabird Colony Register Survey in 1985. In 1992, the first year proper of the current project, a full survey of the Caithness cliffs was undertaken, and to ensure that no colonies had been missed, this included a survey from the air. The count obtained, 230 pairs in 6 colonies, was almost the same as in 1985; there were just 110 nests in 4 colonies in 2002, and it appears that the decline continues, albeit at a reduced rate. Using all the other data we have been able to collect from monitoring and ringing, it is clear that these declines have nothing to do with poor productivity, or any failure of the food supply in the breeding season, but rather seem to be related to poor adult survival. We cannot be sure with the data currently available to us but suspect that excessive shooting and/or food shortages in the winter quarters are the cause of these declines. It is possible that they are due to a shift of birds to breed outside the area but this explanation alone cannot account for the declines. We shall continue to monitor the fortunes of Caithness Cormorants, but numbers are now so low and the remaining colonies so difficult, or impossible, to access that we are unlikely to generate any significant number of new recoveries in the foreseeable future.

For the next few seasons, we have decided to concentrate our efforts on Great Black-backed Gulls, a species that seems somewhat neglected nationally, and which has a comparatively small population in Caithness (about a thousand pairs), and which, given its fondness for fish discards, may be under threat from the much reduced fish quotas recently announced for Scottish fishermen. In 2002, we set up some study plots that together hold about 20% of the Caithness population. To increase the value of ringing, we shall be colour-ringing some of the birds, not simply to enhance the data on where the birds go in the non-breeding season and on survival, but also to shed more light on the timing of movements and the fidelity of the birds to winter sites.

Studying seabirds is, of course, a team activity, and we aim to have a 'social' side to our activities, especially during 'ringing week'. There are few suitable places to stay in the south of Caithness (most of the accessible colonies are in the far south-east of the area), and even fewer places to eat or get a drink, so we generally stay

in or near Helmsdale, just over the 'border' in Sutherland.

We had not realised just how far and wide the reputation of certain of the eating establishments there had spread, until an American colleague of one of us (who has absolutely nothing to do with birds of any description) recently related the following story. He and his wife had been visiting the north of Scotland and had stopped to get a meal at a seafood restaurant. They'd had an excellent meal, freshly landed langoustines and lots of them at a very modest price. Thinking this might be somewhere we had overlooked, he was quizzed closely about where it was. Unfortunately he had completely forgotten the name of the restaurant or the town it was in. He did however remember two things

about it - firstly there was a seven foot high plastic Elvis in the corner of the dining room, and secondly it had a patron who was the spitting image of Barbara Cartland (I'd like to be able to say that this is an exaggeration, but in fact it is all too accurate). And then we had it - this is La Mirage, one of our regular haunts in Helmsdale. We are not sure about the Langoustines, but their fish suppers are excellent.

So, if clambering up and down cliffs, plastic Elvises and Barbara Cartland lookalikes are your thing, please contact us - we may be able to fit you in on a future visit.

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Alan Lauder, armed with ringing crook, at one of the Caithness ringing sites © Andy Wilson

ISLAND SEABIRD COLONIES OF NORTHUMBERLAND

A visit to Northumberland wouldn't be complete without a trip to the Farne Islands. This group of 17 or so low islands 4 km north from Seahouses are crammed with breeding seabirds in the summer - a fantastic place to experience birds at close hand - where else can you get this close to an Eider?

Cormorants, Kittiwakes, Sandwich Terns, Guillemots and Puffins. Apart from a break during the war years, ringing continued until 1986 when Grace Hickling died. Grace was the Secretary of the Natural History Society of Northumbria, and had organised ringing studies on the Farnes on behalf of the Society since 1949. Between 1949 and 1986, over 166,000 birds had been ringed, and these ringing totals represented a considerable proportion of the national ringing totals for Sandwich Terns,



The islands are very important to the local economy, with over 30,000 visitors a year bringing valuable income to Seahouses and to the National Trust who manage the islands. Thirty km south, off Amble, is Coquet Island, an RSPB reserve and home to thousands of Puffins, Sandwich, Arctic and Common Terns, Black-headed Gulls, Eiders, assorted large gulls (unfortunately), and upwards of 40 pairs of Roseate Terns.

Seabirds have been ringed on the Farnes for many years - large gulls were ringed at least from 1910, followed a year or two later by

Arctic Terns, Kittiwakes, Shags and Eiders. The cessation of ringing in 1986 was precipitated by Grace's death; although concern was expressed that ringing may have had a detrimental effect on breeding success, a more significant factor may have been a lack of understanding of the results from ringing and the importance of ringing as a monitoring tool. These days, there is perhaps greater agreement that ringing is a scientific tool (whether for conservation or research), which needs to be used with a clear purpose understood and agreed by the custodians of our ornithological heritage.

From 1996, the Natural History Society was allowed to continue ringing seabirds on the Farne Islands, and this now complements the ringing of terns, Black-headed Gulls and Fulmars on Coquet Island. The range of species and number of birds ringed on both island groups is limited, more by time (of the ringing team) and money (cost of rings) than anything else, and the annual totals since 1996 are about half those for the years up to 1986. Ringing is usually directed at specific projects. From 1995 we initiated a study of Arctic Tern chicks on Coquet Island, extended to the Farnes in 1996, aimed at investigating the utility of simple measurements to monitor the 'quality' of chick rearing from year to year. Ringing has been an essential tool for marking chicks to obtain growth curves, avoid duplicate measurements, and measure the differential mortality of the first- and second- or third-hatched chicks.

Mark-recapture has been used to estimate chick mortality on the Farnes, where excessive vegetation growth can challenge other monitoring methods, and is being used to estimate the apparent survival rate of adult Arctic Terns on Coquet Island as part of a BTO 'Retrapping Adults for Survival' (RAS) project. For this RAS study, currently in its fourth year, around 180 adult terns are ringed or retrapped each year. Two RAS studies are also in progress on the Farnes. In May, the team heads for Inner Farne to ring and retrap adult female Eiders; this usually yields a sample of 150 or more, of which around half will be retraps. The other Farnes RAS study is on Shags nesting on Staple Island, and yields a sample size of 80-120 birds each year.

In addition to the RAS and Arctic Tern growth projects, samples of Sandwich Terns (target 1000; Farnes and Coquet), Common Terns (Coquet - a by product of research projects on Common and Arctic Terns led by Keith Hamer), Black-headed Gulls (Coquet, productivity monitoring plots, target 150), Kittiwakes (Farnes, 300), and Fulmars (to keep ringing pliers oiled; target: all chicks on Coquet) are ringed each year. These help to provide a baseline of recovery data for monitoring mortality and movement patterns. Sandwich Terns are a good example - the catching of these birds, and also Common Terns, by local people on the beaches of west Africa, is still common

practice. In addition, existing recovery data indicate potential interchange between North Atlantic and Black Sea Sandwich Tern populations; the accumulation of further data, perhaps with focussed colour-marking projects, will be needed to find out how extensive this is. Similar studies may confirm the existence of a trans-Pennine movement of Sandwich Terns suggested by Robin Ward (Ward 2000), and allow natal and breeding dispersal between North Atlantic colonies to be quantified.

There is great potential to develop seabird ringing further in the north-east. It is important to get maximum value from the ringing effort. Directing ringing towards conservation priorities - monitoring (survival, productivity, growth), developing efficient monitoring tools, mortality patterns and population structure, will complement colony counts, as well as contributing to knowledge of migration. The ringing effort must retain the confidence and involvement of conservation bodies, and, with good management, the results will spawn other research projects as an integral part of conservation research and planning.

Reference:

Ward, R. M. (2000) Migration patterns and moult of Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* and Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandvicensis* using Teesmouth in late summer. *Ringing & Migration* **20**: 19-28.

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THE FARNE ISLANDS MARINE ENVIRONMENT – INTEGRATING SEABIRDS AND SANDEELS

The Farne Islands are managed by the National Trust as an internationally important breeding site for seabirds. The Farnes seabird colonies have been monitored for many years, and this has included the use of ringing to study the movements and causes of mortality (see previous article). Many of the Farnes seabirds rely on sandeels as their main food, and are therefore susceptible to changes in the abundance or availability of these fish. With

considerable pressure on sandeel stocks as a result of industrial fishing, coupled with depletion of other fish stocks by inshore fisheries and changes to the marine environment resulting from reduced levels of effluent discharge, the future of the Farnes seabird colonies is not secure. Strategies for the future conservation of the Farnes, and nearby Coquet Island, should be based on an understanding of the way in which sandeel stocks depend on the marine landscape, and the factors that affect their availability as prey to seabirds.

As with any seabird colony, there are fluctuations in breeding success from year to year; 1999 was unusual in that Arctic Terns suffered almost complete breeding failure resulting from lack of food, whilst other seabirds (also dependent on sandeels) were relatively unaffected. Although records for the past 50 or more years show that such breeding failures have occurred at irregular intervals, and are therefore not necessarily related to the recent development of industrial sandeel fisheries, planning future conservation strategies for the Farnes are hampered by our lack of understanding of the interdependence of sandeels and seabirds in relation to the marine environment.

'Events' such as the breeding failure of Arctic Terns in 1999, stress the different feeding requirements of each species and how these can be affected in different ways. Terns are essentially surface feeders, and the mechanisms that make sandeels available to terns feeding on the surface are not known. For the Farnes, addressing this type of problem has been made easier by the availability of detailed maps of substrate and benthic habitat types on the seafloor around the islands - a result of surveys over a number of years by the Newcastle University SeaMap team (now Envision Mapping). We have confirmed the presence of sandeels within suitable sandbanks in these waters by sampling from the University of Newcastle Research Vessel *Bernicia*.

This approach of sampling sandeels at sea is being coupled with studies to determine the foraging areas and activities of seabirds in relation to tide, time, weather and seasonal and yearly factors. To do this, we are using a variety of approaches. Radiotracking and data-logging

are being used to determine the foraging ranges and behaviour of individual terns (radiotags only), Shags and Puffins. For a better idea of where the seabirds from the population as a whole are foraging, we are using compass binoculars and optical co-incidence rangefinders to locate the 'at sea' positions of foraging seabirds.

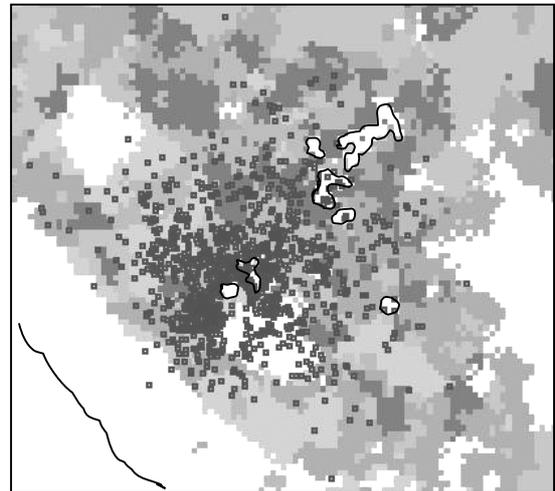


Figure 1
'At sea' distribution of feeding seabirds around the Farnes in relation to sediment type: white areas are sand (except land areas, which are shown with black borders) and black dots are locations of foraging birds. The mainland is shown in the bottom left corner.

One aspect on which we are currently focussing is the relationship between the foraging locations of seabirds and the underlying benthic landscape (Fig 1). This landscape-seabird interaction is being analysed on a fine level of resolution (100 x 100 m) and we plan to increase this resolution still further. While the rangefinder data provide us with information on the distribution of foraging birds, they do not provide us with the more fine-scale resolution of the foraging patterns of individuals. To achieve this, we have been gathering individual-based foraging data using radiotracking. These data show that different colonies have very different foraging locations and strategies. For example, the birds from some colonies are almost exclusively inshore feeders while birds from others within the Farnes group feed only at deep-water sites.

As our aim is to integrate the sub-sea landscape features with the distribution of sandeels and their predators, a vitally important aspect of the project is to determine the availability of sandeels: how their distribution in the sediment relates to their presence in the water column and at the surface, and how this is affected by tide, weather, diurnal and seasonal factors, and the presence of other predators such as seals and larger fish. This project, now in its third year, will provide information on the factors affecting the seabirds of the Farne Islands and drive the development of management strategies for the local environs to ensure the long-term survival of this important resource.

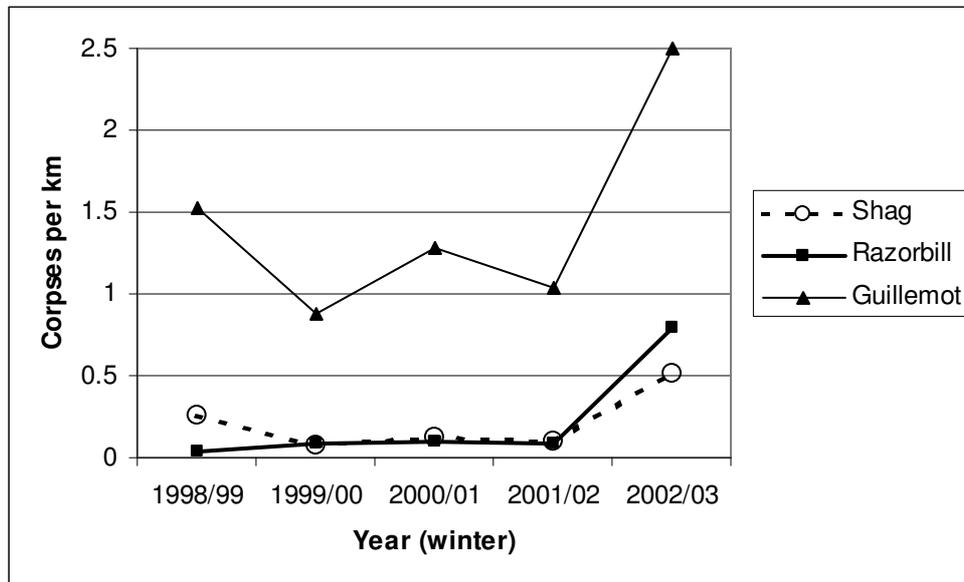
**Richard Bevan, Chris Redfern,
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WINTER BEACHED BIRD SURVEYS IN SHETLAND

The winter of 2002/03 in Shetland was notable for persistent easterly winds, few gales, but unusual numbers of dead Shags washing ashore on beaches, as well as the largest wreck of unholed Razorbills since the large numbers in January 1991 and February 1990.

Shag numbers built up from an unusual 18 on the survey at the end of December 2002 (a month when few dead Shags are normally found) to a peak of 38 on the March 2003 survey, with a total of 124 found between December and April. This may not seem a terribly large number but it was approximately five times the number found during the same period in each of the previous three winters, and double the number found in 1988/89. Of these 124, 60% were adults, 29% were first-winter or immature, and 10% were unaged. A similar pattern was noticed on the monthly beached bird surveys in Orkney, but no precise data were available at the time of writing.

After relatively few on the December and January surveys, 118 Razorbills (2.43/km) were found at the end of February with a further 57 (1.17/km) on the March survey. Of the 136 birds found in these two months that could be aged by bill-grooves, 10% were first winter (no grooves), 7% were probably second-winter (white groove + no black groove), 4% were probably also immature (white + one black) and 79% were probably adults (white + two or three black grooves).



Densities of corpses of Shag, Razorbill and Guillemot per kilometre of Shetland coast during the winter period (December to April) 1998/99 to 2002/03 (author's own data).

No ringed Razorbills were found and measurements of a sample of corpses found no large individuals that might have come from arctic colonies. Guillemot numbers were also the highest for some years, peaking on the February survey at 5.10 corpses/km. Although ageing Guillemots by plumage characteristics is less precise than using bill development in Razorbills, about 20% of 426 birds were probably in their first winter and of the remaining 80%, a large proportion were in summer plumage and were probably adults of breeding age.

Without an overview of beached bird survey data from throughout the North Sea region, it is difficult to put the Shetland data in a broader context, although reports of unusual numbers of uniled Puffins and Razorbills on Dutch beaches in January/February, and of Puffins and Little Auks washing ashore in south-west Norway at the same time, suggest problems on a wider scale. What is pretty certain is that the mortality around Shetland, in a generally mild and gale-free winter, was prompted by food shortage.

AND ON THE CLIFFS . . .

Suspicious about problems with food (at least locally around Shetland) seem to have been supported by early observations on Guillemot attendance during the 2003 breeding season. For most of April, birds were completely absent from the cliffs at Sumburgh Head and the first egg was laid in the single breeding success plot on 10th May (no birds were present on 9th May). This compares with first eggs on 23rd April in 2002, 18th April in 2001, 13th April in 2000, 25th April in 1999 and 14th April in 1998. Since 10th May, laying rates have been slow and protracted and colony attendance by off-duty or non-breeding birds has often been low, leading to losses of eggs from peripheral sites to Herring Gulls. Kittiwake nest-building has also been very late, with most activity and the first few eggs seen only during the last days of May. Once again, things are not looking good on the cliffs of Shetland and an update will appear in the next Newsletter.

Martin Heubeck (31/05/03)
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POMARINE SKUAS OFF SHETLAND

This spring we observed a significant passage of Pomarine Skuas at Wats Ness, Shetland for the first time since 1992, when 2,563 were counted flying north on 8-9th May. A forecast for northwest winds on the night of 13-14th May did not materialise until the early hours of the 14th, when the wind eventually backed from the northeast.

Just after 0700 Hugh Harrop, Martin Heubeck and myself assembled on the banks equipped with scopes, sandwiches, coffee and survival suits. Conditions looked ideal, with rough seas, a force 5-6 north-westerly wind and frequent showers. Memories of 1992 were soon revived when a flock of 24 Pomarine Skuas flew north at good enough range to differentiate colour morphs. Shortly afterwards Roger Riddington arrived, and with more eyes on the job we had accumulated a total of 195 by 1150 am.

Unfortunately MH and RR had to leave for a meeting, so HH and myself decided to stick it out for a bit longer. A couple of lulls during late morning and early afternoon did not deter us even though the cold was starting to bite through our protective clothing, but by 1310 the total had reached 376 Pomarine and 21 Long-tailed Skuas.

Early in the afternoon, the tally was boosted dramatically when an impressive flock of 200 Pomarine Skuas went past; as usual the bulk of these were at the head of the flock, followed by a long trail and a few stragglers. Still more passed, and by 1600 the action had slowed down, and realising that we could hardly move through cramp and cold, decided to abandon it for the good of our health!

After nine hours of sea-watching the total was 748 Pomarine Skuas and 21 Long-tailed Skuas, while two summer-plumaged Little Auks also flew north. One interesting aspect of behaviour involved the occasional flock of Pomarines spiralling high above the sea, similar to soaring raptors, almost as if they were sighting their route northwards before descending back down to the wave troughs. For those lucky few who can access remote headlands during the right

conditions, the sight of these superb birds heading north to their Arctic breeding grounds is totally unforgettable.

Mick Mellor

RECENT RESEARCH ON SOOTY TERNS

The ringing of Sooty Terns (*Sterna fuscata*) in the Seychelles has gone on since the early 1970s, when the late Professor George Dunnet of Aberdeen University was in receipt of a NERC grant to undertake studies there. Chris Feare was involved in the work right from the start, and has continued to work on the birds to this day. Chris' initial research was on breeding biology (eg Feare 1975, 1976a, 1981) but, more recently, his focus has been the issue of conservation management, and specifically the sustainable harvest of Sooty Tern eggs by local human populations, an issue which has interested him from early in his studies (Feare 1976b). The Seabird Group recently contributed a small grant towards the continuation of the long-term study on the Seychelles (see *Seabird Group Newsletter* 89, pp.3-5).

Very few seabird studies have been sufficiently long-term to allow the effects of chick weight/condition at fledging on post-fledging survival to be determined. A recent review (Steinen & Brenninkmeijer 2002) found only seven such studies and concluded that there was no relationship between weight and subsequent survival for species with post-fledging parental care but chick condition did influence survival in species in which parents did not feed young post-fledging.

The long-term study of Sooty Terns in the Seychelles, with many chicks ringed and also weighed prior to fledging in the early 1970s, has provided Chris with a further opportunity to investigate the factors influencing post-fledging survival (Feare 2002). Each year since 1994, searches have been made on Bird Island during incubation for ringed terns and any found have been netted and the ring numbers checked. This allowed Chris to consider cohorts of young terns ringed on Bird Island in 1972 and 1973 and the fledging weights of those found subsequently compared with those never seen again. His

results are consistent with the Steinen & Brenninkmeijer review, in that he finds no relationship between fledging weights and subsequent survival, perhaps because parental provisioning after fledging can buffer young against any condition disadvantage that they may have when they leave the colony.

Chris Feare's (2002) paper demonstrates a further interesting effect, however. For a larger sample of fledglings ringed on Bird Island in 1973 but not weighed, a higher proportion of those young that fledged mid-season were seen subsequently, compared to those that fledged early or late. Without knowledge of where and how juvenile Sooty Terns feed once they leave the colony, Chris concludes that the reason(s) for the greater apparent survival of mid-season fledglings remain elusive. But the results supplement his earlier work (Feare 1976a), which showed that more chicks fledged from eggs laid at the peak of laying at the colony – this being attributed to reduced predation pressure and reduced aggression/interference between neighbours when all were at the same stage of the breeding cycle (neither factor of which would be likely to apply once the young birds left the colony).

In a further recent paper (Feare & Lesperance 2002), Chris & Caroline examine evidence, from ringing, for movements of Sooty Terns between breeding colonies. Differences in fidelity to nest sites within a colony were detected between birds breeding on Desnoeufs Island (where half the Sooty Tern eggs are harvested annually) and Bird Island (little human intrusion). These are attributed to the differences in human disturbance, particularly from egg collecting. Between 1996 and 2001, 19 individuals ringed as breeding adults were recaptured nesting in colonies other than those where they were originally ringed (18 on Bird Island and one on Desnoeufs), having moved 74-370 km between colonies. One of these, ringed on Bird Island in 1994 and recaptured on Desnoeufs in 1996, was back on Bird Island in 2000. These movements of breeding adults between breeding colonies are also attributed to human disturbance at source colonies in part, although changes in the distribution of food resources may have prompted the movements of some birds away from a colony that was protected from interference by humans.

The authors conclude that these movements mean that the Seychelles Sooty Tern colonies should be treated as individual units of a metapopulation when attempting to estimate a sustainable harvest of eggs for human consumption. The gene flow between islands is also supported by recent studies of mitochondrial DNA of the terns from Desnoeufs, Bird and Aride Islands (B.J. Winney 1998, Ph.D thesis, University of Nottingham). Chris and Caroline note the remaining need to determine the full geographic extent of the 'Seychelles' population by looking at genetic variation amongst breeders from more remote colonies, such as Cosmoledo, Farquhar, St. Brandon, Serpent Island (Mauritius) and Europa to the south and the Lakshadweeps and Chagos to the east.

Thirdly in 2002, *The Birds of North America* monograph on Sooty Terns was published (Schreiber *et al* 2002). For those of you not familiar with this series, the monographs offer individually produced 'booklets' for each species, with comprehensive and up-to-date coverage of a broad set of topics. For Sooty Tern, these include detailed information on world distribution, systematics, migration, habitat use, feeding and diet, vocalizations, locomotion, behaviour, predation, breeding (all stages of the life cycle), demography and population biology, diseases and parasites, threats, conservation and management. The text also includes identification and ageing criteria, measurements, and priorities for future research. For Sooty Terns, the latter are highlighted as: (i) censuses of historically known colonies (taking account of variations in the timing of breeding); (ii) impacts of tuna- and squid-fishing (at-sea distributions of foraging birds); (iii) genetic and morphological studies to further define subspecies; (iv) baseline contaminant studies; (v) energetics studies to address energy limitation questions; and (vi) distributions outside the breeding season.

It is gratifying that the Seabird Group has been able to contribute, albeit in a small way, to allow the continuation of the valuable long-term study of Sooty Terns in the Seychelles and the Group thanks Chris Feare for keeping us so well informed of progress and of the fascinating results of research there.

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Ed

7TH EFFECTS OF OIL ON WILDLIFE CONFERENCE

This is the second call for papers for the Seventh Effects of Oil on Wildlife Conference, which will take place in Hamburg, Germany, October 14-16, 2003, hosted by the International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). The Effects of Oil on Wildlife (EOW) is a multidisciplinary conference, whose goal is the mitigation of the effects of oil pollution on

aquatic wildlife. This meeting is a forum for those working in fields related to oil pollution and its effects on wildlife. The specific aim of the conference is to facilitate an exchange of information among peers: biologists, veterinarians, rehabilitators, government wildlife representatives, environmental NGOs and any other individuals or organizations interested in improving the planning, prevention and response to oil pollution's impacts on wildlife.

Planned sessions

Resources at risk

Planning and prevention

Rehabilitation: management & techniques

Marine mammals and reptiles

Wildlife response case histories

New technologies for wildlife response

Evaluation and post release studies

Communications, in English, have been invited as oral or poster presentations. Late offers might still be accepted - e-mail Curt Clumpner (curtc351@aol.com) for further information.

Curt Clumpner

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DUTCH SEABIRD GROUP TRICOLOR SPILL CONFERENCE

This conference, aimed at evaluating the damage done by the *Tricolor* spill in the Channel in the winter of 2003/03, will be held on 25 October 2003 at Neeltje, Zeeland, The Netherlands. It is organised by the Dutch Seabird Group and participation will be free. The language will be English. Further details will be posted at:

<http://home.planet.nl/~camphuys/Tricolor.html>

The proceedings will appear as a special issue of *Atlantic Seabirds*, sponsored by Vogelbescherming Nederland (the Dutch BirdLife partner).

Kees Camphuysen

SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS 2003

Four grants were awarded in March 2003:

(i) *Raymond Duncan/Grampian Ringing Group*: Funds to purchase colour-rings for tracking the recent development of Cormorant colonies in Grampian. The project aims to investigate the dispersal and natal fidelity of these Grampian birds, and will link in with other research on diet, genetics and breeding success;

(ii) *Francis Daunt*: Contribution towards Global Location Service dataloggers to place on Shag chicks as part of a project to obtain detailed information on their movements and foraging patterns from the time of independence through to their recruitment into the breeding population;

(iii) *Trevor Jones*: Contribution towards the cost of studying the productivity of Great and Arctic Skuas on Handa, their interspecific interactions and density effects on breeding success;

(iv) *Bob Furness*: Contribution towards the costs of travel to the Azores for students to work on a number of projects, including a survey of Fea's Petrel, inter-island movements of Roseate Terns and the ecology of Starlings in relation to predation of tern eggs.

All grant recipients will provide reports on their work, and these will appear in future issues of the *Newsletter*. **Ed**

STOP PRESS – SWEDISH SPILL

A Chinese potash carrier, the *Fu Shan Hai*, sunk on 31 May between the Swedish south coast and the Danish island of Bornholm. As well as the cargo, the ship held 2,000 tons of mostly bunker oil. A belt of *ca* 45km struck the Swedish coast between Mälarhusen and Borby but the exposed sandy shores meant that thankfully few birds were oiled. By 6 June, however, more oil had moved further north to areas of rocky shore and *ca* 1000 birds were known to be oiled (*ca* 300 Mute Swans, plus Eiders, Mallards, Shelducks, Cormorants and small numbers of herons). A new oil belt was also apparent to the north (threatening Simrishamn to Kåseberga in the west). **Ed**



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Chris Wernham (BTO Scotland)

JOURNAL REVIEWER

Mark Tasker

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

The Seabird Group promotes and helps co-ordinate the study and conservation of seabirds. Members also receive the journal *Atlantic Seabirds*, containing papers on current research. The Group organises regular conferences and also provides small grants towards seabird research. Current 2003 membership rates are:-

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

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

GROUP NEWS

**CURRENT SEABIRD
GROUP COMMITTEE**

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

Chairman

Prof Mike Harris (**2003**)
CEH, Hill of Brathens, Glassel,
Banchory. AB31 4BY
(mph@ceh.ac.uk)

Secretary

Bob Swann (**2003**)
14, St Vincent Road, Tain,
Ross-shire. IV19 1JR
(bob.swann@freeuk.com)

Treasurer

John Davies (**2005**)
31, Easter Warriston,
Edinburgh. EH7 4QX
(johncdavies@blueyonder.co.uk)

Editor, *Atlantic Seabirds*

Jim Reid (**2005**)
JNCC, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle
Place, Aberdeen. Ab10 1UZ
(jim.reid@jncc.gov.uk)

Editor, *Newsletter*

Chris Wernham (**2006**)
01786 466563 (see box)

2004 Conference Organiser

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

Other Members:

Steve Hunter (**2003**)
Alan Leitch (**2004**)
Linda Wilson (**2006**)

NEXT (38th) AGM

Note once again that this will be held at 3pm on Saturday 22 November 2003 at the Duke of Gordon Hotel, Kingussie. Further details in the October *Newsletter*.

**DON'T FORGET!
SEABIRD GROUP
CONFERENCE
2004**

This is to be held in Aberdeen 2-4 April 2004. Please see the flier mailed with this *Newsletter* and register your interest now! Booking forms will be available in early autumn and offers of contributions (oral or poster) should be sent to the Chairman (address opposite) as soon as possible.

SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS

The next deadline is 31 October 2003 but as most funds were distributed during the March grant round (see p.11), only exceptional applications will be considered until the March 2004 round.

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

'www.seabirdgroup.org.uk'

**CONTENTS OF THE
NEWSLETTER**

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

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

Ed