



## NEWSLETTER 99

February 2005

### SEAWATCHING: AN UNHARNESSED DATA SOURCE OF COASTAL BIRD MOVEMENTS. THE CASE FOR A WEB-BASED SEAWATCHING DATABASE

A discussion paper by  
Chris M. Walther

#### Introduction

Seawatching is a widely popular activity amongst bird watchers. Hundreds of observers seawatch, at over 300 sites in Britain and Ireland, throughout much of the year. Elsewhere in Europe, seawatching is equally popular (e.g. around 250 people are members of a Euro-seawatching web-based discussion group). Observers (often in teams) spend many hours scanning the sea and counting passing birds. Large numbers of passing seabirds and waterbirds are recorded, many of which are sizeable samples of their biogeographic populations. As a consequence, many potentially valuable bird records that can be used for monitoring purposes are collected, but most of these only ever appear summarised in local bird reports, often several years later.

In Britain and Ireland, there is no mechanism to capture these records at the national scale. This issue

(along with beached bird surveys) was raised by Bill Bourne at the 2003 AGM of the Seabird Group as a missed opportunity. In contrast, CvZ in the Netherlands have been collecting records (seawatch and beached birds) in a database since 1972, where it is part of a suite of monitoring mechanisms. However, there is also no current mechanism to collate this data at a wider biogeographic/flyway (European?) scale.



#### The opportunity

Rapid advancements in personal computers, their increasing use by birdwatchers, together with widespread internet communication (especially through broadband), for the first time ever, offers us the tools to capture much of this data.

Capturing seawatch data will need to use a large database to store records. The potential annual volume of data is likely to be huge, perhaps similar in magnitude to the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS).

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However, the ability to track the coastal movements of seabirds and waterbirds accurately in time and space offers the opportunity to compliment the existing monitoring of these birds (Seabird Monitoring Programme, Seabirds at Sea, WeBS, etc). In particular, it brings into a monitoring regime large volumes of temporally and spatially sensitive data, and the efforts of many hundreds of highly-skilled observers who may not normally participate in any of these existing schemes.

Whereas WeBS counts give a snapshot of waterbird populations on a monthly scale, the scheme does not cover many seabird species or open coast sites. It can also take 2-3 years to compile and feedback the data to observers, in the form of a free book.

Much of the breeding Seabird Monitoring Programme is undertaken by professional scientists and ringing groups, often at remote and inaccessible colonies. A free annual summary is provided to participants. Similarly, Seabirds At Sea recording is specialist in nature, time consuming and expensive, with data aggregated over longer periods of time (months and years). There is often limited opportunity for volunteer input. The major seabird censuses (eg Operation Seafarer, Seabird Colony Register and Seabird 2000) only come round every 10-15 years. For these, feedback, in the form of a book to be purchased, can take several years.

In contrast, Seawatching, especially during main migration periods, can give a daily measurement of coastal bird movements of seabirds and waterbirds over large geographic scales. Seawatching can monitor migrations, weather-related movements and more regular feeding and roost movements. As there is currently no mechanism to capture, compile and store this data, most of it is lost. The opportunity to collate and analyse this data is being missed.

Recent years have seen the rapid growth of direct observer input into electronic databases, using a web interface. *Bird Track*, initiated by the BTO, is a good example of this medium. The benefit of these systems is that results can be inputted on the day of observation and the results are fed back to observers in almost real-time. In its current form, *Bird Track* is not readily useable for seawatch data, as it does not use count data, direction of movement or length of observation. *BTO are currently developing Bird Track further, with a view to taking on many of the issues raised in this paper.* In Europe there are several other existing examples of electronic bird database

recording systems. Some of these are better able to record seawatch data than *Bird Track*. Currently, the best system appears to be [www.trektellen.nl](http://www.trektellen.nl) developed by Jethro Waanders and Gerard Troost, used in the Netherlands (and also adopted in parts of Belgium and France), which now has 23,000,000 records from 42,000 hours recording at 124 sites (many non-coastal).

However, each system currently has limitations, but the basics are there to be built on. As powerful, customised databases with robust web-based interfaces are being developed, we should also be agreeing common standards for recording and storing this data. A widely adopted seawatch recording protocol is required.

Seabirds and waterbirds, by their very nature do not recognise political boundaries, so it is important that we take a biogeographic perspective to collecting and storing seawatch data. It is also difficult to separate the bird interests of the Atlantic seaboard of Europe from those in the North Sea, Baltic Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea or Barents/White Sea.

Therefore, the Seabird Group should take a lead, and in partnership with other relevant organisations, champion the establishment of a European Seawatch Database Recording Scheme. This scheme should be based upon observer input of data into a web-based recording system. This could significantly reduce operating overheads, and provide feedback in near real-time.

Such prompt feedback alerts observers to movements and events on a daily basis and will encourage greater participation in the scheme. The European wide dimension will maximise the significance of the data, input into Pan-European monitoring and conservation mechanisms and could be more likely to attract funding from the EU to establish and operate.

In reality, a European Seawatch Database may prove to be a longer-term aspiration, with the likely development of several parallel recording schemes operated by national bodies in different states, each trying to accommodate seawatch data. However, we should not lose sight of the benefits of being able to see the bigger picture, for both science and conservation, and as an organisation the Seabird Group should still continue to call for it. In the short-term, the use of an agreed recording protocol will be essential, as it would ensure comparability of data and ease future integration of national databases.

I would like Seabird Group members to consider the outlines for a seawatching protocol, site gazetteer and following recommendations, together with draft database specifications.

## Box 1: Recommendations

1. Take lead in developing a seawatch web-based database system for Britain & Ireland.  
*Seabird Group & BTO*
2. Discuss with, and form, a wider working partnership with other relevant organisations in Britain & Ireland and across Europe.  
*Seabird Group*
3. Define, design and test a Pan-European scale web-based data recording system for seawatch data.  
*Wider Partnership*
4. Agree a host organisation for the database.  
*Wider Partnership*
5. Develop a common seawatch recording protocol.  
*Wider Partnership*
6. Develop a composite seawatch sites gazetteer.  
*Wider Partnership*
7. Seek a funding and development package to establish and run the database.  
*Wider Partnership*
8. Integrate with other Pan-European Ornithological mechanisms (European Bird Census Committee, International Waterbird Census, African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, Wetlands International, Association of European Records and Rarities Committees, EURING etc).  
*Wider Partnership*

## Box 2: A Sea watching protocol

### Essential Components

- Record all seabirds, waterfowl and waders
- Direction of movements
- Record birds on sea separately
- Start time
- End time

### Additional value components

- Hour by hour breakdown
- Record juvenile/immature for measure of breeding productivity (gannets, terns, gulls)
- Weather conditions

## **Box 2 (Continued)**

### **Rare & Scarce Birds**

- Identification of rare and scarce birds should be submitted to appropriate rarities committee for ratification.
- Species considered by the different bird records/rarities committees should be linked to each site in the gazetteer and to each relevant committee/panel

## **Box 3: Site Gazetteer**

- 300+ sites in Britain & Ireland
- Site Name
- Location – Grid Ref, Lat/Long
- Hide/shelter
- Permissions/contacts
- Weblinks – site description, local recorder, rarities reporting etc

## **Box 4: Database – some suggested minimum design requirements**

### **Input**

1. choose language (English, French, Dutch, German etc)
2. input in common name or scientific name (select from drop-down menu)
3. input site name (select from drop-down menu?)
4. input date (select from drop-down menu)
5. input number of birds
6. input direction of movement (select from drop-down menu)
7. input start time (select from drop-down menu)
8. input finish time (select from drop-down menu)
9. input wind speed – beaufort scale (select from drop-down menu)
10. input wind direction (select from drop-down menu)

### **Output**

1. database search facility (species, site, date range, number range, direction, movement rate)
2. species maps (all sites, select date range, proportional symbol, direction arrow)
3. graph (select site(s), select species, select date range)
4. calculate movement rate (birds/hour)
5. map movement rate
6. graph movement rate

It is very important that we seek your ideas on all of this if the above, if the Seabird Group is to develop this concept further. All views and comments will be gratefully received and should be sent to:

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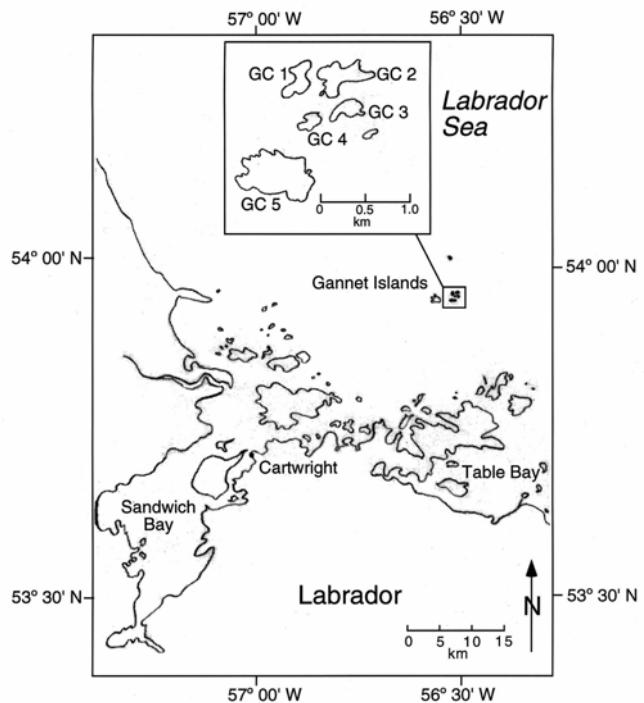
We also hope to post this discussion paper on the Seabird Group web-based discussion forum very soon (see page 11).  
**Ed.**

## SURVIVAL, DISPERSAL, AND PRODUCTIVITY OF THE RAZORBILL IN ATLANTIC CANADA

In Europe, Razorbills (*Alca torda*) have been relatively well studied, but in North America, many areas of Razorbill demography remain unknown. In addition, studies that simultaneously examine species characteristics at multiple sites over a broad area are uncommon, usually due to the high costs associated with accessing multiple study sites. For this project I am collaborating with the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and University of New Brunswick to examine the survival, dispersal, and productivity of the Razorbill at three different colonies across their breeding range including the Gannet Islands, Labrador (53°56'N, 56°32'W, Figure 1), Gull Island, Newfoundland (47°15'N, 52°46'W), and Machias Seal Island (MSI), New Brunswick (44°3'N, 67°06'W).

Annual survival for Razorbills banded as adults and chicks at the Gannet Islands from 1996 to 2004 was found to be 88.8% (SE = 0.02) and 85.2% (SE = 0.01) respectively. At MSI, annual survival for Razorbills banded as adults and chicks from 1995-2004 was 78.4% (SE = 0.04) and 68.5% (SE = 0.10). The survival estimates obtained for the Gannet Islands population are

consistent with other studies, but the estimates for MSI were much lower than anticipated.



**Figure 1. Map of the Gannet Islands, Labrador, Canada**

The low survival estimates obtained for MSI may be due to permanent emigration. To date, 26 Razorbills (17 banded as chicks and 9 banded as adults) have been resighted at a location different from where they were banded. For example, 2 Razorbills banded as chicks in Quebec in 1993 were confirmed as breeders on the Gannet Islands in 2004. Amazingly, 2 Razorbills banded as chicks in western Scotland in 1973 were resighted on the Gannet Islands in 2003 and 2004 (a distance of more than 2000 miles). In the case of MSI, 226 adult Razorbills have been banded since 1995, of which 6 have been resighted on the Gannet Islands more than 1300 kilometers away.

In 2004, Razorbill productivity was quite variable across their range. At MSI productivity values were comparable to previous years, with hatching and fledging success averaging 87% and 68% respectively. At Gull Island, Razorbill productivity had not previously been monitored, but was within expected values (70% hatching success, 68.5% fledging success, T. Diamond

pers. comm.). However, at the Gannet Islands, productivity was significantly lower compared to studies by Birkhead and Nettleship (1983) and Hipfner and Bryant (1999) with only 38 of 119 nests producing a chick (Table 1). In addition, the chicks that did hatch were approximately 3 weeks late and many were still in the nest on August 23, 2004 (peak fledging is usually around August 10).

It is unclear at this time what may have caused such low productivity at the Gannet Islands, a trend that was not observed in the southern parts of its range (Gull Island and MSI), but was observed in northern Europe (see “Disastrous 2004 breeding season?” Seabird Group Newsletter 97, June 2004). Depleted fish stocks and abnormally high sea surface temperatures (SST) may be to blame as the mean SST at the Gannet Islands in August 2004 was 10.8°C (average SST for August is 5-8°C) and exceeded 18°C on two occasions.



**Gannet Islands, Labrador (photo © Ian L. Jones)**

Population counts of Razorbills at the Gannet Islands in 1983 indicated that there were approximately 6,200 breeding pairs (CWS unpublished data). The survey was repeated in 2002 and showed that 10,500 breeding pairs were present. Given that Razorbill survival and especially productivity at the Gannet Islands are

somewhat low, it is surprising that the population has almost doubled in only 15 years. It has been suggested that this may be due to emigration. As a result future efforts will include establishing additional monitoring sites in Labrador (Herring Islands) and in New Brunswick (Matinicus Rock and Old Man Island) in the hopes of resighting many of the Razorbills banded on the Gannet Islands and Machias Seal Island that have not been seen since their banding and may have dispersed to other colonies.

### Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Ian L. Jones for his continuous input and encouragement and to Dr. Antony (Tony) Diamond and Dr. Greg Robertson for agreeing to collaborate on this project.

Thank you to the Atlantic Cooperative Wildlife Ecology Research Network, Canadian Wildlife Federation, Northern Scientific Training Program, and the Seabird Group for their generous financial support.

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Birkhead, T.R. and Nettleship, D.N. 1983. Studies of Alcids breeding at the Gannet Clusters, Labrador in 1981 and 1982. Canadian Wildlife Service Report No. 149.

Hipfner, J.M. and Bryant, R. 1999. Comparative breeding biology of Guillemots *Uria* spp. and Razorbills *Alca torda* at a colony in the northwest Atlantic. *Atlantic Seabirds* 1: 121-134.

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**Table 1. Razorbill productivity at the Gannet Islands in 2004**

Plot Type	Hatch Success (%)	Fledge Success (%)	*Overall (%)
No Disturbance	13/21 (61.9)	12/13 (92.3)	12/21 (57.1)
Low Disturbance	19/53 (36.5)	10/19 (52.6)	10/53 (18.8)
High Disturbance	22/45 (48.9)	16/22 (72.7)	16/45 (35.5)
Total	54/119 (45.4)	38/54 (70.4)	38/119 (31.9)

\* Overall breeding success, from egg laying to nest departure

## BLACK GUILLEMOTS BREEDING IN THE CLYDE SEALOCHS

Seabird 2000 data presented in Mitchell *et al* (2004) shows no breeding of Black Guillemot in the Clyde sealochs - Loch Fyne, Loch Striven, Loch Long, Loch Goil and Gare Loch. This note confirms breeding in these sealochs and the estimated population size during this period, so should act as a supplement to the Seabird 2000 data.

The first breeding bird atlas (Sharrock 1976) for the period 1968-72 shows possible breeding in Loch Fyne (National Grid 10kmX10km square NR97 – Portavadie/ Kilfinan or Tighnabruaich & NR99 – Minard islands), but not in any of the other sealochs. In addition, there were no Black Guillemot recorded in the Inner Clyde north of the Cumbraes (NS15).

Confirmed breeding had been established on MOD piers at Ardgarten, Arrochar, Loch Long and Garelochhead, Gare Loch by the mid 1980s, and on other military structures in these lochs by the end of the 1980s (John Spooner *pers comm.*). Webb *et al* (1990) confirm the Garelochhead site (and the presence of the Port Glasgow breeding sites on the Clyde Estuary occupied from the mid 1970s (Carnduff 1981)), but no others in the sealochs.

By the second breeding atlas (Tasker & Walsh 1994) in the period 1988-91 there had been considerable range expansion within the Firth of Clyde since Sharrock (1976), with breeding in an additional 25+ 10km squares, particularly into the sealochs (5 10km squares) and adjacent parts of the Inner Firth to the Clyde Estuary (Port Glasgow), but also around much of the Outer Firth coasts.

Much of this range expansion, especially in the inner Clyde sealochs, appears to be due to birds using man-made structures for nesting, a practise that had become widespread in the Clyde and adjoining areas (Carnduff 1981, John Spooner *pers comm.*, Waltho 1998\*).

Table 1 (and Map) details breeding sites that were occupied by breeding birds during the

Seabird 2000 survey period (1999-2001). A number of suitable islands near the mouth of Loch Fyne were not counted during the survey period, but breeding is possible on these (Map 1).

**At least 47 pairs were recorded at 15 sites in the Clyde sea lochs.**

Eleven (73%) of the 15 sites were on man-made structures, 10 of those were on piers. Man-made structures accounted for 36% of breeding pairs. The other man-made structure used was on a floating raft moored offshore at Ardnagowan. Nesting on floating structures has also been recorded recently on an operational car ferry in the nearby Sound of Gigha (Waltho 1998\*).

The four natural sites, all on rocky islands in Loch Fyne, accounted for 62% of the breeding pairs.

At the largest site, Eilean Aoghainn, Clive Craik estimated 10-20 pairs in 1995. However, mink predation was noted there in 2000 and by 2002 appears to have had a major impact on breeding Black Guillemot, Shag and Common Eider (Clive Craik). At this site Black Guillemot may now have been eliminated, or at least stopped breeding. The other Loch Fyne sites may also suffer a similar fate.

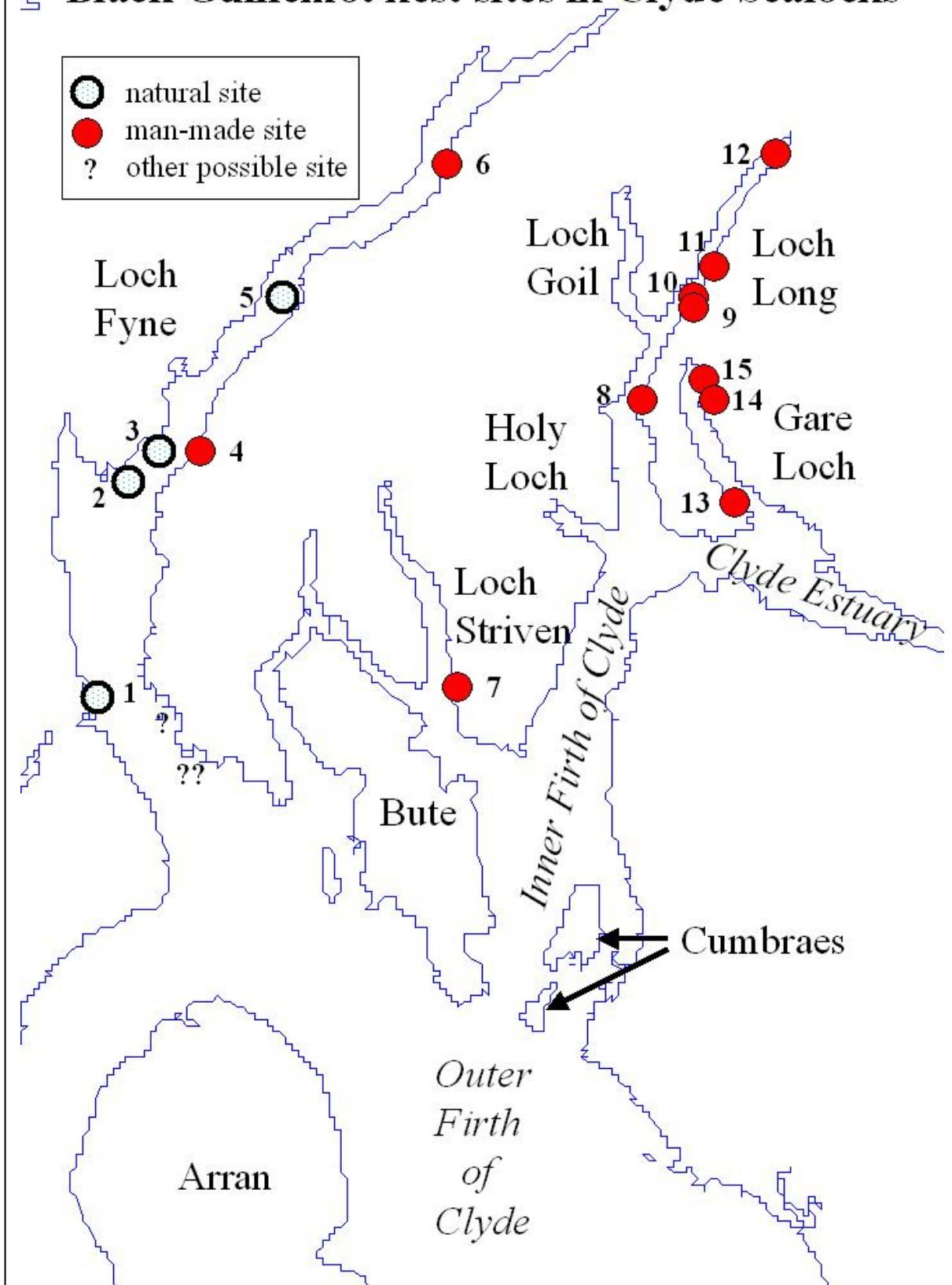
Given the increasing presence of mink and their impact on the rocky islet nesting sites, nesting on man-made structures, in addition to facilitating the recent range expansion, may prove to be a safer option in the longer term.

**\*Reference cited incorrectly as Dickson (1998) in Mitchell (1994).**

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- Carnduff, D. 1981. Black Guillemots breeding in the inner Clyde estuary. *Scottish Birds* 11: 195-196.
- Mitchell, P.I., Newton, S.F., Ratcliffe, N & T. E. Dunn. 2004. *Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland*. T. & A. D. Poyser, London.
- Sharrock, J.T.R. 1976. *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*. T. & A. D. Poyser, Berkhamsted.

## 1 Black Guillemot nest sites in Clyde Sealochs



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M.W.1990. *Seabird distribution west of Britain.*  
 Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough.

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**Table 1. Breeding sites occupied during 1999-2001**

<b>Loch</b>	<b>Site Number &amp; Name</b>	<b>Grid Reference</b>	<b>Site type</b>	<b>Pairs</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Observer</b>
Fyne	1. Sgeir Port a'Ghuail	NR 874 699	Island	1	2000	Clive Craik
Fyne	2. Liath Eilean	NR 888 837	Island	2	1999	Peter Kirk
Fyne	3. Glas Eilean	NR 912 857	Island	2?	2001	Clive Craik
Fyne	4. Largiemore	NR 935 855	Pier	2	1999	CM Waltho
Fyne	5. Eilean Aoghainn	NR 985 945	Island	25+	1999	CMW/Paul Daw
Fyne	6. Ardnagowan	NN 105 055	Raft	1	1999	CM Waltho
Striven	7. MOD Fuel jetty	NS 095 715	Pier	1	1999	CM Waltho
Long	8. Coulport	NS 205 875	Pier	2	1999	John Simpson
Long	9. Finnart S	NS 235 945	Pier	1	1999	CM Waltho
Long	10. Finnart N	NS 235 955	Pier	1	1999	CM Waltho
Long	11. Glenmallan	NS 245 965	Pier	1	1999	CM Waltho
Long	12. Ardgarten	NN 285 035	Pier	3	1999	CM Waltho
Gare	13. Rosneath	NS 265 825	Pier	2	1999	CM Waltho
Gare	14. Faslane	NS 245 895	Pier	2	1999	CM Waltho
Gare	15. Garelochhead	NS 245 905	Pier	1	1999	CM Waltho
Goil	No sites recorded				1999	CM Waltho

## CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

### INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS

The next International Ornithological Congress is to be held in Hamburg, Germany in August 2006. A second circular with details of the conference, and a call for contributions is now available at <http://www.i-o-c.org>.

If you do not have reliable web access for downloading the circular and forms, these are available by e-mail (contact [info@i-o-c.org](mailto:info@i-o-c.org)).

## GROUP NEWS

The 39<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Seabird Group was held at the Duke of Gordon's Hotel, Kingussie on 20 November 2004.

The Secretary presented the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Report (reproduced in full below) and the Treasurer presented the Treasurer's Report and Accounts. Following these reports, two new Executive Committee members were elected, to replace Bob Swann (Secretary) and Alan Leitch (Ordinary Member). The Committee proposed Alan Leitch to take over as Secretary and he was duly elected (no other nominations were received). An election was held between two candidates to replace Alan as an Ordinary Member, and Juan Brown was elected. On behalf of the Executive Committee and all the Members, we thank Bob Swann very much for all his hard work as Secretary, and also thank Alan Leitch very much for agreeing to take over. We also welcome Juan Brown to the Committee and thank Mark Grantham for also standing for election.

Following on from discussion at the 2003 AGM, Chris Walther gave a short presentation with regard to his ideas about using a website based approach to involve members and others in gathering data on the movements of seabirds in waters round the British Isles. A brief discussion followed. It was felt that it was a useful idea and that it could be linked in with a similar Dutch scheme and/or the BTO BirdTrack scheme. The Chairman asked for volunteers to take this scheme forward and Chris Walther agreed to develop the idea further in consultation with Steven Baillie of the BTO. Chris' discussion paper is reproduced in this *Newsletter* (see front page), and we would all value comments from other Group Members on these ideas.

A further brief discussion then took place on whether the group should be involved with the organisation of beached bird surveys. The Chairman reported that there were possible government initiatives that might provide financial support for surveys of beaches in the North Sea and English Channel, which could be used to monitor the percentage of oiled birds.

## THE 39<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SEABIRD GROUP, 2004

There were two changes to the Executive Committee during the year with Mark Tasker being elected as chairman to replace Mike Harris and Jez Blackburn being elected as an Ordinary Member.

At the end of October 2004 the Seabird Group had 265 paid up members, down 31, and a further 37 who had not paid for the year, up 5. The committee is currently considering ways to further promote the group and to reverse this slow decline in membership. In addition, *Atlantic Seabirds* and/or the *Newsletter* were sent to 15 statutory institutions, 19 other subscribers (institution and foreign non-member subscribers via subscription services) and 4 other groups in exchange for their own publications.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Annual General meeting was held at the Scottish Ringers Conference at Kingussie on 22<sup>nd</sup> November with 24 members in attendance. Only one formal meeting of the Executive Committee was held during the year, all other business being conducted by e-mail.

With regard to *Atlantic Seabirds* volume 5 number 2 and 3 had been published by the end of October 2004. *Newsletters* Nos. 96 - 98 were also produced. Problems with the printers delayed the publication of further copies of *Atlantic Seabirds*, but strenuous efforts will be undertaken to get the journal back on schedule.

The 2004 Seabird Group Conference in Aberdeen was a great success attracting 176 delegates from 22 countries. The conference also saw the launch of the Seabird 2000 book, detailing the results of the latest census of seabird numbers in Britain and Ireland. The committee is grateful to Martin Heubeck for the amount of effort he put into organising this event. Mike Harris arranged the programme and Mark Tasker prepared the abstracts. Alan Leitch, John Davies and Sheila Russell dealt with bookings, payments and the reception desk. The University Hospitality Services were responsible for the smooth running of the conference, whilst Bill Edwards of the University's Department of Zoology arranged free use of poster boards.

Finally we were indebted to JNCC, BP Exploration Ltd., SNH and the Shetland Wildlife Trust for sponsoring the conference.

During the past year grants were provided for three projects. These involved Great Skua studies on Handa, wintering seabirds in the Canaries and studies on Yellow-legged Gulls in the Azores.

**R. L. Swann**  
Secretary

## NEXT AGM

Having asked Members (via the Newsletter) for their views and received none, it was agreed at the AGM that the next (2005) AGM will be held at the Scottish Ringers' Conference in Kingussie in November of this year.

## GRANTS AWARDED

In the autumn 2004 grant round, the Executive Committee decided to award Seabird Group Grants to the following three projects:

(i) Jennifer Coffey: £200 towards the purchase of new optical equipment to further her study of Razorbills in Labrador, with the aims of (a) quantifying Razorbill demographic parameters (including annual survival, age of first breeding, and natal philopatry), and (b) developing a model that can be used to examine and quantify the impact of hunting and Arctic Fox (*Alopex lagopus*) predation on Razorbills at the Gannet Islands, Labrador. A report on Jennifer's work on this project to date is included in this Newsletter.

(ii) The West Kerry Branch of BirdWatch Ireland (Michael O'Clery): £250 towards a Roseate Tern conservation project. A nest-box scheme has been set up in response to records of Roseates on two islands off the Dingle peninsula in the west of Ireland in recent years, based on very successful protection work on the Irish east coast. Tern boxes were constructed and placed on two islands off the Dingle Peninsula funded by the local BWI branch in 2004. Both islands, one in the Blasket group and the other in the Magheraees, have cultural and natural heritage

significance. The latter has several tern species colonies already, including Little Tern and an important monastic site. In 2005, the group wish to add more boxes and continue to monitor the sites.

(iii) Nigel Winn: £200 (subject to confirmation of suitable survey methods) for expeditions to Hascuir Island, North Uist to confirm any possible breeding of Leach's Petrel and the Loch Roag Islands, Lewis (including Old Hill, Bearasay, Campay and their satellite islands) to assess the current status of Leach's Petrel there.

## GROUP WEB PAGES

I must apologise that, due to pressure of work, I have been unable to keep our web pages up to date. Linda Wilson of the Executive Committee has now kindly agreed to take over this responsibility from me, and between us we will do our best to get the pages up to date and looking attractive for existing and potential new Members as soon as possible. The Group would also like to thank Jeff Stratford for his continuing help with the website. **Ed.**

## GROUP E-MAIL FORUM

Jez Blackburn of the Seabird Group Executive Committee has kindly set up a web-based discussion forum that anyone with access to the internet can easily join: send an e-mail to:

[seabirdgroupforum-subscribe@yahooroups.com](mailto:seabirdgroupforum-subscribe@yahooroups.com)

You need to be part of Yahoo groups to be able to look at all previous messages and download files but anyone who joins can send and receive messages without being a Yahoo member. If you wish to join Yahoo and take full advantage of all the forum benefits, you will be told how to subscribe when you join up to the forum.

The forum already has 64 members. We hope that this will be a useful facility to allow Members and others with an interest in seabirds to discuss subjects of mutual interest.

If you experience any problems with joining the forum, then please contact **Jez Blackburn** ([Jez.Blackburn@bto.org](mailto:Jez.Blackburn@bto.org)).



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**EDITOR**  
Chris Wernham (BTO Scotland)

**JOURNAL REVIEWER**  
Mark Tasker

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

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

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

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## GROUP NEWS

### CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

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

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

**Secretary**  
Alan Leitch (**2008**)  
2 Burgess Terrace,  
Edinburgh. EH9 2BD  
(alan.leitch@snh.gov.uk))

**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**)  
BTO Scotland  
School of Biological &  
Environmental Sciences,  
University of Stirling,  
Stirling. FK9 4LA  
01786 466563  
(chris.wernham@bto.org)

**2004 Conference Organiser**  
Martin Heubeck (**2005**)  
(martinheubeck@btinternet.com)

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

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

The theme has been agreed as "Seabird Populations under pressure" and the first call for papers is likely to go out in the June 2005 Newsletter.

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

### SEABIRD GROUP GRANTS

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

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

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

### CONTENTS OF THE NEWSLETTER

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

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

**Ed**