the Seabird Group

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News

Volunteer Seabirds at Sea – Project Expansion!

Emma Wilson, VSAS

The **Volunteer Seabirds at Sea (VSAS)** project has been running in Scotland since 2019. VSAS is a citizen science initiative which recruits and trains volunteers to carry out seabird surveys using industry standard European Seabirds at Sea (ESAS) methods. Since the project's conception, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has delivered 11 training courses in Scotland and taught over 100 volunteer surveyors how to collect valuable data on at-sea seabird populations. These surveyors partake in regular surveys onboard CalMac passenger ferries, who currently provide free passage onboard four scheduled sailings per month to facilitate VSAS surveys. Since 2019, over 50 surveys have been completed off the west coast of Scotland on regular sailings to Arran, Islay and the Western Isles.

Following the success of VSAS in Scotland, in 2022, JNCC received funding from DEFRA to facilitate the expansion of the project into English waters. They formed a partnership with the marine science charity, MARINElife, to enable the rapid launch of VSAS surveys onto their established citizen science ferry network. MARINElife shared training opportunities with their members which helped build an initial group of trained surveyors. To date, JNCC has delivered five VSAS courses and trained 35 volunteer surveyors who can take part in English VSAS surveys.

April 2023 marked the beginning of VSAS surveys in English waters, with regular surveys scheduled to take place on ferry crossings in the English Channel and Irish Sea. In the year ahead, JNCC and MARINElife will work together to organise and deliver more training courses. These will increase the number of trained surveyors available to take part in surveys and allow additional routes to be opened in the future.

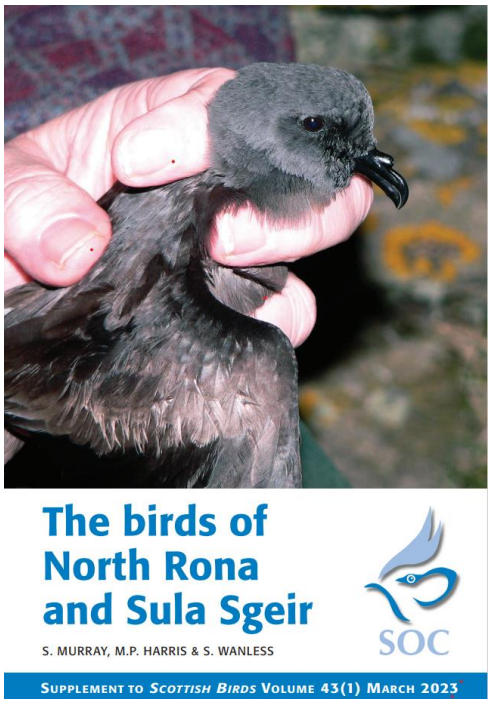
For information on how you can become involved with VSAS and to be notified of future training opportunities, please contact Emma Wilson at emma.wilson@jncc.gov.uk.

Volunteers at the end of a training session in Devon. Photo: Emma Wilson.

The birds of North Rona and Sula Sgeir

Mike Harris, Scottish Birds

Pictured to the right is the cover of a supplement in Scottish Birds, that the Seabird Group members may be interested in reading.



North Rona and Sula Sgeir 73 km northwest of Mainland Scotland are two of Britain's most isolated islands holding large numbers of breeding seabirds. The latter is visited each autumn by the men of Ness to take their legal harvest of 2,000 young **Northern Gannets** (*Morus bassanus*) or gugas. Stuart Murray's involvement with the islands began in 1976 when he spent a week on North Rona as part of an expedition organised by P.G.H. Evans to count the breeding seabirds and investigate their diets and breeding success. Enjoying the work and the place so much, he returned on 13 subsequent summers. Many visits lasted less than a week but he was fortunate to be contracted by various agencies to make seabird counts which in several years led to longer stays. The Seabird Group supported many of these visits and accounts of all these visits can be found in many past newsletters. In total he spent 145 days ashore on North Rona. He had a similarly long association with Sula Sgeir, first landing there in 1980 followed by 17 subsequent visits. The other two authors also made brief visits to the islands.

This online supplement to Scottish Birds documents in detail the human and ornithological history of both islands, gives annotated check lists of the species of all recorded land and seabirds, and includes many historical pictures. If you would like to read a copy of this supplement, please contact murraysurvey@yahoo.co.uk.

Life in the roofless village house on North Rona that was jokingly referred to as the Manse c. 1060. It was the HQ for the early years of the seal work but was neither wind nor waterproof. It was eventually replaced with a wooden hut that gave basic protection against the elements, essential during autumn and winter. Left to right: Malcom Douglas, John Morton Boyd, Jimmy MacGeoch and Dick Laws. Boyd's enthusiasm for North Rona was the driving force behind the Grey Seal studies, putting the work on a firm scientific basis, before handing it on to the NERC and SMRU. The photo was taken using a timer and was discovered and supplied by John A. Love.

The Biosecurity for LIFE Project celebrates a successful collaboration for seabirds

Angela Munn and Laura Bambini, Biosecurity for LIFE and RSPB

This March, people from across the UK and Europe came together at the Biosecurity for LIFE project conference in Edinburgh to share and discuss their work to protect seabird islands. This five-year partnership project by the RSPB, National Trust and the National Trust for Scotland, has raised awareness of the threat invasive mammalian predators pose to seabirds, and to put in place biosecurity measures to safeguard them on the UK's internationally important seabird island Special Protection Areas (SPAs), home to around 3,000,000 seabirds. Invasive mammalian predators are one of the leading causes of seabird declines and extinctions globally, including in the UK.

Anne McCall making her opening speech. Photo: RSPB.

Delegates on a field trip to Bass Rock. Photo: RSPB.

The conference was an opportunity to celebrate the results of the project, which was funded by EU LIFE with contributions from NatureScot, NRW, DAERA and DEFRA. From under 10% of the UK's seabird island SPAs having adequate biosecurity 5 years ago, 95% now take action to better protect seabird colonies from invasive non-native mammalian predators.

Highlights from the conference were the human stories from along the way: Northern Lighthouse Board staff training to carry out surveillance for invasive mammals; volunteers removing a rat from their local island; harbours and boat operators raising awareness with island visitors; and the project pioneering the training and use of rodent conservation detection dogs.

Biosecurity is a shared responsibility. Visit the project website to find out what you can do when visiting seabird islands. To find out about becoming a volunteer rapid responder should an incursion be suspected on a seabird islands, and live near one of the new Rapid Incursion Response Hubs (Shetland, Edinburgh, Stornoway, Haverfordwest, Anglesey or the Isles of Scilly), please email biosecurityforlife@rspb.org.uk.

BIOSECURITY FOR LIFE
PROTECTING SEABIRDS FROM INVASIVE PREDATORS

Light pollution from refuelling ships may affect breeding shearwaters

Steffen Oppell, RSPB, and Martin Austad, Birdlife Malta

Yelkouan Shearwaters (*Puffinus yelkouan*) approach their nesting cliffs on Mediterranean islands only under the cover of darkness to avoid being killed by natural predators. Human activity can result in light pollution.

Malta is an important breeding area for Yelkouan Shearwaters but is also densely populated, and seabird colonies are under pressure from a wide range of human activities. One such activity is the transfer of fuel to ships at sea, which requires very brightly lit ships if the activity occurs at night. Two of these 'mobile filling stations' exist just offshore of important Yelkouan Shearwater breeding colonies – however, it was unclear what effect the light pollution from ships had on Yelkouan Shearwaters.

A new paper published in the Journal of Ornithology now shows that the presence of ships increased the brightness of the colony, with an effect similar to a full moon. Using an RFID system to register tagged birds, the number of birds entering the colony was lower when the night was brighter. In the presence of ships and the resultant light pollution, the number of shearwaters entering the breeding cave per hour decreased on average by 18%.

Brightly lit ships in front of the Yelkouan Shearwater colony at Majjistral Nature and History Park, Malta. Photo: Paulo Lago.

The study suggests that because shearwaters avoid entering the colony when it is not dark enough, they may not be able to feed chicks as regularly as needed if ship traffic artificially illuminates a colony. Ships in front of shearwater breeding colonies should have their lights appropriately shielded or activity limited to daylight hours.

As daylight fades away, Yelkouan Shearwaters return from foraging at sea to enter their breeding colony under the cover of darkness Photo: Marc Schruoffeneger.

Black-capped Petrel sightings around Fea's Petrel colony in Santa Antão, Cape Verde

Peter Stronach

Ever since a chance meeting with a **Black-capped Petrel** (*Pterodroma hasitata*) off Raso Island in Cape Verde on the 6th February 2020 I have been slightly obsessed at the possibility that they may be breeding undetected in the Western Palearctic. There is a recent series of sightings from the Cape Verde islands which are shown below:

6th February 2016 - Individual found by children in centre of Santa Antão

11th March 2017 - Seawatching record from El Barril headland, Sao Nicolau

13th February 2018 - Individual mist-netted in Santa Antão

28th April 2019 - At sea between Fogo and Cima

6th February 2020 - At sea between Raso and Sao Nicolau

29th January 2021 - At sea between Fogo and Cima

All these sightings fall within the period that they would typically be found during the breeding season in the Caribbean, it's a strange pattern of occurrence for what is supposed to be a rare vagrant seabird to the region. Could they be breeding? And how would you even attempt to prove that?!

6th February 2020 Raso sighting. Photo: Peter Stronach.

To turn the problem on its head, I decided to assume they were breeding and then work out where they were most likely to breed. All known Black-capped Petrel nesting sites are in mountainous areas 1,500–2,000 m above sea level in the thick understorey of steep montane forests. A modelling exercise of Caribbean breeding areas identified higher elevation sites, with increased forest cover and those closer to the coast as being ideal[1]. The island that really stood out was Santa Antão, which had large areas above 1400 m and still with areas of native forest. This island has the largest population of **Fea's Petrel** (*Pterodroma feae*) breeding, it also has two very intriguing records of Black-capped Petrels inland, one mist-netted and the other found by children.

I decided to try a trip during the key period. I made sure to time it to coincide with the new moon and peak petrel activity! The following sightings were made during the trip, all seawatching from land:

17th February - 134+ Fea's Petrels and 1 Black-capped Petrel in pre-breeding rafts of petrels on the sea east of Ponta do Sol in NE Santa Antão

19th February - Same area checked as 17th February, 3 Black-capped Petrels amongst rafting Fea's, same location

[1] Satge YG, Rupp E, Brown A & Jodice PG (2021). Habitat modelling locates nesting areas of the Endangered Black-capped Petrel Pterodroma hasitata on Hispaniola and identifies habitat loss. Bird Conservation International, 31(4): 573-590.

Interior of Santa Antão. Photo: Peter Stronach.

20th February - Same area checked as 17th February, 2 Black-capped Petrels amongst rafting Fea's, same location

This number of birds is completely unprecedented in the Western Palearctic. Although this doesn't prove breeding, it definitely makes you ask the question - what are these birds doing here? The seabird team at Projecto Vito, a Cape Verdean environmental NGO, are currently studying the Fea's Petrels on Santa Antão and this includes nest finding. This represents the best hope of conclusively proving that this species is breeding in the Western Palearctic.

HPAI summary

Linda Wilson, RSPB

This season we are all anxiously waiting to see how the ongoing outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) unfolds. Already we know that there have been worrying population impacts for some seabird populations. For example, the number of breeding sites occupied by **Northern Gannets** on the Bass Rock last year decreased by at least 71% compared to the long-term mean[2]. To help us more fully assess the impacts of the HPAI outbreak on our populations of breeding seabirds, a coordinated programme of targeted seabird counts across the UK is underway. This work is being led by RSPB in collaboration with the statutory bodies and other conservation organisations, with surveys directed towards key species and sites most affected by high mortality last season, as well as some coverage of those less affected as a comparison. This will be supplemented with the routine monitoring undertaken at RSPB seabird reserves, as well as other sites as part of the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP). If you are carrying out whole colony counts of any seabird colonies this season, please remember to submit your data to the SMP database.

We are grateful for funds provided by The Crown Estate (through the Offshore Wind Evidence and Change Programme), Scottish Government, Natural England, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs – Northern Ireland, and Natural Resources Wales for providing funding for this work. This project is also supported by the RSPB Avian Flu Appeal. We are grateful for the additional support provided by ScotWind developers of the East and North East Plan areas, BTO, NatureScot, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England, JNCC, National Trust for Scotland, National Trust, Sea Mammal Research Unit, Sarah Wanless, Mike Harris, and The Seabird Group. Our thanks go to all the SMP contributors who continue to submit annual data, many of them doing so as volunteers.

Do not touch or move dead birds. All dead birds can be reported via the BirdTrack app (https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/birdtrack) but should also be reported for testing to DEFRA (England, Scotland, Wales - https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds, DEFRA helpline (03459 33 55 77)) or DAERA (Northern Ireland - by calling 0300 200 7840 https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/wild-birds-and-advice-public). NB only a small number of birds will be tested. If you see dead birds on a nature reserve please also let site staff know. If you are working on a site that is set up to use the Epicollect app then please use this to report dead birds.

Copeland Bird Observatory Gull Census 2023

Katherine Booth Jones, Copeland Bird Observatory

Large gulls are divisive species, with many Lariphiles deeply passionate about their favourites, while public feeling tends towards the hostile, fuelled by sensational media reports during the breeding period of May-June. However, their familiar presence around our coasts and in our urban areas make them an ideal group to introduce new seabird counters to, and the Copeland Bird Observatory have been actively engaging new volunteers in Northern Ireland with their annual gull census in recent years.

[2] Lane et al. (Preprint). High pathogenicity avian influenza (H5N1) in Northern Gannets: Global spread, clinical signs, and demographic consequences. bioRxiv 2023.05.01.538918. https://doi.org/10.1101/2023.05.01.538918

As opportunistic foragers often scavenging carrion, it is believed that gulls were sensitive to infection with HPAI last year, and therefore it is important for understanding the impact of this disease that we account for abundance change between 2022 and 2023. Northern Ireland was relatively fortunate in the timing of the arrival of the HPAI outbreak in 2022, which appeared later in the season than in other parts of the UK, and relatively low numbers of afflicted seabirds were recorded (Gray, in [3]). Of five gulls tested for HPAI by DAERA in 2022, only one came back positive. However, the recovery and testing of seabird carcasses was very low, and therefore questions remain about the real impact on populations that HPAI related mortality may have had.

Volunteers on Copeland. Photo: Copeland Bird Observatory.

With the duel aims of resurveying Lighthouse Island's significant **Herring Gull** (*Larus argentatus*) and **Lesser Black-backed Gull** (*Larus fuscus*) colony after the 2022 outbreak of HPAI, and upskilling new seabird monitoring volunteers in survey techniques, the Copeland Bird Observatory received funds through The Seabird Group to pay for boat costs to bring a team of volunteers to the Observatory island - Lighthouse Island - to make a full census of the colony there.

Counting methodology was consistent with previous years (largely following Census Method 3 in [4]) to facilitate comparison with past totals. A team of 16 volunteers was assembled to walk a line approximately perpendicular to the coast, covering the gull colony from the rocky coastal edge to the vegetated upper slopes of the island. A team of 15-20 is helpful for this on Lighthouse Island, as it ensures that surveyors can cover the full area of the colony quickly and efficiently, with minimal disturbance and maximum chance of discovering Apparently Occupied Nests (AON). Volunteers were briefed on the signs of potential HPAI infection before the survey began, and asked to make a note of any sick or dead birds, but not to touch these. AON were marked with dried pasta from a previously counted known quantity, where the day's total count could be gained by subtracting leftover pasta from the original total. The split between numbers of Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull AON was estimated after the transect survey, by making vantage point counts of Apparently Occupied Territories (AOTs) from nine locations spanning the extent of the colony and applying this ratio to the total AON count.

Table 1: Estimates of AON on Lighthouse Island, the Copeland Islands, Co. Down, Northern Ireland, since 2018. No counts were made in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Year	Herring Gull	Lesser Black-backed Gull
2018	483	365
2019	483	547
2020	-	-
2021	585	390
2022	680	602
2023	869	683

This year we counted a grand total of 1,552 gulls, with an estimated ratio of 1:1.3 Lesser Black-backed Gulls to Herring Gulls (683 AON and 869 AON, respectively). Table 1 shows the result of recent gull censuses on Lighthouse Island, with an indication of an increasing population trend for each species. The 2023 count was higher than in 2022, so while we do not know the exact impact of HPAI on this population, they still appear to be increasing on the island.

Our other aim was to introduce new volunteers to the joy of surveying gull nests, and below are accounts of the experiences of two of our freshly minted gull counters! A fun and educational day was had by all.

Stephanie Pruzina

One boat in dock for repairs and the second one delayed by fog, my daughter Helen and I set off undaunted by the high seas and excited to be visiting Lighthouse Island for our second trip. It should have been a simple job. We were to join a team walking in a straight line and drop a piece of pasta into every gull nest we found. Not as easy as it looked, Copeland Bird Observatory regulars had to call us back into order when we strayed, and again when we found a female **Common Eider** (*Somateria mollissima*) sitting quietly on her nest. We gathered around to watch her being gently lifted and ringed and then undeterred she returned to her nest. We had to differentiate between gull nests to count – Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gull – and nests not to count – **Common Gull** (*Larus canus*)! But Katherine kept us right and we had great fun and a sense of achievement every time we found a

[3] Booth Jones KA (2023). Northern Ireland Seabird Report 2022. British Trust for Ornithology.
[4] Walsh PM *et al.* (1995). *Seabird monitoring handbook for Britain and Ireland: a compilation of methods for survey and monitoring of breeding seabirds. JNCC/RSPB/ITE/Seabird Group.*

nest! Everyone on the trip welcomed us along and we had a relaxed lunch and a guided tour of the island from Wes. I would recommend it as a great day out, with lots of birds to spot, and a warm welcome from the experts. Thanks to Copeland Bird Observatory for facilitating it.

Hala Haddad

Undertaking surveys across the island. Photo: Katherine Booth.

Thanks to funding from The Seabird Group, I made my first gull census and my first visit to the Copeland Island Bird Observatory this May. During the boat journey to the islands, we passed the larger of the three islands and were able to enjoy views of seals, **Atlantic Puffins** (*Fratercula arctica*), **Razorbills** (*Alca torda*), and **European Shags** (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*). After getting to the island, the team gathered around and were each given a bag of dried pasta pieces, carefully counted out to 100 per bag. Our plan was to sweep across the colony area in a line perpendicular to the coast, starting on the north side and moving along the western shore searching for gull nests. Whenever we came across a gull nest, one of the team placed a pasta shell in it to mark it as counted. Walking on the rockier parts of the island was a bit hard on the knees, so I'd recommend wearing good hiking boots or wellies for this task and thick clothes to guard from the potent nettle stings! At the end, we gathered up all the bags and counted how many pasta shells were left to discover the number of nests counted. After our hard work surveying, we had lunch, and I was able to watch some Lesser Black-backed Gull ringing! Overall, it was such a lovely day, I would happily go out again.

Grant Reports

Conducting a national census of Iceland's nocturnal seabirds

Stephen Hurling, Agricultural University of Iceland

Petrels are one of the most threatened of seabird groups[5], facing a complex variety of threats due to time spent both at breeding colonies and at sea[6,7]. Of the three species of nocturnal petrel breeding in Iceland, **Leach's Storm Petrel** (*Hydrobates leucorhous* - LSP) has been categorized as 'vulnerable' globally since 2016[8], while population trends for **European Storm Petrel** (*Hydrobates pelagicus* - ESP) and **Manx Shearwater** (*Puffinus puffinus* - MS) remain largely unknown due to lack of widespread monitoring[8]. Within Iceland, all three species are range-restricted and so nationally red-listed[9].

Fig 1. The difficulties of accessing petrel colonies in the Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland.

The grant I received was to help fund PhD research to conduct a national census of Icelandic breeding populations of LSP, ESP and MS. Establishing the conservation status of any species requires accurate population data; however, nocturnal burrow-nesting seabirds are among the most poorly monitored of bird species globally[10]. They are particularly difficult to survey, nesting on offshore islands, among varied terrain, in burrows that are difficult to access and to which they return only after dark[11,12] (Fig. 1). In Iceland, population estimates used in conservation decision-making for all three species are incomplete and urgently require updating.

[5] Winkler DW *et al.* (2020) Northern Storm-Petrels (Hydrobatidae), version 1.0. In: Billerman SM *et al.* (eds.) Birds of the World. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, USA.
[6] Dias MP *et al.* (2019) Threats to Seabirds: A Global Assessment. *Biological Conservation*, 237: 525-37.
[7] Croxall JP *et al.* (2012) Seabird Conservation Status, Threats and Priority Actions: A Global Assessment. *Bird Conservation International*, 22: 1-34.
[8] BirdLife International (2021) IUCN Red List for birds. Available at: http://www.birdlife.org.
[9] Skarphéðinsson KH *et al.* (2016) Mikilvæg fuglasvæði á Íslandi. Fjölrit Náttúrufræðistofnunar Nr. 55. Available at: http://utgafa.ni.is/fjolrit/Fjolrit_55.pdf.
[10] Paleczny M *et al.* (2015) Population Trend of the World's Monitored Seabirds, 1950-2010. *PLoS ONE*, 10: E0129342.
[11] Oppel S *et al.* (2014) Estimating Population Size of a Nocturnal Burrow-nesting Seabird Using Acoustic Monitoring and Habitat Mapping. *Nature Conservation-Bulgaria*, 7: 1-13.
[12] Soanes LM *et al.* (2012) Evaluation of Field and Analytical Methods for Estimating the Population Size of Burrow-nesting Seabirds from Playback Surveys. *Bird Study*, 59: 353-57.

The research site is the Vestmannaeyjar archipelago (63°28'N 20°11'W), south Iceland. Colonies in the outer islands are of national and international importance, holding > 90% of the total Icelandic population of all three species and the largest breeding colony of LSP in Europe[13]. The last national census, used both in designating important bird areas (IBAs) and helping to inform the red list status of each species, dates from 1991-1992[8,9]. More recently, Icelandic LSP survival rates have been found to be significantly low at 0.718 (95% CI) [Calvert, pers. comm], while a 2018 survey of the main LSP colony at Elliðaey estimated a population decline of 40 to 49%[14]. Given the lack of recent data for ESP and MS, plus the possibility that population densities may vary from island to island for all species[14], there is pressing need to gain accurate census data for each species throughout the archipelago.

Fieldwork began in summer 2021 and is expected to be completed this summer (2023), with a total of six islands to be surveyed. The specific aims of the research are to: 1) test a variety of nocturnal seabird survey methods (including hierarchical distance sampling and conventional playback); 2) establish, based on outcomes of 1), the population and breeding distribution of each species; and 3) evaluate the results from 2) to inform the conservation status and future management of all three species.

Much of our work to date has focused on a hierarchical distance sampling (HDS) survey to establish the Icelandic population of LSP and MS. Research takes place during incubation (June to early July), with playback used to elicit a response from breeding adults in burrows. First developed in the 1980s and 90s[15], use of playback has become standard in population surveys for nocturnal, burrow-nesting seabirds[16]. It has been found to be inexpensive, relatively non-invasive, quick (~ 30 seconds per burrow), and of particular use in instances where burrow entrances are difficult to locate[15]. Nevertheless, though a bird may be present, they do not always respond to playback; factors such as volume of playback, time of day/night, characteristics of nest site (e.g., burrow length), and sex of call (male, female, both) among others may affect response rate[15,17]. Such factors can cause bias in occupancy estimates, causing the need for time-consuming, site-specific calibrations of differing habitat and colony types before surveying begins[14]. Crucially, as colony areas can be difficult to establish with certainty, errors in judgement (i.e., regarding the location of survey transects) may lead to under- or overestimates in population.

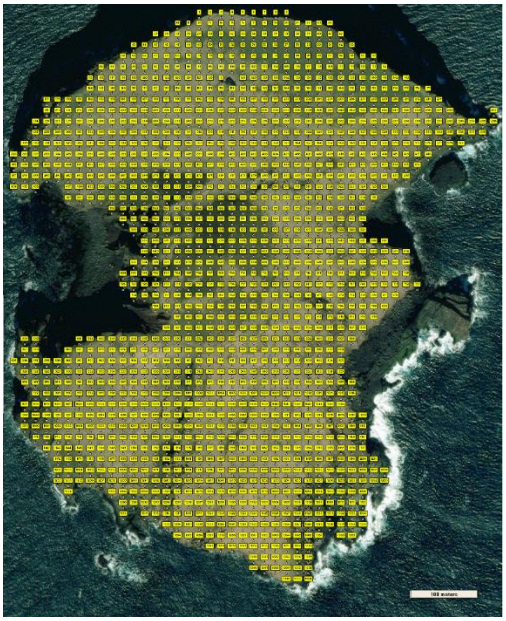


Fig 2. Map of HDS survey points for Elliðaey, Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland.

To address these issues, HDS was selected as the survey method for LSP and MS, in which distance sampling playback is conducted across each island in its entirety. To determine playback points, a grid of numbered GPS points at 16 m intervals was created to cover each island (e.g., resulting in a grid of 1,394 points for Elliðaey; Fig. 2), from which points found to be inaccessible were then removed. At each remaining point, playback was conducted for both species. To maximise response rate, separate female/male calls were used for the former (with LSP responding primarily to same-sex calls), with a mixed male/female duet used for the latter. Playback was conducted between 07:00 and 20:00 and, to ensure calls and responses remained audible, playback was carried out only in fair weather conditions (low to zero precipitation, wind < 10 m/s); responses within a 4 m radius of the researcher were recorded, while those outside were excluded. To estimate response rate, a number of survey points (~ 30%) for each island were played more than once. Lastly, an important benefit of gathering data from multiple survey points is the inclusion of possible environmental covariates, such as vegetation type, altitude, slope, and aspect, in models to predict population density. Data analysis is presently ongoing and is intended to yield island-specific estimates and population density maps for both species.

This summer, one goal is to conduct a conventional playback survey for ESP[15] (Fig. 3). HDS methodology was considered unsuitable for this species, which, due to its preferences for rocky habitat, is likely to be overlooked in a HDS survey of points at 16 m intervals (with smaller intervals proving impractical in terms of effort). In conventional playback, a response rate is obtained from calibration plots in which the number of breeding birds is known; from this a correction factor is then applied to data gathered from colony transects in the wider survey area.

[13]BirdLife International (2022) Important Bird Areas factsheet: Vestmannaeyjar. Available at: http://datazone.birdlife.org/site/factsheet/vestmannaeyjar-iba-iceland.
[14]Deakin Z *et al.* (2021). Decline of Leach's Storm Petrels *Hydrobates leucorhous* at the largest colonies in the northeast Atlantic. *Seabird*, 33:74-106.
[15]Ratcliffe ND *et al.* (1998) "Development of Playback Census Methods for Storm Petrels *Hydrobates Pelagicus*. *Bird Study*, 45: 302-12.
[16]Mitchell PI *et al.* (2004) Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland: Results of the Seabird 2000 Census (1998-2002). London: Poyser.
[17]Perkins AJ *et al.* (2017) Using Dual-sex Calls Improves the Playback Census Method for a Nocturnal Burrow-nesting Seabird, the Manx Shearwater *Puffinus Puffinus*. *Bird Study*, 64: 146-58.

This study represents the first census of all three species in Iceland since 1991-92, providing a basis to evaluate the extent and nature of population change in Icelandic petrel populations over recent decades. The findings are expected to lend focus to future seabird conservation decisions in Iceland, a particularly pressing need given the downward trend of most seabird populations nationally[18] and the lack of formal legal protection at most IBAs[14], including breeding colonies of international importance in the Vestmannaeyjar[9,13].

Fig. 3. European storm petrel at the main colony on Elliðaey, Vestmannaeyjar, Iceland.

Seabirder Spotlight

Seabirder Spotlight aims to illuminate the variety of career paths and roles available to aspiring seabirders. Contributors are asked a range of standard questions about their careers, for example on what their current job involves, what aspects they love about their work and what skills have been important to cultivate on their journey. In particular, we hope that the contributions from members of the seabird community will inspire and motivate people in their early careers to work with seabirds.

Rowan Kuminski – PhD Student, University of Aberdeen

I began studying birds as a master's student in 2020, and started working on seabirds for the first time very recently, in October 2022, when I started my PhD at University of Aberdeen. However, I originally attended university to become a social worker, as I wanted a career that would allow me to work with and help people. Although I later earned my undergraduate degree in Animal Science in the United States, I completed my minor degree in Women's and Gender Studies, and still use a lot of what I learned from my social science education in my current work.

For my PhD, I am studying the effects of predation and bycatch on the metapopulation dynamics of **Northern Fulmars** (*Fulmarus glacialis*) in Scotland. The past few months have involved a lot of learning and making plenty of mistakes as I learn a new set of skills and become more familiar with my study species. While the imposter syndrome can sometimes feel overwhelming, I really enjoy working on a project that allows me to study seabirds and has real-world implications.

Just before starting my PhD, I came out as non-binary, meaning I don't identify as either male or female and use "they/them" pronouns. This was an incredibly freeing process, but also presented specific challenges in my personal and professional life that I had not previously encountered. In the past few months, I've witnessed the extent to which transphobia exists in academia and recreational birding groups, and have experienced how harmful it is to the success and wellbeing of queer ornithologists. Because of this, I realized that in addition to doing science, I wanted to make things better for other people like me. As a starting point, I became involved in EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) and decolonising work through different groups and organisations, before deciding I wanted to do something to specifically support LGBTQIA+ ornithologists. I have been working on forming a group for LGBTQIA+ bird scientists, watchers, and ringers, which focuses on providing safe and supportive mentoring contacts in this field. This group, named the **Queer Birders Network**, has provided me with an outlet to channel my frustrations when I experience transphobia into something positive, and will become active within the next few months.

My favourite part of studying seabirds and promoting LGBTQIA+ visibility and equality in this field has been the people I've met along the way. It has been especially rewarding to meet other queer seabird scientists and build a network of people who accept me for who I am and support me as an early-career researcher.

The more I learn about seabirds, the more I enjoy studying them, and I would be happy to continue working with seabirds throughout my career. Whatever I end up doing after my PhD, it is important to me that I continue to promote LGBTQIA+ equality and representation, and show others that it is possible to be a happy and successful trans/non-binary scientist. My advice to other

[18] Icelandic Institute of Natural History (n.d.a) Bird Populations. Available at: https://en.ni.is/fauna/birds/bird-populations.

early-career researchers would be to embrace the intersectionality of science and engage with people outside your immediate field; stepping outside your comfort zone can expose you to a diversity of ideas that will change your view of the world.

While there are numerous people in my personal and professional life who have helped me get to this point, I am especially grateful to my PhD supervisor, Dr. Ana Payo-Payo, for her unwavering support and encouragement, and for her patience in fielding my never-ending questions. I consider myself very lucky to have a supervisor who I can look up to as both a talented scientist and a compassionate person.

I'd like to thank The Seabird Group for giving me a platform to share my experiences as an early-career researcher, as well as an openly non-binary seabird scientist.

Twitter handle: **@RowanKuminski**

Seabird Paper Roundup

Seabird Paper Roundup is a new section included to help early career researchers (ECRs) promote any recent seabird papers they have produced. We hope this can help focus on some of the amazing work that is being undertaken across our community, whilst highlighting work to those of you who may not be aware of it yet. If you'd like your paper to be included in the next issue of our newsletter, please contact our ECR representative Jacqui Glencross at ecr@seabirdgroup.org.uk.

ECR papers:

Lopez, S.L., Daunt, F., Wilson, J., O'Hanlon, N.J., Searle, K.R., Bennett, S., Newell, M.A., Harris, M.P. and Masden, E. 2023. Quantifying the impacts of predation by Great Black-backed Gulls (*Larus marinus*) on an Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) population: Implications for conservation management and impact assessments. *Marine Environmental Research*, p.105994.

> *The management of predator-prey conflicts can be a key aspect of seabird conservation, but a robust understanding of the predator-prey relationship is needed to inform conservation management, particularly when both predator and prey are species of conservation concern. In this study we quantified the potential impacts of predation by **Great Black-backed Gulls** on an **Atlantic Puffin** population, and we discuss the importance of quantifying predator-prey conflicts to accurately inform conservation management and impact assessments of anthropogenic developments.*

Pelletier, D. and Guillemette, M. 2022. Times and partners are a-changin': relationships between declining food abundance, breeding success, and divorce in a monogamous seabird species. *PeerJ*, 10, e13073.

> *This study investigated divorce in **Northern Gannets** during the breeding season. The results showed that divorce rate increases following a decrease in breeding success, which is mainly influenced by the biomass of Atlantic mackerel (Scomber scombrus), and divorce is an adaptive strategy for maintaining reproductive performance.*

Pelletier, D., Blier, P., Vézina, F. and Guillemette, M. 2023. Good times bad times — Unfavourable breeding conditions, more than divorce, lead to increased parental effort and reduced physiological condition of Northern Gannets. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution,* 11, 1108293.

> *This study examined the physiological components of **Northern Gannets** in relation to their partnership status and foraging effort to understand how behavioral flexibility affects their health. The results showed that changing mates increases parental effort during low food abundance, resulting in negative effects on health condition, suggesting that reproduction during harsh conditions may cause individual quality loss and fitness decline in this species.*

Mead, A.R.R. and Dickins, T.E. 2023. Sibling aggression between Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) chicks. *Journal of the Lundy Field Society*. ISSN 1758-3276 (Accepted/In press).

> *This study looks at the behavioural sequences of alpha and beta **Black-legged Kittiwake** chicks during aggressive interactions and makes comments on these behaviours.*

Other papers:

Lavers, J.L. and Bond, A.L. 2023. Long-term decline in fledging body condition of **Flesh-footed Shearwaters** (*Ardenna carneipes*). *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, fsad048.

Chan, S. 2022. **Chinese Crested Tern** (*Thalasseus bernsteini*). In: DellaSala, D.A.

Goldstein, M.I. (Eds.), Imperiled: The Encyclopedia of Conservation, vol. 1. Elsevier, pp. 19-28.

Rodríguez, B., Suárez-Pérez, A., Méndez, C., Acosta, Y. and Rodríguez, A. 2023. Numbers of seabirds attracted to artificial lights should not be the only indicator of population trends. *Animal Conservation.*

Atchoi, A., Mitkus, M., Vitta, P., Machado, B., Rocha, M., Juliano, M., Bried, J., Rodríguez, A. 2023. Ontogenetic exposure to light influences seabird vulnerability to light pollution. *The Journal of Experimental Biology,* 226(7), jeb245126.

Seabird Group Notices

The Seabird Group membership benefits

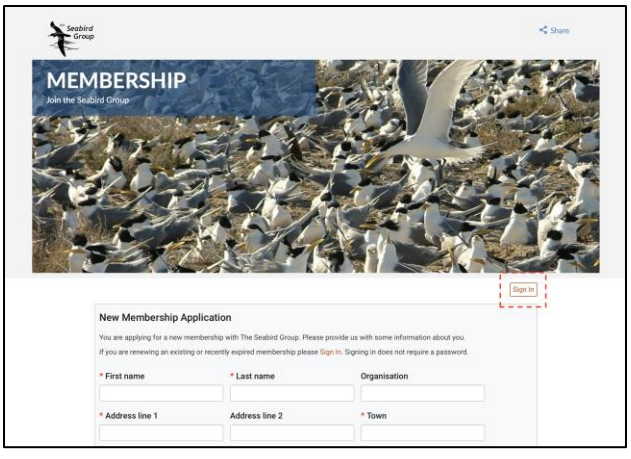
We're pleased to offer additional benefits for The Seabird Group members on Pelagic Publishing, Poyser Monographs, Cotswold Outdoor, the Scottish Seabird Centre, Mooncup, and Any Weather Paper. Details and codes for these are attached with the newsletter but can also be found on our members only page online (see below for details). Please get in touch with Executive Committee member Jacqui Glencross at ecr@seabirdgroup.org.uk if you have any problems, queries or suggestions for additional member benefits.

Accessing Member account and discount codes

Jeff Stratford, Website Officer

The Seabird Group use an externally hosted membership management software **membermojo** to administer member records. Group members can access their records online and edit some details of their account. We thought in this issue it would be useful to provide a step-by-step guide to managing the different features on this platform, to show you what you can do. In order to minimise our environmental impact where possible, you will have been asked if you would like to opt out of paper versions of the newsletter and journal, and instructions are included about how to do this if you decide to change to electronic in future. It also shows you how to access our exclusive member discount codes.

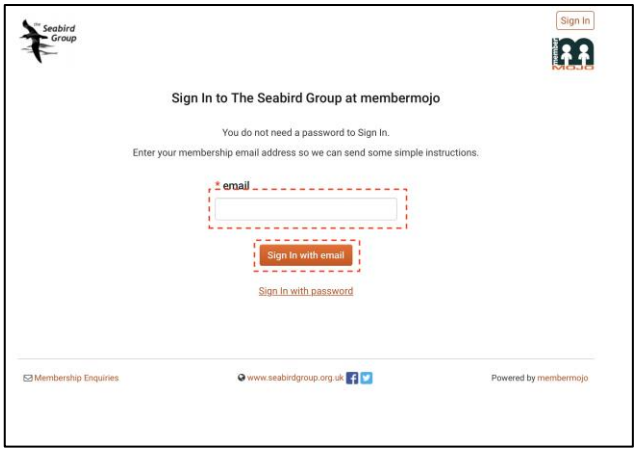
To login:



Go to the membership page of the website http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk/membership.

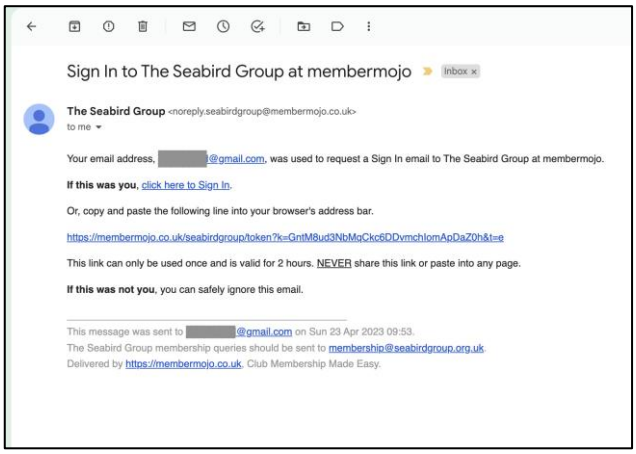
Click the orange Sign in button to display the sign in page.

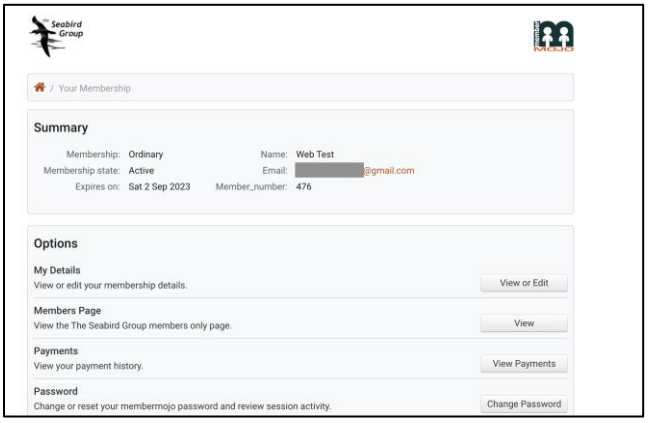
Enter your email address registered with the group and click the **Sign in with email** button.



The software will display a confirmation message and send a login link to your email account.

Clicking the link in the email will log you in to the **membermojo** system.

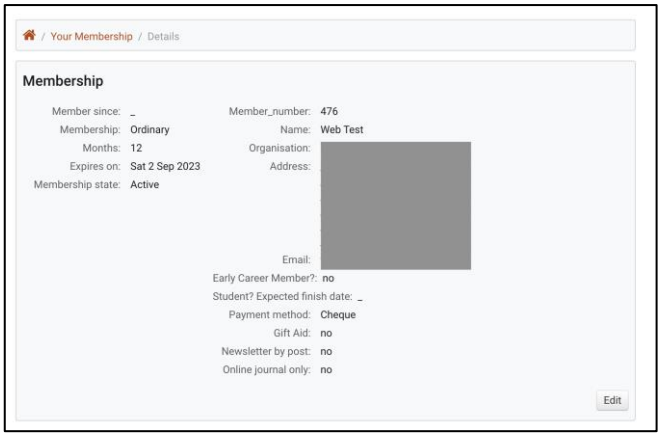


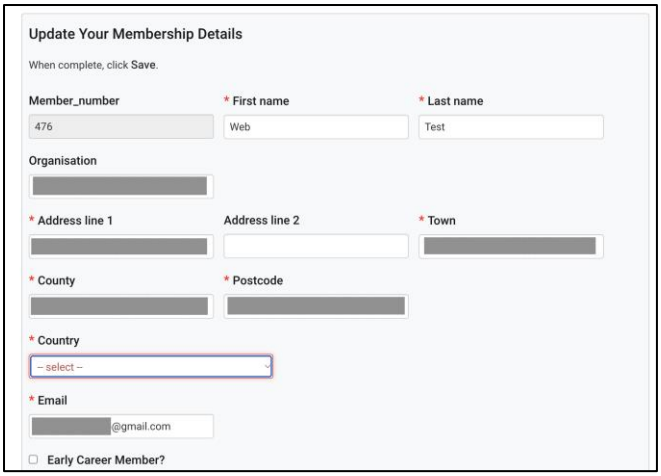


Once logged in, the **membermojo** system will display a page showing some summary account information and some option buttons. The login session will time out after a period of inactivity requiring a repeat login.

To view or edit account record:

Clicking the **View or Edit** button on the My Details section will display your account information such as contact details and opt-ins. To amend any of these click the Edit button, make any changes via the displayed form then click the Save button to confirm the changes.

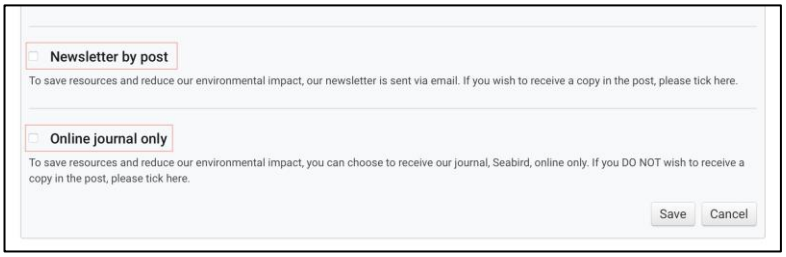




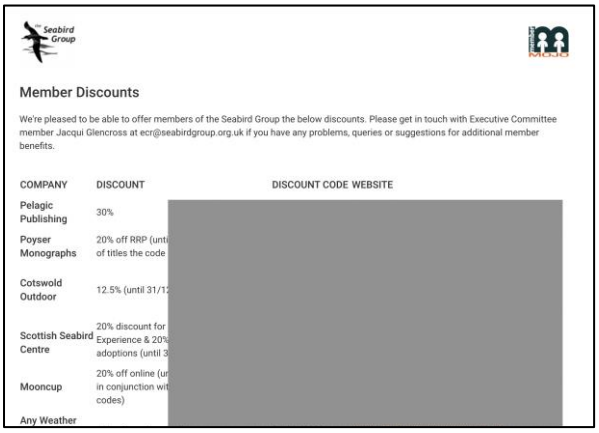
Contact details

Opt outs

Uncheck the *Newsletter by post* to opt out of receiving printed newsletters by post. Newsletters will be sent by email or will be available online. Check the *Online journal only* to opt out of receiving printed copies of Seabird. The journal will be available online.



To view members only discount codes:



Click the View button on the Members Page section to display details of the discounts the group has negotiated. This page displays a list of companies with the discount, a discount code and web link.

To change password:

Clicking the **Change Password** button on the *Password* section will allow entering or editing of a password, if you prefer to set this means of logging in. However, we recommend using the emailed link method rather than a stored password to login, because of the added security provided by requiring access to your email account in order to login.

Events

The Seabird Group Conference 2024

Save the Date!

The Seabird Group is pleased to announce the next conference will be held on the **2-5th September 2024**, kindly hosted by the University of Coimbra, Portugal.

There will be an optional field trip on the 6th September for those who wish to attend for longer.

Submission for abstracts will begin on 1st February 2024.

The Welcome address will be by Paulo Catry, ISPA, Lisbon.

The keynote speakers will be Samantha Patrick (University of Liverpool); Kataryna Wojczulanis-Jakubas (University of Gdansk), and Jennifer Provencher (Canadian Wildlife Service).

Coimbra, with the University overlooking.

Marine Fest 2023, 8th – 12th June

Scottish Seabird Centre

The Scottish Seabird Centre's Marine Fest returns in June (8th – 12th) with a packed programme full of marine-themed fun! From author talks, live science and art workshops to wildlife tours, guided snorkel sessions and plenty of foodie treats, in order to celebrate Scotland's incredible marine wildlife and habitats.

All of the events must be pre-booked and the full programme is available online.

Website: **www.seabirdgroup.org.uk**

Facebook: **www.facebook.com/pages/TheSeabirdGroup/**

Twitter: **www.twitter.com/TheSeabirdGroup (@TheSeabirdGroup)**

Registered charity No. 260907

The Seabird Group promotes and helps co-ordinate the study and conservation of seabirds. Members also receive the journal *Seabird*. The Group organises regular conferences and provides small grants towards research.

CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

Chair	Liz Humphreys (2023)	chair@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Secretary	Annette Fayet (2023)	secretary@seabirdgroup.org.uk
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Social Media Manager	Katrina Siddiqi-Davies (2023)	socialmedia@seabirdgroup.org.uk
EDI Officer	Lila Buckingham (2025)	edi@seabirdgroup.org.uk

Current membership rates	
Ordinary	£30
Concession	£15
Institution	£50
Individual Life:	£300
Institution Life	£300

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

Submissions for the newsletter should be emailed to the newsletter editor: newsletter@seabirdgroup.org.uk. We recommend a maximum of 1500 words and ask that photographs and figures are sent as separate files and with full credits, where appropriate. **Deadlines are: 15th January (February edition); 15th May (June edition); and, 15th September (October edition).** Every effort is made to check the content of the material that we publish. It is not, however, always possible to check thoroughly every piece of information back to its original source as well as keeping news timely. If you have any concerns about any of the information or contacts provided, please contact the Newsletter Editor.