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NEWSLETTER 154

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News

Bass Rock 2023

Maggie Sheddán (Scottish Seabird Centre) and Jude Lane (RSPB)

The summer of 2022 will live forever in the memory of so many of us involved in seabird work. The Bass Rock **Northern Gannet** (*Morus bassanus*) colony that so many people are familiar with, whether it being from seeing it on TV or social media to having had the privilege to visit, was devastated by the outbreak of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) that killed thousands of Gannets and other seabirds across Europe and North America. The eagerness and excitement that pre-empted the start of every breeding season for us was abruptly ended as planned research and public trips were cancelled, and our visits turned to monitoring and observing all that we could as the outbreak unfolded.

As we turned the corner into 2023 there was much nervous anticipation of what the Bass Rock colony would look like. It was patently obvious it would not be the same as we knew it. The Gannets began returning after their winter at sea around their typical arrival date, and were first seen on the Scottish Seabird Centre (SSC) cameras on the 27th March. It was pretty hard to not spend all day watching the SSC cameras and wondering how many birds would end up returning, whilst looking for signs of any sick individuals. At the height of the outbreak in 2022 the colony had all but emptied, with only the birds with viable nests remaining. This had raised many questions about whether abandoned nests were due to the deaths at sea of one or perhaps both members of each pair and therefore, how many would return in 2023.

As many established pairs reunited and settled through April, we allowed optimism to occupy some of the space that trepidation had filled in our minds. However, it was clear that many returning birds were single and waiting for their partners to return.

By mid-May many pairs were incubating but swathing gaps across the colony, previously filled with nests were obvious. Thousands of birds were missing. However, to everyone's enormous relief and to look for the positives, 1000's of birds had indeed returned. The joy we felt to see them back, bringing in seaweed, stealing nest material, greeting partners with so much affection then turning to jab their neighbour for allowing a tail feather to encroach an inch into their territory, was



An immature Gannet on the Bass Rock in 2023, checking out areas previously occupied by breeders.
Photo: Jude Lane.

almost more than we could have hoped for given the anguish of 2022. Yet it was impossible not to acknowledge the reduced density of these occupied sites and that so many of the birds remained single, many faithfully holding and defending their territories until the end of the season. It was fascinating to watch the interactions and bonding behaviour of new pairs, their bill fencing and bowing taking place with a greater intensity than the quick greeting of returning adults with a hungry and demanding chick.



Immature Gannets frequented the Bass Rock in 2023, sometimes partnering for a time with adult birds.
Photo: Jude Lane.

As June approached new solo adults began to fill the swathing gaps, occasionally challenging established lone males. Immature birds, obvious by their dark chocolatey brown plumage, wandered the colony occasionally partnering up with an older bird for a time which in previous years would have been impossible due to the density of breeders.

With the progression of summer and the accompanying hot temperatures, it became more obvious how many territories were occupied by single birds. Not tied to the colony as they would be with a chick to shade and feed, these single birds had the 'luxury' of being able to leave for the sea. The nerves about a second virus outbreak returned briefly in mid-July when a couple of obviously sick birds were seen but thankfully, they appeared to be isolated cases and we were able to relax and continue to enjoy watching the chicks grow.

By September the immatures had left on their migrations and the non-breeders were starting to leave, once more revealing the extent of the loss of birds last year as just this year's breeders remained to see their chicks through to fledging. Displaying and nest building continued by any single birds that remained, but it won't be long until the October storms kick in and they along with the last of the gugas will leave once more for a winter at sea.

As we knew it would be, the Bass Rock is a changed colony, just looking back at personal photographs from 2021 and earlier is a stark reminder how much the virus outbreak has changed the structure and composition of the colony. Yet from our favourite black-eyed 'bolshie birds', to immatures meandering swathing gaps, seeing the wing flapping of so many gugas this autumn has been heart-warming. There has been a wealth of monitoring and research, including drone surveys, GPS tracking and blood sampling, that has taken place on the Bass Rock Gannets, both last summer and this, to understand the initial impact of the HPAI outbreak and the future consequences. If you're interested to know more, some of this work can be found in our recent published and pre-print papers: ^{1,2,3}.

Fifty years of Common Guillemot studies on Skomer Island

Tim Birkhead

The **Common Guillemot** (*Uria aalge*) population on Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire, comprised around 100,000 pairs prior to the Second World War, after which it rapidly declined to the point that by 1972, when the study described here started, it had reached about 2,000 pairs. The aim of the study was to understand the population biology of the Guillemot and what was causing the decline. Chronic oil pollution was considered a significant factor. From 1980, the population began to increase and has since continued to do so at 5% per annum; in 2022, around 21,000 pairs were present on the island. Estimates of adult and immature survival, based on annual resightings of colour-ringed individuals, together with measures of



Common Guillemots at their breeding colony, Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire, June 2012. Photo: Tim Birkhead.

¹ Lane JV. High pathogenicity avian influenza (H5N1) in Northern Gannets: Global spread, clinical signs, and demographic consequences. IBIS.

² Gremillet D. et al. 2023. Strong breeding colony fidelity in Northern Gannets following High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza Virus (HPAIV) outbreak. Biological Conservation 286, 110269.

³ Jeglinski J. (2023, pre-print). HPAIV outbreak triggers long-distance movements in breeding Northern Gannets -- implications for disease spread. Authorea.

reproductive success, have helped to quantify factors causing the population increase. The effects of oil pollution and climate change on survival have also been quantified. Since 1972, the median egg-laying date of Guillemots on Skomer has advanced by over two weeks. This effect is likely to be due to climate change, but so far with no apparent negative effects. An important focus of this study is the reliability and repeatability of the methods employed to monitor Guillemots and identifying the limitations of other monitoring methods.

To read the full article follow this link: <https://britishbirds.co.uk/node/22906>

Zino's Petrel Expedition, Maderia, May 2023

Lt Cdr Philip Boak RN, Royal Navy Birdwatching Society

During a week in May, Phil Boak visited the island of Madeira, to observe and record the **Zino's Petrel** (*Pterodroma madeira*). This species is regarded as one of the most endangered seabirds of Europe, with breeding populations confined to the steep and mountainous slopes of the central mountainous massif. Once considered extinct, the survival of the species can be attributed to the unstinting efforts of the late Alec Zino⁴, whom the bird is named after, and his son Frank Zino, who continues vital conservation efforts to this day.

The visit in May was well overdue, with work commitments and COVID restrictions precluding a trip over the previous two years. A key aim of the latest trip was to utilise thermal imaging technology to record the behaviour of the petrels as they returned at night to the mountainous slopes near Pico do Arieiro (1,818 m), Madeira's third highest peak. Thermal imaging is the process of converting infrared (IR) radiation (heat) into visible images that depict the spatial distribution of temperature differences in a scene viewed by a thermal camera. The technology has long been available, utilised by the world's militaries, hunters, and wildlife filmmakers. However, it is becoming progressively affordable, with high performing handheld devices available 'off-the-shelf'. On the night of 18th May 2023 just such a device, a tripod mounted Leica Calonox View, was used to obtain possibly never-before seen footage of the courtship behaviour of dozens of Zino's Petrel as they wheeled in the sky above Pico do Arieiro. The birds could be seen engaged in pair-flying typical of other *Pterodroma* species. Perhaps just as exciting was the abundance of the birds visible in the moonless night. Previously, estimates



Still from a thermal imaging video of the Zino's Petrel, showing at least 17 individuals high above the slopes of Pico do Arieiro. Photo: RNBWS.



Phil Boak and a preserved Zino's Petrel specimen. Phil is a serving officer in the Royal Navy, and Secretary of the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society.

of numbers were based on call analysis, but this was subject to error as not all birds vocalise, and differentiating the individual birds from a sonogram can prove difficult. From the thermal imaging video, high numbers of the birds were observed, which is extremely good news for the species.

Future trips to Madeira are certainly warranted in order to continue observing and recording the behaviour of this bird using thermal imaging and other technology. A huge thanks goes to Manuel Jose Biscoito for allowing the author use of the Marine Biology Station, and Frank & Buffy Zino for their hospitality and assistance in making the trip possible. The author's thanks are also extended to the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society, of which Phil is a member, for helping facilitate and part-sponsor the trip.

The full video is available for viewing on the Royal Navy Birdwatching Society Facebook page ([RNBWS](#)) or Twitter [@RNBWSbirder](#).

⁴ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1457004/Alec-Zino.html>

Converting drone counts of gulls to numbers of breeding pairs

Sarah A. Dalrymple, RSPB

The paper published by Corregidor-Castro et al. (2022), *Monitoring Colonies of Large Gulls Using UAVs: From Individuals to Breeding Pairs*,⁵ suggested that a 0.7 multiplier applied to drone imagery of **Lesser Black-backed Gull** (*Larus fuscus*) and **Herring Gull** (*Larus argentatus*) colonies was an accurate way to convert counts of individuals to counts of breeding pairs. Applying this to the real-world of gull counts by both drone and quadrat at the large gull colony on Cumbria Wildlife Trust's South Walney nature reserve, in Southern Cumbria, seems to confirm this.

Both drone surveys and traditional quadrat counts were undertaken at South Walney between 2018 and 2023. The drones used were a DJI Inspire 1 Pro (2018 to 2020), a DJI Mavic 2 Pro (2022) and a DJI Mavic 3 E (2023). Flights were at an altitude of 30 m, and large gulls showed no disturbance to any flights. All flights were undertaken with the relevant SSSI permissions in place.

The flights took place within a day or two of the quadrat counts, and at low tide to minimise disturbance to high tide wader roosts. Images from the flights were counted either using manual counting software [Dotdotgoose](#) or QGIS software package as a GIS vector layer. Gulls were clearly visible on the drone imagery, as shown on the right, and their location and species marked.



An example of drone imagery from South Walney in 2018.

Photo: Sarah Dalrymple.

The quadrat counts followed the standard method in Gilbert et al. (1998)⁶, as has been done at South Walney since the year 2000, and were carried out every year apart from 2021, when only a drone survey was undertaken in an attempt to minimise disturbance to the colony. The standard count unit for these species is the Apparently Occupied Nest (AON).

Table 1: Comparison of quadrat and drone counts of AON for two gull species, showing figures for 0.7 multiplier and percentage difference for the two count methods.

Site and Year	Quadrat count	Drone count	0.7 of Drone Count	% difference of quadrat count and 0.7 multiplier
South Walney 2018	3379	5018	3513	-3.9%
South Walney 2019	920	1241	869	5.7%
South Walney 2020	993	1091	763	26.2%
South Walney 2022	956	1426	998	-4.3%
South Walney 2023	1466	1964	1375	6.4%
Rockcliffe 2023	190	251	176	7.6%

Additionally, in 2023 I carried out a drone flight at Rockcliffe Marsh Gull Colony, in North Cumbria, with the help of Cumbria Wildlife Trust staff, and was given the results of the usual colony survey to compare.

Species of gull are not differentiated in these counts; although this can be done from drone imagery, it is not possible during a quadrat count to reliably tell apart Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed AON. Instead, a ratio of the two species is calculated from some other method (counting from a vantage point, or in this case, from drone imagery) and applied to the final result. Therefore, the following counts shown in Table 1 are the combined number of AON from the two gull species.

Five of the six drone results with the 0.7 multiplier lie within 8% of the results of the quadrat count. The exception to this is the

⁵ Corregidor-Castro A, Riddervold M, Holm TE, and Bregnballe T. (2022). Monitoring Colonies of Large Gulls Using UAVs: From Individuals to Breeding Pairs. *Micromachines*, 13: 1844.

⁶ Gilbert G, Gibbons DW, and Evans J. (1998). *Bird Monitoring Methods: a manual of techniques for key UK species*. RSPB.

2020 results; due to COVID lockdown at the time, I undertook the quadrat counts on my own rather than with a small team, and by looking at the results, this seems to have had an impact on the accuracy of the quadrat counts.

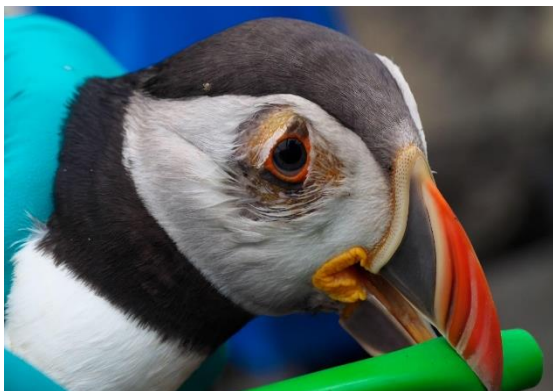
These results confirm the study published by Corregidor-Castro et al. (2022) and suggest that applying a 0.7 multiplier to aerial counts of a colony of Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls gives a good result when compared to the traditional ground-based counts.

An observation of a potentially undescribed symptom of disease in Atlantic Puffins

Lila Buckingham, Chris Heward and Robin Ward, Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group

The Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group (TIARG) undertakes annual week-long visits to the Treshnish Isles (Argyll, Scotland) to monitor and ring breeding seabirds during late June-early July. We did not notice any signs of HPAI (i.e., high numbers of dead seabirds, or any symptoms in live birds) during our visits during either 2022 (see our [report](#)) or 2023. During our visit in 2023, however, we noticed a previously unobserved condition within the **Atlantic Puffin** (*Fratercula arctica*) population on Lunga. There were a relatively large proportion of individuals in which feathers around the eyes were missing or apparently matted, and, in some cases, with breeding ornaments missing (see images below). This condition was observed in up to 12-15% of individuals in some sub-colonies. TIARG have not observed this condition in previous years, although the National Trust for Scotland had observed it within Puffins breeding on Staffa during the 2022 breeding season (Emily Wilkins, pers. comm.). Despite communicating widely with other seabird ringers and researchers, no one appears to have observed this condition in Puffins from other breeding colonies.

It is unknown what caused this condition in Puffins attending the breeding colonies of the Treshnish Isles and Staffa. Ticks appeared to be more prevalent on Lunga during our 2023 visit, particularly on Puffins, with the area around the eye most associated with tick infestation (see images below). There is therefore a possibility that this condition was caused by a previous tick infestation, yet most Puffins with the condition no longer had visible ticks attached in this area. Given that this condition has not been seen in Puffins before and, as it coincides with the emergence of HPAI within UK-breeding seabirds, it is possible that it could be an emerging symptom of this virus strain. It would be informative to sample individuals afflicted with the facial condition for antibodies of HPAI during the 2024 breeding season.



Four images of Puffins taken on Lunga during 24-30th June 2023, showing bare skin and 'wetness' around the eye or (lower right) an individual with heavy tick infestation. Photos: Andrew Carter and Chris Heward.

Forth Seabird Group Counts 2023

Terita Deare, Forth Seabird Group

Introduction: The legacy of the Forth Seabird Group (FSG) contribution to the BTO/JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) traces back to 1959 when Bob Smith conducted the first seabird counts on the Forth Islands in Scotland. His pioneering work laid the foundation for understanding the dynamic seabird populations inhabiting the Inner-Forth Islands. Bob Smith's dedication to this cause led him to become a founder member of FSG in the mid-1990s, cementing the group's commitment to long-term seabird monitoring. FSG's commitment to conservation has resulted in annual seabird counts being conducted without interruption, with the exception of 2020 due to government-imposed COVID restrictions. Over the years, these counts have provided crucial insights into the health and trends of seabird populations in the region.

Methods: Efficiency remains paramount in FSG's efforts, particularly concerning the comprehensive counting of the islands. Overcoming the logistical challenge of optimising boat hire costs, FSG successfully conducted surveys of Inchkeith, Inchcolm, Carr Craig, and Haystack within a single day during the month of June. This required a minimum of 12 individuals; however, this year, FSG marshalled a team of 18 dedicated participants. The team was divided, with half focused on Inchkeith and the remaining half attending to the other islands. Furthermore, Inchgarvie was meticulously surveyed over half a day, ensuring accurate data collection. The partnership between FSG and Edinburgh Marine Academy at Port Edgar Marina facilitated seamless boat hire, enhancing the practicality of FSG's operations and contributing significantly to the survey's overall success. Surveys were conducted through a combination of boat-based assessments and on-foot visits to the islands in order to count the nests for various species. The teams successfully counted the nests of **Northern Fulmar** (*Fulmaris glacialis*), **Razorbill** (*Alca torda*), **European Shag** (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*), **Great Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), **Black-legged Kittiwake** (*Rissa tridactyla*), **Herring Gull**, **Lesser Black-backed Gull** and **Great Black-backed Gull** (*Larus marinus*). Please note **Common Guillemots** were counted as individuals on the cliffs. On Inchkeith and Inchcolm islands, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls have not been regularly counted and have been omitted from the results. Additionally, advice from the RSPB and UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH) stated **Atlantic Puffin** burrows should not be counted due to the risks associated with HPAI.

Results and Conclusion:

Table 1. Results of seabird counts 2023 for the non-SPA Forth islands.

2023	Inchkeith	Carr Craig	Inchcolm	Haystack	Inchgarvie	Total
Fulmar (AOS)	137	0	121	0	124	382
Cormorant (AON)	143	43	0	2	0	188
Shag (AON)	390	12	35	0	0	437
Great Black-backed Gull (AOT)	10	1	6	1	4	22
Lesser Black-backed Gull (AOT)	breeding, not counted	3	597	3	39	642
Herring Gull (AON)	breeding, not counted	37	498	19	36	590
Kittiwake (AON)	480	0	76	0	0	556
Razorbill (AOS)	83	0	30	0	0	113
Guillemot (IND)	170	0	0	0	0	170
Puffin (AOB)	breeding, not counted	0	0	0	0	

Between 2022 and 2023, fluctuations were observed in seabird populations across the surveyed sites (Figure 1; Figure 2, Table 1). Overall, there was a decrease in counts for most species, with exceptions being Shags and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, which showed an increase. These trends may signify changes in populations of seabirds in the Firth of Forth due to causal factors such as HPAI.

In conclusion, understanding these trends is crucial for effective surveillance and management strategies going forward on the Forth Islands.

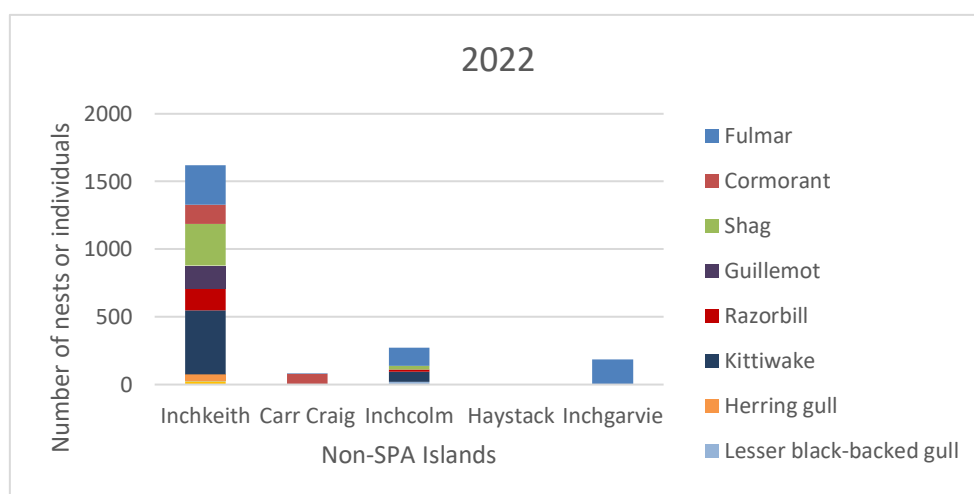


Figure 1. Results from the June 2022 survey season of nesting seabird species on non-SPA Forth Islands.

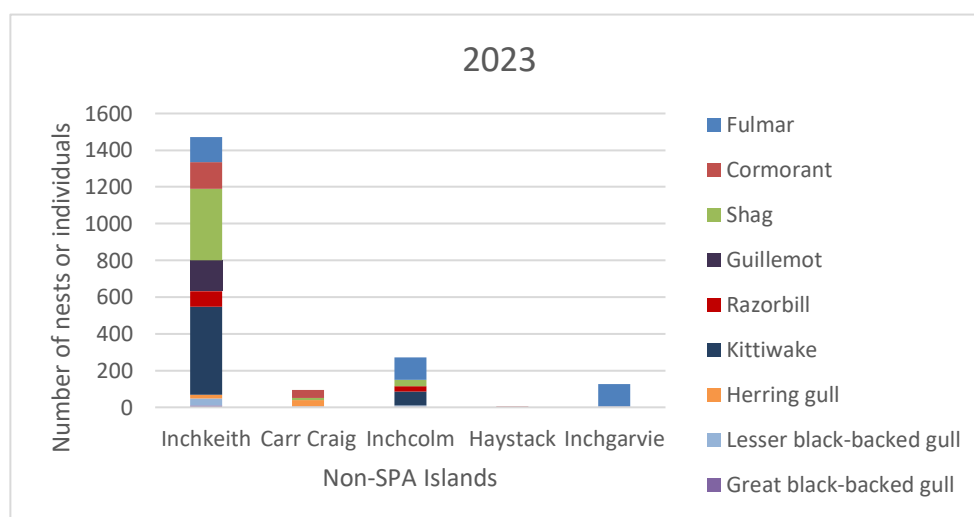


Figure 2. Results from the June 2023 survey season of nesting seabird species on non-SPA Forth Islands.

Acknowledgement

FSG were delighted to be awarded an emergency one-off grant from The Seabird Group to cover the costs of boat hire incurred when carrying out the annual seabird counts on the non-SPA islands in the Firth of Forth i.e., Inchkeith, Inchcolm, Inchgarvie, Carr Craig and Haystack. FSG receive a grant from NatureScot to cover the costs of carrying out the annual seabird counts on the islands in the SPA i.e., Bass Rock, Craigleith, The Lamb, Fidra and Inchmickery.

FSG have posted all of their results for the 2023 seabird counts (i.e., for SPA and also non-SPA islands) into the SMP database. The results will also be published in the FSG's own annual report at the end of the year.

Stroma HPAI visit

Rob Hughes, Caithness Bird Group

Caithness Bird Group gratefully received an emergency HPAI Seabird Monitoring Grant from The Seabird Group to survey the island of Stroma off Caithness. Stroma was surveyed for the recent Seabird Count national census, so there was a baseline for HPAI comparisons. The main aim was to survey the skuas, gulls and terns, but we also counted all other seabird species as we went along. In June, the team crossed the Pentland Firth by boat to Stroma, one of the fastest tidal races in the World.

The data from this trip will be submitted to the SMP database to help understand the impact of HPAI on seabirds locally and nationally. Reassuringly the numbers of **Great Skuas** (*Stercorarius skua*) were similar to that recorded in 2017.

Highlights from the trip included a **Black-headed Gull** (*Chroicocephas ridibundus*) nest, where none were recorded during Seabirds Count.

Interestingly, the team also found a **Great Cormorant** nest, which appears to be the first pair to nest on the island. With a previous The Seabird Group grant, the Caithness Bird Group were able to confirm the first breeding of **European Storm Petrel** (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) on Stroma, and although not possible to fully survey them during this trip, they were heard calling from a burrow again during this trip.

Despite the high numbers of dead birds that were found on the Caithness beaches during the HPAI outbreak, it looks like Stroma itself has not been badly affected by HPAI and we hope this continues. Caithness Bird Group are very grateful to Willie Simpson for taking us across to Stroma and allowing us to land on his island.

Current and future monitoring of seabirds on the St Tudwal’s Islands

Rhys Goodhead

The St. Tudwal’s Islands (St. Tudwal’s Island East and St. Tudwal’s Island West) lie in Cardigan Bay, a kilometre off the coast of the Llŷn Peninsula near Abersoch, Gwynedd. The islands’ situation in the north of Cardigan Bay, provide a unique provision for some of the most easterly colonies of seabirds within the bay and was a site the SMP encouraged to survey.



St Tudwal’s East (left) and St Tudwal’s West (right) with the distinctive silhouettes of the Rhinogydd and Cadair Idris on the mainland behind. Photo: Rhys Goodhead.

Literature from the 1950s documented that the islands used to hold the largest **Atlantic Puffin** colony in North Wales, with significant numbers reported at the turn of the 20th century^{7,8}. However, when rats reached the islands in the 1940s they rapidly wiped out the burrow-nesting avifauna, and by 1951 there were no breeding pairs left. Now the islands still support thousands of breeding ground- and cliff-nesting seabirds⁹.

Data collected from 2021 for AON’s for St Tudwal’s West (Table 1.) provided the recent baseline required to establish the magnitude of the HPAI impact on the colony. The Emergency HPAI Seabird Monitoring Grant facilitated access to these islands which include species that the SMP HPAI Task and Finish Group highlighted. After ascertaining the method used in 2021 and the date the data was collected, the survey was undertaken on the

exact same weekend as the initial counts. Consistency aided confidence in comparing counts; however, going forward the grant will enable far more complete colony counts (largely following Census Method 3 in the Seabird Monitoring Handbook¹⁰).

Table 1. A comparison of 2021 baseline data, to the recent 2023 visit

AON	Great Black-backed Gull	Herring Gull
2021	40	300
2023	38	329

These data are congruent with the visit reports from this year, insofar as, no HPAI related deaths have been noted on either of the St Tudwal’s Islands. As an isolated archipelago adjacent to a popular holiday destination, the monitoring of this breeding

⁷ Thearle RF, Hobbs JT, and Fisher J. (1953). The birds of St. Tudwal Islands. British Birds, 46: 182-8.
⁸ Williams G, Lovegrove R, and Williams I. (2010). Birds in Wales. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing.
⁹ Welsh Bird Report No. 30. (2016). Edited by Julian Hughes. Welsh Ornithological Society.
¹⁰ 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.

ground which sits within a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) provides an interesting data point for geographically important colonies on the fringes of human inhabitation.

This successful count satisfies the short-term aim of the grant, but The Seabird Group have enabled a fantastic capacity to undertake seabird monitoring work that would otherwise not be feasible to the appropriate standards. Beyond this single season benefit, it is anticipated to widen the scope of the monitoring to include the entire gull (*Larus fuscus*, *L. marinus*, *L. argentatus*), auk (*Uria aalge* and *Alca torda*), **Black-legged Kittiwake**, **European Shag** and **Great Cormorant** population on St Tudwal's East. Due to the relatively small colony size, it is not an unattainable ambition to attempt full island estimates of breeding seabird numbers. This would enhance the accuracy of assessing future impacts, global trends and novel stressors of their environment. Annual count data for the St Tudwal's Islands could also potentially provide key indicators for future assessment of rat eradication proposals, with plentiful rabbit burrows for prospective breeding **Manx Shearwater** (*Puffinus puffinus*). Regular colony monitoring could also inform locally important decisions on the impact of increased leisure use of the surrounding marine environment, as the breeding season coincides with an estimated > 40-fold increase in local population size. Thus, the future legacy of the grant will hopefully have long lasting and far-reaching impact on data collection in this nationally important Special Area of Conservation.

Guernsey

Jamie Hooper, La Societe Guernesiaise Ornithological Section

Introduction: The 2023 Breeding Bird Survey of Guernsey and Herm was completed in mid-June to provide comparable data with previous surveys undertaken in recent years. The project was made possible after a generous grant was paid to La Société Guernesiaise (the local equivalent of a UK Wildlife Trust) by The Seabird Group in response to the HPAI outbreak.

Method: The survey covered the main islands of Guernsey and Herm, including Jethou, The Humps, Lihou and other associated islets.

Surveying was predominantly undertaken from boats, one based in the south-west was used for Guernsey's south coast cliffs and another, based on the east coast, visited Herm, Jethou and nearby islets.

Lihou Island, situated off the west coast, was visited on a suitable low spring tide whereas two small islands to the north were assessed from Guernsey using a telescope.

The boat-based surveys were undertaken on 20th and 21st June, slightly later than the previous survey in 2021. This was due to tidal and weather delays. Lihou Island was counted on 16th June and the northern islets on 23rd June; all areas were therefore surveyed within a week.

Boat surveying can be difficult, particularly where inshore reefs impede inshore access. We used two surveyors to ensure all areas were counted and cross-checked, often fairly quickly as submerged rocks, tidal currents and fishing gear put pressure both on the boat operator and the counters.

Results: The general impression during the surveying was that seabird numbers were significantly down on 2021, with entire sections of cliffs being found almost (or completely) devoid of active nests. On Lihou Island, for example, the south side was as busy as normal but on the north side, which normally hosts good numbers of gulls (mostly **Herring Gull**), the traditional sites were vacant apart from two active nests. The east side was similarly quiet apart from a lone **Lesser Black-backed Gull** tending a nest with recently hatched chicks, right alongside the footpath. This nest was fiercely defended against every person walking past, including me, to the point of physical blows. It was therefore a surprise when I was informed that this nest had failed later in the season – the committed parents deserved a better outcome.

In comparing the 2023 figures with 2021, there were significant declines in many species, as shown in Table 1.

Most notably, Herring Gulls were down by more than one-third and **Shags** were down by more than 50%. **Great Black-backed Gulls** were down by 20% whereas Lesser Black-backed Gulls, which are the more mobile of the large gulls, were up by 60%.



Adult Lesser Black-backed Gull in Lihou Island's east coast, Guernsey in background. Photo: Wayne Turner.

Table 1. 2021 and 2023 totals for all areas.

TOTALS	Fulmar	Cormorant	Shag	Little Egret (individuals)	Common Tern (individuals)	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Herring Gull	Great Black-backed Gull	Guillemot (individuals)	Razorbill (individuals)	Puffin (individuals)	Oystercatcher
All areas 2023	35	15- 21*	111- 118	16	1	52	480- 529	61-62	255+	3*	5*	43-45
All areas 2021	35	23	246	9	4	32+	705- 752	77	36	18	25	32+
All areas 2015	62	26-31	440- 450	N/A	0	221- 261	1273- 1323	122- 137	130- 150	20	21	N/A

* Suspected underestimate

Although **Fulmars** appear to have declined over the last 20 years, numbers seem to be stable for the time being, as with **Cormorants**. **Common Tern** (*Sterna hirundo*) is a fickle local breeder, and a lone bird was actually a surprise after a small colony in Guernsey had declined as quickly as it appeared since 2020.

Local auk colonies are extremely difficult to count from a boat but landing on the breeding sites can cause unacceptable disruption, including lost or broken eggs. With this in mind, the figures are at best, an estimate. Tidal cycles and weather certainly can also influence the number of birds present at a colony or in the local vicinity at any one point. Despite these variables, **Razorbill** counts were very low, but **Guillemots** were significantly up on recent counts, with some areas seemingly bursting with birds.

In comparing the figures from the last Bailiwick-wide count, the last two surveys are placed in further stark context. Broadly speaking, the downturn in Shag and Lesser Black-backed Gull is 75%, Herring Gull is down 60% and Great Black-backed Gull and Fulmar have both halved.

Whilst **Puffin** and Razorbill are both showing signs of similar significant declines, the difficulties of obtaining accurate counts must be considered. The notable exception is Guillemot which has nearly doubled in the last decade – is this a genuine increase or just displaced birds from elsewhere?

Discussion: Seabirds around Guernsey and Herm have faced unprecedented issues over the last 20 years including:

- Exceptional storm events including the Great Seabird Wreck 2014
- Periods of high seawater turbidity
- Increasing human disturbance of breeding colonies and inshore waters
- Non-native predators such as Brown Rat and feral ferret
- Increasingly unstable weather during breeding season
- Loss of food waste from local landfill
- Changes in natural food sources due to climate change
- HPAI

At this stage, it is difficult to ascertain which of these factors is driving local declines in breeding seabirds; it is likely that a combination of most or all of them is causing the losses. More recently, whilst widespread die-off from HPAI has not been recorded in local populations, there has been a huge impact on the nearby Alderney Gannetries. It seems inevitable that other species will have been affected but with smaller numbers involved, the deaths may have passed unnoticed.

Whatever the reasons, Guernsey's seabirds are currently in a quite grave position. It remains to be seen whether the recent losses will continue or level out - or reverse. It is unfortunate that in waiting for further data, we may miss the opportunities to address those pressures which could be resolved if we choose to do so, such as human disturbance and non-native species.

Despite the currently depressing outlook for most species, the upturn in numbers of breeding Guillemots is a most welcome exception (Table 1). Elsewhere, there are still sites seemingly bucking the overarching trend; for instance, the small islet of Houmet Paradis, in the north-east corner of Guernsey was packed with half-grown gull chicks and as it was the last site to be counted in 2023, it provided some welcome relief.

Shiant Isles

Jim Lennon, Shiants Auk Ringing Group

The Shiants Isles are situated in The Minch off the west coast of Scotland. The islands hold more than 150,000 breeding seabirds with nearly all species bar terns present.

The Shiants Isles Ringing Group has been monitoring the archipelago's seabirds since the early 1970s, and on this year's two-week visit we were anxious to find out what the impacts of HPAI had been on its seabirds. We have a small boat with us to reach the main islands in suitable conditions, but not the more exposed colonies and the 'sharks teeth' outliers Galta Mor & Galta Beag where a substantial number of our seabirds breed. Support from The Seabird Group enabled us to extend our boat charter and reach these other parts to do additional colony counts and check the entire group close inshore for signs of HPAI.

The Galtas were counted for **Black-legged Kittiwake** and **Great Skua** (Tables 1 & 2). Due to the weather, timing and nature of the Galtas it was only feasible to count Great Skua and Kittiwake, and against national trend the Kittiwakes would appear to be doing okay.

In addition, Sophie Bennett (RSPB), was with us and spent some of her time doing full Great Skua breeding surveys on the three main islands (Eilean an Tighe, Eilean Mhuire, Garbh Eilean). She found 12 Great Skua Apparently Occupied Territories (AOTs) compared to the RSPB's 39 in 2015 (see Table 2). A decline of 69%. However, no dead birds were found, and we did ring some pullus that looked healthy enough. Also, there were non-breeders and or failed breeders present with c10 on Garbh Eilean.

Table 1. Kittiwake AONs on the Galtas, Shiant Isles.

	1986	1999	2015	2023
Galta Beag	45	106	136	193
Galta Mor	77	36	40	67

Table 2. Great Skua AOTs on Shiant Isles.

	1986	1999	2015	2023
Eilean an Tighe	1	1*	5	3
Eilean Mhuire	1	2	3	3
Garbh Eilean	3	24	30	6
Galta Beag	-	-	0	0
Galta Mor	-	-	1	0
Shiant Isles	5	27	39	12

*Note the Great Skua survey on Eilean an Tighe took place in 1995, not 1999.

Our inshore checks revealed very few dead seabirds and across the fortnight we only had one dead **Shag** and a few auks. There were fewer corpses than usual and this suggests the auks were being preyed on less by the Great Skuas.

Acknowledgements

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the crew of the Enchanted Isle (SeaHarris). Linda Wilson & Sophie Bennett, RSPB. The Shiant's Auk Ringing Group members 2023. The counters – principally Sophie Bennett & Noelia Dominguez Álvarez. Historic data via the SMP.

Breeding Reports

Calf of Man

Aron Sapsford (Ornithological Warden), Eleanor Grover, Catrin Ferguson, Anna Miall (Assistant Fieldworkers), Manx National Heritage & Manx Wildlife Trust

Colony counts or population estimates are undertaken in most years, using a combination of both land-based observations and boat counts; complete counts of **Fulmar**, **Shag** and auks are not possible from land only and the use of local charter boats is necessary. Little or no data on productivity rates is collected owing to the inability to view many of the seabird colonies from land, as well as a lack of fieldworkers to undertake such intensive and time-consuming studies.

Northern Fulmar: Population counts are undertaken in most years. A boat-based count on 12th June produced 92 Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS).

Manx Shearwater: Population estimates for 2021/2022 gave a range between 1000 – 1200 Apparently Occupied Burrows (AOBs). Burrow occupancy surveying during 2023 was lower than expected, however numbers of adults seen ashore during June and July were high, suggesting that similar numbers were present this season.

European Storm Petrel: Not yet proven to breed. Small numbers of birds are recorded regularly at night, attracted to tape-lure, between May – August each year.

European Shag: A total of 90 AON were recorded, a decrease of 17 AON on 2022 figures and the lowest ever total in the Calf's history. Productivity was extremely poor with only three successful nests from 26 monitored in two main colonies. A colour-ringing project initiated in 2021 was continued, aimed at investigating fledging success and juvenile survival, although only nine pulli were marked.

Herring Gull: A complete island count found 689 AON, with productivity appearing to be good across the island. A number of young birds were affected by HPAI during late summer.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Breeding numbers saw an increase to a minimum of 45 AON, with high productivity levels.

Great Black-backed Gull: A total of 50 AON were counted on the Calf, with an additional 20 AON on Kitterland, showing a slight increase on recent years.

Common Guillemot: Restricted to just two breeding sites on the north-east tip of the Calf, the population was estimated at 224 Individual Adults (IAs) in 2023, which compares favourably with an average of 178 IAs during the period 2013 – 2022.

Razorbill: Counts of individual birds ashore provided an estimate of 170 in 2023, a slight increase from 154 IAs in 2022 and comparable with the average of 175 IAs during the period 2013 – 2022. Birds were extremely late arriving into their colonies.

Atlantic Puffin: Following an absence of 26 years as a breeding species, several sightings of individuals on land, including one bird carrying nesting material, were made during early June 2021. Small numbers, up to 15 birds, were again seen in association with two potential breeding locations on the Calf, although no birds were seen ashore. A project to encourage Puffins to return to the



Catrin & Anna conducting Manx Shearwater surveying. Photo: Aron Sapsford.

Calf has been running since 2016, with porcelain decoy birds sited at three locations, as well as a sound system playing calls at the main site on the East coast.

Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grille*): One or two pairs were again seen to frequent a couple of sites along the north-west coast of the Calf.

Great Skua: One bird summered for the eighth consecutive year, being present from mid-April through to the end of July, with a second individual seen occasionally from late June until mid-July.

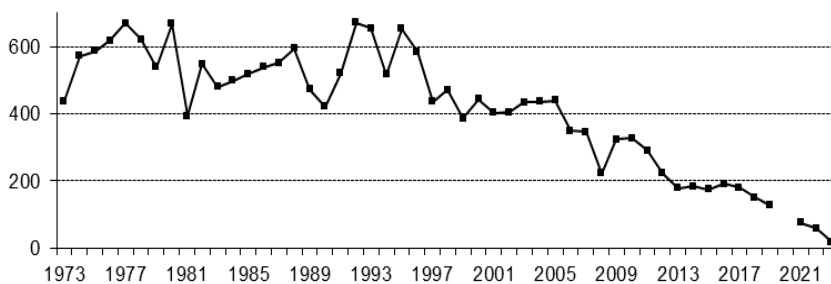
Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*): A total of 72 nests were located during 2023, somewhat less than the 87 found in 2022, with an additional eight 'old' nests located in spring 2023. Effort was however less, and we did not have a student placement this year dedicated to breeding bird monitoring.

Canna

Bob Swann, Highland Ringing Group

Monitoring in 2022 was restricted by a NatureScot ban as a result of a severe outbreak of HPAI in early summer. It was hoped that west coast colonies like Canna might escape, but large numbers of recoveries of ringed **Common Guillemot** suggested this was not the case.

It was therefore with some trepidation that we started our monitoring work this summer. We soon discovered that some species had indeed been badly affected. In 2021 we had 15 pairs of **Great Skua** breeding on the island. This year there were only six pairs, a 60% reduction. We could also see that many **Common Guillemot** ledges looked pretty empty. A check of our study plots showed that numbers had declined by 58% since 2021. **Razorbill** numbers were also well down on 2021 with a 32% decline. These massive declines are a real blow as these latter two species had in recent years showed signs of recovery from low levels reached in the mid-2000s. Even more worrying were the **Fulmar**. In 1995 a peak of 653 pairs were recorded on Canna, since then there has been a gradual decline in numbers. Between 2022 and 2023 this continued with a massive 68% decline. We could only find 19 breeding pairs, none of which reared a chick, the first total failure we have recorded for this species over a 50+ year study.



Number of apparently occupied Northern Fulmar sites on Canna 1973-2023.

We are unsure what is causing the Fulmar decline, which is also being noted at other sites along the west coast of Scotland. It is probably a combination of factors, including a reduction in food in the form of discards from fishing boats, predation from White-tailed Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and high mortality from long-line fisheries in the north Atlantic. HPAI may also have had an impact.

European Shags and **Black-legged Kittiwakes** continued their recent increases in numbers and **Atlantic Puffin** numbers still look very healthy. Shag, Kittiwake and **Herring Gull** all had successful breeding seasons with the number of chicks produced being well above their long-term averages. The surviving Common Guillemots also had a good season, hopefully these survivors have built up some immunity against further HPAI outbreaks. For most of the summer there was no evidence of HPAI affecting birds on Canna, however in late July at least 14 young gulls were found dead in the main colony and tests for HPAI proved positive. It appears this virus has not gone away.

Fair Isle

Alex Penn (Acting Warden), Fair Isle Bird Observatory

After two years of disruption and high mortality due to HPAI, 2023 thankfully saw no unusual mortality in seabirds on Fair Isle, and no further outbreaks. With the notable exception of **Great Skua**, seabirds returned to breed in generally good numbers after a late start, with **Northern Gannets** in particular returning in better numbers than anticipated after a significant die-off in 2022.

Productivity was disappointing almost across the board however, with figures for the majority of species significantly down on recent years. Many species appeared to be struggling to find food, with birds slow to initially settle, breeding adults returning with unsuitable prey items (such as Lumpsuckers or even Buoy Barnacles in the case of **Arctic Terns** (*Sterna paradisica*)) and sizeable chicks of many species apparently starving. Despite this, both Arctic Terns and Great Skua bucked the trend with improved productivity figures, and Northern Gannets look set to also have a successful season.

Northern Fulmar: Numbers in the population plots remained stable, increasing by 0.26% to 384 AOS, while productivity fell by 25.9% to 0.38 chicks fledged per AOS, the lowest figure since 2008.

Northern Gannet: The number of adults returning to breed was better than expected, with just a 2.9% reduction to 4827 AONs despite significant losses to HPAI in 2022. Productivity monitoring is ongoing, but it looks set to be a reasonable year in the colony areas.

European Shag: Poor weather meant access to the population plots along the isle's west coast was not possible this year, but numbers rose slightly in the productivity monitoring plots, where 0.75 chicks fledged per nest. Birds were extremely late to settle and breed this year, with it appearing at first that no birds would breed at all, so despite this being a 33% reduction on 2022's productivity figure, it remained a welcome sight to see reasonable numbers of fledged young around the isle.

Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*): Monitoring of all territories across the isle saw 22 AOTs produce eight fledged young – a productivity figure of 0.36. This is the lowest productivity for Arctic Skuas since 2018, with the food shortages affecting Kittiwakes and Guillemots seemingly causing knock-on issues for the skuas.

Great Skua: After being unable to monitor numbers in 2022, and high HPAI mortality in 2021 and 2022, a whole-isle count of 153 AONs was a better result than we feared, though still a 71% reduction in numbers since their all-time peak of 535 AONs in 2021. Productivity was reasonable too, with 0.46 chicks fledged per AON.

Black-legged Kittiwake: A complete washout for Kittiwakes in 2023 saw adults extremely slow and reluctant to settle back into breeding colonies, with just 21 AONs in the monitoring plot, a 53% drop since 2022. Many of these nests did not last long, with birds quickly abandoning, and no young reached fledging age.

Arctic Tern: After being late to return this spring, adults eventually settled in good numbers, with 295 nests counted in walkthroughs of the colony site on Bunness. Counts of fledged young resulted in a productivity figure of 0.278 – a 54% increase on 2022.

Common Guillemot: Numbers in the population plots dropped slightly in 2023, with a 10% reduction to 1117 individuals. Productivity was poor, as with all our monitored auks in 2023, with 0.21 chicks fledged per AOS being the lowest since 2017.

Razorbill: After a drop in 2022, this year saw a 29% increase in the population plot to 40 individuals. Productivity however was the lowest since 2013, with just 0.43 young fledged per AON.

Black Guillemot: A count of the east coast study plot saw 194 adults logged – an 11% increase on 2022. No productivity monitoring of this species is possible, with the vast majority of nesting sites inaccessible.

Atlantic Puffin: No population count was attempted in 2023. Productivity in the Greenholm monitoring plot was the lowest since 2017, at 0.57 chicks fledged per AON.



A dark-eyed Gannet gathering nesting material at Dronger. Photo: Alex Penn.



Arctic Skua at the airstrip. Photo: Alex Penn.

Shetland

Will Miles, Mick Mellor and Roger Riddington (SOTEAG), Jen Clark, Sally Reay and Mike Pennington (NatureScot), Kevin Kelly (RSPB) and Sheila Gear (Foula Ranger Service)

This summary includes key results up to the end of August

Extraordinarily, in 2023 to date there has been no widespread mortality from HPAI observed in any seabird species across Shetland. This was totally unexpected and in stark contrast to the extremely high and unusual mortality levels from HPAI seen in 2022, particularly in **Great Skuas**, **Northern Gannets** and **Common Eider**. The grim expectation was that HPAI infection and high seabird mortality would again be extensive and enduring in Shetland in 2023, starting in late March with the return of the breeders to land, but thankfully this did not occur. Apart from the sole exception of **Arctic Tern** chicks on Noss, across the whole of Shetland to date, there has been no evidence of unusually high seabird death rates attributable to HPAI this year at any of the annual population, productivity or beached birds standardised monitoring sites (e.g., Figure 1), or from elsewhere across the islands.

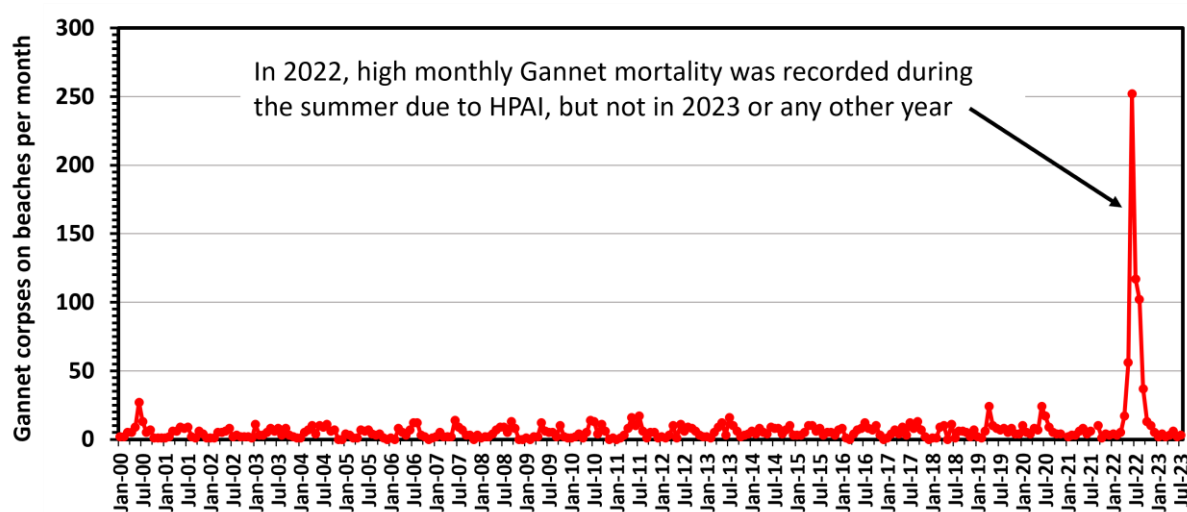


Figure 1. Total Gannet corpses found per month during the systematic Shetland beached bird survey, January 2000 to July 2023. Unprecedented numbers of Gannet corpses were found during the breeding season in 2022 due to HPAI, but so far not in 2023 – only normal, very low, numbers of Gannet corpses have been found this year, as has been the same for all other species too.

At the **Great Skua** and **Northern Gannet** breeding colonies there was much evidence of last year's pandemic, however. For example, at Hermaness the Great Skua population numbered just 208 AOT in 2023 (78% decrease since 2018), while on Noss the population total was just 69 AOT (85% decrease since 2018). Great Skua productivity on Noss was 0.23, low and similar to last year (0.29). The Gannet colonies at Hermaness were surveyed in 2023 using photographic methods and counts are still in progress, but provisionally indicate an overall decline of 40% since 2021, although with large variation between the different breeding stacks, slopes and skerries there. Surprisingly, a whole-island census of the breeding Gannets on Noss this year recorded a 7% increase on the 2022 count of 11,472 AON. The Shetland-wide Common Eider census was carried out in 2023 and the total count was 3403 birds; down by 6% compared with the most recent previous census (3639 birds in 2019), but a lower decrease than feared, given the high Eider mortality that occurred in March and April 2022 from HPAI.

Population and productivity monitoring of other species in Shetland in 2023 indicated that on the whole it was a poor season for raising young, but for reasons other than HPAI. In many species, notably Northern Fulmar, auks, and Black-legged Kittiwake, there was a general pattern of normal or slightly increased numbers of breeding adults but unusually low productivity.

Northern Fulmar: Numbers at the four annual monitoring sites across Mainland Shetland and Yell had hardly changed in comparison with last year, whereas numbers were low at Hermaness and Noss, and productivity at all these sites was generally low. There was no widespread occurrence of dead chicks at the colonies though, so it seemed unlikely that low productivity in 2023 was due to an outbreak of HPAI.

Common Guillemot: Numbers at Hermaness, Burravoe, Eshaness, Troswick Ness and Sumburgh Head were very similar to 2022. However, productivity at the Sumburgh monitoring plot was low at 0.48 (cf. 0.66 in 2022 and 0.67 in 2021), with many breeding

attempts failing at the egg stage. Chick diet at the Sumburgh plot comprised 72% gadoids (82% in 2022), 27% sandeels (16% in 2022) and 1% clupeids (1% in 2022).

Razorbill: Population numbers at the annual monitoring sites were similar to 2022 at Eshaness and Sumburgh, had increased at Burravoe and Troswick Ness, but were low at Hermaness, while Razorbill productivity at Sumburgh was unusually low at 0.14 (cf. 0.59 in both 2022 and 2021) because many breeding attempts failed at the egg stage.

Arctic Tern: Birds at Noss were slow to return and took a long time to settle, but although they laid later than normal the number of pairs was unexpectedly high, with the count of 92 AON up from 73 in 2022. However, chick mortality was high during the first two weeks after hatching and final productivity was depressingly low at 0.03 (cf. 1.09 in 2022). Three dead chicks were sampled and tested for HPAI, with two of the three testing positive - the only proven case of HPAI in seabirds in Shetland to date in 2023. On Mousa, Arctic Terns were late to arrive and slow to lay, but numbers were similar to 2022. Only a small number of chicks successfully fledged though, since many young were predated, with otter the likely culprit. Anecdotal observations suggested that productivity was apparently also low at most of the main colonies elsewhere around south Mainland Shetland.

Black-legged Kittiwake: Numbers had increased around southeast Yell, stayed the same as 2022 around Fetlar, but had decreased slightly at Hermaness, Noss and in south Mainland Shetland. Productivity was low at all sites, but dead chicks were few and at Sumburgh Head the low productivity this year was due to intensive and systematic egg predation by Common Ravens (Figure 2).

European Shag: A notable exception, in that population counts were generally high, with increases recorded at Noss, Sumburgh Head, No Ness, Fetlar, southeast Yell and in southeast Mainland Shetland in comparison with 2022. The increase in numbers at some sites was dramatic, for example the total count of Fetlar was 387 AON, up from 250 in 2022, and at No Ness the count was 166 AON, up from 97 in 2022, while the count on Noss of 121 AON was the highest site total recorded since 1984. Shag productivity at Burravoe and Sumburgh was similar to 2022, unlike the decreases seen in annual productivity in many other species.

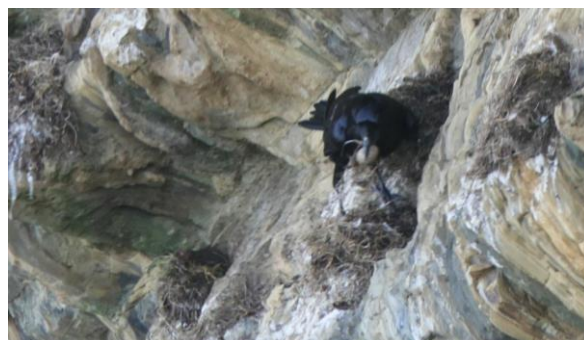


Figure 2. Raven predating Kittiwake eggs at Sumburgh Head, Shetland. At least 30 Kittiwake AON were predated at this study site during a one-week period of rapid egg loss and nest abandonment mid-season, in early June. Photo: Mick Mellor.

Skokholm Island

Richard Brown and Giselle Eagle, Skokholm Wardens

Although in reality it will be a few more weeks until the last of our fledglings have departed, it feels like the end of the seabird season, with the island's tracks littered with fewer and fewer downy trousered **Manx Shearwater** fledglings and infrequent encounters with plump **European Storm Petrel** chicks exercising around the walls. Although we can look back over a decade of generally positive seabird news, this year saw the majority of counts down on those logged recently. The **Common Guillemot** mean dropped to 4992 adults on ledges, this 9.5% down on that of last year and the lowest total for four years. The **Razorbill** total was 3552, this 10.4% down on 2022, but still the second highest to date. A total of 195 apparently occupied **Fulmar** sites was 12.9% down on last year and the lowest in seven years (albeit the seventh highest on record). It is of course tempting to link these declines with the ongoing HPAI disaster, however there was no evidence here of HPAI in these species. That hundreds of Guillemots washed up dead along south Wales during the post-breeding period is cause for concern.

The only confirmed cases of HPAI on Skokholm this year were of a **Black-headed Gull** found along the South Coast Cliffs (this a species which does not breed here) and of an adult **Great Black-backed Gull** found in the colony. Three further Great Black-backed Gulls tested negative, as did one found dead on Lundy (the latter alongside **Herring Gulls** which tested positive). Despite excellent productivity over the last decade, there was a significant decline in the Great Black-backed Gull breeding population; a total of 66 nests was 15.4% down on last year and the lowest total since 2008, this the fifth straight year with a decline following highs of 93 nests in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Productivity was also down, with 1.05 fledglings per pair 27.1% below the 2013-2022 mean. Lesser Black-backed Gull numbers were also down, with a corrected vantage point mean of 715 being 14.2% below that of last year and

the lowest total for well over 50 years. Conversely a mean Herring Gull count of 309 nests matched that observed last year and was fractionally up on a 2013-2022 mean of 301.2. Herring Gull productivity was 0.78 fledging per pair, this up on a mean of 0.69, whilst Lesser Black-backed Gull productivity was 0.70, this up on a mean of 0.37.

The peak whole Island **Atlantic Puffin** count came in at 12,192, this the highest Skokholm day count since 1934. Puffin productivity of 0.79 fledging aged chicks per pair was very close to a 2013-2022 mean of 0.76. Razorbills nesting amongst boulders had a poor breeding season, with only 27% of pairs producing a jumpling; three dead or dying chicks in a row led to HPAI concerns. However, these birds tested negative, an unfortunately timed period of poor weather perhaps responsible for some of the losses in an area where water often pools. Razorbills on the cliffs proved much more successful, with 70% of pairs producing a jumpling, this being the highest observed for five years.

Playback monitoring in the Manx Shearwater plots suggested that the population of approximately 89,000 pairs remains stable, with the number of responses almost exactly matching that recorded in 2019. Productivity was below average, at least in part due to a pair of Great Black-backed Gulls nesting adjacent to the Lighthouse which are proving adept at digging chicks from their chambers. The nocturnal mist netting of Storm Petrels in South Haven has proven exceedingly productive this decade, however catches during the last two years have more than halved in size; it is tempting to link these declines to HPAI, however there is again no evidence of such and the transect playback surveys again suggested that the breeding population is stable. There were Storm Petrels in nearly all of the traditionally monitored productivity sites and the breeding season has proven to be excellent, with productivity at the time of writing being 0.80. Although numbers were down, mist netting in South Haven did produce some exciting results and we encountered several Storm Petrel ringed as chicks in previous years; most notably we retrapped chicks which fledged from Petrel Station box 11 in 2019, 2020 and 2021. The Petrel Station population continues to grow, with five of the 119 nest boxes containing fledglings this year (there were an additional two egg stage failures and a total of 64 boxes showed signs of occupancy at some point). Given the success of the original, permission was granted for Petrel Station II which is currently appearing along a wall at the farm. Being at the farm will mean that we have a mains(ish) electricity supply which will benefit future monitoring.



Building Petrel Station II. Photo: Giselle Eagle.



This year's chick from Petrel Station II. Photo: Giselle Eagle.

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.

Dr Jennifer Lavers, Researcher

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB/ROLE?

Healthy Country Plan Coordinator, **ETNTAC**, Adjunct Lecturer, Gulbali Institute, Charles Sturt University, Team Leader, Adrift Lab

WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE?

Co-ordinating the Adrift Lab, including our annual April and October field seasons on Lord Howe Island. Each year for over a decade, we've travelled to the island at the exact same time of year to undertake sampling and monitoring following very specific protocols. This is what makes this long-term project and dataset so reliable: things have always been done in a consistent manner. In April, our field day starts at 6am – each team member is allocated a beach they need to check, we're looking for shearwaters that failed to fledge and have washed-up dead/dying. Our field day ends in the colony, under the Kentia Palm forest canopy, late at night banding and measuring the chicks that are headed to the beach. The 12 hours in between these two sampling events are often quite hectic - a flurry of tissue samples, measurements, photographs, and the occasional slice of cake.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE JOB/ROLE?

Building a sense of community: watching students and community members involved in the project grow from inexperienced field assistants to fully fledged (pun intended) data collectors who know every precise detail of our routines and methods. They become this well-oiled machine, processing samples in the most rigorous way which still making time for plenty of laughter and sharing of stories. It's lovely to sit silently some days and watch these accomplished, beautiful people dutifully carry out their roles with pride, skill, and love for nature.



Jennifer Lavers. Photo: Silke Stuckenbrock.

ARE THERE PARTS THAT ARE PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING?

As a Supervisor, I've personally struggled with many issues that directly affected my ability to support students. For example, I have a number of chronic, degenerative illnesses that increasingly limit how much I can type and (sometimes) whether I can even walk in the morning. I think everyone would agree that both of these skills are essential to writing papers and completing field work, yet I hid much of this from my team for years because I felt like I had no other option. This meant I couldn't be my full, real self on countless occasions. Over time, a number of my students eventually learned of my struggles, and the kindness they showed me (*that we showed each other*) consistently demonstrated that shared understanding and mutual respect is what leads to the most rewarding and productive working relationships.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS OR ATTRIBUTES FOR SOMEONE IN YOUR ROLE?

Being humble. Putting the aspirations and needs of others at the forefront of every decision: being willing to forgo accolades and opportunities so that others (who need them far more) can benefit and be lifted. On that note, I'm glad to hear one of our incredible Adrift Lab students will also be profiled here (see the Seabird Paper Roundup below) – her voice needs to be heard far more than mine! 😊 My role is really just to point to them and say "look over there, and be willing to really listen".

WHAT WAS YOUR CAREER PATHWAY TO THIS POINT?

Oh dear, do I dare tell you a really embarrassing story? I grew up in the Canadian Prairies and did not see the ocean until I was about 21 years old. I knew nothing about marine science, all of the courses I completed as an undergrad focused on boreal ecology: bears, foxes, and ducks. On my first trip to Newfoundland (a holiday) I was excited to go on a whale watching tour, to see Humpbacks and Atlantic Puffins for the first time. About halfway through the tour, I said to the captain that I was disappointed because I hadn't seen any Puffins yet. He looked at me totally perplexed and said "they're everywhere!". Turns out, we'd been surrounded by them the entire time, I just didn't realise because I thought Puffins were the size of an Emperor Penguin (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) and kept waiting to see an enormous seabird swim by. Of course, I now know they're the size of an orange and indeed – they really were EVERYWHERE that day. I think it's hilarious that a few years later I was enrolled in a PhD in marine science in Newfoundland (of all places) with my project focused on Puffins (well, Razorbills). The lesson: it's often not about what you know. What matters is your willingness to embrace new challenges, be open minded and willing to learn from those around you, and once you find your passion (turns out, mine was seabirds, I just didn't know for a long time), chase it to the ends of the Earth.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE CAREER GOALS?

Seabirds are my life, and I'm immensely proud of the Adrift Lab team and long-term datasets we've built (some are now approaching 20 years and the largest datasets of their kind in the Southern Hemisphere). It's important to recognise this phenomenal effort and the legacy of these projects through continuing to build on the momentum and knowledge. Thus, in 10 years, the Adrift team will still be here – likely even larger and more diverse than ever (and the better for it) as we find new and better ways to collaborate with Traditional Owners, scientists and community members from myriad disciplines. To address global environmental challenges, we all have a role to play and my goal is to help people envision a space for themselves.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WORKING TOWARDS A SIMILAR CAREER?

Your supervisor(s) are real people who grapple with many of the same issues that affect graduate students and postdocs. We almost never speak of this, and for me, I still struggle to accept that in 4 years, I never stopped to ask my PhD supervisor if he was okay¹¹. Was his cup “full enough” to be able to dedicate time, energy and resources to lifting me and my project? These kinds of one-way, extractive relationships are never okay. As a community, equity and inclusion means everyone. Student-supervisor relationships are about team building – your best, strongest ally is the one who feels you're as invested in them as they are in you.

Seabird Paper Roundup

Jacqui Glencross, ECR Representative

Seabird Paper Roundup is a section included to help Early Career Researchers promote any recent seabird papers they have produced. We hope this can help highlight 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.

ECR PAPERS

Ausems, A.N.M.A., Kuepper, N.D., Archuby, D. *et al.* 2023. Where have all the petrels gone? Forty years (1978–2020) of **Wilson's Storm Petrel** (*Oceanites oceanicus*) population dynamics at King George Island (Isla 25 de Mayo, Antarctica) in a changing climate. *Polar Biology* **46**, 655–672.

A team of 20 authors combined all data on Wilson's Storm Petrels breeding on King George Island, Antarctica to study their population dynamics. The main findings were that the population appears to have crashed, showing a 90% decline in adults caught and nests found. They also found that environmental factors affecting food availability and local weather conditions (primarily snow cover) most strongly affected the population dynamics. Under continuing global warming, the population is unlikely to make a recovery, as not only breeding conditions may deteriorate but they also found indications that non-breeding factors may affect the population decline.

Osiecka, A.N., Briefer, E.F., Kidawa, D. *et al.* 2023. Seabird's cry: repertoire and vocal expression of contextual valence in the **Little Auk** (*Alle alle*). *Scientific Reports* **13**, 8623. **AND**

Osiecka, A. N., Briefer, E F., Kidawa, D. and Wojczulanis-Jakubas, K. 2023. Social calls of the Little Auk (*Alle alle*) reflect body size and possibly partnership, but not sex. *Royal Society Open Science* **10**, 230845.

Little Auks are very colonial, most numerous Arctic seabirds maintaining stable partnerships over the years, where both partners coordinate self- and chick-care. These works explore socially important information in the Little Auk calls: we show that they have a complex vocal repertoire and are capable of carrying emotional information in their calls. Calls carry no information on sex, but some inform on the callers size, and the partners match in some parameters of their calls, sounding more similar than random birds.

de Jersey, A.M., Lavers, J.L., Zosky, G.R. and Rivers-Auty, J. 2023. The understudied global experiment of pollution's impacts on wildlife and human health: The ethical imperative for interdisciplinary research. *Environmental Pollution* **336**, 122459.

¹¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-019-0695-2>

This perspective piece discusses that no one field of research has the practice's and methodologies required to encapsulate the diversity of health consequences from exposure to pollutants. Given the magnitude of pollutants, there is a great positive benefit to researching the wildlife experience and integrating the use of medical techniques to ecological research. Seabird populations offer a unique opportunity to investigate environmentally relevant animal models of varying exposure to pollutants (e.g., plastics) to begin to work towards a comprehensive understanding of ecotoxicology.

Darby, J.H., Clairbaux, M., Quinn, J.L., et al. 2023. Decadal increase in vessel interactions by a scavenging pelagic seabird across the North Atlantic. *Current Biology* **33**, 1–7.

*Darby et al. use a 16-year tracking dataset to show that **Northern Fulmars** from four colonies across the North Atlantic increasingly encounter vessels at night. Fulmars are known scavengers of fishing waste, and vessel attendance leads to reduced range and time foraging. However, it also increases bycatch risk and may signal decreases in natural prey.*

OTHER PAPERS

Birkhead, T.R. and Montgomerie, R.D. 2023. Census counts of **Common Murres** adjusted for timing of breeding are more accurate than counts based on calendar dates, *Ornithological Applications*, duad036.

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*, **26**, 425-427.

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

Rodríguez, A., Atchoi, E., Rodríguez, B., Pipa, T., Le Corre, M. and Ainley, D.G. 2023. Moonlight diminishes seabird attraction to artificial light. *Conservation Science and Practice*, e13014.

Seabird Group News

The Seabird Group Annual General Meeting

Save the date! The Seabird Group AGM will take place online again this year on **Saturday 25th November 3-5pm (GMT)**.

Instructions about how to join the meeting, and all relevant documents, will be emailed to all members prior to the AGM. You do not have to hold a Zoom account in order to be able to participate in the meeting.

Please direct any enquiries to either the Secretary (Annette Fayet, secretary@seabirdgroup.org.uk) or the Chair (Liz Humphreys, chair@seabirdgroup.org.uk).

We look forward to seeing you online!

Committee Nominations

We have five members of the Executive Committee who have reached the end of their term and we are now requesting that members of The Seabird Group consider proposing themselves for one of the following roles: **Chair**, **Secretary**, **Treasurer**, **Journal Editor**, and **Website Officer**.

Job descriptions for each of these roles can be found on our [website](#). We would recommend that potential candidates reach out to the current post holders, but for the role of Journal Editor, we suggest reaching out to the Assistant Journal Editor as well.

All applicants then need to email secretary@seabirdgroup.org.uk a short description of up to 200 words explaining why they want the role by the **31st October 2023**. Voting will be done online, and all candidates will be notified before the AGM. The successful candidates will then be proposed and seconded at the meeting to be formally made a member of the Executive Committee. We look forward to hearing from you!

Seabird Journal copy editors and book reviewer applications

Ruth Dunn, Seabird Assistant Editor

The Seabird Group continues to seek volunteer copy editors for Seabird, to assist the Editor and Assistant Editor with checking manuscripts for both general mistakes and deviations from the journal's house style prior to publication. If you have previous experience of copy editing, or an eye for detail, an excellent command of written English, and would be interested in helping out, please get in touch via journal@seabirdgroup.org.uk.

We are also seeking individuals who would like to review books for the Book Reviews section of Seabird. We are able to source copies of new seabird-related books and post these to volunteer book reviewers. Have a look at previous issues of our [journal](#) to see the kind of thing that we publish and please get in touch via journal@seabirdgroup.org.uk if you are interested in doing this.

We would like to amplify a diverse range of voices within our journal, including those of Early Career Researchers.

Guillemates

Jacqui Glencross, ECR Representative

Guillemates is an initiative to [create a support network for Early Career Seabirders](#). Individuals can sign up to be a part of the initiative. They will then be paired with another Early Career Seabirder and we encourage communication and support. The purpose would be to provide someone you feel like you can ask questions relating to seabird research, general Early Career questions and generally build your network.

For many Early Career Seabirders, it can be quite isolating and intimidating starting out in the field, especially if you are not part of an established group or working remotely. Guillemates aims to make you feel more included in the seabird community. So if you are an Early Career Seabirder and you would like to find your Guillemate, check your email for the sign up form which was recently circulated or email our ECR rep Jacqui Glencross at ecr@seabirdgroup.org.uk.

October Research Grant Call

The Seabird Group has the facility to award small grants each year to help with costs associated with research projects, or with survey projects for the UK national seabird census. Grants can cover travel, subsistence, and equipment, but staff costs are excluded. Priority is given to Seabird Group members working on Atlantic seabirds. We also award training grants to help support people to undertake voluntary seabird activities.

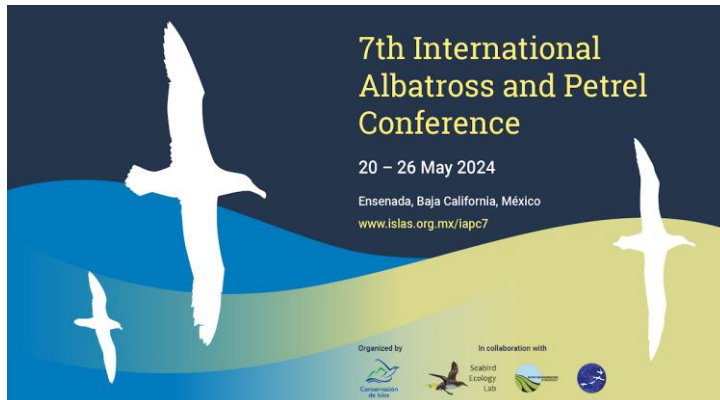
More information can be found on the Research Grants guidelines (link below). Applications should be submitted, preferably in electronic form, to the Secretary using the official application form available below.

The deadline for the next round of grants is 31st October. All applications will be circulated round the Committee and decisions taken. We aim to inform applicants of the outcome of their application within six weeks of these dates.

Details & application forms here: <http://seabirdgroup.org.uk/grants>

7th International Albatross and Petrel Conference (IAPC7)

Call for abstracts and registration opens 1st November 2023



The next in-person (no virtual option) conference is taking place from **20th-26th May 2024 in Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico.**

Abstract submissions are being accepted from 1st November 2023 – 1st February 2024. There are also travel awards being given for Early Career Scientists, both students and professionals, from all countries except those classified as high income by the [World Bank](#).

Pre-register [here](#) to receive IAPC7 updates as it develops!



Website: www.seabirdgroup.org.uk

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

Twitter: [@TheSeabirdGroup](https://www.twitter.com/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
Treasurer	Ian Cleasby (2023)	ian.cleasby@rspb.org.uk
Membership Secretary	Antoine Grissot (2026)	membership@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Seabird Editor	Viola Ross-Smith (2023)	journal@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Newsletter Editor	Amy King (2026)	newsletter@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Website Officer	Jeff Stratford (2023)	jeffstratford@gmail.com

Ordinary Members:

Assistant Newsletter Editor	Kirsty Franklin (2024)	kirsty.franklin@rspb.org.uk
Seabird Assistant Editor	Ruth Dunn (2026)	journal@seabirdgroup.org.uk
ECR Representative	Jacqui Glencross (2026)	ecr@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Social Media Manager	Katrina Siddiqi-Davies (2024)	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.