the Seabird Group

NEWSLETTER 155

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News

Farewell from our Chair

Liz Humphreys, Outgoing Chair of The Seabird Group

Sitting in a cupboard in my office, waiting to be dispatched to the BTO headquarters in Thetford where they will be archived for future generations, are the old hard bound copies of the minutes and correspondence which document the founding of The Seabird Group in 1966. This combination of volunteer and professional ornithologists had the foresight to recognise the importance of the UK and Ireland's seabird populations and the need to champion their conservation. One of their main aims was to pioneer the delivery of a complete census of seabirds breeding along our coasts and on our numerous islands. This was an incredible feat given the limited resources and people involved in seabird work at that time. Their vision gave rise to the Nature Conservation Committee (now Joint Nature Conservation Committee) taking a greater role in monitoring seabirds through further periodic comprehensive censuses of breeding abundance (the most recent being Seabirds Count as published in 2023) and the setting up of the Seabird Monitoring Programme, which targets a limited number of sites annually.

Since its inception, the group has grown in membership and is now a registered charity. All members of the Executive Committee take on the role of being trustees, as well as their designated roles, and do this in an entirely voluntary capacity. At the start of my time with The Seabird Group, there was a broad recognition that significant changes were needed around how the group operated e.g., ensuring GDPR compliance and moving over the management of the membership process from paper forms to a more secure online system. Whilst this isn't exciting work by any stretch of the imagination, and we do pay a small annual fee to the service provider, it ensures that the group doesn't compromise its charity status and we stay on the right side of the law. The unexpected benefit of this initiative was that Danni Thompson had the time to set up a website selling merchandise through Teemill which went on to raise additional funds for the group. We also made the decision to have monthly meetings of the Executive Committee and set up working groups to deliver set tasks - the former of which increased the administrative load to our highly capable former secretary Annette Fayet but ensured that progress was being made.

Viola Ross-Smith, as editor of the journal Seabird, restructured the editorial board including changes in the constitution to bring in an assistant editor, a role which Ruth Dunn has excelled at. Between them they have brought in additional initiatives such as a service which allows less experienced writers to get support with their manuscripts and the online early functionality on our website, whereby accepted manuscripts are publicly available before each journal is published. With unstinting support from Jeff Stratford all the back copies of the journal are online and now have associated DOIs which will undoubtedly affect how easily articles are located and cited. Jeff has also been incredible with new initiatives around getting conference talks online and uploading all the old newsletters, and he is currently working hard on transitioning the group's website to WordPress, which will allow editing to be undertaken without the need to be an IT expert.

Another area where we have made significant progress is around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (although Equity with hindsight seems a better word to reflect what The Seabird Group would like to achieve). Based on a few workshops that I initially ran in 2020 to have a better insight into LGBTQ+ and race issues, Lila Buckingham took up the new post of EDI officer and has absolutely run with it. We now have an Action Plan, a Code of Conduct and a new grant specifically designed to help people overcome financial issues when looking to gain experience of surveys and ringing through residential, but volunteer-based experiences. Another positive initiative, led by our Early Career Researcher Jacqui Glencross, was the launch of Guillemates which will buddy up new seabirders who can meet up regularly, whether online or face to face, and support one another.

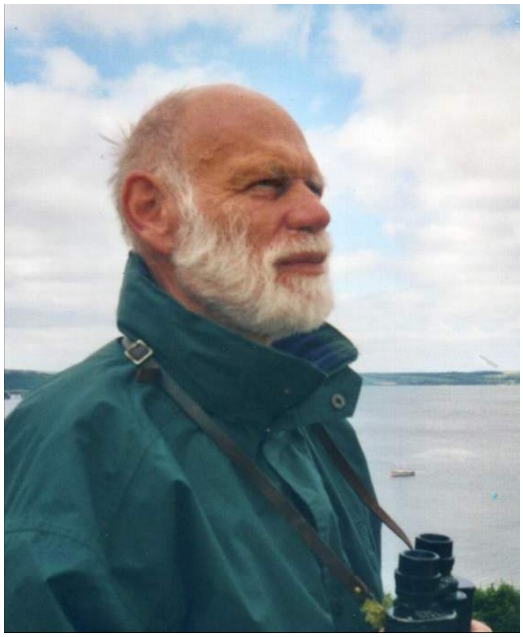
Possibly one the greatest challenges for The Seabird Group moving forward is to be absolutely clear on why EDI matters within our community and that any investment in this area doesn't deflect from the group's overall aims of the research and conservation of seabirds. Although the gender balance of people working on seabirds is far better than it was when the group was founded, there are still challenges around women's career progression if they have children. People who identify as being part of the LGBTQ community can still experience high levels of prejudice ranging from microaggressions in the workplace to the more alarming issue of being asked to visit, as part of their job, countries where homosexuality is illegal. It is also a collective shame that there is an absence of people of colour working on seabirds in the UK. Whilst we shouldn't forget the legacy of the founding members, we should acknowledge the world has changed significantly since then. The Seabird Group, by striving to be more inclusive and supportive, will be far better placed to help protect and conserve our bird populations for the future.

It has been an absolute pleasure to be part of the Executive Committee and I am simply delighted that Alex Bond will be taking over from me. Wishing the group the best of luck moving forward.

David Saunders MBE Obituary

Mike Harris

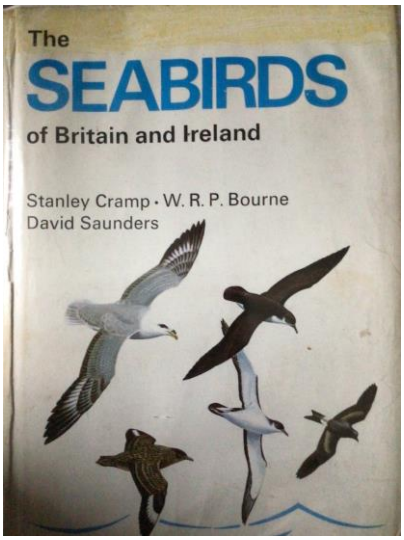
This article was written and submitted before the sad loss of Mike Harris. The Seabird Group wish to acknowledge Mike and his valued work and presence within the seabird community and an obituary will be included in the next edition of 'Seabird' journal rather than in this edition of the newsletter.



With the sudden death of **David Saunders** in October 2023, the seabird world lost one of the pioneers of seabird censusing. I first met David in 1961 when he was the first warden of Skomer National Nature Reserve, and I was a naïve PhD student working on the ecology of Herring, Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls. David remained on Skomer while I moved to be warden of the bird observatory on the neighbouring island of Skokholm. Over the following 60 years we regularly corresponded about a wide range of seabird topics, most recently on Gannet counts of Grassholm. Yet, his retiring nature meant that his key contributions to seabird research and conservation are far less well recognized than they should be.

After seven years on Skomer, David moved to become organiser of Operation Seafarer. Virtually everyone working on seabird populations will have typed 'Cramp, Bourne & Saunders (1974) *The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland*' into countless reference lists without ever meeting David in person. In many ways he was the lynchpin of Operation Seafarer and made ground-breaking contributions to modern seabird survey methods. These days organising a national seabird census is a highly professional undertaking with a team of staff and a big budget. Not so back in the 1960s and early 70s. David encouraged and cajoled people to get out into the field in their spare time to find seabird colonies and make counts. This was normally without payment, although

grants were given to cover boat expenses to some of the largest and/or remotest colonies. David, using his camper van as a base, then set about filling in the many gaps in coverage which tended to be in the most isolated areas with low densities of seabirds. Constraints on time and lone working had no part in this. Count and location data were meticulously entered onto record cards which seems very low-tech compared to today's methods. However, his cards proved invaluable when I carried out a survey of Shetland's seabirds in 1973. Seabird populations and counting methods have changed markedly since Operation Seafarer but the three subsequent national surveys: the Seabird Colony Register, Seabird 2000 and, most recently, Seabirds Count, have all benefitted immeasurably from David's groundwork.



Cramp, Bourne & Saunders (1974) The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland.

After Skomer, the family moved to the nearest village of Marloes and alongside his work for Operation Seafarer David became a storm-weather watcher at the coastguard station overlooking Midland and Skomer islands. He later became Director of the Dyfed Wildlife Trust, with his drive and efforts ensuring that the Wildlife Trusts in Wales worked together more effectively and that some of the most important nature reserves in West Wales were protected for future generations. After he left his role as director of the trust, he spent time lecturing on cruise ships around the world, accompanied by Shirley (his wife), as well as continuing to lecture across West Wales. He became known as an author, historian and a bibliophile writing several books on Welsh birds and islands. The latest (with Jon Green) 'Where to watch birds in Wales (5th edition)' was published to much acclaim in 2022. He retained a passionate interest in the islands of Pembrokeshire and remained in regular contact both with The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales as well as the Friends of the Islands. He received an MBE in 2003 for his services to nature conservation in Wales and in 2014 was given a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Welsh Ornithological Society. His instantly recognizable soft Gloucestershire accent will be dearly missed and, as one of the messages received by his family said, "Pembrokeshire won't be the same without him".

Seabirds Count: The completion of a monumental project

Daisy Burnell, Joint Nature Conservation Committee

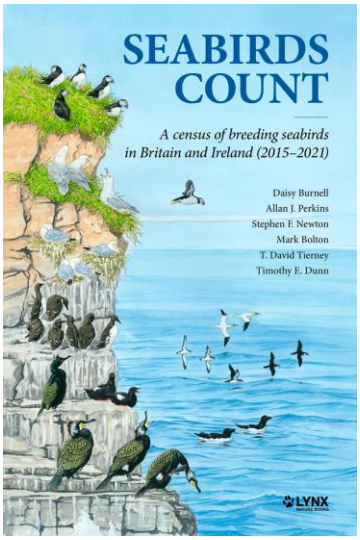
It will come as no surprise to many of this newsletter's readers that **Seabirds Count**, the 4th breeding seabird census for Britain and Ireland, was a project of epic scale. Over 1,000 volunteer and professional surveyors, spent thousands of hours trudging thousands of miles to count millions of breeding seabirds between 2015 and 2021. All their hard work and valuable data collected has taken two years to analyse, map and contextualise and has now finally been completed in the form of a published book.

This project was not a novel concept, instead it built upon the legacy of three previous censuses. The first being Operation Seafarer (1969-70) which was developed and conducted by none other than the, then, newly formed Seabird Group. With each iteration, censuses have improved survey methods, coverage, and analytical techniques to enable more accurate population estimates to be produced each time. Seabirds Count was no different, utilising new technology, survey techniques and analytical approaches for nocturnal burrow nesters and urban-nesting **Herring** (*Larus argentatus*) and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** (*L. fuscus*). Thus, allowing for more accurate and complete population estimates for these species, subsequently making Seabirds Count the most comprehensive census so far.

Like its predecessors, the aim of Seabirds Count was to produce up-to-date population estimates of all 25 regularly breeding seabird species. Additionally, it would aid our understanding, where feasible, of how these populations have changed over time and distributionally through comparison with previous censuses. To do this, almost 10,000 breeding sites and more than 5,500 1km urban squares were surveyed, resulting in over 40,000 records being submitted between 2015 and 2021.


Survey being undertaken on Harris and Lewis. Photo: Danni Thompson.

The results from this massive effort are now fully published in a book, and suggest mixed fortunes for Britain and Ireland's breeding seabirds. Across the entire survey, the populations of 11 species have declined between the last census (Seabird 2000, 1998-02) and Seabirds Count, five remained stable, five increased and the remaining four are uncertain due to changes



in methods minimising comparability. Geographically, the results are just as mixed with Scotland showing declines in 14/23 species whilst Wales has 11/21 species showing increases. This variability in the fortunes of our seabirds will pose challenging questions for future seabird conservation initiatives.

The results of this census will inevitably become the building blocks for seabird conservation over the next decade or so. They come at a key moment for providing a timely baseline from which impacts of new and emerging pressures, such as the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak and the expansion of the marine renewable industry, can be understood. They will also provide evidence to test the success of conservation actions across varying geographical scales, from local to international.

It goes without saying that this project would not have been possible without the support of the volunteers and professional surveyors, that went out and collected these vital data. So, just to end on a huge thank you to any members that participated in this project, we are truly grateful!

Ecogrief: What is the point?

Jacqui Glencross, Scottish Oceans Institute, University of St Andrews

A conversation with Dr Jennifer Lavers, Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation

Recently I attended a conference, and when someone asked me which species I worked with, she immediately offered me her condolences. We had just listened to a talk describing the **African Penguin** (*Spheniscus demersus*) population declines and this species is likely to be re-categorised to Critically Endangered within the next two years. I joked that I'll be very upset if my whole PhD is for nothing if the African Penguin goes extinct. But I wasn't really joking. A lot of the time I feel quite desensitised to the population trends and predictions as I robotically write the same depressing statistics and sentences over and over again in each of my thesis chapters. When in the field, I get the "pleasure" of witnessing the declines first hand and I feel helpless. No doubt, I'm lucky to have worked with and witnessed penguins in the wild, but when storms hit and we find the colony littered with dead chicks or adults barely alive after being attacked by a seal, I wonder how much longer they'll be around. It feels like an easier option would be to give up, start a small bakery, and live a life free of these worries.

I know I am not the only one to sometimes feel like this – many seabird populations are declining, and recent HPAI outbreaks have further impacted many species already under pressure. It seems like we are surrounded by bad news. Ecogrief, **the emotional response to environmental losses**, is common in our line of work, and as we head further into the climate, biodiversity, and pollution crises, there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. While awareness of ecogrief is growing and an increasing number of papers and articles are published on this topic each year, I'm not sure how many of us talk about this *regularly* – I know I certainly don't. How many of us have fallen into the trap of thinking, '*This is just how it is*,' suppressing those thoughts and feelings and then carrying on?

African Penguins on Robben Island, South Africa. Photo: Jacqui Glencross.

Our recent Seabirder Spotlight was Dr Jennifer Lavers, for years she's been a vocal advocate for raising awareness of ecogrief. On the topic of ecogrief amongst seabird researchers, Jenn recently said, 'Dedicating your entire career to something only to watch it degrade and decline, no matter how hard you work, how many papers you publish, [how much] sci-comm you do, or [how many] students you graduate. It's never enough, and yet the workload is often unbearable. Scientists cannot solve the world's issues; we can barely get out of bed some mornings. Watching the world shift this conversation and collective "hope" for solutions for a better world onto the next generation of young scientists is therefore very hard to watch.'

Jenn was my Master's thesis supervisor, and I remember having discussions with her about the topic in 2019. After writing an essay on plastic pollution and the fact policy is failing to do anything about it, I remember asking her how she does it. How does she go to work each day and continue researching something so catastrophic, destroying environments and killing animals in front

of our eyes? Her response was essentially: if she, or whoever else, doesn't do it, then we definitely won't be any better off – at least if we try, there is a chance. Jenn is also part of the Adrift Lab, whose motto is 'good people, good science'. And I think this is the answer.

We can't fix the world by ourselves. We possibly don't stand a chance of fixing it even as a collective. But if we surround ourselves with good people, we might just make a difference and, importantly, be able to hang on to a bit of our sanity. Most papers, conference talks and news headlines seem to be all doom and gloom, but there are positive stories out there. Hardworking, dedicated people who are building new seabird colonies from scratch, eradicating invasive species from islands, and finding new and innovative ways to communicate science more effectively so that others can better understand the urgency and role we all play in reversing poor environmental trends.

Towards the end of the conference, the discussion continued about the decline of each of our beloved study species. Eventually, someone stood up and encouraged us all to fight for our species because, in many cases, they have given us our PhDs, our jobs and our livelihoods. It is only fair we give them a chance to fight, too. So, to conclude, I would like to encourage you all to continue your amazing research/conservation efforts/campaigning while also prioritising compassion and support for your colleagues because this is a team effort. Broken people have little left to give and are leaving science and academia in droves. We must do more to lift and celebrate each other, or risk becoming a threatened species ourselves.

Bass Rock gannetry count in 2023

Mike Harris, Sarah Wanless (UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology), Emily Burton (Scottish Seabird Centre), Amy Tyndall, Caroline Nichol, Tom Wade (University of Edinburgh) and Sue Lewis (Edinburgh Napier University)

The authors of this article would like to acknowledge particularly the contributions of Mike Harris when completing this work. He was still interested in, and working on, seabird-based things right up until his death, and this was the last thing he helped to write.

In the last issue of the Seabird Group Newsletter, Maggie Sheddan and Jude Lane provided a vivid description of events on the Bass Rock gannetry in 2023, the year after the population was devastated by an outbreak of HPAI[1]. Clearly, to experienced researchers the colony looked and felt very different and the sixty-four thousand dollar question was how many occupied sites were there.

There is a long history of counting **Northern Gannets** (*Morus bassanus*) on the Bass Rock which shows that numbers have been increasing relentlessly for over 100 years such that each year Gannets have colonised new areas and the colony boundary has moved inexorably towards the summit of the rock[2]. In 2014, the Bass Rock overtook St Kilda (Scottish Western Isles) and Bonaventure Island (Canada) to become the largest northern gannetry in the world with a total population of over 75,000 Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS)[3]. Over the next few years Gannets filled in the few remaining gaps and by 2021 the colony appeared to be full up with the population estimated to be about 81,000 AOS[4].

Figure 1. A Bass Rock Gannet with neck & wings outstretched performing the bowing display. Photo: Greg MacVean.

Over the years counts of the Bass Rock have been made from land, sea and air but most recent counts have been made from images taken with digital cameras from fixed-wing aircraft. However, in June 2022 researchers from Edinburgh University made the first drone survey of the colony and this provided dramatic images of the Bass Rock at the height of the HPAI outbreak. A repeat drone survey was flown in 2023 and the resulting composite image, that covered about 85% of the total colony, enabled assessments to be made of the changes since the last Gannet survey

[1] Sheddan M & Lane J (2023) Bass Rock 2023. SGN 154, 1-2.

[2] Jeglinski JWE *et al*. (2023) Metapopulation regulation acts at multiple spatial scales: Insights from a century of seabird colony census data. Ecological Monographs, 93(2): e1569.

[3] Murray S *et al.* (2014) The Bass Rock – now the world's largest Northern Gannet colony. British Birds, 107: 765-769.

[4] Wanless S *et al.* (2023) Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*. In: Burnell, D., Perkins, A.J., Newton, S.F., Bolton, M, Tierney, T.D. & Dunn, T.D. (eds). *Seabirds Count, A census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland (2015–2021).* Lynx, Barcelona.

in 2014, the pre-outbreak population estimate in 2021, and the HPAI outbreak in 2022[5]. Key findings were that although the number of live birds present in the colony had increased by *c.*142% since 2022, the density of AOS was drastically reduced, and the population was estimated to have decreased by *c.*31% and *c.*36% since 2014 and 2021 respectively. The quality of the 2023 image was so good that it was possible to pick out birds in immature plumage in the colony. Even though the density of AOS had decreased there were no obvious clubs of non-breeding birds, rather immatures were scattered throughout the colony, a few apparently associating with adult plumaged birds. In contrast to the image for 2022 in which thousands of dead birds were visible[6], only a handful of birds appeared to be dead in the colony in 2023 and some of these could have been displaying (in a vertical view it is surprisingly difficult to distinguish a dead Gannet from one with neck and wings outstretched performing the bowing display (Figure 1) or menacing a neighbour[7]).

The figures for 2023 reported above are based on mean estimates of manual counts made independently by three observers i.e., the traditional counting method for Gannets. However, interpretation of the counts in particular confirming that many AOS were occupied by pairs and were bred at even though nest mounds were difficult to see, benefitted immensely from detailed observations from the Scottish Seabird Centre webcam made throughout much of the breeding season (Figure 2). In addition, the results of manual counts were used to sense check output from a novel deep-learning neural-network which aimed to automate the detection and counting of Gannets. Given the increasing importance of documenting changes in seabird populations in the aftermath of HPAI and in the face of multiple environmental and climatic threats, the development of automated counting techniques to complement observational data are an extremely timely and powerful addition to the monitoring toolkit.

Figure 2. The Edinburgh Napier University Bass Rock Gannet study colony in July 2023 as viewed from the Scottish Seabird Centre camera. © Sue Lewis.

A comparison of Kittiwake breeding success at urban and natural coastal colonies in Scarborough

Nathalie Stevenson (Shoney Wind Ltd), Nick Addey, Katie Hackett and Steven Wignill

Introduction

Between 2021-2023 Shoney Wind Ltd (SWL), undertook monitoring of **Black-legged Kittiwake** (*Rissa tridactyla*) in Scarborough to inform wider studies into Kittiwake thermoregulation, nest microclimate and artificial nesting structure designs[8,9,10]. During the same period, SWL has undertaken similar studies in Northumberland and Tyneside which are not reported here.

Breeding habitat quality strongly influences breeding success and therefore Kittiwake are under strong selective pressures to select optimal breeding habitat. Stevenson (2022)[11] outlines that heat and cold stress affect Kittiwake's daily energy expenditure budget, postulating that Kittiwake are capable of preferentially selecting nest site locations in the '*Goldilocks zone of least thermoregulatory stress'* i.e., where there is a net balance between heat stress from solar irradiation, and cold stress from wind exposure.

Rates of convective heat transfer increase with wind speed. Webb and King (1983)[12] outline that forced convection has a greater influence on rates of heat dissipation than conduction and evaporation and Elkins (1983)[13] states "*There is greater heat loss with a temperature of 0˚C and wind at 5m/s than in a calm environment with temperature of -20˚C*". Christensen-Dalsgaard *et al.*

[5] Tyndall AA *et al.* (in review) Quantifying the effects of Avian Influenza on the Northern Gannet colony of Bass Rock using drones and deep learning. Drones.
[6] Lane JV *et al.* (2023) High pathogenicity avian influenza (H5N1) in Northern Gannets: Global spread, clinical signs and demographic consequences. Ibis.
[7] Nelson B (2002) *The Atlantic Gannet.* Fenix Books, Great Yarmouth.
[8] Addey NW & Stevenson NJ (2021) Shoney Wind Report: Overview of breeding Kittiwake, Scarborough.
[9] Addey NW & Stevenson NJ (2022). Shoney Wind Report: Overview of breeding Kittiwake, Scarborough.
[10] Addey NW & Stevenson NJ (2023). Shoney Wind Report: Overview of breeding Kittiwake, Scarborough.
[11] Stevenson NJ (2022) Kittiwake thermoregulation and the importance of solar irradiation and wind exposure in nesting site selection. Report for RWE Renewables.
[12] Webb DR & King JR (1983) Heat transfer relations of avian nestlings. Journal of Thermal Biology, 8: 301–310.
[13] Elkins N (1983) *Weather and Bird Behaviour.* T & A D Poyser, London.

(2018)[14] showed that Kittiwake chick growth is negatively affected by increasing wind speed. Conversely, Kittiwake are cold adapted seabirds, susceptible to overheating from anomalous direct solar exposure. In higher latitudes Kittiwake experience longer solar days, with the sun lower on the horizon than in lower latitudes. Reduced cloud cover will worsen heat risk, which may be important under climate change scenarios. Thus, both heat and cold stress are a threat to breeding success. Kittiwake which can correctly select and defend a nest in the Goldilocks zone will minimise demands on thermoregulation and metabolism, which (if all other things are equal) should ultimately improve productivity and/or body condition at the end of the breeding season.

Outline of Scarborough survey locations and methods

We classified Scarborough subplots into two broad categories according to theoretical wind exposure as either a) more wind-exposed natural coastal cliff subplots, or b) more wind-sheltered urban built environment subplots. Monitoring included arrivals, departures, Apparently Occupied Nest (AON) counts and chick counts. 2021 surveys included all four sides of Spa Bridge and a single ENE facing subplot of Castle Cliffs which is *c.*1.2km from Spa Bridge. In 2022 four further urban colonies and a further Castle Cliffs SE facing subplot were surveyed. In 2023 a further three urban subplots were included: resulting in twelve urban subplots and two coastal subplots.

Surveys of wind exposed natural coastal cliffs included:

- Castle Cliffs ENE subplot (directly exposed to N-NE winds) with a manageable number of *c.*100 AON.
- Castle Cliffs SE subplot which is exposed to frequent SE winds (which are typically not as cold as ENE winds) with a manageable number of *c.*137 AON.

Surveys of more wind-sheltered urban built environment subplots included:

- Spa Bridge located close to the seafront within a bay that is partially sheltered by the Castle Cliffs Headland to the north, has multiple orientations (broadly north, east, south and west) which held 263-270 AON between 2020 and 2022.
- One inland town centre subcolony which had 68 AON in 2020 was surveyed in 2021. In 2022 this subcolony was split into three subplots as the three sets of ledges had different solar exposures. By 2023, six inland town centre locations were surveyed using nine subplots.

Kittiwake arrivals were monitored weekly in March (arrival dates for last six years were 15-19 March). The AON and chick counts undertaken by S. Wignill (Castle Cliffs) and N.W Addey (urban/harbour sites) were based on four visits undertaken between 30 May and 19 July.

Scarborough coastal vs natural colonies

Between 2021 and 2023, the mean productivity of the more wind-sheltered urban built environment sites was 0.88 (±0.08 SD) and the mean productivity of the wind exposed natural coastal cliffs was 0.53 (±0.07 SD). Results were calculated from a total of 1103 urban AON and 575 coastal AON. The results support the hypothesis that urban nest sites have higher productivity than wind exposed natural coastal cliffs. This has important ramifications for North Yorkshire County Council's decision, validated by Natural England, to add deterrents to Spa Bridge in early 2023.

Spa Bridge Scarborough. Photo: Nick Addey.

Some have suggested that urban sites experience a lower predation rate than coastal sites however five of the town centre subplots were located in areas of high-density breeding **Herring Gulls**. These five subplots had a mean productivity of 0.90 in 2022/2023, compared with a mean of 0.53 for the Castle Cliffs subplots over the same period. Whilst we cannot confirm whether predation rates at the inland high predation risk sites are the same as Castle Cliffs, these results would suggest that improved productivity at inland subplots was unlikely to be a result of a lower predation risk.

[14] Christensen-Dalsgaard S *et al.* (2018) Prevailing weather conditions and diet composition affect chick growth and survival in the Black-legged Kittiwake. Marine Ecology Progress Series, 604: 237-249.

We assert that urban coastal sites and inland town centre sites provide nests within the '*Goldilocks zone of least thermoregulatory stress*'. We hypothesise that urban Kittiwake may be utilising a philopatric 'bet hedging' strategy which may enable urban Kittiwake to retain meta-colony fidelity between breeding seasons but retain nest site location optionality.

In the face of increasing environmental variability, such as heatwave events and summer storms associated with climate change, this bet hedging strategy is likely to be advantageous. Remaining faithful to more homogenous cliff sites with fewer 'patch choices' to choose from may be a risky strategy. Furthermore, we suggest that Kittiwake may also be urbanizing in response to fluctuating Sandeel (*Ammodytes* spp.) prey availability. Sandeel are a rich source of lipids which Kittiwake store in the liver. Lipids are broken down to maintain internal body temperature. Christensen-Dalsgaard *et al.* (2018)[14] showed that wind chill increases energetic demands and that a Sandeel diet improves metabolic resilience to wind chill. We agree with Ruffino *et al.* (2020)[15] that individual birds must escape poor local quality 'patches' while retaining breeders on higher quality 'patches' in order to maintain a long-term total population size during spatial and temporal environmental change. We assert that Scarborough's urban subcolonies offer higher quality breeding 'patches' than coastal colonies in North Yorkshire.

A word on Spa Bridge kittiwake deterrents

Productivity of Spa Bridge from 270 AON was 1.03 in 2021, and 1.04 in 2022 from 270 AON. In 2023 the circa 2500 'fire-gel' deterrents initially deterred colonisation. A 'gull proofing protestor' removed *c.*60 deterrents and some were dislodged by weather. Previous years nests were removed prior to 'fire-gel' installation, so nests were rebuilt from scratch, which may have had energetic consequences. Consequently, AON on Spa Bridge in 2023 was reduced to 189 AON with a productivity of 0.64, representing a loss of 81 breeding pairs. Mean 2023 productivity for the other urban sites was 0.84 suggesting that deterrents reduced breeding success at Spa Bridge, rather than common factors. There was a greater variety of chick sizes in the Spa Bridge July counts, suggesting that some breeders were delayed by the deterrents.

Spa Bridge is approximately 7km from Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA (FFC SPA) which had an average productivity of 0.55 in 2018. If Spa Bridge (alone) typically produced *c.*1 chick per nest, with 270 AON in 2021 and 2022, the bridge previously produced 270 'excess' birds annually. Ignoring mortality rates and a typical age of four for a first-time breeder, AON counts at Spa Bridge are not increasing by 270 annually, and thus there must be a net emigration to other locations within Scarborough or other colonies, such as FFC SPA.

We believe that Spa Bridge is likely to be functionally linked to FFC SPA, and we therefore object to the installation of deterrents on the basis that they will affect emigration into the wider FFC SPA and affect the site's conservation objectives. We recommend immediate removal of the deterrents.

HPAI Grant Report

Siolaigh, Monach Islands 2023

Alister Clunas, Shiants Auk Ringing Group

Our group visited Siolaigh, one of the Monach Islands in June 2021 to carry out a seabird survey as part of the recently published book Seabirds Count. The habitat looked suitable for **European Storm Petrel** (*Hydrobates pelagicus*; hereafter Storm Petrel), so we played a tape and had two responses. The time on the island was limited so there wasn't any time for further survey. When we returned from the trip, we couldn't find any records of breeding Storm Petrels in Siolaigh and realised this was the first proven record. A plan to revisit the island in 2022 was arranged, however this had to be postponed until 2023 due to restrictions caused by HPAI.

Lighthouse on Siolaigh. Photo: Alister Clunas.

On Sunday 2nd July 2023, Noe, Carole, Ian and I set off from Uig on the ferry to Lochmaddy. We had arranged to be taken to Siolaigh by Uist Sea Tours based at Eriskay and were

[15] Ruffino L, Thompson D & O'Brien S (2020). Black-legged Kittiwake population dynamics and drivers of population change in the context of offshore wind development. *JNCC Report No. 651*, JNCC, Peterborough, ISSN 0963-8091.

staying at Grimsay on North Uist. We allowed the Monday morning to buy provisions for the trip, planning to set sail later in the day. The night before the boatman told us to turn up at 10 am rather than the 7 am previously arranged to allow us maximum time on Siolaigh. When we arrived at Eriskay he advised us that there were high winds forecast later in the week. At best we could have a day and a half on Siolaigh but after that he could not guarantee to get us off before Sunday when we had the return ferry booked to Skye. After a discussion, we decided that one and half days would not allow sufficient time to carry out the survey, as repeating the calibration transects is essential to provide an accurate estimate of the Storm Petrel population.

What were we going to do in the small weather window? Uist Sea Tours offer trips to Mingulay, so we booked for the next day. The weather was calm and pleasant. On our way to Mingulay we noticed what we thought was a blow from a cetacean. We spoke to the skipper, he was sceptical *"Are you sure it wasn't just the splash of a Gannet diving?"* We said we thought it was a blow. He altered the course towards the blow. As we approached, we saw a Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* which was watched for about 15 minutes, giving excellent views. When we returned later in the day the wind had increased as the forecast had predicted.

A group photo from the week. Photo: Alister Clunas.

Although we spent the rest of the week birdwatching on Uist; it was a frustrating week. The Humpback Whale, Corncrake *Crex crex* and Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* sightings were the highlights of our week on the Hebrides.

We plan to return in 2024 and are extremely grateful to The Seabird Group for allowing us to roll over the grant from 2023. In order to prevent another aborted trip, we will allow for a longer stay on the Hebrides in case of adverse weather. Fingers crossed for 2024.

Training Grant Reports

In 2023, The Seabird Group's training grant helped support three more individuals to undertake an unpaid voluntary activity focussing on seabirds. We hoped that this grant would enable people to undertake such activities who may not otherwise have the opportunity. Read on to hear what they got up to over the summer months:

Amelia Corvin-Czarnodolski

Having started the season with no seabird-related experience but with an interest in both marine biology and ornithology, I've spent a magical three months on **Skokholm Island** with its soaring inhabitants learning how to monitor, ring, and conserve seabirds, thanks to a generous training grant from The Seabird Group.

Ringing a Manx Shearwater fledgling at night. Photo: Ellyn Baker.

From the moment I set foot on Skokholm Island, I was immersed in the enchanting world of seabirds. On my very first night, I awoke at 1am to the sound of screeching **Manx Shearwaters** (*Puffinus puffinus*; also known as 'Manxies') and, armed with a head torch and a pair of pliers, ventured out with a visiting ringing group for my first experience of seabird ringing. Clumsy Manxies littered the dark paths, waddling around on short pink legs and flapping their wings uselessly, so unlike their graceful displays at sea. By the end of that first night, my fingers were torn to shreds by sharp claws and beaks, only exasperated by my experience of colour-ringing **Atlantic Puffins** (*Fratercula arctica*) the very next day, but it has been a huge privilege to see these birds up-close.

Not only have I learnt about handling larger birds and using bigger rings, but I have a much deeper understanding of the importance of tracking individual birds and collecting vital data about their survival and productivity. Many hours have been logged re-sighting the colour-ringed Puffins from previous years and reading the rings of re-trapped Manxies to monitor adult survival, not to mention the hours spent surveying the productivity of both species, as well as **European Storm Petrels** (or 'Stormies') and **Northern Fulmars** (*Fulmarus glacialis*).

Searching for European Storm Petrel chicks in rock crevices. Photo: Giselle Eagle.

I was barely aware of the existence of European Storm Petrels before I arrived on Skokholm but these gorgeous birds have very quickly risen to the top of my favourites list. I've spent many hours scrambling around cliffs playing Stormie calls into small rock crevices to assess the level of occupancy in suspected nest sites. Hearing a bird respond with their characteristic "turr-chick" sound or getting a whiff of their musty tinsel-like scent has never failed to spark excitement but it wasn't until I saw them up-close that I truly appreciated how brilliant they are.

Having watched a Storm Petrel struggle to squeeze out an egg on a nest box camera, it isn't hard to believe that these guys have the highest egg:body weight ratio of any other bird and watching the chicks grow from adorable little balls of fluff to sleek birds ready to fledge has given the elusive Storm Petrel a special place in my heart. Their cryptic behaviour has taught me patience and the importance of preserving remote nesting sites for these enigmatic birds; it even persuaded me to help shift 11 tonnes of concrete blocks and cement to build new Storm Petrel nest sites at the Observatory. Maybe one day I will return to Skokholm and have the opportunity to see the new "Petrel Station" in action, housing these adorable crevice-dwellers.

Not only did this three-month experience give me a new favourite bird but it has instilled in me a deep appreciation for the wonders of seabirds and the fragile ecosystems on which they depend. It has demonstrated the interconnectedness of all life on the island and the importance of preserving sanctuaries such as this, as well as equipping me with the baseline knowledge and technical skills to make a real difference in this field. I am extremely grateful to The Seabird Group for providing the training grant which opened the door to this incredible world of seabird research and enabled me to participate in the monitoring and conservation of some fascinating species.

Joel Tragen

With the grant, I volunteered at **Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory** (BBFO) for two weeks between May & June. BBFO is located on Ynys Enlli/Bardsey Island, off the tip of the Llyn Peninsula in North Wales. It's hard to find a better place to be in the height of the breeding season. Bardsey is famous for its **Manx Shearwater** population and the monitoring work carried out; this was the very reason I was there. My main duty was checking nests with GPS tagged birds to see if they'd made a foraging journey, returned and were ready for removal of their tracker. To tag the birds in the first place we had to head out and find suitable nests, tag the birds, take biometrics and return them to the comfort of the burrows. In addition, I was carrying out the Manx Shearwater census with the assistant warden, Ed, on the rugged East-side. Quadrat by quadrat we counted the burrows in 100m² squares, taking 3-4 hours each due to the steep mountainside. Steve, the warden, carries out guided Manxie nighttime walks most weeks during the breeding season, allowing the public to connect with these wonderful birds. I got to attend one, handling, ringing and ring reading the birds we found during the walk.

I also got involved in the ongoing seabird monitoring and ringing efforts the Observatory carries out. With the seabird season delayed in North Wales in 2023, most birds ringed were adult auks and nestling **European Shags** (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*). The Shags were fitted with red colour-rings and metal rings, whilst the auks were fitted with specially shaped metal rings. Towards the end of my trip, I got to ring some of the gull chicks on the island, a mixture of the three large species. Getting this experience was really beneficial, coming in handy at another Welsh seabird colony later in June. Ynys Enlli is fortunate to host multiple pairs of Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*), half of these nests are relatively easy to access, allowing the observatory staff to colour-ring the chicks. Steve set me the mission of finding a new access route to one of the less easy nests. With the aid of Ed, I worked out a new route, discovering the chicks were the perfect size to be fitted with colour-rings.

East of Bardsey, offshore from Aberdaron lie two small islands, the Gwylans. These barely grassy outcrops both support decent seabird populations for their size, holding a small **Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) population, particularly notable due to

Bardsey's lack of any breeding pairs. BBFO is in charge of monitoring the seabird populations on these islands so when the conditions allowed, we set sail. Once on the islands we counted all the nest on the islands and ringed the majority of the Shag and Cormorant nestlings.

On top of all the seabird experience, I got to gather general observatory experience. Mornings were spent undertaking census around the island, counting all the birds seen, particularly the migratory birds. Getting the chance to birdwatch alongside very experienced birdwatchers staying or working at the observatory was amazing, I picked up lots of tips and was lucky enough to see a few rare species; Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), Eastern Subalpine Warbler (*Curruca cantillans*) and White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*). Whenever the weather and time allowed, nets were opened meaning I got plenty of experience opening and furling nets, and of course getting to ring some of the passerines too. Being a trainee, this experience was invaluable. Even if it seems like life at Obs is birds, birds and more birds, there are plenty of other jobs which I got stuck in with. Some of this being the general upkeep of the observatory for the guest, but it also included habitat management within the garden and the task of priming the outer walls for painting. Staying at the Obs there's plenty of public engagement experience too, talking to day visitors and staying guests. Bardsey attracts a wealth of incredible people from all over, so I learnt tonnes just from chit chat.

Catrin Ferguson

My name is Catrin Ferguson and I am one of the lucky recipients of the training grants The Seabird Group awarded in 2023. As a recent graduate in conservation, my goal with this grant was to progress my ringing ability, whilst also developing my overall knowledge of avian ecology. With the support of The Seabird Group, I took the opportunity to join the team at the **Calf of Man Bird Observatory** and assist with the **Manx Shearwater** Recovery Project!

Interestingly, one of the first accounts of these amazing seabirds was recorded by Vikings in Manx waters when they set anchor just off the island; the sailors were subsequently stunned when thousands of birds started descending upon them at night!!! However, this project was set up to monitor these fantastic seabirds after the Manx population was decimated by the introduction of rats to the Calf of Man, with Skomer and Skokholm now hosting the larger colonies in the UK. The project has been a large focus of the observatory; aiming to eradicate rats and to monitor the population since this event.

Catrin with a Manx Shearwater. Photo: Aron Sapsford.

My role as assistant to the Manx Shearwater Recovery Project focused on monitoring the population of colonies by playing tapes at burrows. This involved setting up sample burrows at three sites across the Calf, totalling 110 burrows. Each day of my month-long stay I visited these sites and played Manx Shearwater calls next to each marked burrow; recording the absence or presence of any callback. Alongside this I sexed the callbacks. Females tend to have a lower and scratchier call, whilst the males have a far squeakier call. Additionally, we attempted to find accessible eggs in the burrows for later chick monitoring which we were successful in doing! This was a fantastic result as these egg chambers are often completely unreachable.

Manx Shearwater chick on the Calf of Man. Photo: Aron Sapsford.

My stay at the Bird Observatory included many other activities, from daily mist netting and estate work to seabird ringing and nest monitoring (I was constantly covered in bird poo). Maytime on the Calf was incredible, spent with the best people and unwavering support from Aron, the Head Bird Warden, and Eleanor, the Assistant Bird Warden, who were extremely patient and kind whilst I learnt from them.

I can confidently say that my ability and knowledge has greatly improved from my stay on the Calf of Man. This amazing experience would not have been possible without the help provided by The Seabird Group and I am extremely grateful.

We now invite applications for our next round of training grants. Grants provide up to £250 for individuals to use for travel, accommodation and subsistence while undertaking unpaid seabird-focussed fieldwork or volunteering. Training grants are aimed at people with limited or no previous experience with seabirds, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds or those who have faced increased barriers to gaining experience. Therefore, no previous experience is required. Seabird fieldwork is often unpaid and can be expensive, but field skills are highly sought after and can be key for future career opportunities. We hope that this grant will enable people to undertake such activities who may not otherwise be able to afford it.

Deadline: 28th February. For further details, please see the 'grants' section of our website: http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk/grants or our application form: https://forms.gle/mcUDtSdmfmYJ66Y36.

For a paper form or any other enquiries, please email Lila Buckingham on edi@seabirdgroup.org.uk.

Breeding Reports

Skomer

Leighton Newman, Skomer Warden

It was a mixed seabird season on Skomer in 2023 with some species up and some species down.

The year started well with our record ever **Atlantic Puffin** count. It's the first time since our records started that Puffin numbers have surpassed 40,000 individuals. The first Puffin of the year was also three days earlier than any other previous year.

Throughout April, however, we saw very low attendance at the cliffs of both **Guillemot** (*Uria aalge*) and **Razorbills** (*Alca torda*); is this driven by birds in poor condition compared to previous years, as a result of the well documented marine heatwave, or some hidden effects of HPAI in the population?

Razorbill in North Haven. Photo: Leighton Newman.

Once counting started it was clear that there would be a drop in the Guillemot population. In total, there was an almost 10% drop in the population, although productivity was OK.

The **Fulmar** population also dropped quite significantly, and the productivity was very poor, in fact it was one of the poorest on record. Furthermore, there was also a drop in the **Kittiwake** and **Lesser Black-backed Gull** populations and the **Manx Shearwater** response rate was low, indeed it was one of the lowest we've recorded for the past 10 years. Razorbills fared a little better with only a very slight drop in the population.

In better news, there was a rise in the population of **Great Black-backed Gulls** (*Larus marinus*) which is now at its highest level since 2015. The productivity, whilst below the five-year average, was also still good. There was also an increase in the **Herring Gull** population although numbers are still below the five-year average. The productivity of Herring Gulls, however, was the best in over twenty years and over triple the five-year average. There was also an increase in the **Shag** population.

Although not completely clear during the peak of the breeding season, it looks like HPAI took hold in the Skomer seabird populations. At least one Skomer Guillemot washed up in North Wales and tested positive and there were further hundreds – if not thousands – of mainly Guillemots, washing up dead during the late summer period around the coast of Wales. We wait anxiously for the seabirds to return to Skomer this season.

Bempton

James Butcher, Seasonal Seabird Researcher, RSPB

Despite the continuing impacts of HPAI, 2023 was a relatively positive year for seabird productivity. **Black-legged Kittiwake** productivity continued to rise to its highest level since 2010, while **Northern Gannet** recovered from last year's all-time low but remained below average. **Fulmar** and **Razorbill** showed slight increases from the low levels of 2022, while **Guillemot** remained stable. **Herring Gull** productivity continued its long-term decline and crashed to its lowest ever level (Figure 1).

Northern Fulmar: 65 chicks fledged from 145 AOS, resulting in a mean productivity of 0.46 chicks fledged per pair. This is a marginal increase on the productivity low point of 2022, but the general trend remains one of slight decrease.

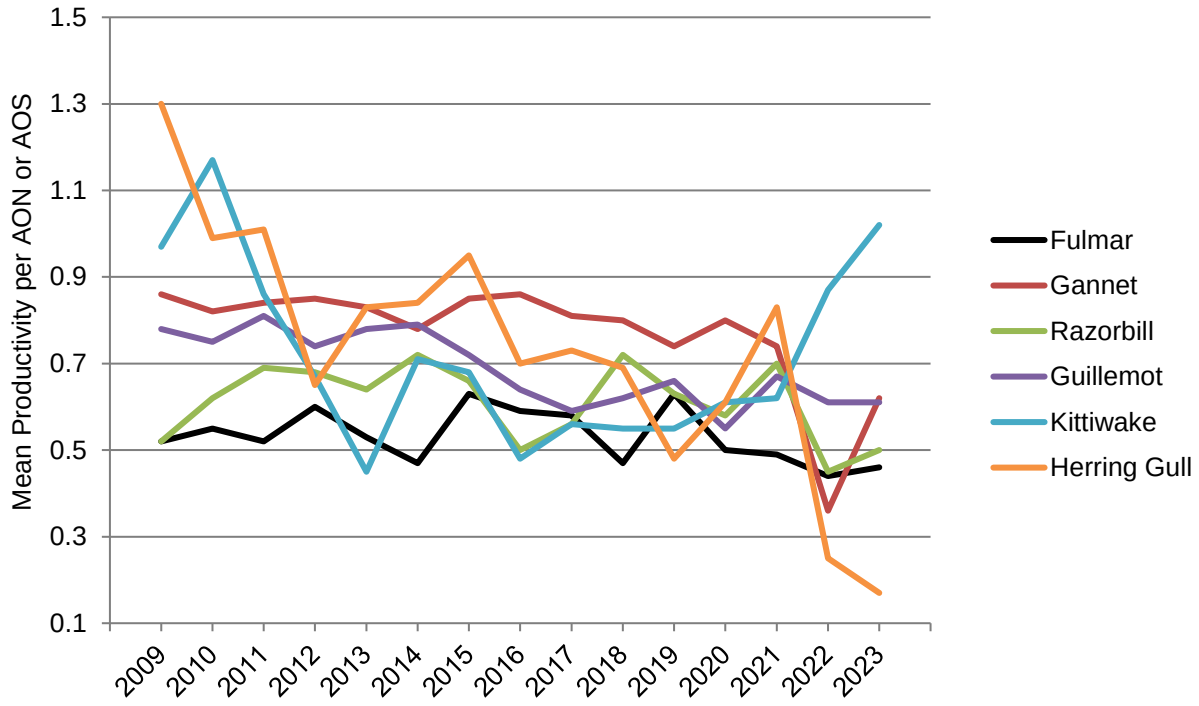


Figure 1. Summary of the productivity trends of the six seabird species monitored from 2009-2023.

Northern Gannet: An additional two plots were monitored this year, increasing the number of plots monitored to seven. Overall, Gannet productivity recovered this year to a mean of 0.62 fledged chicks per AON, after a very poor year in 2022. In total 238 chicks successfully fledged from a total of 383 AON monitored. This was nevertheless the second lowest productivity recorded since 2009.

Black-legged Kittiwake: A total of 1041 AON were monitored in 20 plots across the SPA. From those nests, 1072 chicks successfully fledged, giving a mean productivity of 1.02 chicks per pair. This is the highest productivity recorded since 2010, despite apparent localized outbreaks of HPAI causing increased chick and adult mortality in some plots. The long-term trend is still one of decline, but the rapid increase in productivity since 2021 is encouraging.

European Herring Gull: Productivity reached a new low this year with just 17 chicks fledging from 92 AON, giving a mean productivity of 0.17 chicks fledged per pair. The long-term trend remains one of continued decline and is a cause for concern.

Common Guillemot: A total of 181 chicks fledged from 295 AOS across five plots. The mean productivity was 0.61 chicks per pair, identical to that recorded in 2022. The overall trend is still one of steady decline, although both Bempton plots continue to be affected by conflict with prospecting Gannets. It is therefore hard to know how much this result reflects the general trend across the whole colony.

Razorbill: Seven plots were monitored in 2023, with 208 chicks successfully fledging from a total of 405 AOS. The mean productivity of 0.50 chicks fledged per pair was a slight increase from 2022's low productivity, although the long-term trend continues to be one of decline. Once again corvid predation had a significant effect on productivity at two Flamborough plots this year, and this may not be representative of the colony as a whole.

Northern Gannet Colony Count

In response to the worrying impacts of HPAI on the Gannet colony last year, a boat-based colony count of the full SPA was carried out on 16 June 2023. This recorded a total of 15,233 AOS, an unexpected but welcome increase of 2,243 AOS on the count made in June 2022 (Figure 2).

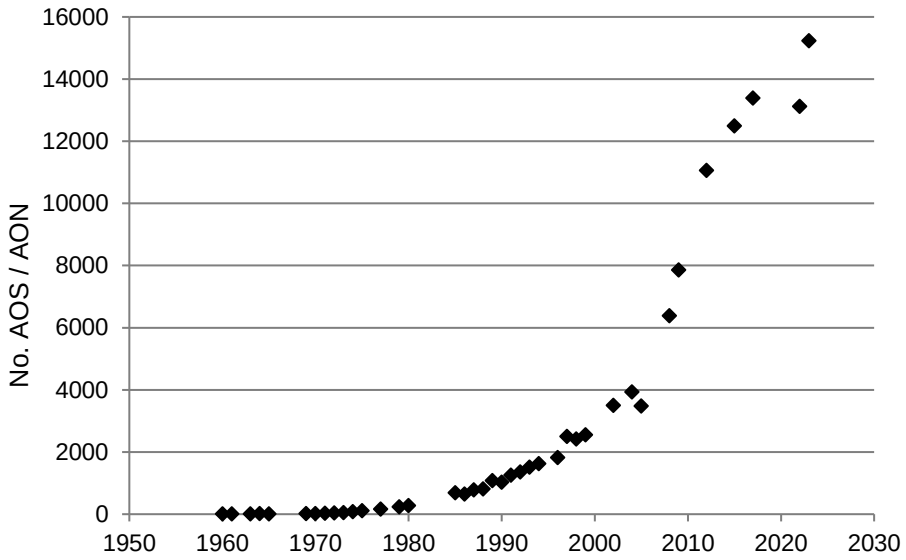


Figure 2. Gannet breeding population trend at the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA 1960-2023.

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.

Morgan Coleman, Field Ecologist, Manaaki Landcare Research

Recently I was very fortunate to be able to spend several weeks carrying out field research on **African Penguins** on Robben Island, a short distance off the coast of Cape Town, South Africa. Jacqui Glencross is a PhD student working on this feisty bird, sometimes aptly called Jackass Penguins due to their spookily similar raucous call. Jacqui kindly took me under her wing as her field assistant.

Morgan and Jacqui Glencross fitting a GPS logger to an African Penguin, Robben Island, South Africa. Photo: Nicholas Ngcathu.

My career journey that took me to South Africa however has been a very varied and winding road, perhaps a little atypical compared to other seabird researchers.

I received my love of ecology from my scientist father. There are pictures of me when I still had hair, catching butterflies, and standing beside Brushtail Possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) in cage traps. At an early age I collected birds' eggs, seashells and insects, and was generally happiest outdoors.

After completing my Bachelor's Degree at Canterbury University (in New Zealand), I jumped straight into a job as a Science Technician with what would become Landcare Research New Zealand Limited, New Zealand's leading terrestrial research agency. It has generally been a very rewarding role, though it has demanded a good level of physical fitness, adaptability and often meant long periods away from home, living in sometimes very basic field conditions.

Over the first 10-15 years, I was mainly involved with research on introduced mammalian predators. However, the second half of my career has seen a shift away from hairy things to those with feathers. My work is still often focussed on movement patterns

and juvenile dispersal, however now I get to work with treasured indigenous birds rather than the pesty animals that often seek to dine on them.

I have fitted VHF transmitters and GPS devices, collected blood samples, mist-netted and banded an assortment of birds from small passerines to petrels and **Australasian Gannets** (*Morus serrator*). I've been fortunate enough to work in an amazing variety of habitats from semi-urban landscapes to isolated bush covered offshore islands, the latter being safe havens for seabirds such as **Grey-faced Petrels** (*Pterodroma gouldi*), **Fluttering Shearwaters** (*Puffinus gavia*) and **Diving Petrels** (*Pelecanoides* sp.) to name but a few. These birds are only able to thrive in the absence of mammalian predators. Myself and my colleagues have spent many hours using burrowscopes to look at occupancy rates of such burrowing seabirds.

Without doubt, the highlight of my career has been the numerous visits to Ross Island, and the Victoria Land coastline of Antarctica carrying out field research on **Adelie Penguins** (*Pygoscelis adeliae*). Anyone fortunate enough to have likewise visited the continent will agree that this is a place of unparalleled grandeur.

In 1996, I was awarded a study grant to visit Canada to look at the application of GPS technology for monitoring moose movement in one of the very early studies using this technology to track wildlife. Hard to believe that almost 30 years later, GPS transmitters are tiny enough to fit on small birds.

Just prior to the onset of COVID, I worked as a guide/lecturer for Heritage Expeditions on voyage to the subantarctic Islands directly south of New Zealand, sometimes collectively known as "The Galapagos of the South". For those that want a seabird experience like no other, I cannot recommend such an experience highly enough.

My key piece of advice for young people considering a job working with seabirds would be that your career pathway may not necessarily involve the completion of a PhD. While this may well appeal to many, there is always a need for skilled technical expertise. I have had unbridled variety in my career as a Research Technician. Just as in my childhood, I am happiest outdoors!

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

Mills WF, Ibañez AE, Carneiro APB *et al.* (2024). Migration strategies of skuas in the southwest Atlantic Ocean revealed by stable isotopes. Marine Biology 171: 27.

Dunn RE, Duckworth J, Green JA (2024). A framework to unlock marine bird energetics. Journal of Experimental Biology, 226(24): jeb.246754.

Trevail AM, **Wood H**, Carr P, **Dunn RE**, Nicoll MA, Votier SC, Freeman R (2023). Multi-colony tracking reveals segregation in foraging range, space use, and timing in a tropical seabird. Marine Ecology Progress Series, 724: 155-165.

Hernandez MM, Favero M & Seco Pon JP (2024). Effect of environmental variability on seabird assemblages across the Brazil–Malvinas Confluence during the austral winter. Marine Biology, 171: 51.

Puskic PS, Slocombe R, Ploeg R, Roman L, Lea M-A, Hutton I & Bridle AR (2024). Exploring the pathology of liver, kidney, muscle, and stomach of fledgling seabirds associated with plastic ingestion. Journal of Hazardous Materials, 465: 133306.

New Committee Members

The Seabird Group is wishing a warm welcome to new Executive Committee members. Our Chair, Secretary, Journal Editor, Treasurer and Website Officer all departed at the November AGM. We would like to give a huge thank you to Liz Humphreys, Annette Fayet, Ian Cleasby, Viola Ross-Smith and Jeff Stratford for the invaluable contributions made to the work of The Seabird Group during your time on the committee. Our new committee members introduce themselves below:

Chair: Alex Bond

Alex Bond (he/him) is the Principal Curator and Curator in Charge of Birds at the Natural History Museum in Tring and London, UK. His research focuses on anthropogenic impacts of pollution on marine birds and islands, with a particular focus on plastic pollution. He also is an advocate for improved equity, diversity, and inclusion in science.

Secretary: Andie McQuillan

Andie McQuillan (they/them) is a Senior Marine Ornithologist working closely with the renewable energy sector to ensure infrastructure does not adversely impact seabird populations. They are based in Glasgow and completed a BSc in Environmental Management at Glasgow Caledonian University and an MSc in Marine Conservation at the University of Aberdeen. Their favourite seabird is the Blue-footed Booby.

Treasurer: Rowan Kuminski

Rowan Kuminski (they/them) is a PhD student at University of Aberdeen and Treasurer for the Seabird Group. Their research focuses on how predation and bycatch affect the metapopulation dynamics of Northern Fulmars. In addition to their work with seabirds, they are also passionate about creating and participating in initiatives that improve EDI in ornithology and STEM.

Journal Editor: Katherine Booth Jones

Katherine Booth Jones is a Senior Marine Ornithologist at the Scottish Government's Marine Directorate. She has worked on a range of professional and volunteer seabird ecology projects in the UK and abroad since 2007, involving seabird monitoring, GLS/GPS tracking, diet, remote-sensing and molecular ecology. She has been a Seabird Group member for 10 years and has volunteered for the ExComm in two other roles, as ECR rep in 2015, and Newsletter Editor (2018 – 2022). She hopes to support The Seabird Group in its mission to be a driving force for innovative seabird research and conservation in the Atlantic.

Website Officer: Amanda Mead

Amanda is our Website Officer. Amanda is a Behavioural Biologist and her research has focussed on sibling conflict in Black-legged Kittiwake chicks. Amanda works as an Associate Lecturer in the Psychology department at University of the West of England and is currently hatching a plan to expand the Kittiwake work to also consider the effects of climatic variation on parent and chick behaviours and division of labour between parent birds.

February Research Grant Call Open

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 (see training grant reports section on page 12 above).

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 29th February. 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

Seeking copyeditors for Seabird

Ruth Dunn, Assistant Seabird Editor

The Seabird Group continues to seek volunteer copyeditors 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 interesting in helping out, please get in touch via journal@seabirdgroup.org.uk.

New designs in our store!

The Seabird Group shop has some wonderful new designs available to purchase here. These include our winner from the competition before Christmas, Chris Heward, with his amazing mirrored Manxie, as well as non-binary (enby) and Trans Pride designs by Rowan Kuminski. If any budding artists have new seabird designs they wish to submit throughout the year, please do get in touch with our membership secretary at membership@seabirdgroup.org.uk. We are always keen to add to our collection!

Events

The 16th International Seabird Group Conference

The Seabird Group would like to welcome you to the 16th International Seabird Group Conference on the **2nd – 5th September 2024** at the **University of Coimbra, Portugal**, with optional field trips on the 6th.

The **call for abstracts is now open**, with a deadline of **15th April**. Registration is also open with a deadline of 20th August with the following rates: Seabird Group members €165, early bird €200, standard rates (from 1st July) €295.

The program already includes a welcome address by Dr Paulo Catry and plenary talks from Dr Samantha Patrick, Dr Katarzyna Wojczulanis-Jakubas and Dr Jennifer Provencher. Full conference details can be found on the website.

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	Alex Bond (2027)	chair@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Secretary	Andie McQuillan (2027)	secretary@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Treasurer	Rowan Kuminski (2027)	treasurer@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Membership Secretary	Antoine Grissot (2026)	membership@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Seabird Editor	Katherine Booth Jones (2027)	journal@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Newsletter Editor	Amy King (2026)	newsletter@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Website Officer	Amanda Mead (2027)	website@seabirdgroup.org.uk

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.