



NEWSLETTER 143

February 2020

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Seabird Group News

Welcome to our new committee members

We wish a warm welcome to our new executive committee members. Some may be familiar to you, having held different committee positions in the past.

Chair: Liz Humphreys

It's great to be returning to the Executive Committee of the Seabird Group after serving as the Newsletter Editor over 12 years ago. During this time the prominence of seabirds in the UK has really increased in terms of the policy agenda. This is partly due to the expanding offshore renewable industry and concerns over the likely impacts on our internally important seabird population. There is also increasing recognition that the status of seabird populations reflects the state of the wider marine environment. Consequently the opportunities for early career scientists have increased significantly and it brings me a huge amount of joy to meet such a motivated and dedicated cohort of younger people at our Seabird Group conferences. There is also a wealth of skills found in many of the volunteers who engage with key monitoring effort and ringing initiatives, sometimes working under challenging conditions in remote places.



Over the next few months, we plan to look at SEABIRD and think about the role that our journal fulfils within the wider research community and how we can promote it. Plans for the next Seabird Group Conference in Cork, Ireland Autumn 2021 are currently underway and we hope to be able to confirm the dates with you as soon as possible. We will also continue support for the current Seabird Census through offering grants to support travel and subsistence for 2020 breeding season. The Seabird Group is proud of its role in kick starting and delivering the very first census back in 1969.

My love for seabirds started back in 1999 when I started my PhD on the Isle of May looking at the foraging behaviour and energetics of kittiwakes. I was extremely lucky to work with Centre of Ecology and Hydrology who have shown the huge value of long term monitoring schemes in quantifying the impacts of fisheries and climate change on seabird demographics. My current role with the British Trust for Ornithology includes understanding the evidence base of the impacts of offshore wind farms on seabirds and a strong network of monitoring across the UK seabirds colonies is fundamental to this. In a climate where funding for long term monitoring is becoming harder to secure, the value of volunteers will become ever more important. The Seabird

Group should be able to capitalise on the enthusiasm of its members and help support not only our current network of seabirders, but also help build capacity for the future.

Secretary: Annette Fayet

I'm a seabird ecologist and Junior Research Fellow at Oxford University. I'm particularly interested in understanding what drives seabirds' movements and the fitness consequences of individual and population differences in migration and foraging strategies. My research also aims to identify drivers of population declines to inform conservation. My main study site and favourite place on Earth is Skomer Island in Wales, where I've been studying puffins for nearly a decade now. Recently I've also worked on seabirds in Iceland, Norway, and Japan, and started a program studying seabirds on Aldabra Atoll (Seychelles, close second favourite place on Earth!). I'm excited to join the executive committee of the Seabird Group and to see/meet many of you at the World Seabird Conference next October! Photo credit: David Silverman.



Ordinary Member (Seabird Census co-ordinator): Will Miles

I am delighted to return to the Seabird Group Executive Committee, having been on the committee as Treasurer from 2014 to 2018. I have had a passion for seabirds my entire life, including their ecology, behaviour, conservation and identification. I have a doctorate in storm-petrel and skua ecology and my first dedicated seabird job was on Fair Isle, 14 years ago. Since then, I have worked on seabirds almost exclusively, at a range of Scottish sites but also on Ascension Island and the Falklands. I am now based on Shetland and employed by St Andrews University and SOTEAG to monitor seabird populations across the whole archipelago.



SEABIRD Editor: Viola Ross-Smith

I am Science Communications Manager at the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), but I am also a seabirder. You might occasionally come across me in the media, as I find myself dedicating time each summer to combatting the bad press received by gulls. I studied gull breeding ecology for my PhD and was a seabird researcher for BTO for several years, including work tracking gulls, skuas and petrels. I have been lucky enough to study seabirds at various fantastic island breeding colonies around the UK and further afield. I previously served on the Seabird Group Committee as an Ordinary Member responsible for social media, and I have now taken on editing SEABIRD journal.



Minutes of the 53rd Annual General Meeting (draft- to be proposed at the 2020 AGM)

Saturday 16th November 2019 14:00, Carrbridge Hotel, Carrbridge, PH23 3AB

Present/Apologies

Present: Ian Cleasby (Treasurer), Danni Thompson (Membership Secretary), Holly Kirk (outgoing secretary), Katherine Booth-Jones (Newsletter Editor), Beth Clark (Early Career Rep.), Ian Francis, Chris Redfern, Sarah Wanless, Mike Harris, David Jardine, Robert Morten Alan Leitch, Maggie Sheddin, Mark Oksien, Gary Clewley, Rob Robinson, Amy King, Liz Humphreys, Mark Newell, Sophie Bennett, Tim Morley, Simon Zismian, Jeremy Greenwood, Martin Heubeck, Ellie Owen.

Apologies: Steve Votier (outgoing chair), Saskia Wichnewski (Social Media), Viola Ross-Smith (acting SEABIRD Editor), Viv Booth (Ordinary Member), Stuart Murray (OM Census Rep.), Jeff Stratford (Website Secretary), Zoe Deakin (Assistant Membership Secretary), Annette Fayet, Dave Vokel, Mark Tasker, Adrian Blackburn, David Howey, Daniel Turner, Stephen Hunter.

Minutes of the 52nd AGM (2018)

Minutes of the last AGM were available for all to read during the meeting. Martin Heubeck raised a discussion around whether the 2017 AGM was quorate. Holly Kirk said it was not but there is no advice in the constitution as to next steps. Mike Harris asked if this was legal as we are obliged to have an AGM every 12 months. Chris Redfern asked if the Seabird Group has any trustees who could oversee or resolve such issues. Jeremy Greenwood explained that the committee act as trustees and are therefore responsible for such decisions.

Minutes of the 52nd AGM were proposed by Ellie Owen and seconded by Danni Thompson

AP: committee to investigate legalities of the 2017 AGM and resolve the issue, with communication back to the membership. At the very least we need to amend the records to show that there was no AGM that year.

Amendment: In December 2019 following discussions with the current Seabird Group Executive Committee and consultation with the UK Charity Commission, the 2017 Executive Committee decided that the 2017 AGM would be struck from the records (recorded as a non-quorate general meeting). The subsequent AGMs (2018 and 2019, the latter of which is recorded here) will be renumbered accordingly as the 51st and 52nd respectively. This decision will be officially proposed to the membership at the forthcoming 2020 AGM where the 51st AGM minutes, 52nd Annual Report and Treasurers report will need to be proposed again. Members will be forewarned in the Newsletter. In the longer term it is anticipated that all AGM minutes and Annual Reports will be made available on the website.

The 54th Annual Report

Ian Cleasby went through the annual report, which was also available for meeting attendees. The report included information about:

- Changes to the Executive Committee
- AGM and meetings of the Executive Committee
- Membership
- Grants
- Journal (SEABIRD) and newsletter
- 15th Seabird Group Conference, 2021
- World Seabird Union

Liz Humphreys raised a discussion over General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This was raised by Viola and previous Membership Secretary (Alice Trevail) and discussed in May 2018 but may not have been followed up. Holly Kirk stated that we are somewhat compliant as members' details are only available to the committee and are never shared or disclosed to anyone else. Jeremy Greenwood requested that we make the Seabird Group compliant but in a minimal way. Liz Humphreys suggested checking again and maybe look at what guidelines the RSPB and BTO are using.

Ellie Owen said it was great that we had 10 grant applications in Feb but why were only three awarded? Danni Thompson explained that we only have three pots of £500 available.

Sarah Wanless said that it was great that the journal is trying to encourage and engage Early Career Researchers (ECR), and any ideas to increase that and maintain the journal in the future would be great.

Annual report proposed by Sarah Wanless, seconded by Ian Francis

AP: Committee to investigate GDPR compliance to make sure everything is transparent to members.

2018-19 Accounts and Treasurers Report

Ian Cleasby went through the accounts and treasurer's report.

Jeremy Greenwood asked if we should keep some money in reserve for the journal if due to the delay in publishing, we are likely to be printing two copies within one financial year? Ian Cleasby said we aim to keep a reserve of around £7k. It costs approximately £3,500 per year for the journal. A more regular journal would help to maintain the finances.

Rob Robinson said it was helpful to see the previous year's figures to compare. Do we have a budget going forward to smooth things out? Ian Cleasby said that the journal is the biggest issue/expenditure; perhaps we could reconsider grant money allocations to reflect our other changing costs?

Martin Heubeck asked why there was a substantial return from the Liverpool conference. Ian Cleasby explained that it was due to the great job in organising and fundraising by Jon Green and Sam Patrick. We cannot rely on such high returns in future.

Martin Heubeck requested that the finances and the annual report be distributed with the AGM minutes so that there is a written record for members to have reference to. Jeremy Greenwood stated that it is still useful to have copies of the report etc prior to the AGM so any questions can be raised.

Proposed by Ellie Owen, seconded by Mike Harris

AP: Committee to make sure that the final copy of this year's Annual report, Treasurer's report and AGM minutes be circulated around the membership and provided a few days before the AGM next year.

Nominations to the Executive Committee

Regarding the editor position, Martin Heubeck pointed out that the editor would need to be voted in for a full term but if they wish to resign early then they are able to.

- Chair: Liz Humphreys. Proposed by Sarah Wanless, seconded by Rob Robinson
- Secretary: Annette Fayet. Proposed by Ellie Owen, seconded by Mike Harris
- SEABIRD Editor: Viola Ross-Smith. Proposed by Martin Heubeck, seconded by Liz Humphreys
- Ordinary Member (Census Representative): Will Miles. Proposed by Mike Harris, seconded by Ian Francis

SEABIRD Journal

A discussion was held around making the future of the journal more maintainable into the future and attracting more submissions:

Sarah Wanless has investigated indexing previously and it comes with strict conditions for deadlines and time keeping. This was seconded by Rob Robinson, who stated that the journal will need to have been published on time for three consecutive years to be considered for indexing. Citations both in and out of the journal are also important.

It was discussed whether the character of the journal may change if it becomes indexed; would it be deemed 'more professional' and therefore put off ECRs from submitting?

Ellie Owen pointed out that the open access nature of the journal is very good and very quick. We could advertise this aspect of the journal more but care needs to be taken as members pay for first access to the journal. Another idea for recouping costs is to implement 'pay to publish' however this may discourage amateurs.

Rob Robinson suggested having low fees (few hundred £) and a fee waiver for ECRs

Discussion around adding an Assistant Editorial position.

Sarah Wanless agreed that the journal is a lot of work but working collaboratively could potentially introduce even more work, so care is needed when considering this option. Need to discuss with current Editor (VRS) what would work for her; can she identify the bottlenecks/solutions/people to help?

Martin Heubeck had informal assistance for graphics etc from people he knew personally. Perhaps the Editor knows who they would like to work with. Realistically, the Seabird Group needs an Editor who has the time and commitment to put into the journal. Could we restart the timing of the next journal e.g. label it 2019/20 to get back on track?

Liz Humphreys suggested we decide on the function of the journal before deciding on an editorial team – do we want the journal to be available for ECRs and smaller but still interesting notes, or do we want it to be attracting a ‘higher calibre’ of research?

Ellie Owen asked if Ordinary Members could help with the journal, as we have two for the newsletter but only one for the journal. Liz Humphreys explained that she originally requested help for the newsletter as it was a lot of work.

AP: committee to check constitution regarding the expansion of the committee. Perhaps look at re-assigning Ordinary Member roles.

AP: committee to discuss the function/audience of the journal and put together a set of actions for keeping the journal going.

Thoughts on Seabird Group inclusive online communications

Mike Harris asked if it would be legal to have an online AGM? How would people vote? Rob Robinson has used an online voting system for Wader Study Group and has had a higher turnout when using online voting for Executive Committee elections.

Ellie Owen stated that online communications can work with the right technology; however technology can also be a barrier if it doesn't work. She thinks a trial would be positive but perhaps at another meeting and not an AGM. Martin Heubeck also commented that if we lose connection with those online then we could lose quorum for the meetings.

Danni Thompson stated that as well as encouraging inclusivity in the group, using online communications is important in reducing our carbon footprint, which is something we should be advocating.

Rob Robinson pointed out that we have responsibilities to the charity commission to share with our members. It was raised that elections don't have to be held at the AGM, they could be held online prior and the results be announced at the meeting.

AP: committee to check constitution – do we need quorum from members or could finances etc be agreed on by committee members?

AP: committee to discuss online voting options for elections. These could potentially be held outside an AGM

AOB

WSU – Liz Humphreys said that they are having trouble deciding on registration costs for WSC3. They recently lost a £75k bid which was to cover the costs of the conference itself plus travel grants etc. She would be grateful to hear from anyone with big funds to spare or to help with fundraising. Previously the WSU has had favourable finances but this was due to sponsorship.

Seabirds Count Census – Danni Thompson said things are looking good for the final census survey season but in order to accurately plan what work is required next season we need to know which sites have already been surveyed. A plea was made to enter any data you may have as soon as possible, including the all-important zero counts. If you can't or don't have time to enter data onto the SMP then please send your data to daisy.burnell@jncc.gov.uk

Ellie Owen asked to officially thank the outgoing committee members for their time and contribution to the Seabird Group.

Keith Cowieson thanked the group on behalf of RAFOS for funding their seabird census surveys.

The meeting ended 15:40

The 54th Annual Report of the Seabird Group: September 2018 – November 2019 (draft – to be proposed at the 2020 AGM)

Holly Kirk, Secretary, November 2019

NB. This report was amended in Jan 2020 to reflect changes to the AGM numbers since the non-quorate 2017 AGM.

Changes to the Executive Committee

Following elections at the 52nd AGM the Executive Committee (ExCom) welcomed new members: Ian Cleasby (Treasurer), Danni Thompson (Membership Secretary), Katherine Booth-Jones (Newsletter Editor), Saskia Wischniewski (Ordinary Member – Social Media) and Zoe Deakin was elected as a non-voting member to assist Danni Thompson with membership duties.

During 2019 Richard Sherley stepped down as Editor of SEABIRD, and in February the ExCom co-opted Viola Ross-Smith as Editor for the remainder of 2019. The ExCom would like to thank Richard for his stewardship of SEABIRD and wish him the very best with his future endeavours.

In November Beth Clark (ECR representative) was co-opted onto the committee for an additional one-year term.

This year two committee members will end their rotations, with elections taking place during the 53rd AGM. Many Thanks to our outgoing committee members: Steve Votier (Chair) and Holly Kirk (Secretary). Stuart Murray has also decided to step down as ordinary member (National Census Representative). The Seabird Group Executive Committee would like to acknowledge Stuart's substantial contribution to the committee, not only in his role as Census Rep, but also his wealth of seabird experience. Thank you, Stuart, you will be missed and we wish you the very best.

AGM and meetings of the Executive Committee

The 52nd Annual General Meeting was held during the 14th Seabird Group Conference in Liverpool on 5th September 2018 with 27 members present.

Five ExCom meetings took place this year (No. 114-118) and additional business conducted via email. The ExCom have been meeting using the Zoom video and telephone conferencing software which enables members to join using either phone or computer.

Most business has related to the following:

- Hand-over between out-going and in-coming committee members
- Grant applications
- Upgrading the SG Dropbox storage to get additional space
- Upgrading the SG Zoom video conferencing account so we can have longer and larger meetings
- Arranging content for the newsletter
- Discussion of ways to encourage submissions to SEABIRD
- Potential activities for ECR members
- Methods to improve accessibility and attendance at AGMs
- Allocation of extra funds from the 15th SG Conference, some to the Census account, some to a potential future ECR/older member networking event.

Membership

The Seabird Group currently has 261 paid members, including statutory institutions and life members. This looks like a fair loss since the 2018 report but the database has recently been updated and expired memberships removed, some of which may have been inactive for a while. We have had at least 15 new members in 2019.

It has been suggested that an online payment system with automated annual renewal would be beneficial as this would allow members to join easily and much more quickly at any time of year, would minimise work for the Membership Secretary, and potentially reduce loss membership loss. Research into this option is ongoing.

Grants

Four applications were received in October 2018: three research grant applications (all successful) and a Seabird Group membership was contributed as an ECR prize to be awarded during the 5th World Seabird Twitter Conference (WSTC5). It has been good for the Seabird Group to support the last two WSTCs, raising our international profile in line with the Pacific Seabird Group.

We received a record number of 10 grant applications for the February 2019 round and awarded three applicants with the maximum grant value of £500. We also received two more applications to the Seabird Group legacy fund for supporting the national seabird census, contributing a further £4700 towards SEABIRDS COUNT expeditions. There is still funding in the legacy account to continue this support for a final year of the survey. The October 2019 grant round just closed with nine research grant applications and one census application. The committee will review these grants during November.

We continue to enjoy publishing grant reports in the newsletter, with most grant recipients submitting a report within 12 months of their successful application. We have also encouraged recipients to submit their work to the SEABIRD journal where appropriate.

Journal and newsletters

Unfortunately, SEABIRD 31 (2018) was again somewhat delayed and only went to press in February, with delivery to most members in March, but the issue was well received, and a step up from SEABIRD 30 in terms of the number of articles, with 10 papers and 4 book reviews. SEABIRD 32 got off to a very faltering start. Until the end of August 2019, there had only been a single submission. However, there was then a flurry of submissions in September and October, thanks in no small part to an excellent initiative spear-headed by Beth Clark, Katherine Booth Jones and Viola Ross-Smith to attract manuscripts from early-career researchers. There are now 11 papers and 4 book reviews under consideration. It is a huge relief that people did eventually submit work to SEABIRD – for several months it looked as though the journal was about to cease to exist – but clearly having so many come in late in the year means that having an issue out in time for Christmas is unrealistic. Most manuscripts are currently still out for review, and some of the referee comments that have been returned have called for substantial revisions. It is unlikely that this issue will see the light of day before spring 2020 at the earliest. During 2019, Richard Sherley wanted to step back as Editor for issue 31, so Viola Ross-Smith offered to take up the Editor role for a short period, but not a full committee term. It would be helpful to discuss who edits this publication longer-term and whether an Assistant Editor role needs to be formally filled on the Seabird Group ExCom.

The newsletter continues to flourish under Katherine Booth-Jones' editorship and we welcome all contributions from members, at any time.

The 15th Seabird Group Conference

The next conference is due to take place in Autumn 2021 in Cork, Ireland and co-hosted by Mark Jessop and John Quinn. This was decided during the 52nd AGM, where it was agreed that conference would skip 2020 in order to avoid clashing with the World Seabird Conference (Hobart, Oct 2020). The exact date for the 15th SG Conference has still to be decided and will be discussed with the hosts.

SEABIRDS COUNT national census

The Seabird Group executive committee were happy to continue supporting the national seabird census (SEABIRDS COUNT), which is now running into its final year of coordinated data collection. To-date, the Seabird Group census funds have supported

nine survey expeditions around the UK since Feb 2018. Stuart Murray has been acting as the Seabird Group representative on the census steering group for the last few years, up until November 2019. Going forward, the position of Seabird Group Census Representative is likely to be filled by Will Miles, pending his election during the 54th AGM.

World Seabird Union

The SG Secretary regularly attends teleconference meetings organised by the World Seabird Union (WSU) chair, Patrick Jodice. These take place every month and mostly deal with administrative task around the maintenance of the World Seabird Union. Meetings include representatives from the various membership organisations including other Seabird groups and larger NGOs (such as RSPB and BirdLife International). If members wish to directly contact WSU, the local representative for Europe on the WSU executive committee is Dr Liz Humphreys (BTO).

During 2019 most calls have focussed on the organisation of the 3rd World Seabird Conference (WSC3) which will be held at the Grand Chancellor Hotel, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia 19th-23rd October 2020. Abstract submissions are still open for this conference but will close on 30th November. Recent meetings have dealt with: conference budgets, conference social media policy, international fundraising, ECR activities, promotion of the “World of Seabirds” video project, updates from the scientific committee and the organisation of an election committee.

In addition to the organisation of WSC3, the World Seabird Union webpages have been updated this year, with the launch of the new webpages going live in September. The WSU website (<https://www.seabirds.net/>) has many resources, including a discussion forum and access to the Seabird Information Network, a collection of databases with relevant data for seabird research. There is also information and contact details for the “Plastics” working group and “Conservation Support” sub-committee.

Holly Kirk, Secretary

November 2019

ADDENDUM: In December 2019 following discussions with the current Seabird Group Executive Committee and consultation with the UK Charity Commission, the 2017 Executive Committee decided that the 2017 AGM would be struck from the records (recorded as a non-quorate general meeting). The subsequent AGMs (2018 and 2019, the latter of which is recorded here) will be renumbered accordingly as the 51st and 52nd respectively. This decision will be officially proposed to the membership at the forthcoming 2020 AGM where the 51st AGM minutes, 52nd Annual Report and Treasurers report will need to be proposed again. Members will be forewarned in the Newsletter. In the longer term it is anticipated that all AGM minutes and Annual Reports will be made available on the website.

Update from the Seabird Group Executive Committee

Seabird Group Executive Committee

The Seabird Group meeting held on the 7th December 2017 at Swanwick did not meet the 12 members needed to reach quorate, necessary for the meeting to be considered an Annual General Meeting. While this meeting was mistakenly recorded as the 52nd AGM, no decisions were made in relation to the Group’s operations. The Seabird Group ExComm at the time of the meeting and present have agreed to amend records to reflect that there was no AGM in 2017. The subsequent meeting on 5th September 2018 at the 14th International Seabird Group conference in Liverpool will be renumbered to the 52nd AGM, and Seabird Group Annual Reports and Meeting Minutes will be amended to reflect this. These will be made available online for members to view. The 51st AGM minutes, the 52nd Annual Report and Treasurer’s Report presented at the informal meeting in 2017 will be proposed formally at the 54th AGM in 2020.

Online documents [can be found here](#).

Research and Census Grants update

A reminder that the next deadline for [Seabird Group research grants](#) will be **29th February**. Grant application information can be found on the [webpage](#). Successful applicants will be required to produce a short report on their work for the Seabird Group Newsletter and website.

Seabird Bulletin

Martin Heubeck

The Seabird Group was formally constituted in January 1966 and *Seabird Bulletin* was its first publication, and the principal means of communicating with its members. The first issue had in fact been compiled, edited and circulated widely by Bill Bourne in August 1965, who produced Numbers 2 & 3 before editorship passed to John Crudass for the next four issues, the last (No. 7) being produced in February 1969 and succeeded by the printed *Seabird Report*. Note the word ‘printed’, for *Seabird Bulletin* was produced on a rotary duplicating machine, either Roneo or Gestetner, which only a minority of those reading this will now remember. In the days before photocopiers were invented these machines provided an incredibly useful and cheap way of mass producing ‘printed’ material but the quality of the outcome was at the mercy of a number of variables: how hard the author hit the keys of their manual typewriter onto the stencil; whether correction fluid was to hand – or was it easier and quicker to just type hard over a mistake and hope for the best; and was there enough ink in the machine, a critical judgement call.

George Dunnet was the first Chairman of the Seabird Group, and I was given his set of *Seabird Bulletins* after he died in 1995. Over the years I enjoyed dipping into these for they provide a fascinating insight into the formation and development of the Group, and a period when investigations of seabirds really took off. One problem was that for the reasons explained above, parts of the copies I had were difficult or impossible to read in places and I suspect the few remaining sets held privately, or those in libraries, would be no different. Once I retired and had a bit more spare time, a minor ambition was to retype these bulletins and make them available as PDFs and I’ve now made a start, having completed the 116 pages of text for Numbers 1 & 2. I can’t say when I’ll finish, but having gone public with what I’m doing I’m now duty-bound to complete it!

I finished *Seabird Bulletin* No. 2 (1966) this afternoon and reproduce below a couple of snippets I particularly liked. The first is from a lovely (and for its day, extremely useful) article by Jimmy Flynn on Some South-west Irish Seabird Colonies:

Blasket Islands: Inishtearaght. This is a spectacular, precipitous and dangerous rock; the Puffins alone were there in thousands the day I landed. Every rock and outstanding boulder on the north side was covered with them standing shoulder to shoulder. Overhead there was an unbroken ring of hundreds circling the topmost 600 ft. spire like a living halo. The lightkeepers also mentioned “thousands” of Storm Petrels and some shearwaters breeding. On the north and south side of a central natural rock archway there fifty and sixty pairs of Kittiwakes. There were two smaller groups of twenty and 25 on the north-east and south-east corners. The island is dangerous for its steep, loose, shale-like surface in most sides which place a severe limit on the amount of ground that can be covered in safety. Two concrete piers serve the lighthouse. As with the Bull Rock and Great Skellig permission for a lengthy stay would, I think, have to be obtained from the Commissioners of Irish Lights, Dublin.

The second piece is from a series of articles on oil pollution, which was a very serious issue globally in the mid 1960s, but in the initial discussions over ‘what the Seabird Group might be about’ seems to have excited less attention than the novelty of recording (and trying to understand) movements of seabirds from familiar or newly explored headlands. It refers to south-west England, and the poignancy of reading this is that much of *Seabird Bulletin* No. 3 is taken up with the Torrey Canyon disaster of March 1967. I’ll start typing that tomorrow.

30th January 1966. Travelling Superintendant G.H.D. Thwaites reports the situation serious. Never in living memory have so many seabirds been washed ashore polluted with oil. As the situation has reached a peak over ten days well over a thousand birds have been handled by RSPCA Inspectors and probably double that number seen dead. The majority were Guillemots, with the remainder Razorbills, Shags, Cormorants and Great Northern Divers, in that order. No inshore birds such as gulls were seen to be affected.

The north Cornwall coast was most badly affected, with more than two thirds of the birds. The oil is like fresh diesel oil, and starting at Sennen and St. Ives, gradually moved eastwards to Newquay and Padstow. In the south the oil started as a

heavy tarry sludge at Rame Head, Looe and Fowey, though later a fresh yellow oil was reported at Mevagissey, with birds also washed up at Millbrook, Plymouth and Wembury.

From 23rd January to 1st February, the birds collected alive and treated or immediately destroyed as untreatable included Penzance 406, Truro 714, Bodmin 270, Plymouth 72. Many of the treated birds died within 48 hours; of 597 birds sent to Mousehole, 337 still survived, of 262 sent to Exeter approximately 200 still survived. In addition to 1,460 birds found alive, well over 1,000 were seen dead, and there must have been over twice as many missed on this inaccessible coast. The birds were now becoming increasingly weak when washed ashore.

Grant Reports

Note from the Newsletter Editor: Many thanks to Kirsty Franklin and Nina O'Hanlon and their teams for allowing us to publish these grant reports in the February 2020 edition rather than the October 2019 edition of the newsletter, due to space issues. It has been worth the wait!

Storm Petrels in Portugal

Kirsty Franklin, Renata Medeiros and Rob Thomas, A Rocha Portugal

We are very grateful to The Seabird Group for a grant of £500 to support the annual Storm Petrels in Portugal research project: monitoring **European Storm Petrels** (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) during their northwards migration past the Algarve coast of southern Portugal in early summer.

For 30 years, A Rocha Portugal -in collaboration with Cardiff University- have been catching European Storm Petrels by using acoustic playback of Storm Petrel song, played on a battery-powered loudspeaker, to attract migrating petrels into mist nets positioned at the base of a cliff on the Algarve coast. The birds are ringed, weighed and measured, and DNA and faecal samples are collected – increasing our understanding of the travels, longevity, populations and diet of these enigmatic little seabirds.

Over the years, some of the equipment has become degraded or damaged due to wear and tear, as well as regularly being doused in salt spray! The Seabird Group's generosity has allowed us to replace our mist nets and loudspeaker system, as well as some weather-recording kit.



Top: Some of this year's hardy fieldwork team.
Bottom: European Storm Petrel ready for release.
Photos: A Rocha Portugal.



Top: Masters student Jess Hey ringing a Storm Petrel. Photo: A Rocha Portugal.

This long-term monitoring project not only collects valuable ecological data on the European Storm Petrel and the wider marine environment, but also provides a unique opportunity for students and/or volunteers to be actively involved in scientific research. Many of our past volunteers (including two of us -Kirsty and Renata) have gone on to work with seabirds in other contexts such as Masters or PhD research. Over 280 volunteers have participated in the project over the years, and in 2019 we were delighted to welcome nine volunteers, including six undergraduates and one Masters student.

The 2019 season was a big success, with 231 birds ringed. Of these, three were recaptured later in the summer at breeding colonies in Scotland (Priest Island and Mousa), and 13 had been ringed before, including five previously ringed in the Faroe Islands (2,800 km away!). Remarkably, after double-checking ring numbers, we confirmed that two of these individuals had actually been ringed on the Faroes last year by one of this year's Algarve ringing volunteers, Cardiff University Masters student Jess Hey.

"I was working on the Faroe Islands for Anne Ausems from the University of Gdańsk,"

recounts Jess, ‘helping her collect samples for her PhD whilst also collecting samples for my Masters project studying the diet of Faroese European Storm Petrels and Leach’s Petrels. I first discovered my love of seabirds on the Storm Petrels in Portugal project at the end of my first year of university – and so it seemed like the right way to finish my degree too!’

Another student volunteer, undergraduate Lucy Rowley, collected DNA samples (a single breast feather from each bird) to add to our genetic archive of DNA from Storm Petrels moving between Portugal and breeding locations across the NE Atlantic and the Mediterranean. On her return to Cardiff, Lucy has spent the summer analysing this archive in the molecular lab in collaboration with Dr Frank Hailer and funded by the Cardiff University Research Opportunities Scheme. It is hoped that this work will help to understand the apparent geographical structuring of Storm Petrel pre-breeding movements.

Over the 30 years of this project, the research has also been supported by a range of other funding and in-kind support from A Rocha Portugal, CEMPA (who provide our bird rings free of charge), European Union Erasmus and Global Opportunities programme support for volunteer travel and accommodation, and PhD/Masters funding for shorter-term specific research projects associated with the annual monitoring. If you are a seabird enthusiast interested in joining us in next year’s fieldwork (June 2020), please get in touch!

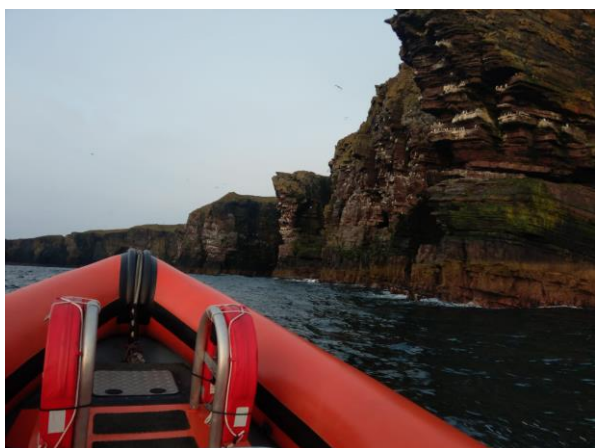
Kirsty Franklin rst18vzu@uea.ac.uk, Renata Medeiros MedeirosMirrarj@Cardiff.ac.uk, Rob Thomas ThomasRJ@Cardiff.ac.uk

Caithness Black Guillemots

Nina O’Hanlon, Caithness Seabird Count Co-ordinator, Rob Hughes, RSPB and Phil Davey, RSPB.

Caithness is great for watching **Black Guillemots** (*Cephus grylle*). The best spots are the low-lying coastal stretches, such as Dunnet Bay, or in the harbours. It is more difficult to observe them from the cliffs, especially from those along the east of the county. However, this stretch of coast is important for Black Guillemots. The East Caithness Coast is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for the internationally important numbers of breeding seabirds such as **Northern Fulmar** (*Fulmarus glacialis*), **Black-legged Kittiwake** (*Rissa tridactyla*), **Razorbill** (*Alca torda*), and **Common Guillemot** (*Uria aalge*). In 2014, the coastline between Helmsdale and Wick was also designated as the East Caithness Cliffs Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area (NCMPA), incorporating nearshore waters up to 2 km out to sea, to protect the foraging and breeding areas of the Black Guillemots. In 2014, 1569 adults in summer plumage were recorded between Helmsdale and Wick (Swann 2014), an increase on the 939 individuals counted along the same stretch of coast during Seabird 2000 (Mitchell et al. 2004).

As Black Guillemots have a scattered breeding distribution they can be a challenge to count. The recommended approach is to count adult birds in summer plumage, on land and on the sea offshore from breeding areas, early in the morning during the pre-laying period, in calm weather (Walsh et al. 1995). For Seabirds Count, the north Caithness coast was surveyed for Black Guillemots from land, during April 2018 and 2019, thanks to a team of volunteers from the local SOC Caithness Bird Group and the Environmental Research Institute, University of the Highlands and Islands.



Boat surveys of Black Guillemot. Photo: Nina O’Hanlon.

Due to the length of coast along the east of the county, and the long stretches of 30-60m high cliffs, rising to 150m at Berriedale, we needed a boat to complete the Caithness Black Guillemot counts for Seabirds Count. Thanks to a grant from the Seabird Group we were able to charter the Geo Explorer RIB from Caithness Seacoast. The weather in April this year (2019) was not ideal for counting Black Guillemots or taking a boat out. The peak survey time for monitoring Black Guillemots is between the 1st and 21st April. Our first count was within this period (20th April), however, unfortunately, due to wet and windy weather, the second count on the 28th April was outside this period. Although the timing for this count is acceptable, the count on this date is likely to underestimate the potential number of breeding Black Guillemots along this stretch of coast.

Following the methodology in the Seabird Monitoring Handbook we counted Black Guillemots between first light and 08:30 BST. From the boat we recorded all birds in adult summer plumage on land or on the sea within 300m of shore. We also counted individuals in other plumages, those further than 300m from shore and foraging birds. On the 20th April we surveyed from Wick Bay to Latheron Wheel between 06:00 and 08:25, whilst on the 28th

April we surveyed from Latheron Wheel to Badbea between 05:30 and 07:20. Over the two mornings we counted a total of 854 adult summer plumaged Black Guillemots. This count is similar to that recorded along the same sections during Seabird 2000 (834 adult summer plumage individuals) but is considerably lower than the 2014 count for this stretch of coast (1,449 adult summer plumage individuals, Swann 2014). Part of this difference may be explained by the later timings of the 2019 surveys.

The east Caithness counts, and those from the north coast, have been uploaded to the Seabird Monitoring Program database so it will be interesting to see how these numbers compare to other locations and to see how the Black Guillemot is faring within the region and across the UK.

Massive thanks again to all the Caithness volunteers who got up early to count Tysties over the last couple of years, and to the Seabird Group for providing funds to charter the boat to complete the east coast counts.

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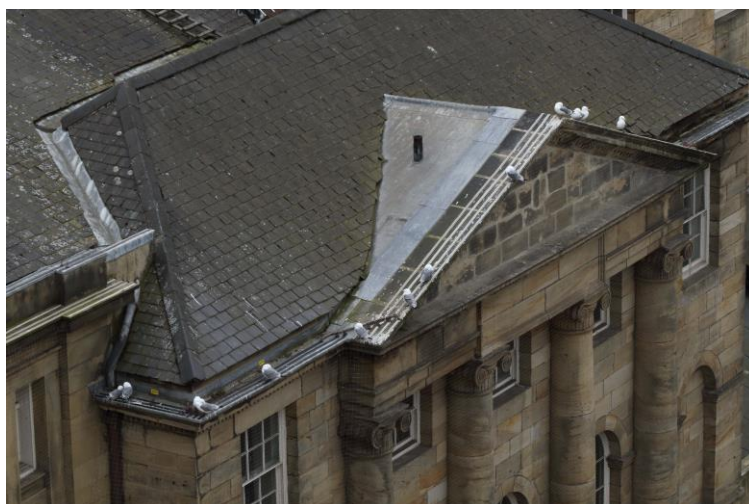
Swann, R. 2014. Marine Protected Area – related black guillemot surveys 2014. *Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 792*.

River Tyne Kittiwakes – Notes about the 2019 breeding season

Daniel M. Turner

When I first saw Tyne Kittiwakes at the Newcastle quayside in 2019 on 21st February there were three or four, although that was not really the start of the season for me. Preparations had begun the previous autumn. The summer of 2018 had been notable because several of the gulls had become accidentally entrapped by bird-deterrent netting on buildings at Newcastle quayside and 12 to 15 of them had died as a consequence while six to eight were rescued and released alive. This drew much concern and particular attention on social media and in some press. Following the summer of 2018 and the departure of the Kittiwakes from the river, several meetings took place to try and ensure these issues did not recur. Newcastle City Council held and chaired the meetings which involved many parties including: Newcastle quayside businesses, property owners and managing agents, Northumbria Police, RSPB, RSPCA, Rentokil and the Tyne Kittiwake Partnership. One of the outcomes was that any netting which had become dangerous to the Kittiwakes was to be removed during the winter. Possible alternative deterrents were also discussed at the meetings.

By late February 2019 this work was concluding and some quayside buildings had invested in alternative deterrent measures to protect their property and the public from kittiwake droppings if it was thought appropriate. From 24th February to 3rd May I made weekly two-hour-long surveys of the Newcastle Guildhall, an impressive Grade I listed building next to the river and beside the Tyne Bridge. The angled top-netting there had been removed and Avishock tracks introduced as an alternative on a previously popular nesting ledge. In addition, optical / fire gel pads were now installed on a ledge around the lower part of the clock tower. My aim was to check on how well these new deterrents were working as the kittiwakes returned after the winter. The most nests recorded on the Guildhall in past years had been 72 in 2017 when 93 chicks fledged from the building. During this ten week Guildhall observation period these deterrents worked pretty much as designed, though I was puzzled to see many Kittiwakes actually resting on the Avishock tracks on the north aspect of the building during my visits on 4th and 10th April. The Avishock on the east and south aspects remained clear of Kittiwakes. The City Council was informed and it was determined that a visiting electrician had thrown a switch, not realising what it was for. It controlled the Avishock of the north aspect! So it was switched



Kittiwakes resting on Avishock deterrent tracks at Newcastle Guildhall, 10th April 2019. Daniel M. Turner.

back on and started to work again to deter the birds from resting on that particular set of top ledges. As the summer progressed I recorded 31 apparently occupied Kittiwake nests on the Guildhall which fledged 24 chicks. The bulk of the nests were now on unprotected ledges of the clock tower, to which some of the previous resident gulls must have moved.

As the Kittiwakes returned to settle at the Ferry Mews apartments beside North Shields ferry landing it became apparent that some tampering had occurred during the winter. Some of the Kittiwakes there were seen with blackened breast feathering. Anti-climb paint had been placed on the short roof section where thirteen pairs had nested in 2018. Their old nests had also been removed. Quite rapidly a letter was dispatched by the RSPB to ask for the removal of this inappropriate deterrent. The Kittiwakes were then able to raise 12 chicks from nine fresh nests.

On 6th March around 10% of the full breeding numbers had returned to nesting locations at Saltmeadows Tower (Gateshead) and Akzo Nobel (Felling Shore) as Kittiwakes started to make their way back from winter at sea. A Newcastle pair was watched attempting to mate on 4th April while by six days later at least 39% of full summer numbers were present at the north abutment of the Tyne Bridge and some nest building was underway. On 5th June a first small chick was seen and on 12th July an early free-flying juvenile was observed. On 30th August only one Kittiwake showed in the Newcastle-Gateshead quayside area; a fledged juvenile, the rest had left by then.



A Tyne kittiwake with the outline of Newcastle Cathedral in the background, 1st August 2019. Daniel M. Turner.

Frequent rain during the early part of the nesting season was a concern at the time, but turned out to have no great impact. The 2019 breeding season produced the most Kittiwake nests ever recorded along the river on man-made structures and buildings ... 1,355 Apparently Occupied Nests (AON) with 1,307 well-grown nestlings. This resulted in a breeding productivity of 0.96 chicks per nest compared to 0.99 on the natural cliffs at the mouth of the Tyne at Tynemouth with an extra 350 AON. It was a great season! The continuing trend is for increasing numbers of nests and chicks along the Tyne.

During 2019 I gave seven Kittiwake talks. Three were at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art (Gateshead) as part of the 'Kittiwakes and Doughnuts' events organised by [Wild Intrigue](#) each of which included a guided Kittiwake walk. I also participated in an activity at the Great North Museum: Hancock on 6th August with a seabird display table and encouraging families to make origami Kittiwakes.

You will find the more complete main summary table and report of the 2019 Tyne Kittiwake breeding season, showing data for all river nesting sites, on the website of the Natural History Society of Northumbria (under the section '[Conservation and Research](#)').

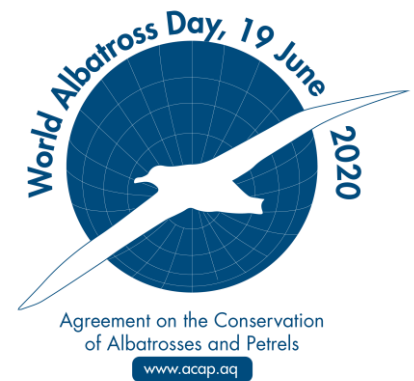
The 'Tyne Kittiwake Partnership' has an account on Facebook and Twitter ([@TyneKittiwakes](#)). During 2019 the Facebook account was regularly updated, as during previous years, with short news items about the Kittiwakes' progress.

World Albatross Day

This year we will celebrate the first World Albatross Day on the **19th June**. The day was inaugurated at the most recent meeting of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP, of which the UK is a Party) to coincide with the anniversary of the date the agreement was signed in Canberra 2001. World Albatross Day will be an opportunity to promote these majestic seabird giants and to raise awareness of the plight of albatrosses around the globe. Follow ACAP online to keep up to date with World Albatross Day, and spread the word.

Website: <https://www.acap.aq/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AlbatrossesandPetrels/>



Northern Ireland Seabird Report Launch

Katherine Booth Jones, Northern Ireland Seabird Coordinator

Join us to celebrate the launch of the latest Northern Ireland Seabird Report. The annual report (see previous reports [here](#)) presents the very latest seabird monitoring data gathered by our dedicated team of Seabird Network volunteers and by staff of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), National Trust and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

The evening event is a chance for those interested in seabirds and seabird monitoring in Northern Ireland to receive a hard copy of the report and network over tea/coffee and a light buffet.

We also have three excellent speakers lined up:

- **Tessa Coldale** of the **Biosecurity for LIFE** programme will make sure we are all prepared for maintaining excellent biosecurity on our seabird surveys in the coming season.
- **Daniel Johnston** of BTO Scotland will be speaking about his research into foraging ecology of **Black Guillemots** in relation to tidal stream turbines and marine protected areas.
- **Liz Humphries** of BTO Scotland will be speaking about how a Shetland-based tracking project is revealing the foraging ranges of **Arctic Skua** (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), the most steeply declining seabird species in the UK.

Where: Bangor Castle, Bangor, Co. Down, Northern Ireland.

When: 18th March 2020, 18:00 – 20:00.

Free to attend but booking essential - [visit the BTO website](#).



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

Current retirement dates (at AGM) are shown in brackets:

Chair	Liz Humphreys (2023)	Liz.Humphreys@bto.org
Secretary	Annette Fayet (2023)	secretary@seabirdgroup.org.uk
Treasurer	Ian Cleasby (2022)	ian.cleasby@rspb.org.uk
Membership Secretary	Danni Thompson (2022)	membership@seabirdgroup.org.uk
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Social Media	Saskia Wischniewski (2022)	saskia.wischniewski@rspb.org.uk
Assistant Membership Secretary	Zoe Deakin (2022)	DeakinZ@cardiff.ac.uk

Current membership rates

Standing Order	£20
Concession	£15
Institution	£35
International:	£21
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.