

# The Shearwater

Issue 4 November 2014



Working with the local community and visitors on the Isles of Scilly to enhance their important seabird heritage

## Shearwater chicks successfully fledged on St Agnes & Gugh – first time in living memory!

As many of you may well have heard, following our press release in late September, we have seen and captured footage of 10 Manx Shearwater chicks outside their burrows. They have since left Scilly and set out on their long-haul migration to Latin America. There they will stay for between two and four years before returning to the islands to raise their own young.

A big pat on the back for everyone involved in the project to date! You have helped ensure that these chicks have survived to start their journey through life. We are equally delighted to say that there has been no sign of rats on either island for the past 11 months. Thanks to those of you who have been carrying out monitoring and reporting potential rat sightings to us. Do keep assisting us, report any possible sightings to the team by calling 01720 422153 and for further information on the project just visit [www.ios-seabirds.org.uk](http://www.ios-seabirds.org.uk)

**Jaclyn Pearson, Project Manager**

**Edward Marshall and Lydia Titterton, Project Volunteers**



Above: Manx shearwater chick at a burrow on Gugh.

Left: Volunteers Lindsey Death and Abbie Pailing busy with activities at St Agnes school.

Below: St Agnes schoolchildren show the BBC's Mike Dilger our Scilly shrews.

Bottom: Scilly shrew – numbers are increasing since rat removal.



Filming at St Agnes school  
© Ed Marshall



Mike Dilger and St Agnes school  
© Ed Marshall



Scilly Shrew  
© Ed Marshall

## The BBC and ITV visit the Islands

Recently the project has hosted both BBC and ITV. They were here to film for 'Inside Out' and the regional news respectively. It was an absolute pleasure to meet them. BBC presenter Mike Dilger joined us at the Manx shearwater burrows and helped with St Agnes school's shrew survey. We and he were delighted to see a live Scilly shrew, another species benefiting from rat removal.

Project Partners and supporters



## Your Manxies Need You!

We are looking for volunteers. Do you live on St Agnes or St Mary's? Can you check any monitoring stations? Are you visiting next year and can you assist us? Please get in touch.

Phone: 01720 422153

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# A View from Lower Town Cottage

**Richard McCarthy, St Agnes Councillor:** ' My view back over the past 12 months has been dominated by two very hard-working women. From the outset the Seabird Recovery Project would never have got off to such a successful start on the islands in terms of rat removal without the professional expertise and personal touch of New Zealand ecologist Biz Bell from Wildlife Management International. Since then it has been project manager Jaclyn Pearson who has diligently chased up potential rat sightings and kept the community on its toes, including yours truly when it comes to helping edit these newsletters. With her wide knowledge and good humour Biz was able to persuade even the most sceptical of old souls like me of the project's exciting possibilities if we all pulled together. At the other end of the age spectrum Jaclyn's cheerful enthusiasm has readily communicated itself to children, not least through involvement in monitoring of Scilly shrew numbers. It is difficult to see how the project's purposes could have been better served without either lady.'



© Alastair Wilson

## Autumn Beach Clean



© Ed Marshall



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The St Agnes and Gugh Autumn Beach Clean was carried out by a team of volunteers. They collected a total of 40 bags of rubbish! Well done to team leaders, the Wildlife Trust Rangers and all those volunteers who assisted; also to the Council of the Isles of Scilly for supporting the cost of waste collection and incineration. It is still vital that we keep beaches clean, thus helping to remove potential food sources. Should a rat reach the islands, if there is minimal food available, then it is more likely to try and eat the chocolate wax monitoring blocks and we will detect its presence much quicker than otherwise.

## Stakeholder Visits



This summer RSPB finance team members Adrian Oates and Ruth Sharman, staff who help keep our show on the road, came and saw the project for themselves. David Appleton, from project partner Natural England was also here and had a good look at the Manx shearwater burrows. David was part of Lundy's 'seabird recovery project' 10 years ago where the shearwater population has since risen by over 250%.

## Project Steering Group

<b>Paul St Pierre</b>	Project Supervisor RSPB
<b>Jaclyn Pearson</b>	Project Manager
<b>Sarah Mason</b>	Chief Executive Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust
<b>Richard McCarthy</b>	St Agnes representative
<b>Will Garratt</b>	Estate Assistant Duchy of Cornwall
<b>David Appleton</b>	Landscape Scale Project Leader Natural England
<b>Julian Pearce</b>	Senior Officer: Physical Assets and Natural Resources Council of the Isles of Scilly
<b>Paul Buckley</b>	Regional Conservation Manager RSPB
<b>Leigh Lock</b>	Senior Species Recovery Officer RSPB

## New IOSWT Rangers

We also welcome two new Estate Rangers to the team at the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust. Murray Guy and Rob Carrier have earned their orange hats. They are both trained to assist in the event of a potential rat sighting.

**Rob Carrier**

**Murray Guy**



# Introducing New Faces under those Orange Hats

With a number of Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust residential volunteer placements now starting, we are welcoming new members to the volunteer team on the Seabird Recovery Project, as well as catching up with some of its more familiar faces.



**Lydia Titterton**

“I began volunteering three days a week with the Seabird Recovery Project back in May and I’ve loved every second of it! From late nights on Gugh with the first shearwater chicks to examining the contents of pitfall traps, my time on the project has been varied to say the least. If I had to pick one, I’d say my best moment so far has to be hearing Storm petrels calling from underneath the boulders on Annet. It’s a moment I’ll never forget and I look forward to what the future brings for the project and these fantastic birds.”

© Ed Marshall

**Tom Bassnett**

“A large part of the ecological monitoring work we have undertaken has involved invertebrates. This is done using pitfall traps which are placed in different habitats for three days, before contents are analysed up at Trenoweth. This analysis has revealed several exciting species rarely seen before on Scilly.”



© Ed Marshall



**Ed Marshall**

“Having spent two months photographing the work of the project over the summer I’m looking forward to being more

involved over the coming months, especially now that I’m trained to respond to rat sightings”

© Lydia Titterton

**Will Stubbs**

“The ROAR training was both interesting and informative. The day started with an introduction to the monitoring project and how well it was going. We then progressed on to methods for interview, information gathering for potential ROARs and the procedure involved. It rolled nicely into the equipment sheds and how everything was stored. The day then wrapped up with a recap of the day and an Ice cream at Troytown!”



© Ed Marshall



**Rhianna Pearce**

“It was great to see members of the community joining us for the beach clean on St Agnes and Gugh. We all had such fun and there was a great sense of achievement seeing everything free of rubbish.”

© Ed Marshall

**Rebecca Etheridge**

“I took part in checking the permanent monitoring stations on Gugh for signs of rats. It felt great to be a part of this important work and to see that there are still no signs on the island.”



© Ed Marshall

**Abbie Pailing**

“A few months ago I took part in a vegetation survey of St. Agnes and Gugh. This meant counting the plants within various random quadrats. As complete beginners to the subject of vegetation, we all needed a bit of training. But now I can successfully identify most of the common plants found on the islands.”



© Ed Marshall

# All the fun of the fete for Young Seabird Ambassadors



A key part of the project is engaging and inspiring young people - Young Seabird Ambassadors – about the world of seabird conservation. This summer we brought a mix of activities to all Five Islands School bases, to youth groups, to visiting schools, colleges and universities. We led important school assemblies, teaching young people about how to enjoy themselves on the islands without disturbing nesting birds. We took small groups of young people to visit Manx shearwater burrows, carefully giving them a glimpse of the bird's private life. We taught students how best to use binoculars and understand seabird monitoring methodologies. And of course we arranged high energy activities celebrating our wonderful seabirds which really sparked the young people's imaginations. We found the 'storm petrel food chain game' a big hit this year so took it to all the fetes and 'Apple Day' went down well too. Thanks to the volunteers for joining forces in these activities. The message certainly got through to young Jake on St Martin's. 'Seabirds are super-duper,' was his verdict.

From top left: St Mary's School on a bird watching field trip; Apple Day at school on St Agnes; St Just School field trip; Bishop Stopford school visits Manxie burrows; Primary School assembly on St Mary's; Fun at the fetes; Activity Week at St Mary's school.

## Grazie!

In August we received visitors Giovanna, Massimo and Paulo from Italy. Like us, they are carrying out an EU LIFE Project. Its title is lengthy: 'Protection of main world's population of *Puffinus yelkouan*'. Their project's key element is to remove rats from Tavolara, an Island off the north Sardinian coast. On it 600 mountainous hectares, the island boasts no less than 50% of the world's population of the Yelkouan shearwater. Our continental friends particularly wanted to learn about bio-security measures implemented here so far. They really valued meeting members of the community at the Island Hall and in their homes, where they learned about the part ongoing community support plays in keeping St Agnes and Gugh rat-free. They sent a big 'Grazie' to Scilly. We look forward to following their progress.



## Date with Nature, Seabird Safaris & Scillonian III guides



We organised 'Date with Nature' walks on Tesco in June and September. Well done to all the volunteers who talked to more than 800 people over 60 hour-long walks, telling them all about our seabirds and the project itself. Three cheers also for skipper John Peacock and Interpreter Darren Mason on this year's weekly St Agnes boating 'Seabird Safaris'. Feedback from visitors about Darren's commentary was excellent.



Thanks to the volunteer guides onboard the Scillonian this year. They pointed out wildlife and gave leaflets to the passengers—explaining about seabirds and the project before the passengers even reached the islands! These trips finished for the season on 7th November.

# Biosecurity: keeping the islands rat-free

Biosecurity is all about preventing rats from re-infesting St Agnes and Gugh and what to do should one or more be found on the islands. There are now three Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust rangers, seven residential volunteers and five staff members at the Penzance RSPB office all trained and ready to assist Jaclyn. There is also a brand new project volunteer, our very own retired Islands' GP, Randolph Hessing. He will be sharing the task of checking out the permanent monitoring station checks with the Wildlife Trust volunteers and assisting in incursion response. His first such venture required the donning of a lifejacket as he and others had to be punted on to the islands at a very low tide.

There are four stages to Biosecurity:

- 1. Prevention.** There is bait on board boats which serve the islands (including the Lyonesse Lady and St Agnes Boating's vessels.) The local community has been trained a. to check high risk items being brought ashore (eg hay and animal feed) b. to ensure good waste management practice by using compost bins and secure wheelie bins and c. to remain vigilant at all times for sign of rats and to encourage all visitors to be equally vigilant.
- 2. Detection.** The permanent monitoring stations are examined every two to three weeks. The chocolate wax inside the permanent boxes around the coastline is checked for teeth marks. So far any marks have only been from shrews. Thanks to those of you on the islands who have been checking inland monitoring stations on your land. The 'Rat On A Rat' (ROAR) hotline number has also been introduced so that visitors and residents can call about anything suspiciously 'ratty.'
- 3. Surveillance.** This is where someone trained in biosecurity measures carries out an investigation into a suspected rat sign.
- 4. Incursion response.** A 300 metre-wide, 50 station monitoring grid is set out with flavoured wax or tracking tunnels. This is checked over a monthly period. If there is a rat, it will be detected. If there is no sign, then the grid is brought in after that month and vigilance returns. So far the ROAR hotline has had 11 calls. Thankfully all of them have been false alarms.

Question: what is the most important part of this biosecurity stage? Answer: **YOU, the island residents**, because prevention is always better than cure and you are the eyes and ears of the project. **'Rat on a Rat' and call either 01720 422153** to report any sign or sightings of rats or call Jaclyn direct on 07881 517047.



Summer volunteer Holly Paget-Brown.

Island volunteers Randolph and Basil.



Volunteers training

## Shrew droppings: they're surprisingly big!

Shrew. 15mm length. Thinner width



Rat. 25mm when straight. Thicker width



Now that rats have been removed from St Agnes and Gugh, you may have noticed a modest increase in the number of shrews, maybe evidence of shrews in your garden or even in your property. Last month each household received a 'droppings crib sheet!'. Although Scilly shrew droppings can be surprisingly big and as long (up to 16mm) as some smaller rat droppings they do have a narrower width. If in doubt, put on plastic gloves and look at the consistency. Shrews only eat insects. Their droppings are **crumbly** and **sandy** and full of insect wings or bits of woodlice. Rats eat anything. Their droppings can be **sticky** and contain seeds from blackberries and other fruit. If in doubt, remember each household has been given some chocolate wax which you can put out to check for tell-tale teeth marks. Give us a call first though and we will talk you through exactly what you need to do.



© Ed Marshall

Scilly shrew teeth marks



© Ed Marshall

Rat teeth marks

# Seabird Recovery – the Wider Picture

The prime objective of the project is to keep St Agnes and Gugh rat-free so as to protect our seabirds. But everyone also needs to be aware that the project reaches out to other islands. The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust continues with its baiting duties on the uninhabited islands. So you may well notice rangers and volunteers busy in their orange hats throughout autumn and winter. Meanwhile, Dr Vickie Heaney carries on her task of conducting seabird monitoring across the islands with 2015 seeing a full audit of the entire seabird population within Scilly's SPA, its Special Protection Area.

## Counting Scilly's Seabirds

"The Isles of Scilly are vitally important for seabirds. They support as many as 9000 breeding pairs. This is the most significant seabird colony in South West England. Recording these populations and their breeding success is crucial. It is a way of monitoring the current health of our seabird heritage. It also helps to focus resources for future conservation and survey work.

"Seabirds are vulnerable to disturbance during the breeding season. So the number of landings and time spent in the colonies is kept to an absolute minimum. Access to closed sites has to be by permission of the Wildlife Trust which manages the archipelago's untenanted land and its uninhabited islands. To signal this permission rangers and volunteers wear orange Seabird Recovery Project hats.

"The main element of these surveys involves searching for and counting up nests and their contents. For a start there has to be co-ordination with the volunteer team, calm enough weather to get to the islands where the birds are nesting and a boatman willing to land you there! In addition, different species begin nesting at different times so survey work needs to be timed to coincide with 'peak incubation', when a majority of the birds are on their eggs.

"Herring and Lesser black-backed gull nests and eggs look similar so it is a case of checking what birds are calling overhead and which one returns to the nest as you move away. Shag eggs are narrow and white and to reduce predation nests are often hidden under boulders. Contents of kittiwake nests along low ram cliffs can be checked early in the season with a mirror on a stick. For fulmars the best method is to count apparently incubating birds from a boat. This eliminates the risk of a startled bird dislodging its single egg as it takes off. Finally, burrow nesters—Manx shearwater and storm petrel need something completely different. It entails playing a tape of their calls right outside burrow entrances and at regular intervals along boulder beaches. This allows an estimate of the number of 'Apparently Occupied Burrows' from the number of incubating birds down below that reply ! It's all in a day's work for a Seabird Ecologist."

**Dr Vickie Heaney, Seabird Ecologist**



## Winter work for the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust

Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust Chief Executive Sarah Mason explains what is planned over the winter months for the Trust and its nine-strong team of willing staff and volunteers:

"Winter heralds the start of the season in which we ensure that the uninhabited island bird colonies are protected from predation by brown rats. The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, in partnership with the Seabird Recovery Project, has been maintaining those uninhabited islands most important for seabirds, namely the St Helens/Round Island Group & the Eastern Isles, rat-free for the last seven years. This winter, the team of Rangers (wearing orange hats, of course) will carry out monitoring for rats and laying bait where necessary on islands which have shown increases in numbers of breeding seabirds. Using the Trust's catamaran, Samphire, which is being skippered this winter by John Peacock of St Agnes Boating, the project team will make three visits per island between November and March."

# Ecological Monitoring of Other Species

Other surveys being carried out on St Agnes and Gugh are those designed to monitor changes to rabbit and shrew numbers, to species of vegetation, to invertebrates and to land birds. Last year 'baseline surveys' were carried out by Spalding's Associates. They used Bryher as a control site. This year more than 30 volunteers joined us in May, June, July and September. The logistics of carrying out these surveys across three islands were always going to be quite challenging. But we managed to complete the workload for the year and data is now being analysed by Spalding's Associates.

Tracking tunnels are used to measure the prevalence of shrews via their footprints within four separate habitats, over three different nights, on each individual island. The bait used inside these tunnels is blowfly larvae, as shrews are insectivorous. For vegetation, we use 20 random quadrats to measure vegetation cover. For invertebrates we set up 40 'pitfalls', again over three nights in these same habitats. For land birds, all birds (but not seabirds) seen or heard within a timed transect across each island are surveyed. As well as to Spalding's Associates and the volunteers, our gratitude goes out to campsites on both St Agnes and Bryher; St Agnes and Tresco boats for making trips at unusual times; to the Judson family on St Agnes and Chris and Geoff Taylor on Bryher for storing equipment in their barns. If you are interested in volunteering please do get in touch. Next year sees the final year of monitoring for all the wider species mentioned above.

From top left: Neil and Ed carrying out vegetation surveys on St Agnes foreshore with Winter Task Force volunteer Sarah Havery, returning to assist.

Tash, Val, Colin, Aimee and Will on vegetation survey work in the scrub on St Agnes.

Matthew, Olly and Tamsin checking shrew tunnels on Bryher.

Tom, Jaclyn and Abbie emptying pitfalls on St Agnes.

Catriona providing vegetation training to volunteers on Gugh.

Tristan carrying out fixed point photography on Wingletang.

## Bob Dawson: a big thank you

The project has benefited from Bob's experience and expertise in bird surveys which has involved a range of species, habitats and methods and has extended to Canada and Morocco as well as the UK. Working closely with Spalding Associates, Bob established the method to be used for our land bird surveys and the survey routes on St Agnes and Gugh. He also provided valuable training and advice. Time he spent with volunteers has been enjoyable and much appreciated.

"I am really encouraged by the volunteers getting involved in the land bird surveys. Whether you're just starting to apply your identification skills or a seasoned survey veteran, there's always something new to learn, and it's fun too!" says Bob.

## Pitfall Friday!

After collecting the contents from the pitfalls, it was the project volunteers' task to sort out all the insects. They really rose to the challenge. Each Friday from May to September was dubbed 'Pitfall Friday' and Friday July 18<sup>th</sup> had to be the busiest pitfall analysis ever. Thirteen volunteers worked a nine hour relay counting out the contents of more than 200 pitfalls! A round of applause to everyone involved, because thanks to their efforts, the analysis of no less than 90,811 invertebrates is now complete: quite incredible! More applause for team leaders Abbie, Tom and Lydia.

# Your Seabird Recovery Project - what do you think of it so far?

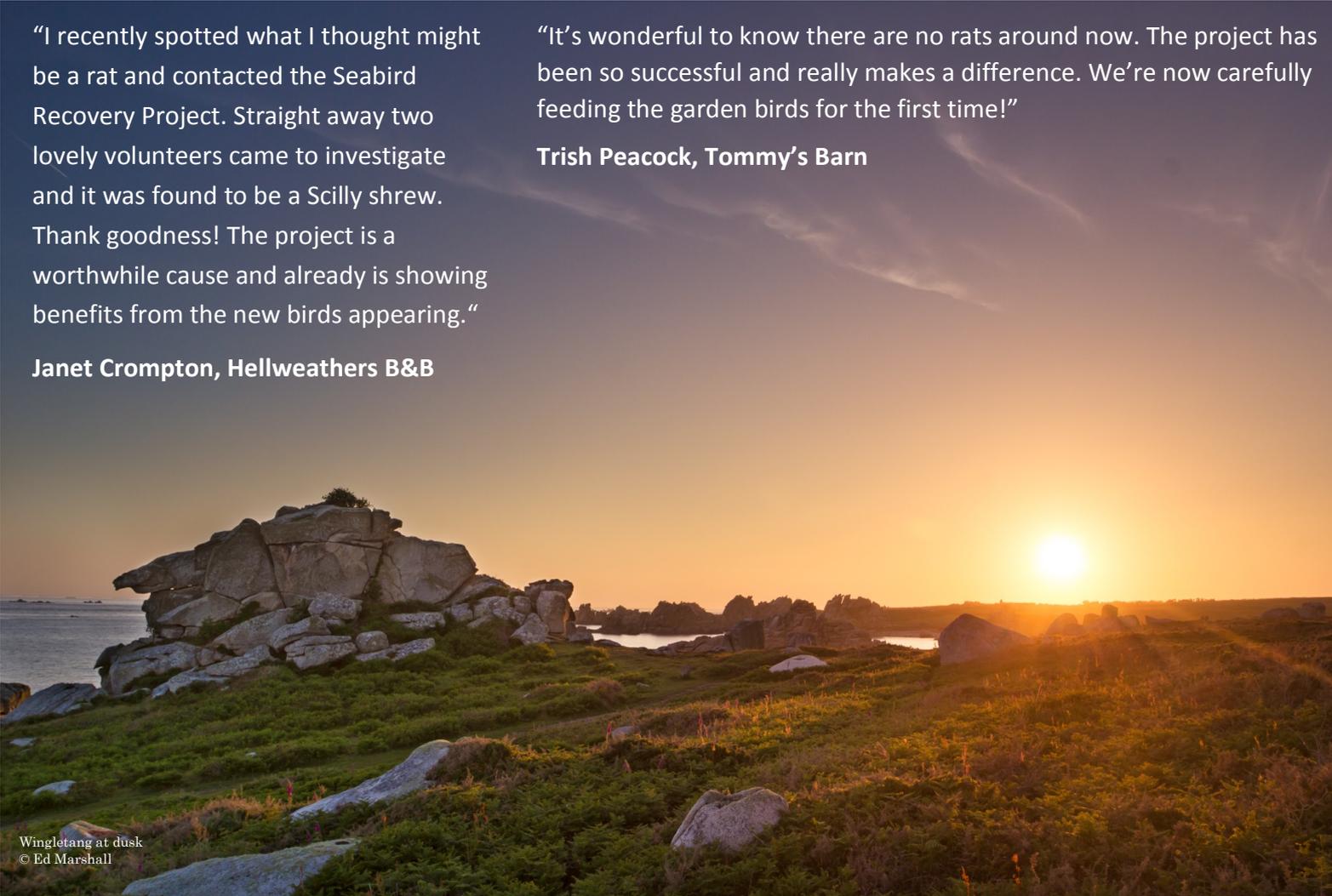
Project volunteers, Lindsey and Lydia collected feedback from the community, here are some quotes.

“I recently spotted what I thought might be a rat and contacted the Seabird Recovery Project. Straight away two lovely volunteers came to investigate and it was found to be a Scilly shrew. Thank goodness! The project is a worthwhile cause and already is showing benefits from the new birds appearing.”

**Janet Crompton, Hellweathers B&B**

“It’s wonderful to know there are no rats around now. The project has been so successful and really makes a difference. We’re now carefully feeding the garden birds for the first time!”

**Trish Peacock, Tommy’s Barn**



Wingletang at dusk  
© Ed Marshall

## Quotes from ‘Bin Day’. How have wheelie bins and compost bins assisted waste management?

“They’ve *bin* fantastic!”

**Tristan Hick, Coastguard Cafe**

“The wheelie bins have been great. Compared to the old bins they are so much better as the lids don’t blow off in strong winds. Also thanks to the volunteers for constructing the compost bin for us.”

**Carol Hicks, Lowertown Farm**

## Quotes from ‘Apple Day’. Has rat removal positively affected you and your businesses?

“The project has had a great result for the seabirds already, and for us and our business the project has been fantastic. The rats used to eat poultry food, haylage and apples. They created a lot of work for us and now they are gone it has made such a difference. It is so great to know they are not there any more. We will now remain vigilant.”

**Mike Hicks, twentyeight, Westward Farm**

“We have apple trees and it has been great this year to know rats are not around and we can still use the wind-fallen apples. Thanks to the school children for helping to collect them for us this year. We will continue to remove them each year to reduce the food available if a rat does get back to the islands.”

**Pam and Julian Beresford-Smith, The Parsonage.**

# Thank you!

“Yes, thanks for each and every part you have played and are playing in the project, both on and off the islands. It was one of the happiest moments of my life to see those Manx shearwater chicks outside their burrows this September. It is not often that the results of such hard work are seen so soon. It can take years of land management and conservation techniques to see flora and fauna benefiting - but we all did it together within the first year. And now we need to really stick at it to see that the seabird population really does thrive in the years ahead!



“A special vote of thanks to the community. You are all such a delight to work with: from attending the meetings to learn more about biosecurity, to welcoming guests from abroad who want to meet you while working so hard to keep your island rat-free. You should all be very proud. On the 8th November 2013 we started the winter removal programme. So as you read this newsletter a year on, just think how far we have come, courtesy of course to Wildlife Management International and their team. They put us in a very good place and we are proving that we can continue to carry on their good work and tell others all about it.”

**Jaclyn Pearson, Project Manager**



St Agnes Bonfire November 2013  
© Alastair Wilson

## Bonfire Night

**November—watch the notice board for upcoming date.**

Last year we destroyed nesting material which could harbour rats as part of Bonfire Night celebrations. We will support this event again this year, providing refreshments and encouraging you to continue to rid your barns and gardens of waste. Should a rat get back to St Agnes or Gugh, we want to have made sure that potential nesting sites have been reduced as much as possible.

Please add your wood and garden waste to the Fran Hicks bonfire site near Big Pool. See you there.

### Contact us

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Phone: 01720 422153

or 07881517047

Email: [jaclyn.pearson@rspb.org.uk](mailto:jaclyn.pearson@rspb.org.uk)



Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project  
Facebook Page

Please come and “like” us and follow all the project’s events and updates.

Postal address:

The Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project  
Trenoweth, St Mary's,  
Isles of Scilly, TR21 ONS

**We need YOUR help  
to keep St Agnes  
and Gugh and the  
uninhabited islands  
rat-free**



The project is funded by LIFE, the EU’s programme for financing key environmental schemes across the continent, and the UK’s own Heritage Lottery Fund.



**giving  
nature  
a home**

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