



ISLES OF SCILLY SEABIRD RECOVERY PROJECT

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

'RAT ON A RAT' UPDATE: MAY 2015

Volunteers; Mat and Becky Crowe; Rebecca Etheridge; Ros, Steve and Tristan Fletcher; Randolph Hensing; Ed Marshall; Irina Mereniuc; Colin and Bella Taylor; Joshua Wells; Amie Wheeldon; residents of St Agnes and Gugh. Thanks again to St Agnes Councillor Richard McCarthy for helping edit the newsletter from back on home turf this time.

Incursion response and training

We had three 'Rat on a Rat' calls this month. The first involved suspicious droppings on Gugh. We think it may well have been an 'unusual' rabbit dropping (perhaps from a younger rabbit) because although we couldn't locate the exact dropping as reported, we did find 'unusual' droppings elsewhere. Call number two was from a visitor who thought they saw a rat on the shoreline near Troytown Farm. She had a brief glimpse but was 90% sure it was a rat. We carried out a full incursion response, placing a monitoring station every 50m over a 300m wide area. So far there has been no sign of a rat at the stations. Gemma, now fully trained in the process, continues to check them. The third call was from a visitor who saw a suspicious mammal and we confirmed it was a rabbit though use of a camera trap. Please, everyone, do remain vigilant. Thanks for reporting anything suspicious (and keep doing so) on the 'Rat on a Rat number:' 422153.

We have also carried out 'refresher' incursion response training and added four new community members on Agnes to the incursion response team. Grateful to those who came along. You can hear an interview with the group about what they learnt and enjoyed about the training on the Project website under 'audio'. Also two new residents joined our band of St Mary's volunteers: Police Sergeant Mat Crowe and Irina Mereniuc. We will be offering further half day training sessions on St Agnes soon, keep an eye on the notice board or we will email or call you. Pick your morning or afternoon. John and Trish Peacock are pleased with their voluntary role: 'We check the rat boxes every fortnight on Wingletang and Horse Point while we're walking the dog. It's easy – just lift out the wax and check for teeth marks. We then just email the team to let them know that's been done.' says Trish. 'I enjoy spotting the shrew nests too. It's great that we can help out with something so simple that we know is making a difference to protection the island's seabirds.'



John Peacock, Gemma and Rebecca, training on Wingletang



Incursion response training at the 'incursion shed' thanks to Rick Legg



Gemma sets up a monitoring grid by Nags Head.

The islands' popular walking festival 'Walk Scilly 2015' kicked off with a 'Seabird Recovery Project' walk starting the festival on St Mary's. Jaclyn guided over 20 people around Peninnis to see where Manx shearwaters nest each year but where unfortunately the chicks don't fledge due to rat predation. It was therefore nice to be able to point out St Agnes and Gugh from Peninnis lighthouse and explain how 'there' the future of these birds is much brighter. The walkers were delighted to see and hear all about our amazing seabirds. Our second Project walk - 'St Agnes – Land Air and Sea' was led by Bob Dawson on St Agnes. Walkers were excited to spot fulmars and migrant hoopoes.



Walk Scilly 2015, St Mary's project walk



Walk Scilly St Agnes walk, picture by guide Bob Dawson



First puffins seen on Rosevear and Manxies at Bishop Rock lighthouse

It has been an incredible few weeks for Spring migrants alongside our resident seabirds. We had a big fall of ring ouzel and song thrushes across fields on St Agnes and then there was the 'mega' Great Blue heron seen on Tresco, Bryher, St Mary's (with a possible sighting in the mist on Periglis Meadow too!) On April 19th Bob Dawson heard the first cuckoo of the year on St Agnes. The following day the first puffins were seen by the project at Rosevear with Manx shearwaters also seen flying past Bishop Rock lighthouse.

Education sessions this month included youth activities on St Mary's. Second year undergraduates in Conservation and Countryside Management from Duchy College joined the Project as part of their field trip to the islands. They visited Manx shearwater nesting habitat, learnt about ongoing biosecurity and viewed the nesting colonies of kittiwakes and Lesser black-backed gulls on Gugh. The three most popular words from the feedback were: interesting, enjoyable and fun – we agree! The Scillonian III Wildlife volunteer guides have been busy pointing out the wildlife seen from the Scillonian III on Friday sailings over the past month. Highlights have included over 200 Manx shearwaters on one journey, and other wildlife has included Basking sharks near Cornwall and bow-riding common dolphins



Manx shearwater holiday activity at nesting habitats, St Mary's



Duchy College 'Environmental Sciences' Second Year field trip undergraduates



Wildlife Guides onboard Scillonian III ferry point out wildlife to passengers on Fridays.

Seabird Youth Ambassadors and seabird-friendly visitors

Both championing and assisting the Project are island teenagers Xanthe Hicks representing St Agnes, Kerry Hulands from Bryher and Keely Lawson and Katherine Pritchard from St Mary's. They became interested in truly engaging in the Project through the 'Music in Nature' activity at Five Islands School. They support the project by being advocates on their respective islands. Meanwhile 11 year old Bella Taylor demonstrated excellent map reading skills while assisting dad Colin inspect the incursion grid during a Sunday afternoon check. Lately we have had lots of lovely visitors to the islands contact the Project to find out more about how we're safeguarding our seabirds. Congratulations have followed for our efforts so far. So thank you for those kind words. We never mind being asked questions. Just look out for our orange hats!



Youth ambassadors Xanthe, Kerry, Keely and Katherine



Incursion volunteer Sergeant Colin Taylor with assistance from youth ambassador Bella Taylor



Seabird friendly visitors Frank & Margery Hutchinson say "the project is great".

Full Special Protection Area (SPA) seabird surveys - Dr Vickie Heaney is now in post until October as the project's Senior Research Officer and we have just appointed three Research Assistants, we will introduce them in the next newsletter. The surveys will begin on 18th May. If you would like to volunteer on these surveys please get in touch.

Jaclyn and Gemma

Comments and queries welcome: Jaclyn.pearson@rspb.org.uk or 07881517047. This partnership project is supported by LIFE, the EU's programme for financing key environmental schemes across the continent and the UK's Heritage Lottery Fund.

