

The Shearwater

Issue 3 March 2014



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

We are delighted to update you to say there has been no sign of rats on St Agnes and Gugh for the last 16 weeks at the time of writing this newsletter. The winter removal phase has been carried out by Wildlife Management International Limited (WMIL), led by Senior Ecologist Elizabeth (Biz) Bell and team leaders Dave Boyle and John Tayton. More than 30 volunteers have joined the team, including five long-term volunteers who have lived on site for five months.

Everyone has done a fantastic job. They have worked through some of the worst weather the islands have experienced in recent winters and the community have been really impressed —they really have been an incredible team. As part of this issue, you will read a little more about the people who were ‘under the orange hats’ this winter and as we move into the biosecurity phase of keeping the islands rat-free, I will introduce you to some new faces.

For more information on the project, please do visit www.ios-seabirds.org.uk



Jaclyn Pearson
Project Manager



Wildlife Management International Ltd and the ‘seabird task force’ on the first day of baiting



March 13th 2014— the final day of collecting in the last of the 1036 bait stations

Seabirds return to their Spring breeding grounds!

Stop Press! The first Puffins and Manx Shearwaters returning to the islands from their wintering grounds have just been seen from the Scillonian III on March 21st. Good to have them back!



Manx shearwater
© Joe Pender

Project Partners and supporters



Introducing new faces ‘under the orange hats’

Who is the project team now on the islands if Wildlife Management International have departed?

The Project Manager, Jaclyn Pearson is in post for 5 years. She is now being joined by the team at the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, by volunteers from across Scilly and by St Agnes residents. Without them the project would not be able to continue. It remains the largest community-based rat removal project in the world to date. The WMIL team wore orange hats during the removal phase so they could be easily identified. These hats have now been passed onto the new team, so when visiting if you see someone wearing a bright orange hat, it must be one of us – come and say hello.



Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust

Ranger, Darren Hart. IOSWT staff will carry out monthly checks and continue keeping the uninhabited islands rat-free.

Isles of Scilly AONB

AONB Assistant, Rebecca Steggles, will assist when required and will continue to facilitate through her role.

The project and WMIL would like to thank Bell Labs www.belllabs.com and PelGar www.pelgar.co.uk for their generous donation of bait and advice and support throughout the project.

A view from the RSPB

Sophie Thomas, Project Manager Seabird Island Restoration, visited the project in March 2014 to assist and advise on the biosecurity workshop.

“It has been a genuine pleasure to visit St Agnes and Gugh and meet the project team working to remove rats from the islands. It was wonderful to be here in person and see first hand how well the project has been carried out. It is exemplary. The hard work of everyone involved and the support from islanders are obvious. As the largest community-based rat removal project in the world, the IOSSRP is truly groundbreaking and the consequences for other important seabird islands with invasive rats, both in the UK and across the globe, will be resounding.”



Sophie's assistance and advice throughout has made this project possible, thank you .

A view from Lundy

Beccy MacDonald is the warden from Lundy Island (Bristol Channel). Lundy has been rat-free for 10 years now and the benefits to seabirds and other wildlife continue.

“The successful removal of rats from St Agnes is fantastic news for both the community and resident wildlife. Lundy became rat free in 2006 and has seen a dramatic increase in numbers of Manx Shearwaters (328 to 3,500) and Puffins (5 to over 180). The removal of the rats has also benefit the island's population of pygmy shrews and other wildlife. The support shown by the community of St.Agnes and all of the stakeholders is fantastic and will ensure the success of the Project.”



Beccy (left) and Vickie Heaney (Project's Seabird Ecologist) being trained by Biz (right) in how to recognise rat and shrew sign on chocolate wax and soap

What the project means to islanders and local businesses

“At Troytown farm on St Agnes we run a dairy, an ice-cream business and a camp-site. Our campers come here to enjoy the natural environment and the seabirds, particularly the Manx shearwaters which call at night from Annet. The rats have been destructive over the years, so the project will certainly benefit all our operations here and we know our campers will enjoy the island being rat-free. WMIL and the whole team have really toiled away this winter. They have trained us to carry on their hard work and we look forward to seeing them back in 2016 to check how things have gone in their absence.”

Sam Hicks, Troytown Farm

www.troytown.co.uk



“I provide tours to the Western Rocks for visitors to see our seabirds. If this project does allow colonies of seabirds to flourish on St Agnes and Gugh, it will undoubtedly have huge benefits for the islands for future generations.”

John Peacock, St Agnes Boating

www.stagnesboating.co.uk

Beach cleans



© Alastair Wilson Photography

The islands have experienced long spells of severe weather this winter, which means a large amount of litter was washed ashore. This litter impacts wildlife and of course attracts rats, so it was important to remove it. The islanders would like to thank WMIL and volunteers for assisting with clear-up and clean-up operations. St Agnes resident Johann Hicks explained; *“The community is extremely grateful that the team put in so much effort to the beach cleans.”*

Project Steering Group

We oversee the activities of the Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project :

Paul St Pierre	Project Supervisor RSPB
Jaclyn Pearson	Project Manager
Sarah Mason	Manager Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust
Trevor Kirk	Manager Isles of Scilly AONB
Richard McCarthy	St Agnes representative
Will Garratt	Estate Assistant Duchy of Cornwall
David Appleton	Landscape Scale Project Leader Natural England
Paul Buckley	Regional Conservation Manager RSPB
Leigh Lock	Species Recovery Officer RSPB

Stakeholder Visits

Thank you to all those stakeholders, including project funders, who have visited the project this year. Also thanks to all islanders and the school for explaining to us what the project means to them. Thanks also to Adrian Spalding for his talks to the community in March about the baseline ecological surveys of wider species (shrews, rabbits, vegetation, land birds and invertebrates) across St Agnes, Gugh and the control site on Bryher. We begin collecting Year Two data in April.



Biosecurity to keep the islands rat-free

St Agnes and Gugh has had no rat sign since Dec 2013 - so what now?

The bait has now been removed from the islands but the rat removal phase of the project was just the first part of the IOSSRP! Now everyone needs to do their bit to help keep the islands rat-free and enable the seabirds to recover. The Project Manager, the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust and islanders will be responsible for the upkeep of biosecurity measures which should help ensure the islands remain rat-free. We ask all residents and visitors to remain vigilant for any sign of rats. According to international protocols, the islands cannot be **officially** declared rat-free until two years after the last sign of rats was detected. Wildlife Management International Ltd will return in 2016 to do a final rat check for us. Only then can we claim rat-free status.

How will the islanders and the project team keep the islands rat-free?

Well - we need your help!

Help us to prevent incursion of rats onto St Agnes and Gugh. Check your baggage when visiting the islands - rats can easily stow away between islands.

'Rat on a Rat', call 01720 422153 to report any sign or sightings of rats. We will then inspect the area and set up surveillance measures.



The community are taking measures to reduce the likelihood of an incursion by: ensuring that goods brought to the island are rat-free or checked on arrival (e.g. hay will be checked as this is a high risk freight item); ensuring good waste management using compost bins and secure wheelie bins; and at all times remaining vigilant for rat sign and encouraging all visitors to do the same.



Thanks to all those members of the community who came along to the biosecurity training workshops this month. We learnt about risks and how to reduce them, how to detect signs of rats through

surveillance methods and how to implement an incursion response should any rat be detected.

There will be permanent monitoring stations from now on around the coast of St Agnes and Gugh. They are housing pieces of chocolate wax which are very attractive to rats. If a rat does arrive on the islands the first thing it will do is look for food, gnaw on the chocolate wax and leave teeth marks for us to detect. These monitoring stations will be checked by the project team and the islanders. If there is an incursion (detected through teeth marks, any other rat sign such as droppings or a sighting of a rat) the response will be to set up a 50m baiting grid in the immediate area. Special interpretation signs around the islands will let you know if there is bait on the islands.



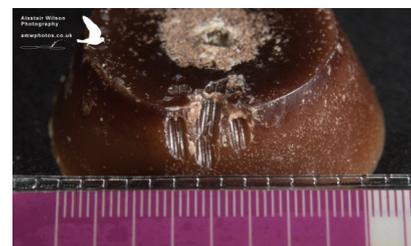
Monitoring stations



Chocolate wax



Scilly shrew teeth marks



Rat teeth marks

Young Seabird Ambassadors

The young people on the islands are our 'young seabird ambassadors'. Biz and Jaclyn recently presented a special seabird assembly at Five Islands School on St Mary's. At St Agnes School, we celebrated Apple day, collecting up apples so they were not available to rats. We created seabird Christmas crafts, learnt about Caribbean island restoration for snakes and birds and we enjoyed 'spy cam' activities which taught the children how to be our 'rat sign detectives' and to report any rat sign straight away. We recently gave talks to the students at Exeter University and Newquay College. Back on the islands the children in Year 9 Music class on St Mary's, have taken part in an exciting 'nature in music' project. They selected footage from the project and created music for it as part of their music assignment. The winning composer will have their work featured on the project website, we will keep you posted.



School assembly



Apple day



Apple juice taste test



Year 9 'nature in music'

Scilly shrews

The project is set to benefit other species of wildlife too. Numbers of Scilly shrew seem to have increased already. The project set up trail cameras to see which species were leaving footprints on ink tunnels and, from the inspection of the children at St Agnes school, footage showed lots of Scilly shrews! Also, tracking tunnels have shown many examples of tiny shrew footprints. Thanks to Sarah Havery, Jack Roper and Lewis Yates who helped deliver the education project 'spy cam' to the children.



Spy cam picture of a Scilly shrew



Don't just bin it!



The project has provided wheelie bins and compost bins to assist islanders in managing their waste in order to reduce potential food for rats. Should there be an incursion, a successful response could hinge on limiting food sources. The team have trained the community in best practice as good waste management is key to the success of any project.



Thanks to WMIL team leader Dave Boyle and 'seabird task force' volunteer Will Whittington for putting up the interpretation boards for the project on St Agnes, to Tresco Estate for putting them up on Tresco and to IOSWT Ranger Darren Hart for putting them up on St Marys. Enjoy reading them!

Isles of Scilly 'seabird-themed' Festival of Light 2014



From this....

to this....

to this....

Ta da!

The islands' second 'Festival of Light' was a great success. The Council of the Isles of Scilly commissioned the arts company ARTiculate to run the event with support from the AONB. We were delighted that, in support of the project, this year's theme was seabirds. More than 125 people took part in workshops throughout the week-long event. Thanks to everyone who came along to the parade on the evening of 1st March to showcase over 40 lanterns, lighting up the streets of St Mary's whilst celebrating our seabird heritage in such a splendid and enjoyable way.



Making the lanterns, shadow puppet activity and the final parade on St Mary's.

What's on?

BBC Countryfile are hoping to film the project in early April for screening later in the month .

St Agnes Boating Wildlife Safaris— a project interpreter will be onboard these Wednesday afternoon boat trips to Annet and the Western rocks. For more information visit www.stagnesboating.co.uk.

Walk Scilly — Saving Scilly's seabirds. Two walks; Thurs 13th April St Agnes 2pm and Fri 14th April St Mary's 2pm. Cost £7 each walk. For more information on the walking festival visit www.simplyscilly.co.uk

Date with Nature—join the RSPB for free guided walks in the Abbey Gardens on Treco 8th–20th June.

Scillonian III ferry cruises— a project interpreter will be onboard each Friday to point out the seabirds and other wildlife. For more information on booking visit www.islesofscilly-travel.co.uk

St Mary's Boating Association run 'Shearwater Specials' with Will Wagstaff, looking for seabirds including shearwaters and puffins around the islands. Every Monday and Thursday evening at 8pm from May.

Island Wildlife Tours with Will Wagstaff. His not-to-be-missed natural history talks and walks include seabirds of Scilly. For itinerary and dates visit www.islandwildlifetours.co.uk

For more information about how to see and learn about seabirds on the islands visit the project website www.ios-seabirds.co.uk and head to the Events, Calendar and Seeing Seabirds pages.

'Seabird task force volunteers'

A big thank you to all the volunteers who assisted the winter rat removal phase;

Helen Brandes
Lindsey Death
Sarah Havery
Helene Jessop
Rachel Taylor
Will Whittington

Haydn Brookes
Neil Duffield
Vicky Heaney
Tegan Newman
Toby Taylor
Alastair Wilson

Alex Cropper
Paul Garner-Richards
Jack Ibbotson
Billy Renny
Sophie Thomas
Lewis Yates

Bob Dawson
Richard Halstead
Cal James
Jack Roper
Matthew Tickner

Here are some thoughts from a selection of the volunteers. For volunteer stories head to the 'Seabird Stories' pages of the website www.ios-seabirds.org.uk

"The project has been so important to me as I feel I'm involved in a relatively new area of wildlife conservation in the UK. Removing invasive non-native species should be an important technique in the future for restoring wildlife on islands. It has also been great to be involved in the largest community-based rat removal project in the world!"

Alex Cropper



© Alastair Wilson Photography

"Time flies when you're having fun and it's a real testament to the superb group of fellow volunteers, the hospitable community on St Agnes and the friendly team at the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust that it's difficult to comprehend that nearly 5 months have passed since arriving!"

Tegan Newman



© Alastair Wilson Photography

"Working with an experienced and dedicated team has allowed me to learn a great deal about island restoration. I have had a hugely enjoyable experience volunteering on the Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project and I look forward to seeing its long term benefits."

Jack Ibbotson



© Alastair Wilson Photography



"It has been wonderful to get to know all the people involved in the IOSSRP project, the local community, who have been very welcoming, the people running the project, project partners and the numerous volunteers who have given up their time to help at this important stage. St Agnes and Gugh are beautiful islands. To explore them fully has been a very special experience, and I feel privileged to have been a part of this incredible project, paving the way for a brighter future for the seabirds on Scilly."

Alastair Wilson

"I have learnt so much about island restoration and had a great time on the project. This is a wonderful scheme which will make a real difference to the islands' seabirds. The team have been so great to work with, it is one of the best volunteering programmes I have ever been part of."

Lindsey Death .



"For me, being involved in the community part of the project has been really exciting and the skills I have gained have led me to secure a role leading a similar project in the Caribbean, again working with the local school and community. Thanks to the project for teaching me so much and I will return in the summer to give St Agnes school an idea of how things have gone in the Caribbean".

Sarah Havery



"In removing the brown rats from the islands of St Agnes, Gugh and Annet, it is hoped that Manx Shearwaters and Storm Petrels will once again breed successfully on these beautiful islands. Other UK rat removal projects have proven the removal of rats to be hugely beneficial to seabirds. It has been just fantastic to be involved in such a project here on St Agnes and Gugh, and I hope very much in future years it will be possible to read similar statistics about recovering seabird populations here."

Will Whittington



© St Agnes Nature

"Coming from a public engagement background with the RSPB, working so closely with the community was a highlight for me. I was genuinely chuffed with how much the kids knew about the project."

Jack Roper



© Alastair Wilson Photography

Thank you!

On behalf of WMIL and the volunteers, Biz Bell would like to say thank you to the community for their support this winter

"It has been a real pleasure for all of us to work with the St Agnes and Gugh community on this very important rat removal project. We could not have completed it without the support, commitment and involvement of every resident. Thank you all for your hospitality, encouragement and feedback. I look forward to returning in 2016 for the final check."

Richard McCarthy, Councillor and community representative, would like to say a big thank you to WMIL and the volunteers

"The winter rat removal work has gone brilliantly. Despite the dreadful weather Biz Bell of WMIL and her team plus all the volunteers marched round the islands checking the bait stations with a cheerful word for everyone and a smile on their faces under their bright orange hats. They worked tirelessly and it was a pleasure to have them around this winter. They became part of the community. They helped with the fireworks on bonfire night and they helped with the children in school. They've done their bit and we're really sorry to see them go. Now it is over to us. Getting rid of the rats in such a short space of time has been a major triumph. But keeping St Agnes and Gugh rat-free is going to present a considerable challenge for the project team, the Wildlife Trust and islanders at large in the weeks and months ahead."

And Jaclyn Pearson wants to say....

"Thanks to everyone involved in the project so far, WMIL and all the wonderful volunteers have left a legacy which the project team, islanders and visitors can all continue. At this project milestone, I cannot tell you how much it means to me to be working with such lovely people in the community who make this project what it is. The seabirds are about to return and already they have a brighter future. I look forward to working with you to keep these islands rat-free, it will require everyone's help — and I know we can do it. Here's to the next four years of the project and beyond."



Contact us

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or 07881517047

Email: jaclyn.pearson@rspb.org.uk

 [Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project Face book Page](#)

Please come and "like" us and follow all the events and updates of the project.

Postal address:

The Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project

Trenoweth, St Mary's,
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**We need YOUR help
to keep St Agnes
and Gugh and the
uninhabited islands
rat-free**



ISLES OF SCILLY
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

In addition to the support from LIFE, The EU's programme for financing key environmental schemes across the continent, and the UK's own Heritage Lottery Fund, the Seabird Recovery project is also being supported by the Defra-funded Isles of Scilly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).



giving
nature
a home

The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654.