



giving
nature
a home

Seabirds South West



Manx shearwater

Joe Pender

Welcome to *Seabirds South West*

So much has happened since our last edition four years ago! There have been some remarkable successes in giving our seabirds a safe home, but also frustration that we still don't have a network of protected areas in place for them.

Did you know that the South West has almost a third of England's coastline? And eighteen of the UK's 25 breeding seabird species regularly nest here, some in nationally important numbers.

This newsletter showcases some of the work done by us and our partners, monitoring seabirds and safeguarding the places where they breed and feed. We hope that you will enjoy this edition, and be inspired to support our ongoing work to make the South West a brilliant place for our sealife, and for people to enjoy it.

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- **Isles of Scilly - major seabird recovery project underway**
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- **Global ban after thousands of seabirds killed by glue-like pollutant**

Restoring our seabird colonies

Lundy - seabird recovery in action

Ten years ago, the seabird population on the rugged and beautiful island of Lundy was in dire straits. Rats, accidentally introduced by man, had a disastrous impact on seabird numbers, especially Manx shearwaters. So a partnership between English Nature (now Natural England), RSPB, the National Trust and the Landmark Trust set out to recover the Manx shearwater population - and we have done just that!

Around 90% of all the world's Manx shearwaters breed in the UK with the south west having England's only two breeding colonies, Lundy and the Isles of Scilly. Non-native predators are one of their biggest threats, especially rats, which enter their burrows and eat the eggs and chicks.



David Price

Juvenile Manx shearwater

By 2004, rats had been successfully removed, and a first survey in 2008 showed a strong recovery was already under way. So when staff and volunteers returned to survey Lundy in 2013, hopes were high. The results are better than anyone could have hoped - an estimated 3,451 breeding pairs, a tenfold increase since 2001. This is far beyond our expectations and amazingly Lundy now holds over 1% of the British population and almost 1% of the global population of Manx shearwaters.

Beccy MacDonald, warden on Lundy, is absolutely thrilled: "At night, visitors to the island are hearing more and more the eerie, haunting calls of the returning Manx shearwaters - one of nature's great experiences."

And other seabirds are also on the up. From an all time low of just five birds in 2004, numbers of puffins have swelled to 80 birds. Guillemots and razorbills have also increased but gull species, reflecting the national situation, are declining. With your support, we're continuing to monitor these declines to look for and act upon solutions.

The number of seabirds nesting on Lundy is now over 14,500, double the number we had in 2000. We'd like to say a huge thank you to all those involved. This project is proof of how successful nature conservation can be when partners work so well together.

Little terns at Chesil Beach - back from the brink

The magnificent Chesil Beach in Dorset is where the south west's only breeding little terns, Britain's second rarest breeding seabird, spend their summers. They have bred on the beach for as long as anyone can remember, delighting visitors with their chattering calls and repeated dives into the sea to catch tiny fish. In 1997 the colony numbered 100 pairs and was one of the largest in the country, with 5% of the UK population. A decade later it had dwindled to just 10 pairs with only three fledglings reared successfully in the previous four years. If we could not stop this decline, it would soon see the south west's only colony lost forever.

Since 2009 a rescue plan has been in action. The dire situation was made clear to Natural England who provided funding to kick start the project. The RSPB took on the management in partnership with the Crown Estate (the landowner), the Portland Court Leet, the MoD and the Chesil Bank and the Fleet Nature Reserve. More recently, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Dorset Biodiversity Fund and Dorset AONB have also supported the project, and this year it also forms part of the 'PANACHE' Project (a French-English marine conservation partnership).

We employ four full time seasonal wardens who, along with the small band of long term volunteers, provide 24 hour wardening during critical periods. A new electric fence design has reduced the chance of predation by foxes, which have been a real threat to the colony's survival.

Chesil Beach also has the unusual problem of being 'draughty'; as wind whips between the gaps in the pebbles, it causes the eggs to cool which leads to a really low hatch rate. In response, we provided small 'sand mats' to help insulate the nest area. The result? A dramatic increase in hatched eggs - just what was needed.



John Dadds

Little tern chick and egg on sand 'nest patch'

Since the project started, the colony has produced more chicks and gradually begun to recover. In 2013, numbers reached 25 pairs, with the best breeding success ever recorded at 1.2 fledged chicks per pair. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of staff and volunteers and the support of a range of organisations, the outlook for this little tern colony now looks brighter.



Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project



THE ISLES OF SCILLY
SEABIRD
RECOVERY
PROJECT

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

The Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project is now underway on the islands of St Agnes and Gugh, and is the largest community-supported island restoration project in the world. This ambitious 25-year project has the support of all 75 island residents and is a partnership between RSPB, the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, the Isles of Scilly AONB Partnership, Duchy of Cornwall and Natural England, with an island community representative.

The islands are highly protected for their breeding seabirds, forming part of the 'Natura 2000' network of globally important nature conservation sites. But seabird numbers declined by a quarter between 1983 and 2006, when the last full breeding survey revealed 20,000 breeding birds of 14 species.

Scilly has England's only known colony of storm petrels (1,398 pairs) as well as 171 pairs of Manx shearwaters. As on Lundy, studies have shown non-native brown rats are the greatest threat to these two special birds, preying on the eggs and chicks. Removing the rats should allow seabird



Storm petrel

Joe Pender

numbers to recover, and should also benefit the lesser white-toothed ('Scilly') shrew, found nowhere else in Britain.

An experienced contractor, Wildlife Management International, will carefully eradicate an estimated 3,100 brown rats from St Agnes and Gugh this winter. The project will also work with local schools, run community activities, boat trips and talks, and connect the islands' communities with other seabird recovery projects around the world. Jaclyn Pearson, IOSSRP Project Manager, says "We're grateful for the overwhelming support we've had from the island communities, so crucial to the project's success, and to the future of these special birds."

The project is funded by LIFE, the EU's financial instrument for the environment, and the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is also supported by the Defra-backed Isles of Scilly AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

For further information visit www.ios-seabirds.org.uk

Protecting our seabirds at sea



Marine Protected Areas

Our seabirds need better safeguards against increasing pressures from escalating human activities at sea. Many of our seabird breeding colonies are well protected by national or international laws, yet at sea, where seabirds feed and spend most of their lives, there is still virtually no protection. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) should provide a way to protect and manage appropriately areas of sea relied upon by birds and other marine life for feeding or resting.

The UK Government has signed up to international targets to designate a well-managed network of MPAs by 2016. In England, proposals for 127 Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), a type of MPA, were put forward by regional stakeholder groups in 2011. In the south west, the RSPB participated in the Finding Sanctuary stakeholder group, which resulted in six sites being put forward with protection proposed for seabirds.

At the end of 2012 we were bitterly disappointed that only a small proportion of the sites put forward across the country, and only 15 of the 45 proposed by the Finding Sanctuary stakeholders, were taken forward by Government for designation this year. Even worse, seabirds and other species like harbour porpoise were to be excluded from sites as protected features. In the south west, Lundy, Torbay, and Padstow Bay and Surrounds are three of the sites proposed for designation in 2013, but they no longer include their seabird protection features.

We now know that all 15 of the Finding Sanctuary sites will be designated, which is good news, but with important features missing. We will continue to press for a coherent network of protected areas that will effectively safeguard seabirds and other marine wildlife.

Global ban on discharge of seabird death chemical

Fantastic news! From 1 January 2014 it will be illegal to discharge high viscosity polyisobutylene (PIB) into the sea anywhere in the world. PIBs killed thousands of seabirds off the south coast of England earlier this year and the decision by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) is great news for marine wildlife and a victory for the RSPB and other wildlife charities that campaigned against the substance.

These man-made chemicals are shipped across the globe in increasing quantities and, until this momentous decision, it was perfectly legal for ships to discharge PIBs at sea after washing out their tanks. This practice led to two major pollution incidents early in 2013 when thousands of dead and disabled seabirds washed ashore along the south coast from Dorset to Cornwall, covered in the sticky PIB. These are just the birds we know about and there's no telling what else has been affected out at sea.



The swift decision to re-classify PIBs to require disposal of all cargo tank residues in port followed the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's (MCA) recommendation on behalf of the UK Government. This action was influenced by the concerted efforts of the RSPB and partner organisations and the widespread public outrage at the seabird deaths - not to mention the passion shown by Cornish schoolchildren angry at what they'd seen.

The ban is excellent news and we're proud of what we've achieved but this is not an end to pollution and other threats to seabirds. Our precious marine environment needs greater protection and we are as determined as ever to provide it.

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The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.

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Help us to help the marine environment

If there's no home for nature, there will be no nature. Safeguarding our marine environment requires adequate protection for its special species and habitats, and sustainable use of its resources. The RSPB and other wildlife charities rely on supporters to give us the voice necessary to save nature. Why not be a part of these amazing success stories? Seabirds can't campaign against threats to their environment but we can act on their behalf. Join the RSPB by visiting rspb.org.uk or call us to find out more on **01392 432691**. Find us on **Facebook (RSPBSW)** and **Twitter (RSPBSouthWest)**.