



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: APRIL 2015

Volunteers; Tom Bassett; Rebecca Etheridge; Ros, Steve and Tristan Fletcher; Vickie Heaney; Randolph Hensing; Ed Marshall; Abbie Pailing; Rihanna Pearce; Lydia Titterton; Joshua Wells; Amie Wheeldon. Thanks again to St Agnes Councillor Richard McCarthy for helping edit the newsletter, this time from his son's base in California.

The Manx shearwaters are back; back on the islands from South America. So spring has officially sprung! At the time of typing this, no less than 297 Manx shearwaters have been recorded from the deck of the Scillonian III ferry by our Friday Wildlife Guides while youngsters attending the recent Easter Holiday Club's 'St Agnes Seabird Trip' heard the first two Manx shearwater of the year calling from burrows on Gugh! At this time of year adult Manxies are clearing out their burrows and getting ready to lay their single eggs.

We have now successfully completed our winter education programme at Five Islands School. It included Year 9's 'Nature in Music' project and among the winners was St Agnes's Xanthe Hicks. The assignment involved making a video for the Seabird Recovery website using September's footage of the fledged chicks and adding sound and narrative to the pictures. You can check out the winning video on the website at www.ios-seabirds.org.uk. We have been busy too delivering activities on the islands for the Council: for its Extended School services, its Youth Hub and its Holiday Club. This week, for instance, 12 young people joined a field trip to St Agnes and Gugh and were delighted, of course, to hear those Manxies but also to tuck into some Troytown ice cream!

Meanwhile early in March over at Penzance, Scillonian III Wildlife Guides were gathering for training sessions ahead of their first Friday trip of the year to the islands on Eclipse Day March 20th! They'll be on the boat each Friday throughout the season pointing out wildlife to passengers. Again you can check the website for weekly updates on what they spot.



'Nature in Music Project' Year 9



Council of the Isles of Scilly youth activity



Scillonian III Ferry Wildlife Guides

Over winter Access and Engagement Officer Gemma Bowcock co-ordinated IoS Wildlife Trust Ranger team's rat monitoring and removal programme on the uninhabited islands. This time Northwethel, Tean and St Helen's were the targets because they are high-priority locations for burrow-nesting seabirds. Rats on each of these islands behaved differently. But once bait started to be consumed, signs of the rodents on all three rapidly decreased. Once winter was over and bait was being gathered in, the wonderful volunteer rangers received their own special reward. On Thursday March 26th, while collecting up bait from St Helen's, they heard a Manx Shearwater from inside a burrow! Let's hope that seabirds like this one will now get a better chance of raising chicks, thanks to the Seabird Recovery project.



Gemma Bowcock, Access and Engagement Officer



Volunteer Abbie carrying out monitoring



IOSWT Rangers St Helens

Extra eyes and ears needed, please!

A request to residents on St Agnes and Gugh – please could you spare up to an hour once a month to check 10 or so monitoring stations along parts of the coast. Big thanks to those of you who are already assisting the project in this way, but we do need more eyes and ears!

We'd also like to add others to the team of a dozen residents currently helping us with incursion response. If and when 'Rat on a Rat' calls are received we have to put out a monitoring grid and check it for up to a month and this is where we need assistance. On the graph below you can see the 11 'Rat on a Rat sightings' we've received since March 2014. None of them so far has revealed any sign of rats. But again thanks to those who reported their suspicions, because it's critical that anything suspicious rat-wise is reported and checked out.

We will be offering half day training sessions on St Agnes after Easter. Pick a morning or afternoon. Details will follow shortly so keep an eye on the notice board. Now the visitor season has started, please do remain vigilant and in particular do remember to carry on with your bio-security protocols to keep rats away. But as ever, should you notice anything suspiciously ratty, just call that number!



The 11 'rat on a rat' calls since March 2014, no rats recorded so far.



The 'rat on a rat' sticker!

We have also been letting others know about the project. In Leeds we gave a talk at the RSPB's Conservation Conference and in Plymouth we spoke to the 2015 South West Marine Ecosystems meeting (SWME) at the Marine Laboratories. Both talks were well received. Over the other side of the Irish Sea Jaclyn went on a busman's holiday to Rathlin Island. Rathlin is Northern Ireland's only inhabited island with a similar number of permanent residents to St Agnes. Larger in size and very different topographically, it is somewhere else that could certainly benefit from the removal of rats to hopefully bring back breeding Manx shearwaters and storm petrels. While there Jaclyn explained how the success so far of our project has been down to the whole-hearted support of the community.



Jaclyn with Mike Clarke, Chief Executive, RSPB & Martin Harper, Director of Conservation, RSPB



Paul St Pierre gives talk at SWME meeting, Plymouth



Jaclyn with RSPB warden Liam McFaul, Rathlin Island, Northern Ireland

Between May and July this year we'll be carrying out full seabird monitoring across Scilly. The last full survey like this was back in 2006. The new one will be headed by Seabird Ecologist Dr Vickie Heaney. She will be leading a team of research assistants and volunteers. If you would like to add your name to the list of volunteers then please do get in touch.

Notes for your diary! Thursday 16th April: Walk Scilly... 'St Agnes – Land Air and Sea' with wildlife guide Bob Dawson.' Each Wednesday after Easter: Seabird Safaris will begin and run throughout the summer.

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.

