

The Shearwater



Issue 2 October 2013

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

So much has happened since the first newsletter in March. It has been a wonderful 'summer of shearwaters' and our baseline seabird and other wildlife surveys have been completed. Thank you again to all members of the community, volunteers and funders who have helped us so far. We look forward to working with you this winter and over the years to come.

The Project Leaflet will be out soon. It folds out to reveal a poster inside. We hope you like it and that it is a useful reference.

This month we see the start of the rat removal operation with Biz Bell returning to Scilly for the next five months. Her team will be very much a part of the island community until spring.



© Nathan Fletcher

Jaclyn Project Manager

'Rat removal ready'!

The visit of Biz Bell in June was the springboard to get St Agnes and Gugh 'rat removal ready'. Everyone has helped prepare the islands for the big operation this winter and can be proud to be part of the world's largest community-supported project to restore breeding seabird populations.

As part of the 'rat removal ready' programme, a team from RNAS Culdrose came to work with islanders and other volunteers for three days in September, including beach cleans on Wingletang and Gugh.

Commander Nick Gibbons, RN said: "This has been a great experience for 824 squadron to support the community and assist the project. Thanks to everyone on the islands and good luck with the project!"



What a fantastic response and a huge 'thank you' to RNAS 824 squadron. The teams joining us on St Agnes and Gugh were a real mix of residents from St Agnes and St Mary's, plus first-time and regular visitors to the islands. We made a massive contribution to getting St Agnes and Gugh 'rat removal ready', complementing the summer's efforts. Our thanks also to the Council of the Isles of Scilly for covering the cost of waste removal.

Bob Community Engagement Officer

Partners and supporters



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nature
a home



Seabird-friendly Communities

After Biz's comprehensive audit of everyone's needs, we have been working hard over the summer to get the islands 'rat removal ready'.

It is really great that, even with such a busy summer season, the whole community has been tidying up to facilitate access by the removal team for the baiting stage. Getting 'rat removal ready' has also involved withdrawing poison bait, with snap-trapping used in the interim if necessary. By doing this we ensure that rats will readily take the project's bait instead of avoiding it, and reduce opportunities for rats to develop resistance. In addition, careful disposal of waste in tandem with beach cleans have removed sources of food and bedding for rats.

When Biz arrives, we will see the composting facilities and feed storage completed and the arrival and construction of the various bait stations that we will all become very familiar with over the coming months.

The wonderful volunteers at the Penzance RSPB workshop have been hard at it making up lots of bait stations for use, so a big 'thank you' to them. The 'basic' version is made from a 70cm length of plastic drainage tubing. Other bait stations will be needed for certain situations and these will be made under Biz's direction in October.

The completed bait stations will then be fixed in place across the island, marked by a bamboo cane and flag, with the location recorded by GPS to enable follow-up checks. All the bamboo canes around will no doubt make the islands look a little strange this winter, so please do ensure that bait stations aren't disturbed and let everyone else know what they are.

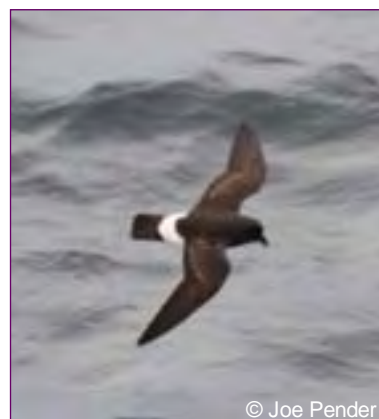


Project Steering Group

We oversee the activities of the 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

'Natura 2000 - Europe's nature for you'



The Isles of Scilly are part of the European Natura 2000 Network.

They are designated because they host some of Europe's most threatened species and habitats.

The storm petrel (above) is one of our breeding birds whose numbers in Scilly are of international importance. Rarely seen except on specialist pelagic trips, 1400 breeding pairs were estimated here in 2006.

Like Manx shearwaters, they lay a single egg and the chick has a long development period.

Seabird Ambassadors

The project's **Seabird Ambassadors** Programme was launched in the summer. It is the way people can volunteer for the project. Please get in touch if you have skills you can offer, want to learn more, or get involved. We need your help, whether for practical work, computer work or helping at events.

My best day out this year was on a calm evening in a boat off Annet watching the shearwaters at sunset rafting amongst the other seabirds and sea mammals. If I can do my little bit to improve the lot of these wonderful creatures by volunteering in the stunning location of St Agnes then it is a no brainer'. Count me in. The exercise will do me good too.

I encourage everyone to do the same so we can all look back and say that we did our bit to leave the islands better than how we found them.

Sergeant Colin Taylor



Sergeant Taylor, accompanied by PC Faye Webb, talking seabirds with Community Engagement Officer, Bob Dawson.

2013 Seabird Summer



© Isles of Scilly AONB

There were mixed blessings for seabirds nesting in Scilly this year. It was good news at last for the kittiwakes at the Turk's Head, with 36 chicks fledged from 38 nests (see photo, right). However, numbers across the islands were down again and kittiwake nests now number less than a quarter of the 266 nests in 2006.

Left. Watching the kittiwakes through a telescope from St Agnes Quay. During July and August many young chicks could be seen below the Turk's Head (Right). Kittiwakes usually lay two eggs and the young are a beautiful combination of grey, black and white.



The large number of Manx shearwaters seen around the islands this year far exceeded the 200 pairs nesting in Scilly. Such non-breeders may be young birds looking for suitable nesting areas – we hope some will return in future to actually nest here.

On St Agnes, Gugh, Bryher and Annet, the impact of rats on Manx shearwaters were very clear. On 'rat-free' Annet there were signs of success in two-thirds of occupied burrows. At other sites, less than a third of breeding attempts resulted in a fledged chick.

Storm petrel numbers at a long-term study beach on Annet remained stable and it was good news for shags there too, with most nests containing eggs and chicks. However, the long-term prospects for common terns continue to look bleak.

Dr. Vickie Heaney, Seabird Surveyor

N.B. More information will be available at www.ios-seabirds.org.uk/our-seabirds/

Young Seabird Ambassadors

All the fun of the fete

The Seabird Recovery Project team joined forces with the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust and the Isles of Scilly AONB Partnership at St Agnes, St Martin's and Bryher fetes this year. The food chain game was very popular!



School activities

We took part in the Five Islands School Activities Week, exploring Old Town Bay and Peninnis. We also joined in with a Bronze Age event on St Agnes and Gugh, organised by the Isles of Scilly AONB team.



Congratulations to Aiden and Grace on the arrival of their daughter earlier this month!

Biz Bell visited St Agnes School in June to talk about rats, waste and snap-traps.

Postcard from Brazil

Although our puffins, guillemots, razorbills and kittiwakes tend to stay in the north Atlantic for the winter, Manx shearwaters and storm petrels undertake impressive southward migrations.

One Manx shearwater covered the 7750km journey to Brazil and Argentina in just 6.5 days, averaging 1200km a day (Land's End to John o'Groats is only 970km)!

Storm petrels are equally impressive, with some even reaching the Indian Ocean.



Manx shearwater ←
Storm petrel ←

About WMIL

Based in Blenheim, New Zealand, Wildlife Management International Limited (WMIL) is an ecological and conservation consultancy. WMIL has staff and associates with a large skill and experience base in protecting, managing and monitoring natural ecosystems. The highly trained WMIL team offers a range of specialised skills and we use the latest technology, ecological principles and conservation management methodology to complete the research and projects.

WMIL has undertaken more than 25 invasive species eradications around the world, including three in the UK (Ramsey Island, Lundy Island and the Isle of Canna). Many involved working with local organisations, conservation agencies and communities in a partnership approach, which WMIL sees as critical to achieving long-term conservation gains.

The WMIL team of Biz Bell, Dave Boyle, John Tayton and Kelvin Floyd will be directing the St Agnes and Gugh brown rat removal phase of the Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project with a team of six volunteers. This project, between October and April, will combine international best practice techniques with the experience of the WMIL personnel, involving bait stations, rodenticides, monitoring tools and biosecurity. Although there will be bait stations, bamboo poles and flagging tape across the island, it will be a short-term situation over the winter. We will work to ensure the community is not affected by any aspect or action of the project and we will keep everyone fully informed over the five months. WMIL is looking forward to working with our team of volunteers and the community towards the successful outcome of this important project for seabirds and the islands.

Elizabeth (Biz) Bell

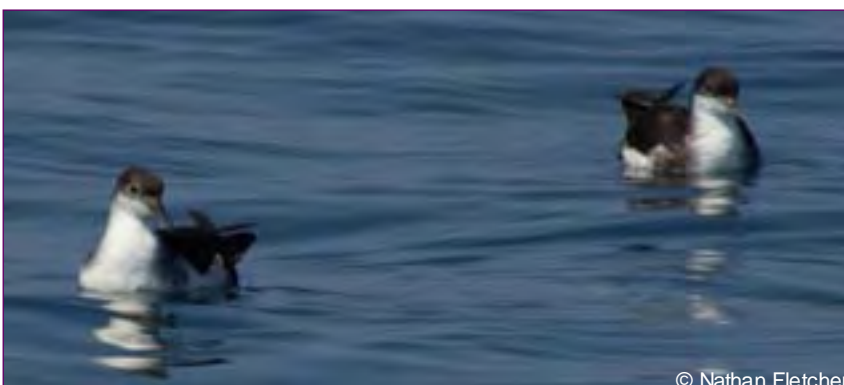
Senior Ecologist

Wildlife Management International Limited

www.wmil.co.nz



Photo spot



These two Manx shearwaters appear very curious. Are they eager perhaps to know more about the project?

If some of the young, non-breeding birds visiting the islands this year do return next year and breed for the first time, they could continue to rear chicks for several decades. The oldest Manx shearwater we know of in the wild was at least 55 years old!

'Shear brilliance' - view from the community



Having Darren Mason, a volunteer with the project providing information about seabirds, the project and other wildlife has been fantastic this year. Not only have I learnt so much more about the wildlife and seabirds that we have around our shores, I have grown very fond of the Manx shearwater - what a fantastic bird!

Excuse the pun, but 'shear brilliance' - the way they soar over the water is just mesmerising. Windsurfing with these birds flying along with me is just amazing too.

I hope that, with the Seabird Recovery Project on St Agnes and Gugh, this wonderful bird flourishes on our shores once more.

Rob Seddon, Crew at St Agnes Boating

Seabird-friendly Tourism

We are incredibly supportive of the project and have taken boat trips out to see the Manx shearwaters. We have witnessed the benefits to seabirds through island restoration projects on Ducie, a 70ha island in the Pitcairn Islands of the South Pacific. There were petrels nesting everywhere. It was truly marvellous. The thought of how vulnerable these birds are when rats are accidentally introduced really struck a chord with us. Now we know about the vital work in Scilly, we will certainly be back in a couple of years. We were privileged to see the birds on Ducie and have felt the same taking a shearwater trip around Annet. Good luck with the project!



Val and Geoff Webster
visitors to Scilly in 2013

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The Wildlife Safaris to the Western Rocks with St Agnes Boating have been a great success this year, with Darren Mason volunteering for the Seabird Recovery Project.

Good numbers of Manx shearwaters and puffins were seen, with a diverse range of other seabirds and one of very few Basking Shark seen in Scilly this year.



In addition to generous 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).

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

The RSPB is a registered charity in England & Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654



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