

# The Shearwater

Issue 6 December 2016



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

## Manx shearwater and storm petrel numbers continue to climb on our rat-free islands.

We have lots to celebrate this year. In January Biz Bell and the Wildlife Management International team carried out their final check and in February we were declared officially rat-free. Thanks to all the residents of St Agnes and Gugh who made our 'rat-free celebration' such a wonderful event.

Manx shearwaters and storm petrels continue to increase on the two islands. For Manxies, we recorded 72 nesting pairs and 32 chicks this year. For storm petrels there were 9 nesting pairs and 6 chicks across a new survey site from Troytown to Castella Down. Big thanks to community members who joined these Manx shearwater surveys and our 'chick-check' evening walks.

We completed the final year's field work of ecological monitoring for wider species. Results will be out in the Spring. And as these surveys came to a close, the training of community members in biosecurity and incursion response training was stepped up, ready for the final year of the project.

Please do keep assisting us, do report any possible sightings to the team by ringing 01720 422153 and for any further information on the project just visit [www.ios-seabirds.org.uk](http://www.ios-seabirds.org.uk)  
A Merry Christmas to one and all!

**Jaclyn Pearson— Project Manager, Lydia Titterton—Project Officer, Holly Paget Brown—Project Assistant.**



Above: St Agnes school children, community members, project team, WMIL's Biz Bell and volunteers celebrate rat-free status at the 'rat-free celebration'. Photo Ed Marshall.



Above: Project Manager Jaclyn Pearson and Volunteer Coordinators John and Trish Peacock carry out biosecurity and incursion response training. Photo Nick Tomalin.



Above: Project Officer Vickie Heaney delivers community seabird survey training on Manx shearwater burrows. Photo Lydia Titterton.

## Your Manxies and Stormies Need You!

For more information;

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giving  
nature  
a home



Thanks to St Agnes Councillor Richard McCarthy for editing the newsletter.



# Manx shearwater and storm petrel numbers climb on St Agnes and Gugh

We are all thrilled that these seabirds are thriving since rat removal. Project Officer Vickie Heaney recorded breeding populations in June and July. For Manx shearwaters, numbers are up from 22 pairs pre - rat removal in 2013 to 73 pairs in 2016, with new areas colonised around Castella Down and Kittern Hill on Gugh. We then recorded 32 'star-gazing' chicks outside their burrows. Storm petrels have also been recorded breeding again this year. We now have a sample survey area running from Troytown campsite on to Castle Vean and have placed 6 storm petrel nest boxes into the area. We recorded 9 apparently occupied storm petrel breeding sites and heard 6 chicks. Again many thanks to community members who've joined this year's seabird surveys and our 'chick-check' evening walks. It's been lovely to catch your responses.

**Monitoring work elsewhere on Scilly:** from the annual count on Annet, it was good to find out that common terns have returned to breed at the south end of the island. It was also nice to see storm petrels on rat-free islands Illiswilgig and Castle Bryher.



Left: Volunteer Amy Horn-Norris places storm petrel nest boxes into boulder beaches on St Agnes. Middle: Adult storm petrel incubating egg on Castle Bryher. Right: Cllr Richard McCarthy and Jaclyn recording Manx shearwater chicks as part of a 'chick check walk' (Photo Nick Tomalin).

## Community Fetes and prize winners



Applause for everyone who came to our stand and activities at island fetes this summer. You helped us raise £320 towards seabird conservation through the 'Storm petrel bucket game' as well as with our colouring and map competitions. The colouring competition saw Johan May win the 6-12 years age category; Phoebe Moulden, the 5 years and under. Merryn Smith won a beautiful storm petrel print by our Project Officer and artist Vickie Heaney in the map game. He correctly guessed the position of the first storm petrel chick nest site from September 2015. Well done all.

Left: Volunteer Jo leading the 'storm petrel bucket game'. Middle left: IOSWT's Nikki Banfield with the 'storm petrel map game'. Middle left: Phoebe Moulden wears the project hat as the winner of the 5 yrs and under colouring competition (her picture is bottom right). Middle: Merryn Smith wins the Vickie Heaney storm petrel print. Right: Johan May wears his project hat as the winner of the 6-12yrs colouring competition (his picture of Manx shearwater is top right)

## Project Steering Group

**Paul St Pierre**

**Jaclyn Pearson**

**Sarah Mason**

**Richard McCarthy**

**Will Garratt**

**Kate Sugar**

**Julian Pearce**

**Paul Buckley**

**Leigh Lock**

Project Supervisor RSPB

Project Manager

Chief Executive Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust

St Agnes representative

Estate Assistant Duchy of Cornwall

Project Leader Natural England

Senior Officer: Physical Assets and Natural Resources. Council of the Isles of Scilly

Regional Conservation Manager RSPB

Senior Species Recovery Officer RSPB



# Young seabird ambassadors

A vital part of the project is inspiring young people - Young Seabird Ambassadors – about the world of seabird conservation. The project has been delivering a mix of activities to local schools and visiting schools, youth groups, colleges and universities.

**St Agnes School:** the school continues to check 5 permanent monitoring stations on the island and this year has shown our visiting funders how to tell the difference in wax between snail, shrew and rat marks. They have taken part in wildlife treasure hunts, Manx shearwater burrow surveys and Apple Day. In fact, each Autumn they've been picking up wind-fall apples, so helping reduce potential food for rats. Should a rat get back, it's more likely to be detected nibbling wax in monitoring stations if fewer food sources are available. Head to the website [www.ios-seabirds.org.uk](http://www.ios-seabirds.org.uk) to watch the video 'Apple day' by volunteer Matt Brierley.



Top left: Wildlife treasure hunt. Top right: Visiting the Manx shearwater burrows at Troytown, St Agnes. Bottom left: Collecting wind-fall apples on Apple Day. Bottom right: Feedback words on apple artwork.

## Isles of Scilly Council Extended School Ser- vices, Youth Hub

**Holiday Club:** this year activities included field trips to St Martin's.

One group went to the 'flats' for coastal creature identification and bird watching at low tide. Another group took part in beach art activities and seabird bingo! One member of the group commented: "Today it was just awesome to learn what lives on our beaches".

Above: Holiday club bird-watching with Jaclyn at on St Martin's.



## Natura 2000 Day! May 14th

Natura 2000 is the name given to nature protection sites within the territory of the European Union, of which Scilly's Special Protection Area (SPA) is just one. This year we took St Agnes school to Manx shearwater burrows, carried out wildlife sound-recording and a bird watching tour.

The tour included seeing nesting fulmars, calling oystercatchers and spotting 'weatabix bird,' also known officially as the Northern wheatear!

Above: In support of Natura 2000 Day, St Agnes school did the 'butterfly symbol' recognised throughout Europe



## Higher Education Field Trips and projects:

We laid on a seabird workshop for Cornwall College Ecology students on Gugh. Top three words used to describe the field trip were: 'Interesting, fun and educational'. Exeter University Zoology students carried out research projects during their week's stay on Scilly. We were grateful many students assisted our 'pitfall pop-up labs,' categorising invertebrates collected as part of wider ecological monitoring work. Students assisted lab work for two days and based their own project on the data. They visited pitfall survey sites and learnt about our key project species by listening to call back from Manx shearwaters.



Left: Exeter University Zoology students listen to Manx shearwaters in burrows. Right: Cornwall College Ecology students birdwatching on Gugh

## Five Islands School and visiting mainland schools:

This summer's weather was ideal for outdoor beach activities. Blue and Yellow classes at Five Islands School took part in beach games, bird watching and rambles. When asked 'what words do seabirds make you think of top answers were 'flying, splash, fish, and happy'



Top: Five Islands School Blue class 'coastal creatures' activity on St Mary's. Bottom: Five Islands school Yellow class wildlife bingo at Old Town beach, St Mary's.



# Monitoring of wider species and 'pop-up pitfall labs'

We've now finished fieldwork for wider species. By comparing St Agnes and Bryher, this work aims to uncover whether rat removal has had any impact on vegetation as well as numbers of rabbits, land birds, the lesser white-toothed shrew and invertebrates. In 2013 'baseline surveys' were conducted by Spalding's Associates. In 2014 project staff and volunteers carried out first year surveys and this year they completed final surveys. Field work in 2016 was led by Project Assistant Holly Paget-Brown with volunteer support. There was help too from RSPB staff and volunteers in Penzance and on Scilly while University of Exeter Zoology students sorted through and categorised thousands of invertebrates. We're grateful as well to the campsites on both St Agnes and Bryher; to the Judson family on St Agnes and to Issy Tibbs on Bryher for storing equipment in their barns. Spalding Associates are currently crunching the data. Their full report will be completed in April and a community talk will be arranged on St Agnes to share the results.



Left: Project Assistant Holly carries out vegetation surveys. Middle left: Volunteers Hazel, Lindsey, Liam and Adam on Bryher. Middle right: Exeter University Zoology students categorise invertebrates. Right: RSPB staff and volunteers at the Penzance office assist a 'pop-up pitfall lab'.

## 'More Seabird Friendly Islands'

**More Seabird Friendly Islands:** Earlier in the year there were talks on Bryher, Tresco and St Martin's where we were joined by **RSPB South West Regional Director, Nick Bruce-White**. This is his account of the visit:

"As I joined the team in listening to the views of islanders about the possibility of a future project phase (funding & community support willing) to remove rats from the remaining three inhabited off-islands, what struck me, besides the hospitality and openness of the people I met, was the strength of enthusiasm for looking into rat eradication on their islands too.

"Serendipitously timing my visit shortly after the official 'rat-free' celebrations, I also had the pleasure of spending a night on St Agnes with Biz & team, including a fun evening at the Turks Head pub quiz! It felt quite emotional accompanying Biz as she sailed off the island for the last time. Amidst the usual chit-chat on board, one couldn't ignore the quiet mood of pride and achievement around a team who knew they had achieved something quite special. I now look forward to working with my own team at the RSPB, with partners & island communities, to develop an effective rat monitoring & incursion response strategy for St Agnes & Gugh. Keeping the islands rat-free in perpetuity will not be without its challenges. But with such a supportive community, I have every faith that we will continue to see the fortunes of seabirds on the Isles of Scilly improve".



Top: 'More seabird friendly islands' talk - Photo Nikki Banfield. Middle: Biz, staff and volunteers at incursion response training (Nick Bruce-White second from right). Bottom: Biz and the 'final check' team leaving St Agnes, February 2016.

## News from New Zealand and the Outer Hebrides



Volunteer Skip with female Black petrel. Photo WMIL

Ten months after her departure from Perconger Quay, we still miss Biz Bell. But away from Scilly that IOSSRP orange hat of hers has found a job to do down under. Biz and her volunteer team are presently on Great Barrier Island Aotea, north of Auckland, busy monitoring black petrels. This 20 year study of black petrel/taiko is providing conservation advice for this threatened species. There are now over 100 study burrows containing taiko eggs and Biz is using her Scilly hat to keep these Kiwi (sorry taiko!) eggs warm whilst the burrows are investigated! Biz and her team have also returned lately for monitoring purposes to the northern hemisphere and the Outer Hebrides. There Biz with the Shiant Isles Seabird Recovery Project removed the rats last winter. And so far so good; removal looks to have gone well for the seabirds.



Black Petrel egg being kept warm in IOSSRP project hat! Photo WMIL

# RSPB sabbatical and volunteer stories

## RSPB's Learning & Development Adviser Lyndon Parker took his sabbatical assisting Tresco's 'Date with Nature' walks this September:

"Who wouldn't jump at a chance to spend two weeks on the Isles of Scilly in September? I jumped, even though the accommodation was going to be a tent and at 52 years of age I'd never been camping before, but hey, in for a penny...

"The Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project is a fantastic partnership helping to reverse seabird declines, particularly Manx shearwaters and storm petrels, in what is a globally important breeding area for our seabirds. We arrived at the Bryher campsite on a windy and rainy evening. My first night camping was going to be interesting.

"I was part of the Project's 'Date with Nature' event based in the courtyard of the lovely Abbey Garden on Tresco. What a commute; a boat ride across from Bryher with the sight and sound of seabirds all around us and the wonderfully crisp sea air in our lungs.

"At our stand we welcomed visitors to come along on one of our free guided wildlife walks. The walks were gentle ambles, allowing us to point out interesting plants and insects (the hornet hoverfly was popular) as well as to talk about the Project of course and how people's support can help seabirds thrive. One of the wonderful things I found out about Manx shearwaters is that when the chicks are nearly fully grown they come out of their nest burrows on clear nights and stargaze, building up a constellation map that will help them in the future navigate back over the ocean to their home island. A huge thank you to everyone on the project for the opportunity to be part of something amazing. By the way, I now absolutely love camping!"



Top: Lyndon (middle) and the 'Date with Nature' team at the campsite Bryher. Bottom: the Date with Nature stand outside Tresco Garden.



Above: Stuart Taylor (left) volunteer Alex and Project Assistant Holly setting up monitoring tools on St Helens.

## RSPB's Assistant Warden at Blacktoft Sands Stuart Taylor spent three weeks volunteering for an array of tasks on the Project:

"Highlights for me included the survey field work and particularly the evening 'chick check' walks. Recording Manx shearwater chicks outside their burrows was brilliant. I assisted surveys for many species which was great fun and I learnt lots. When not surveying, I was making monitoring wax blocks—a mixture of wax and chocolate, aniseed and other various flavours. These were then put in various places around the islands and then checked for chew marks at regular intervals. I was able to visit the uninhabited island of St Helen's to carry out monitoring work there. We found several Manx shearwater burrows but unfortunately there was evidence of predation of shearwater chicks by rats—a stark contrast to the evidence of thriving chicks on St Agnes and Gugh.

So more steps will have to be taken to keep St Helen's clear of the rodent. Monitoring and research continues over winter. I also helped with a community talk at the Island Hall on St Agnes, with 'Date with Nature' walks and carried out vegetation, rabbit, shrew and invertebrate surveys—I really did learn so much. It had been a fantastic trip and I advise anyone that wants to visit Scilly or volunteer on one of the projects, not simply to think about it, just do it! I had such a wonderful time with wonderful people."

## RSPB's Head of High Value Fundraising Pam Davis assisted the project in October:

"I am thankful for the immense privilege of being able to volunteer with the Seabird Recovery Project and the RSPB. The value of the project -removing invasives so that our iconic seabirds can reclaim their homes and knowing that we have 'solved' a conservation problem - is clearly evident. The birds are returning. Humans are benefitting as well. Two aspects hearten me the most: resilient communities working together to overcome a threat to their island life and knowing that there will again be storm petrels and Manx shearwaters amongst them, whose calls will provide music and whose presence will fill the skies. How poor we would be without them."



Above: Pam Davis setting up monitoring girds on Tresco



# 'Date with Nature' and seabird walks



'Date with Nature' walks on Tresco took place in June and September. Well done to all those volunteers who guided a total of 348 people on more than 90 hour-long walks, telling them all about our seabirds and the recovery project itself. Thank you also to Tresco for your hospitality and to Bryher campsite and Tresco boats for camping and boating between islands.

At Question 5 on questionnaires visitors were asked: 'What will you do now, based on what you have learned today?' Answers included the following;

**Look more closely and be more aware of wildlife.**  
**Support conservation work.**  
**Visit my local nature reserves.**  
**Carry on striving to understand the birds I see.**  
**Visit my local Wildlife Trust**  
**Go on guided walks at home**  
**Keep bird watching and try to improve.**  
**Follow the project on the website.**

Above: RSPB's Dave Flumm at the stand.  
 Below: RSPB's Jeff Knott talks to visitors.



## 'Searching for Sirens'



'Searching for Sirens' seabird walks aim to tell visitors all about the Project alongside searching for signs of Manx shearwaters on land. Manx shearwaters are known as 'sirens of the sea' because of their distinctive nocturnal calls, while during the day they can be heard calling back from nesting burrows. We joined the 'Walk Scilly Festival' in both April and October, leading walks on St Agnes, Gugh and St Mary's. We also lead four further walks during the year. You can hear interviews on the project website [www.ios-seabirds.org.uk](http://www.ios-seabirds.org.uk) and head to 'audio'.

Above left: Walk, Peninnis, St Marys.

Middle: Walk Scilly October—Jaclyn, Lydia and volunteer Pam lead walk on Gugh.

Right: Holly shows walkers Manx shearwater burrows as part of a walk on Bryher.

## Scillonian III Ferry Guides & Seabird Safaris

Each year 12 RSPB volunteers take to the decks of the Scillonian III Ferry on Fridays to point out wildlife species for passengers. We're grateful for your dedication and enthusiasm in all weathers. Also for spotting no less than **17348** animals this season, whether seabirds, cetaceans or even the occasional fish! And not least for explaining all about the project to your audience.

To the right is a breakdown of the species seen and recorded in 2016 – not a bad list!

Feedback from passengers included:

*"Very informative, its important to make people aware of what wildlife is around them"*

*"The Guides did a brilliant job at explaining things well to younger people too".*

Pats on the back in addition for Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust Guides and St Agnes Boating for their regular Wednesday afternoon 'Seabird Safari' trips which also support the project and inform visitors all about our work.

Birds			
Ad Sabine's Gull	1	Reed Warbler	3
Arctic Skua	3	Ringed Plover	2
Arctic Tern	4	Sandwich Tern	13
Auk sp.	34	Shag	380
Balearic Shearwater	7	Shelduck	2
Chiffchaff	1	Sooty Shearwater	18
Common Gull	7	Spotted Flycatcher	1
Common Redstart	2	Storm Petrel	60
Common Scoter	28	Swallow	10
Common Tern	19	Whimbrel	14
Common Whitethroat	1	Willow Warbler	11
Cormorant	15	Mammals	
Cory's Shearwater	35	Atlantic Grey Seal	3
Eider	9	Bottle-Nose Dolphin	13
Fulmar	215	Common Dolphin	366
Gannet	3220	Dolphin sp.	2
Goldcrest	1	Harbour Porpoise	52
Great Black Backed Gull	224	Fish	
Great Northern Diver	18	Basking Shark	3
Great Shearwater	11	Ocean Sunfish	8
Great Skua	7		
Grey Phalarope	4		
Guillemot	620		
Herring Gull	690		
House Sparrow	1		
Kittiwake	168		
Lesser Black Backed Gull	47		
Little Egret	3		
Manx Shearwater	10785		
Mediterranean Gull	1		
Mute Swan	2		
Oystercatcher	1		
Pintail	1		
Pomarine Skua	1		
Puffin	54		
Purple Sandpipers	17		
Razorbill	130		

## Key Results

Number of bird species seen:	48
Number of mammal species seen:	5
Number of fish species seen:	2
Total birds seen:	16,901
Total mammals seen:	436
Total fish seen:	11
Total animals seen:	17,348

# Biosecurity: keeping the islands free of 'rat-sign'



Above: Incursion training on St Agnes. Residents Chris Simmonds and Rosie Felton join Lydia and Holly.

Biosecurity is all about preventing rats from re-infesting St Agnes and Gugh and what to do should one or more be found on the islands. **Lydia Titterton, Project Officer** leads a team of 27 trained volunteers across St Agnes, Gugh and St Marys. Biosecurity designed to keep the island rat-free can be summarised in four separate steps:

**1. Prevention.** There is bait on board boats which serve the islands. The local community has been trained A. to check high risk items being brought ashore (eg hay and animal feed) B. to ensure good waste management practice by using compost bins and secure wheelie bins and C. to remain vigilant at all times for sign of rats and to encourage all visitors to be equally vigilant.

**Beach cleans and Apple Day** are just two activities which also aim to reduce food and 'rat-friendly' materials on the islands. Thanks to all those who have joined these events.

**2. Detection.** Permanent monitoring stations are examined every four weeks by Seabird Heritage Volunteers (**SHVs**). Chocolate wax inside the permanent boxes around the coastline is checked for teeth marks. So far any marks have only been from shrews. The '**Rat On A Rat**' (**ROAR**) hotline number **01720 422153** enables visitors and residents to call about anything suspiciously 'ratty'.

**3. Surveillance.** This is where someone trained in biosecurity measures carries out an investigation into a suspected 'rat sign.' Volunteer Coordinators carry out an inspection of the site within 24 hours and contact the two **SHVs** nearest to the 'ROAR' site. **SHVs** are then advised of the need to check their stations if required. Anything suspicious, we then move on to the next stage of response.

**4. Incursion response.** If 'rat sign' is confirmed, a trained team of RSPB staff and volunteers on the mainland will assist with a month-long baiting operation to remove any rats. The **SHVs'** response within the first 24 hours will be vital in order to get the wax replaced by bait in their permanent monitoring stations. Find out more on Page 9.

## Networking visits and talks



In March Project Officer Lydia Titterton visited the island of Lundy in the Bristol Channel to help install Manx Shearwater nest boxes there and to learn how we might further help our nesting Manxies on St Agnes and Gugh. Thanks to the team there for their hospitality.

Spring 2016 saw a flurry of significant visits to St Agnes and Gugh. **Our LIFE Funding NEEMO Monitor Karen Lunan** came and joined a very early morning land-bird survey. She saw Manx shearwater burrows and chatted to residents. We welcomed local **MP Derek Thomas**, who after visiting the project, became a 'Species Champion' for Manx shearwaters. This role helps raise awareness of Manx shearwaters and the causes of their decline. Derek will be encouraging the development of public policy and supporting legislation to help the species flourish.



**Our HLF Funding Monitor Claire Hyne** was here in May joining school education sessions, setting up shrew monitoring tunnels on Gugh and Bryher and visiting the venue of 'Date with Nature' walks on Tresco.



Recently Jaclyn gave a talk to Exeter University Zoology students learning about island restoration and how such conservation methods are happening right here in the South West.

Top left: Local MP Derek Thomas on St Agnes (IOSWT CEO Sarah Mason, Jaclyn, Lydia, Derek and family plus Sam Hicks). Middle left: Lydia joins the team on Lundy. Middle right: HLF's Claire Hyne visits the project (Lydia, Holly, volunteer Martin, Paul St Pierre, Claire and Jaclyn). Top right: Action shot of the Exeter University lecture. Middle: Martin Harper and Pam Davis join St Agnes school wax checks. Bottom: Karen Lunan (left) with Lydia and Jaclyn at a Manxie burrow.



# Monitoring rats on other islands on Scilly



Project Officer Lydia Titterton and Project Assistant Holly Paget-Brown have been collecting DNA samples from rats and analysing the rodent's behaviour on St Martin's, Tresco, Bryher and St Helen's. This will help us understand whether rats there have any resistance to bait and what (for monitoring purposes) is their favourite taste in wax! So far aniseed and fish-flavour seem to be up there with chocolate and peanut butter. The point is that when rats smell flavoured wax, they assume it's a food source, take a bite and leave teeth marks. This helps us locate the whereabouts of rats and their territories. Our gratitude to Tresco Estate, residents on St Martin's, Bryher and Tresco. Also to the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust and St Agnes Boating for access to St Helen's. With regard to the possibility of removing rats from other islands on Scilly, funding options for their removal from Tresco, Bryher and St Martin's together with surrounding uninhabited islands are still being investigated. The possibility of one large operation has been deemed feasible and we will keep you posted with any developments.

Top left: Holly, Lydia and Jaclyn setting up monitoring tools on St Helen's. Middle left: Lydia sets up snap traps. Middle right: RSPB staff member Pam Davis visits project and assists Lydia and Holly with different flavoured wax tools on Tresco. Top right: Lydia and volunteer Alex discover a 'message in a bottle' on St Helen's whilst setting out rat monitoring tools. Luckily not an SOS ! Bottom: The team boating between islands (Holly, Lydia, Amy King, Alex, Stuart, Jaclyn).

## Queen's Patron's Lunch



At the start of the year Holly was volunteering. And it's great when volunteer dedication can and does lead to a staff role, as with Holly. But prior to becoming a member of the staff team, she had the honour of attending the Queen's Patron's lunch representing RSPB volunteers. The event was part of the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations in the Mall and Holly linked up with other RSPB representatives - David, Jen, Hugo, Alan, Jill, Russell, Natalie, Peter, Simon - and took Jaclyn as her plus one! Wet weather on the day did not dampen spirits. The RSPB joined more than 60 other charities of which the Queen is also Patron. It was a wonderful day. We were very proud to be representing the society's volunteers and the key work they carry out to help save nature. In a speech to us all, the Queen said she was very proud too.

## Rat - free fun!

Recollecting the wonderful rat-free party celebration of February 12th 2016, here are a few pictures. Thanks for everyone's help in providing food and fun! All photos Biz Bell. Left: Lydia and Holly with 'rat-free' project cake. Middle left: Buffet and bunting. Middle right: Doug and Jackie with sparklers Right: community members watch the fireworks.





# Isles of Scilly Seabird Heritage Volunteers (SHVs)

Seabird Heritage Volunteers or **SHVs** are the community members of St Agnes and Gugh who together will continue to help keep the islands rat-free. We are grateful to all of you for the invaluable support you give. Since the last update we've had 6 'rat on a rat calls' and responded using the new protocol. This has entailed a team leader (either a staff member or Volunteer Coordinator John Peacock) to carry out an inspection of the site within 24 hours and contact the two **SHVs** nearest to the 'ROAR' site. **SHVs** are then advised of the need to check their stations if required. If there is anything suspicious we then move on to the next stage of response. As with these latest 6 calls, vigilance is the order of the day even when there's no rat sign.

The next phase of **SHV** training due to new legislation started this month. Anyone handling bait in the future is going to need a licence, part of the **SHVs** role will require wax to be swapped for bait in your stations within 24 hours should an incursion occur. So far 8 community members have attained their Lantra-approved 'rodent control' certificates—well done! We will continue to contact you all through January to explain what's needed and carry out further practical training at the 'incursion shed'. Meanwhile, over at the Penzance and Exeter Offices, training continues to ensure there's an RSPB team able to deliver an incursion response, if needed, post 2017.



Right: Seabird Heritage volunteers Grace and Joss Hicks check for potential teeth marks on flavoured wax from a permanent monitoring station on St Agnes.

Photo Nick Tomalin.



"The seabird recovery project has been a great success so far, and we the community are excited to carry on the good work. The 'rat on a rat' number can be called by anyone who sees anything 'suspiciously ratty' on St Agnes and Gugh and we have a robust incursion plan in place. This year many of us joined 'chick check' walks to see Manx shearwater chicks 'stargazing' outside their burrows and listened to cheeping calls of storm petrel chicks in boulder beaches. It really is wonderful to know these chicks are now surviving, thanks to the removal of rats. We hope to protect our seabirds for a long time to come."

**Trish Peacock**

"As the owner of St Agnes Boating I carry bait boxes onboard our boats and the crew keep an eye out for rat sign at all times. I will also be passing on information each year to other boatmen who use the harbours on how they can also reduce the risk of transporting rats. We have learnt so much about island restoration and we continue to learn more in this final year of the project."

**John Peacock**

Thank you to Bell Laboratories and Barretine Environmental Health for Protecta Bait stations (or as we refer to them, the permanent monitoring stations)







# Thank you

Each year our newsletter is compiled I continue to be so proud of all the people involved in this pioneering project who enable me to continue to report such great news. The highlight for me in the first year (2013) was just getting the 'green light' for this project. The second year (2014) saw the removal of rats completed by Wildlife Management International, led by world expert Biz Bell. Plus we recorded the first Manx shearwater chick in living memory to fledge on St Agnes. The third year (2015) celebrated storm petrels returning to breed and successfully fledge young on St Agnes and Gugh. Now in year four (2016) it is really rewarding to be able to report our official 'rat-free status' – yes: we did it! Also I am delighted that Manxies and stormies continue to thrive and that so many wonderful community members (our Seabird Heritage Volunteers) lent a hand with surveys this summer as part of 'chick check' walks.

As the final year of the project approaches, I remain impressed at just how many community members continue to commit time to biosecurity and incursion response training. This passion and commitment to protect seabirds into the future makes the community of St Agnes and Gugh very special. We - the project team - have lots of exciting work to complete this year (with the help of you the community) before the project ends in September 2017. We are very much looking forward to these next nine months but in the meantime, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all.

**Jaclyn Pearson, Project Manager**

## And finally...well done youngest Seabird Heritage volunteers!



The youngest of our seabird heritage volunteers, 6 year-old Joss Hicks from Westward Farm, wrote to Blue Peter to tell them about his volunteering work with the project and the beach cleans. He received a Blue Peter badge in the post for his efforts. We were all delighted. Joss helps mum Grace check permanent monitoring stations each month and also joins his school friends and teachers to check 5 stations monthly. They have to be the youngest people in the UK skilled in identifying the difference between shrew and rat teeth nibbles on wax! By keeping the islands rat-free, Manx shearwaters and storm petrels will continue to increase on Scilly. So very well done Joss and all the other young seabird ambassadors on St Agnes for together helping protect your special seabirds.

Meanwhile, over the water in Penzance, Solomon St Pierre, was also getting involved in the project. He helped his dad, Project Supervisor Paul St Pierre, sort through pitfall contents and categorise invertebrates. Thank you Solomon: you're clearly an entomologist in the making!



### Contact us

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Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project

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The Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project

Trenoweth, St Mary's,

Isles of Scilly, TR21 ONS

**We need YOUR help  
to keep St Agnes  
and Gugh and the  
uninhabited islands  
rat-free**



The project is funded by LIFE, the EU's programme for financing key environmental schemes across the continent, and the UK's own Heritage Lottery Fund.



**giving  
nature  
a home**

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

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