



## 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: JUNE 2015

*Volunteers: Toby and Rufus Branston; Will Brown; Mat Crowe; Rebecca Etheridge; Emma and Bryony Foulger; Ros, Steve and Tristan Fletcher; Randolph Hessing; Amy King; Ed Marshall; Irina Mereniuc; Stella, Solomon and Amalia St Pierre; Colin Taylor; Matthew Tickner; Alice Trevail; Anabelle and Jasmine Wentworth; Amie Wheeldon; residents of St Agnes and Gugh. Thanks to St Agnes Councillor Richard McCarthy for helping edit the newsletter.*

**Incursion response and training.** We've had eight 'Rat on a Rat' calls over the last five weeks from visitors plus one call out from a St Martin's resident. Four 'sightings' were on Gugh and turned out to be rabbits. On Agnes, the first was a report of suspicious 'gnaw' marks on a gull carcass. We couldn't find them. The second was from a visitor who saw what looked like a rat running from a compost heap. The surveillance grid is still out for another two days. The third was confirmed to be a shrew and the final call out from the man on St Martin's was the most concerning. He and his wife were 100% sure they saw a rat on the quay. Again the surveillance grid is still out but there has been no rat sign on the grid yet. Please remain vigilant and if you notice anything suspicious do call the 'Rat on a Rat number' 422153.

Meanwhile, St Agnes school children have been trained up to check five monitoring stations along Periglis. They are convenient to check as they are close to the MUGA where they do PE. The stations used to be on Johann's 'patch' so thanks for swapping. The young students excelled at map-reading and chocolate wax checks straight away! Are you able to spare an hour a month to check 10 coastal stations? Or can you assist us with incursion response? Let Gemma know if you'd like to join one of her training sessions. Away from St Agnes, we also provided a seabird workshop to Cornwall College Ecology students on Peninnis, St Mary's. They were delighted to hear about the project.



St Agnes school base check their stations



Training for youngest volunteers (Jaclyn's nieces on holiday)



Incursion response: Gemma trains Matthew Tickner



Ecology and Conservation students, Cornwall College listen at burrows

**Special Protection Area (SPA) Seabird Surveys.** Dr. Vickie Heaney heads the team as Senior Project Officer conducting the first full seabird survey in Scilly for 9 years. She says: "We have a great set of data on seabird numbers from Scilly with regular all-island counts going back to 1970 but the last full one was back in 2006. That showed a 25% decrease in numbers of breeding seabirds over the previous two decades. Having coordinated the surveys in 2000 and 2006 I do have an almost personal affinity with these birds and am really keen to see how they've fared in the last 9 years." Vickie has three research assistants: Lydia Titterton, whom many of you will recall from her past years volunteering work with IOSWT; Will Scott from St Mary's and Australian Lana Austin, who has been working in the UK for the past 12 months. Volunteers Alice Trevail, Matthew Tickner, Toby Branston, Emma Foulger, Amy King, Amie Wheeldon and Will Brown have already joined the surveys and many more will be joining too over the summer period.



Jaclyn, Lydia, Vickie, Lana, Alice & Will.



First official Manxie burrow located on Gugh



Vickie explains her work to visitors

**Natura 2000 Day!** Thursday May 21<sup>st</sup> was 'Natura 2000 Day'. **Natura 2000** is the name given to the nature protection sites within the territory of the European Union, of which Scilly's Special Protection Area (SPA) is just one. We

decided the best way to celebrate the day was to carry out youth activities for some of the islands children. We took pupils from Blue Class, St Mary's for a boat trip to seek out seabirds, not least puffins. Blue Class joined local school children for a picnic at the Island Hall and told them all about their boat trip. In return they found out about the project on St Agnes and Gugh and the part the school was playing in monitoring for shrews and checking rat monitoring stations. We then met up with pupils from Probus school in Cornwall who were visiting St Agnes and they too learned about the project, Natura 2000 Day and the special 'butterfly sign'. Making this sign is a demonstration of support for the projects within Natura 2000 sites. The event ended with a sing-song in Red Class – the nursery class back on St Mary's. Pictures can be found on the website [www.lifecommunity.eu/events/natura-2000-day-on-the-isles-of-scilly/](http://www.lifecommunity.eu/events/natura-2000-day-on-the-isles-of-scilly/)



Five Islands School Primary Blue Class take a seabird boat trip



Blue Class joins St Agnes base for a picnic lunch and shared what they learnt



St Agnes School teach Blue Class about how to monitor for shrews and rats



Probus School's 'butterfly sign'



Seabird research team, RSPB's Leigh Lock and Andy Brown, Principal Ecologist Natural England



Five Islands School nursery Red Class

We have also carried out walks and talks for visitors and residents: thanks to the Turks Head where we held a community talk. 'Date with Nature' walks have returned and will run until June 19<sup>th</sup> on Tresco. Visitors and islanders alike can join the 50 minute guided walks on the hour each day between 10am and 4pm and learn about seabirds and other wildlife found on Tresco. Ecological monitoring of shrews and rabbits continues on St Agnes, Gugh and at control sites on Bryher and St Mary's. Issy Tibbs gets big thanks for storing the shrew tunnels on Bryher. We also continued to collect our fixed point photos. On St Agnes and Gugh, just as New Zealand Senior Ecologist Biz Bell predicted, our surveys are showing an increase in rabbit numbers and a high number of shrew footprints in the monitoring tunnels.



Guided walk on Gugh



'Date with Nature' on Tresco



Community talk



Young shrew surveyors on Bryher (Paul St Pierre's family assisting whilst on holiday)

**Coming up:** 'Date with Nature' until June 19<sup>th</sup>; St Agnes Boating 'Wildlife Safaris' on Wednesday afternoons; Desk Officers from project funders LIFE visiting June 20-23<sup>rd</sup>, do say hello when you see us out and about; The project may feature in the newspaper column 'Country Diary' by Robin page, in the Daily Telegraph on Saturday June 20<sup>th</sup>.

*Jaclyn and Gemma*

Comments and queries welcome: [Jaclyn.pearson@rspb.org.uk](mailto:Jaclyn.pearson@rspb.org.uk) or 07881 517047. 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.

