

# SMPnews

Monitoring internationally important seabird populations across the UK

## Welcome...

to the first issue of *SMP news*. The **Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP)** tracks the population changes of the UK's internationally important breeding seabird species at coastal and inland colonies.

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Kittiwake and chick, Newcastle: Jonnie Fisk

## The seabird monitoring journey so far

By Sarah Money, JNCC

The Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) was established by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, JNCC, (then known as the Nature Conservancy Council) in 1986, working in partnership with 19 other organisations. The aim was to set up an annual monitoring programme for the 25 seabird species which breed regularly in the UK, to allow their conservation status to be assessed.

JNCC coordinated the collection, collation, and analysis of data on seabird breeding numbers and success, which were gathered from around the UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland, by hundreds of skilled volunteer and professional participants. A dedicated SMP database was set up to allow entry of the tens of thousands of records from coastal and inland colonies. In addition, more detailed studies on adult survival, diet and phenology were also captured annually at four geographically dispersed Key Sites located on Canna, Fair Isle, Isle of May and Skomer Island.

The data and statistics were initially published annually as a report – *Seabird Numbers and Breeding Success in Britain and Ireland* – but in more recent years were presented online on the JNCC website. The data have provided invaluable insights into the status and trends of our breeding seabirds, have helped identify possible drivers of change and, alongside national censuses, have been crucial for informing conservation policy, research and actions for this group of species.

**In 2022, JNCC formed a new partnership with BTO and RSPB for funding and management of the SMP.** Drawing on its considerable expertise in running bird monitoring projects, BTO now leads on the coordination of the scheme, data collation and analysis. Huge thanks are due to all who got the programme to where it is today.

## PARTNERS



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# Latest news

By Sarah Harris, SMP Organiser  
and *SMP news* editor, BTO

This is the first issue of *SMP news* and we are delighted to feature a number of varied articles and news items. We look back at the history of the SMP, provide an update on coordinational changes and introduce staff involved in the smooth running of the scheme, discover what is being done in light of the recent Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak, focus in on a selection of seabird species, find out about a nationally important seabird site, and take a look at SMP site coverage and participation over time. This is the very first *SMP news* and we would therefore like to hear if there was anything in this newsletter you found particularly interesting, or were not so captivated by, and what you might like to see in future issues. See the back cover to find out where and how to feedback your views – we want to hear from anyone and everyone! Thank you.

Here at BTO, we have been working with SMP Partner, JNCC, to transfer coordination of the scheme from JNCC to BTO. In addition, we have been working with JNCC, Associate Partner RSPB, and the wider SMP Advisory Group to plan the future of the scheme and ensure it continues to go from strength to strength. In order to do this, an Engagement Plan, a Review of Reporting and a Sampling Strategy have been drafted and are near completion, and work is also underway to fund, review and update the *Seabird monitoring handbook for Britain and Ireland* (with the help of ‘species experts’), hereon referred to as the ‘SMP handbook’. Site allocations on the SMP Online data entry portal require a lot of attention and time to ensure they are correct, as does data collation and input from the last couple of seasons. **It is never too late to input historic data, so if you have outstanding data, please do not delay entering it as Nina O’Hanlon will be running the latest set of population trends imminently.**

We have been overwhelmed with the interest and participation requests coming through and thank everyone for their patience as we manage requests and organise site availability. An initial wishlist of SMP Online developments has been drawn up and in the autumn we plan to focus again on the next steps and requirements for the SMP Online data entry system – we will be reaching out for feedback via a questionnaire later in the year when data are being input and the system is fresh in people’s minds. In addition, increased monitoring in 2023 is underway in response to the ongoing HPAI outbreak and therefore site allocations are complicated further. Luckily, we have a fantastic group of organisations working together to coordinate and seek funding for this additional monitoring (see page 4).

We were pleased to see the publication of the *Northern Ireland Seabird Report 2022*, edited and coordinated wonderfully by Katherine Booth Jones, Senior Research Ecologist at BTO Northern Ireland. Thank you to all the participants and funders involved in making this publication possible. On the horizon, we also have the publication of the much anticipated *Seabirds Count, A census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland (2015–2021)* – the best of luck to all involved in scripting and editing this mammoth undertaking.

This leaves me to thank you all for your support as I take on the role of UK SMP Organiser based at BTO HQ in Thetford, and to thank Ilka Win and JNCC for steering the scheme before me, and to wish everyone a productive 2023 monitoring season – I’m excited for the future of the SMP, let’s go!

Sarah

## NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

We are grateful to Sarah Money for the introductory words covering the history of SMP, to Ciaran Hatsell and Liz Humphreys for their ‘Focus’ articles, to Dawn Balmer for outlining the monitoring response to the Highly Pathological Avian Influenza troubling our seabirds, and to Scott Mayson for summarising the status of some of the UK’s rarer breeding seabirds. Thanks also to Nina O’Hanlon for joining Sarah Harris in this issue’s team introductions – are they twins?! Sarah, SMP Organiser, authored the remaining text, and produced and edited the newsletter.

## SMP PARTNERSHIP

The Seabird Monitoring Programme is funded jointly by BTO and JNCC, in association with RSPB, with fieldwork conducted by both non-professional and professional surveyors.

Including the organisations above, the SMP also has an Advisory Group of 24 organisations who feed into the direction and decision making process of the Steering Committee.

Read more about the scheme governance at [www.bto.org/smp-contributing-organisations](http://www.bto.org/smp-contributing-organisations)



[www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)



[www.jncc.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.gov.uk)

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[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

## THE SMALL PRINT

The Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) monitors breeding seabirds throughout the United Kingdom, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. Close collaboration with organisations in the Republic of Ireland enables all-Ireland interpretation of seabird trends. Information in this newsletter is compiled from a variety of sources and does not necessarily reflect the views of SMP partner organisations. © BTO 2023. Published by BTO, JNCC, and Associate Partner, RSPB.



## KITTIWAKE

This issue of *SMP news* focuses on Kittiwakes. They are the most numerous species of gull in the world, yet are a species in long-term decline in the UK. Productivity (Breeding Success), however, appears to have increased in recent years. A species focus covering Kittiwake can be viewed on page 10.

*“In Newcastle it's hard to assign a preferred urban vista of mine but at the core of this city is a green bridge full of Kittiwakes living life large on the Tyne”*

**Jonnie Fisk, 2023**  
Tyne Kittiwake observer

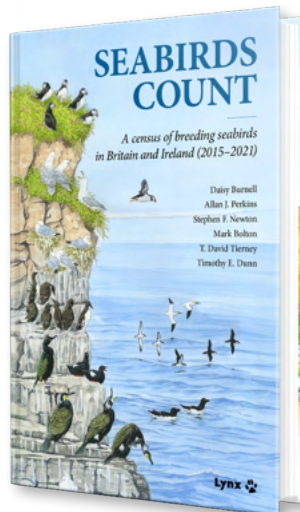
Kittiwake, Newcastle: Jonnie Fisk

## SEABIRDS COUNT

### A census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland (2015–2021)

*Daisy Burnell, Allan J. Perkins, Stephen F. Newton, Mark Bolton, T. David Tierney, Timothy E. Dunn*

Seabirds Count is the fourth census of Britain and Ireland’s internationally important populations of breeding seabirds. Over 10,000 sites and 25 species were surveyed between 2015 and 2021, providing a comprehensive update on the state of these populations. These vital data will help aid our understanding of the relationships between seabirds and the pressures they face. Due to be published in the autumn 2023.



## SMP DATA CALL – Urgent

As we collate and prepare data for the 2021 and 2022 SMP Report, it is apparent that the SMP database is missing expected data for these two years. In order to produce trend results for seabird abundance and productivity, we *urgently* need any outstanding data to be entered directly into the SMP Online application without delay. Thank you.

## NORTHERN IRELAND SEABIRD REPORT, 2022

The *Northern Ireland Seabird Report 2022* provides an update on the country’s seabirds and is unique within the UK. The report is the culmination of the efforts of the Northern Ireland Seabird Network; a collaboration between volunteer seabird surveyors, the BTO, NIEA, RSPB, Ulster Wildlife and the National Trust.

Seabirds can be challenging to survey, therefore maintaining a motivated network of volunteers and professional surveyors is important to provide the high quality annual data needed to chart long-term changes in seabird abundance and productivity. The *Northern Ireland Seabird Report 2022* provides an accessible summary of seabird monitoring data in Northern Ireland, which in turn provides tangible feedback to those collecting these valuable data.

[www.bto.org/ni-seabirds-report-2022](http://www.bto.org/ni-seabirds-report-2022)



# Additional monitoring in 2023

By Dawn Balmer, BTO, on behalf of the HPAI Monitoring Task and Finish Group



Deceased Gannet: Lukassek/ stock.adobe.com

At the meeting of the SMP Advisory Group on 17 November 2022 we discussed Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and the devastating impact on some seabirds in 2022. We discussed the importance of planning survey work for 2023 to ensure that priority sites and species are covered so that we can better understand the impacts of HPAI. This will likely involve professional fieldworkers and the requirement to direct some volunteers to priority sites. We agreed to work together through a Task and Finish Group to ensure that fieldwork in 2023 is well coordinated through SMP.

A group was formed, including representatives from BTO, RSPB, JNCC, the Country Nature Conservation Bodies (CNCBs), National Trust, National Trust for Scotland, Marine Science Scotland and the Seabird Group and we met monthly from

December 2022 to April 2023. One of the first tasks was to identify which sites and species we might expect to be covered through the SMP as 'Business as usual' and then to come up with a list of priority sites and species that would require additional fieldworker effort. RSPB took the lead in putting together a funding proposal and worked closely with the CNCBs who each worked on their own funding requirements.

One of the main aims of the Task and Finish Group was to facilitate communication between the key people involved in planning fieldwork and seeking funding to ensure there was no duplication of effort. Working closely with the SMP Organiser was also critical to ensure that sites were allocated to professional fieldworkers so that data can be entered efficiently later in the season and encouraging volunteers to cover sites where possible.

Thanks go to everyone working so hard and communicating so effectively, to RSPB for leading and securing funding and prioritising species and sites, and to those who have supported funding requests. We are now in an excellent position at the start of the breeding season. Fieldworkers have been employed, 'in kind' offers of fieldworkers have been pledged, grants from the Seabird Group have been awarded to independent participants and the difficult logistics of getting fieldworkers where they are needed at the right time are largely sorted. The work of the Task and Finish Group is done but we will reconvene for a final meeting once all the fieldwork has been completed to discuss reporting and next steps.

Thank you to everyone involved in the Group and we wish all fieldwork participants an enjoyable and successful summer of surveying.

## REPORTING SUSPECTED AVIAN INFLUENZA



**Do not touch dead birds with your bare hands.**

If you have to touch a bird, invert a plastic bag over your hand and pick it up in the plastic.

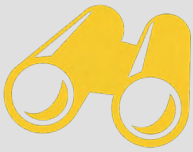


**Report avian mortality to Defra online:**

[www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds)

**If in Northern Ireland, see guidance at:**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/wild-birds-and-advice-public](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/wild-birds-and-advice-public)



**IN ADDITION to alerting Defra, sightings of dead birds can be submitted to BirdTrack, and birds with rings logged via the EURING website:**

BirdTrack: [www.bto.org/birdtrack](http://www.bto.org/birdtrack), e.g., during SMP surveying.

EURING: [www.euring.org](http://www.euring.org)

### AVIAN INFLUENZA

Commonly known as bird flu, this is an influenza caused by viruses adapted to birds, in a similar way to the human adapted influenza known as simply 'the (human) flu'. Flu viruses can vary in their ability to cause disease: these are high pathogenicity (HPAI) or low pathogenicity (LPAI) variants. Over the last couple of years, wild birds and the poultry industry have been dealing with the onslaught of a Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, strain 'H5N1'.

Symptoms of a bird with HPAI include: swollen head; blue discolouration of the neck and throat; loss of appetite; respiratory distress such as gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling; diarrhoea; fewer eggs laid; increased mortality; neurological signs such as trembling, falling over, swimming or walking in circles.

Outbreaks of Avian Influenza are not uncommon, however, the effects

of H5N1 appear to be particularly severe. Over the winter of 2021/22 an outbreak was confirmed on the Solway Firth and shocking images were released showing hundreds of dead Barnacle Geese strewn across the estuary landscape. Normally, we see the outbreaks subside as spring and summer return, however on this occasion, the virus spread to the UK's seabird populations as well as raptors, wildfowl, waders, gamebirds and other bird species.

It is thought that significant numbers of species such as Great Skua and Gannet died as a result. The UK hosts 60% of the global breeding population of Great Skua and 56% of the global breeding population of Gannet, making this more than a UK-related threat to some seabird populations.

Seabirds tend to be long-lived species, slow to reach sexual maturity and often produce low numbers of eggs

each year, and are therefore slow to recover from losses. Additionally, many seabird species are already facing pressures from threats such as climate change, renewables, pollution, invasive species, fisheries and disturbance.

The work of the HPAI Task and Finish Group and the increased monitoring effort planned for 2023 is therefore vital as we attempt to measure the impact of H5N1 on seabird populations and better understand these impacts longer term.

Who knows how the 2023 breeding season will play out but by being pre-warned and armed with lessons learnt during the 2022 season, and working together with other organisations and country agencies, we are better placed to manage monitoring activities than ever before. With both biosecurity and the importance of the data in the forefront of our minds, here goes...

### SMP-HPAI MONITORING

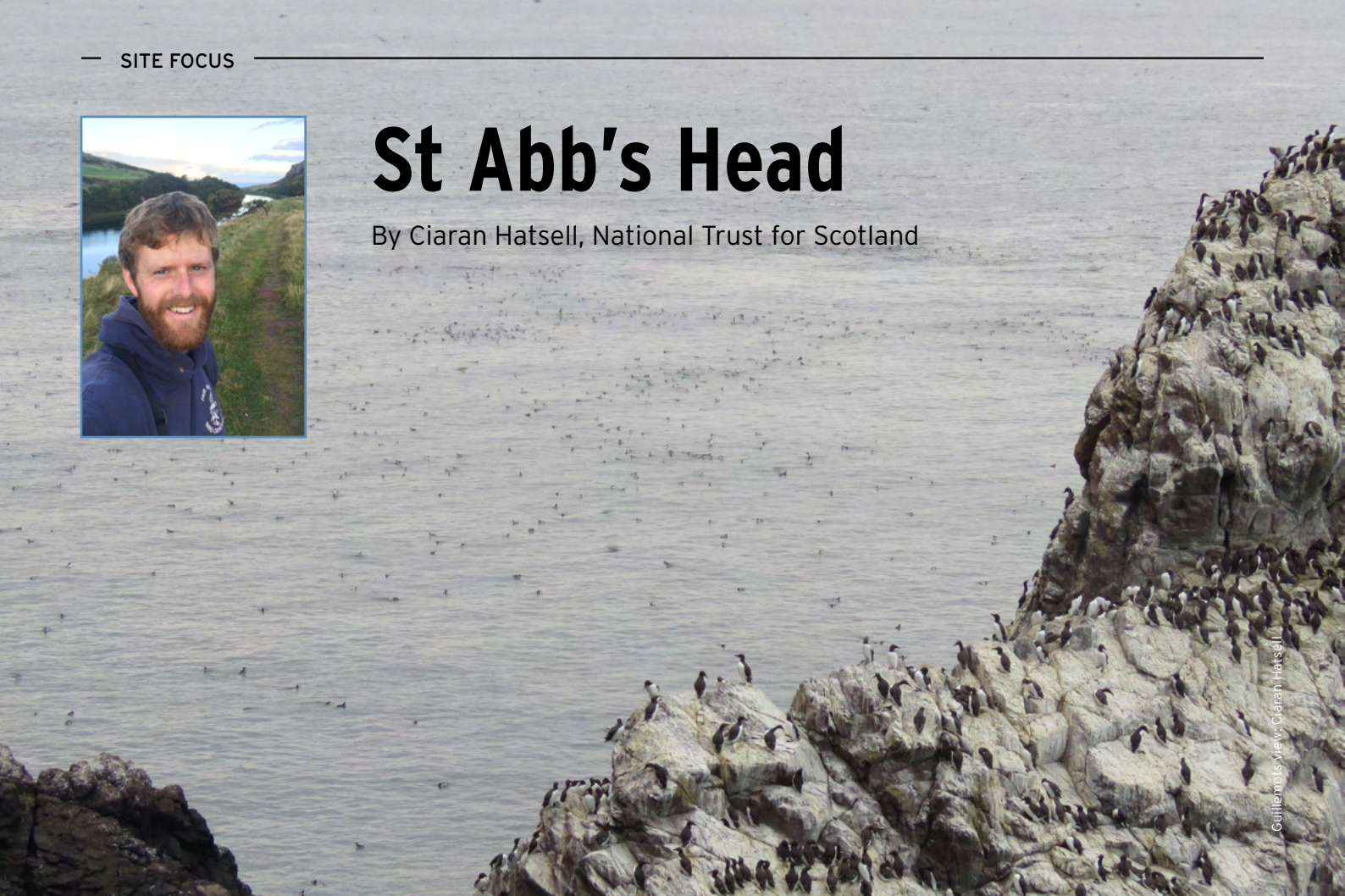
If you are involved in this additional HPAI monitoring effort on behalf of one of the organisations mentioned above, or as a volunteer, please ensure that you are registered to the SMP Online data entry system and have been allocated the site/s you will be monitoring.

 [app.bto.org/seabirds/public/index.jsp](http://app.bto.org/seabirds/public/index.jsp)



# St Abb's Head

By Ciaran Hatsell, National Trust for Scotland



Guillemots view, Ciaran Hatsell

St Abb's Head is the jewel in the crown of the Scottish Borders for wildlife and its incredible seabird colonies have been studied on and off since 1978. The data collected feed into the SMP, a vital conservation tool we can use to look at wider seabird trends and use the data to inform conservation action.

Sitting on the east coast just north of the Scottish border, St Abb's Head is not a huge place, with the main part of the reserve we call 'The Head' measuring just 77 hectares. But while it may be small it certainly packs a punch and is one of the best mainland seabird sites in the UK. In spring and summer, tens of thousands of seabirds gather on the headland to nest, bringing a vibrant atmosphere to the cliffs. Just down from the lighthouse at Foul Bay, you can sit and watch breeding seabirds go about their business set against a dramatic landscape of rugged rock and wild ocean.

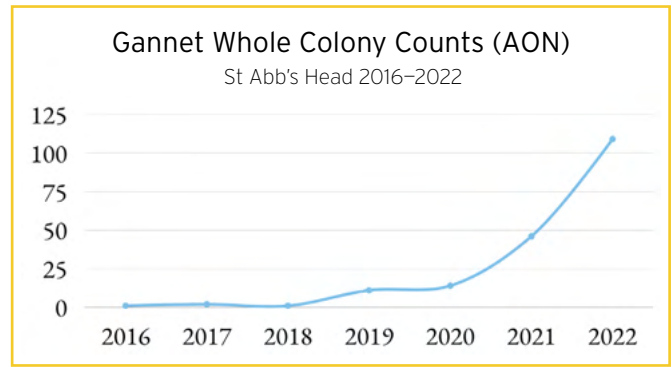
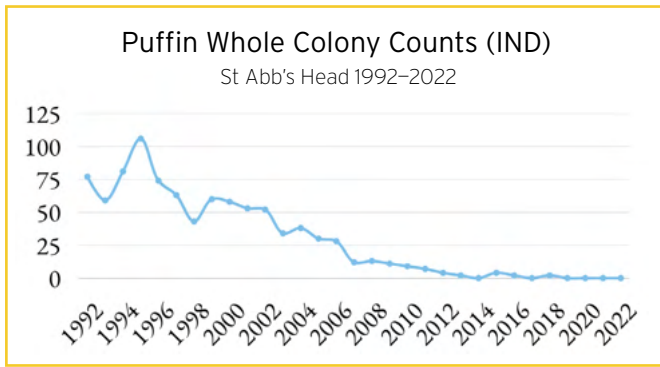
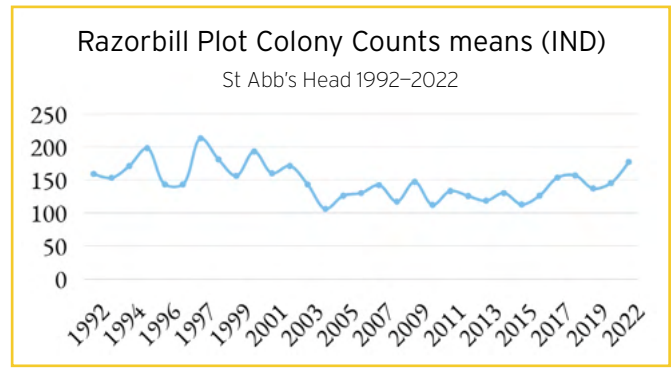
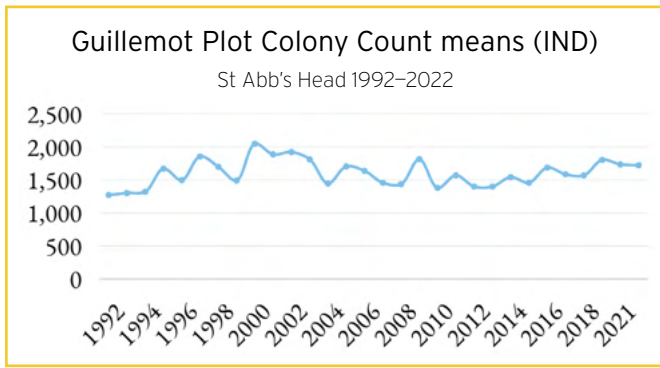
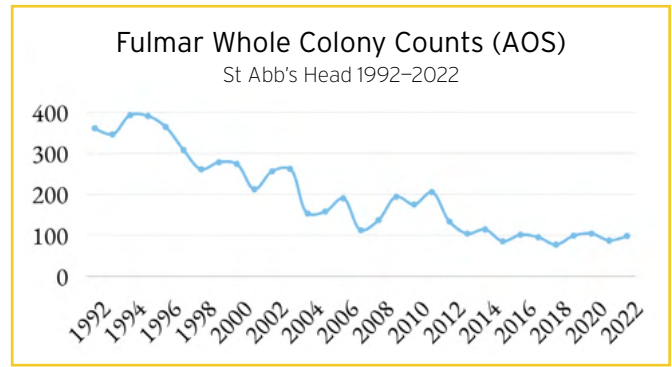
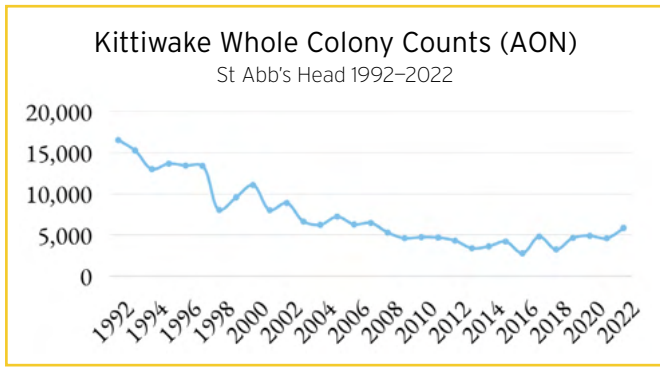
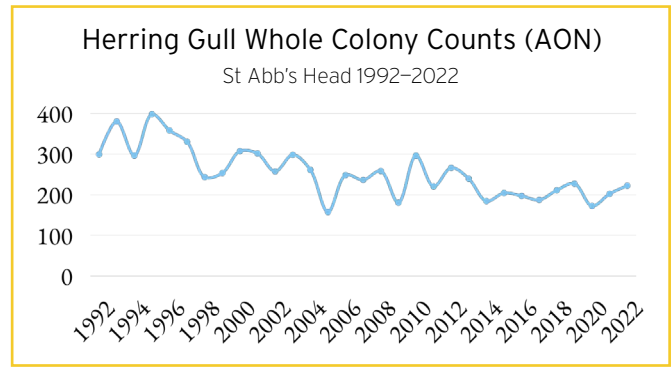
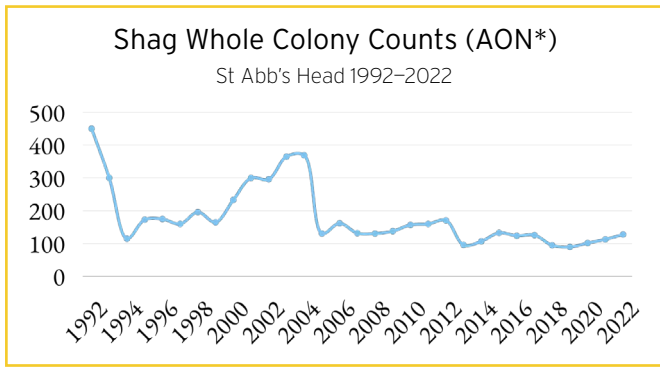
On calm evenings in late June/early July, young Guillemots leave the cliffs before they've grown their wings, taking the leap of faith and paddling out

accompanied by an adult into the big wide ocean. The noise and atmosphere are a seabird scene like a football stadium packed to capacity. It's one of the few spots on the Scottish mainland where you can witness this amazing spectacle so if you ever get the chance, come and see it!

Another new and interesting dynamic can be seen in the Gannet versus Guillemot battle playing out on the clifftops. Gannets attempted to nest at St Abb's Head for the first time in 2016 and their population has since undergone a meteoric rise! Our largest seabird has overspilled from the nearby Bass Rock (the biggest Gannetry in the world!) and we have been seeing them slowly take over. We are looking to work with universities for this rare opportunity to study a newly forming colony. On a basic level, it is truly fascinating to watch their dynamics at play – our Gannets here often only settle when the Guillemots have laid eggs, so they quite literally kick them off their nest sites in order to claim the prime cliff-top real estate.

One of the core aims of National Nature Reserves is to connect people with nature and here at St Abb's Head we try and do this as best we can. We hold 'see the seabird' events in the summer to bring to life the stories of our seabirds. The benefits of nature for our physical and mental health are well known and a trip to a seabird colony is one of the most immersive natural experiences you can have! We welcome around 70,000 visitors each year to the reserve and hope that every single person leaves having connected in some small way with the natural world.

Many of our seabirds are in trouble and overleaf is a quick insight into the trends of each species since regular monitoring began. As can be seen on the graphs, many of our seabird populations are in sharp decline – Shag, Herring Gull, Kittiwake, Fulmar and Puffin showing the steepest negative trends, while the picture for Guillemot, Razorbill and Gannet gives slightly more room for optimism. They all have different requirements for habitat and food but the thing that inextricably links them is the health of the marine environment.



\*AON: Apparently Occupied Nests; AOS: Apparently Occupied Sites; IND: Individuals

Who would want to be a seabird? As amazing as it must be to conquer the oceans and master flight, seabirds face so many challenges across the marine landscape: availability of food; industrialisation of the marine environment; changing sea temperatures; overfishing; disease – they really are the toughest of the tough! Avian Influenza impacted seabirds across the UK and beyond last year, and we lost hundreds of birds here at

‘The Head’. Guillemots, Kittiwakes and Gannets were hit hardest and it is another vital reason for our monitoring to continue, to understand how our seabirds fare under even greater pressure from all manner of threats, both human-made and natural.

In addition to Whole Colony Counts we also carry out Breeding Success monitoring – giving us a closer look annually into how our seabirds are

far. This involves monitoring the same plots of nests each year and determining how many chicks fledge from each one.

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) is a collaborative organisation and we play host to various research projects relating to our amazing seabirds. Working in partnership with various organisations including Edinburgh Napier University and the RSPB,

we are looking to better understand our seabird colonies and the threats they face. Carrying out research into disturbance events and tracking seabirds to identify their feeding grounds, we have built a better understanding of how our seabirds use the reserve and the wider marine habitat.

Our monitoring is carried out mainly from land but we are lucky enough to have to go out in a boat to count the blind spots that can't be seen from land – as well as making the data more complete, it's always a great opportunity to get out and see things from another perspective! Shags croaking from inside pitch-black caves, thousands of seabirds packed shoulder to shoulder on precarious ledges, Kittiwakes screeching from their lofty double-bed nests on the cliff edge; there are few finer places to be on a summer's evening than finishing seabird counts while Guillemot chicks fledge, launching themselves off the cliffs into the water for the first time.

As a Ranger for the NTS, it's a privilege to be on the ground monitoring and sharing these waifs of sea and sky with visitors. One of the most exciting things about this work is knowing it can



make a difference. By collecting long-term data, we can feed into the vital SMP database and look into ways of conserving and protecting our species and habitats.

Combining this with the chance to inspire the next generation of conservationists is what makes me so passionate about my job and keeps me going every day.



Fulmar, Razorbill, Gannet & Guillemot, and Kittiwake: Ciaran Hatsell

### VISITING ST ABB'S HEAD

St Abb's Head National Nature Reserve is managed by the National Trust for Scotland.

It is possible to visit using public transport and there is a bike rack at the reserve car park. Alternatively, there is a £3 car park fee to park for the day.

The nature reserve is open all year round and the Nature Centre is open from 1 April to 31 October, 10:00–16:00.

[www.nts.org.uk/st-abbs-head](http://www.nts.org.uk/st-abbs-head)





# The Kittiwake

By Liz Humphreys, BTO

The Black-legged Kittiwake (hereafter Kittiwake) is a small gull that is associated with nesting on cliffs and is largely dependent on small shoaling marine fish such as sandeels and clupeids for food. Named after their iconic call “kittee-wa-aaake, kittee-wa-aake” they can be heard at their breeding colonies usually from February to August. Typically they will be found nesting in clusters, nestled in amongst other cliff nesting seabirds such as Guillemots, Razorbills and Fulmars. They are site faithful, returning to breed at the same nest structure, made from mud and vegetation, from one year to the next. From the middle of last century they have been increasingly recorded at inland sites – recognising buildings and bridges as suitable nesting sites – but their commitment to foraging at sea remains intact. Urban Kittiwakes have not been universally welcomed, however, and conservationists have challenged the use of netting to dissuade them from their newly selected breeding habitat.

Identification guides often describe the adult Kittiwake as being gentle looking but what sets them apart from their closest sized counterparts – the



Kittiwake: Ben Darvill/BTO

Common Gull – is their black legs, fully yellow bill and black ink-dipped wing-tips. Immature birds lack the plain grey wings and have distinct black markings on the tips of their tail, upper wings and around back of the neck. They are classified as surface feeders since they are restricted to the uppermost layers of the water column for foraging. During the breeding season, Kittiwakes can easily achieve mean foraging ranges of just over 150 km.

Kittiwakes breed across the coasts and islands of Britain and Ireland with larger colonies traditionally concentrated in the Northern Isles of Shetland and Orkney. Colonies are sparser further south, particularly on the east coast of England. During the winter months they remain entirely at sea with some birds staying closer to home in the North Sea whilst others travel as far as the north-west Atlantic, between Newfoundland and Greenland.

Data from the SMP, based on a subset of colonies, have shown a marked decline in breeding numbers with those in 2013 reported as being 70% lower than the baseline of 1986. However, there has been a partial recovery in since then and the latest report indicated that by 2019 numbers were 52% lower than the baseline. Data from the Seabirds Count census will be critical in determining the scale of this loss across Britain and Ireland and any changes in distribution that may have occurred. Breeding Success data reflects the effect of local environmental conditions, such as food availability, and SMP data show highly variable trends in the numbers of chicks per pair. There appears to be a possible increase in productivity between the years 2014–19 (noting low sample sizes), and are reminiscent of the early years of the SMP, up until the early 1990s, when Breeding Success was at its highest.



Adult

Juvenile

Adult Kittiwake: Richard Jackson/BTO, Juvenile Kittiwake: Liz Cutting/BTO

## FACT BOX

**Status:** Birds of Conservation Concern 'Red-listed', globally vulnerable.

**Measurements:** 108 cm wingspan, 410 g weight.

**Breeds:** north and west Eurasia and North America.

**Winters:** Atlantic south to North Africa and US.

**Diet:** marine invertebrates and fish.

**Lifespan:** 12 years typically. Maximum recorded is 28 years, 6 months and 5 days.

**Breeding:** starts at four years, single brood per year, two to three egg clutch size.

**Nest sites:** coastal cliffs and coastal artificial structures, including offshore platforms.



Kittiwake Colony, Gary Clewley/BTO

Fishing pressure was once regarded as the main threat to Kittiwake populations in the UK, this resulting in the closure of 20,000 square kilometers to the sandeel industry operating in the North Sea in the year 2000. Since then there has been a huge amount of research looking at the links between climate change and seabird populations and much of the focus has been on the relatively easy-to-study Kittiwake.

There is strong evidence for climate mediated bottom-up processes whereby oceanographic changes result in changes to their key prey species, phenology (timing of peak availability) and abundance (amount present), particularly in the North Sea. This is manifested as lower Kittiwake Breeding Success and survival rates and these declines are now being observed in counts of breeding adults. There are also concerns arising from their likely interactions with wind farms since they are known to fly at the height at which

rotor blades operate and consequently they have been identified as being a species of high risk from collision with turbines. Predation at Kittiwake breeding colonies may also be an issue with reports of Peregrine and Great Skua preying on Kittiwakes at some breeding sites in the UK. In some countries they can be targeted by other bird species such as the Raven and the White-tailed Eagle, with the latter known to significantly suppress both Breeding Success and population trends of the Kittiwake colonies affected. Kittiwakes were also badly affected by HPAI in 2022 although the true scale of mortality will be better understood through SMP counts.

Given the scale of pressures that have been acting on Kittiwakes populations, notably around food shortages, a more holistic approach around marine management, focusing on licenced activities (*e.g.*, wind farm construction), and fisheries is important.

## HOW TO HELP

There are 733 sites/plots in the SMP database containing Kittiwake colony count data and 72 with Breeding Success information.

Long-term monitoring of both breeding success and abundance better enables the drivers of population change to be determined.

Increasing this monitoring effort will help provide improved evidence on the conservation needs of the Kittiwake, identify where more research may be needed and help to track the outcomes of relevant policy measures.



# Seabird breeding oddities

By Scott Mayson, BTO

As the nursery rhyme goes “If you go down to the woods today, you’re sure of a big surprise” – the same could be said for your next visit to a seabird colony! Britain and Ireland are well placed to receive rarities from all points of the compass; trans-Atlantic vagrants from the west, Siberian waifs from the east, Arctic wanderers from the north and Mediterranean and African vagrants from the south. With an ever-growing list of species recorded in Britain and Ireland (630 species in Britain alone as of November 2022), it is little wonder that sometimes these rarities have stayed throughout the summer and attempted to breed. Most records involving rare and scarce breeders relate to species that many of us are familiar with and tend to be scarce passage migrants rather than mega rarities from far-flung countries.

Yellow-legged Gulls, for example have been increasing as a winter visitor and this is mirrored in an increase in the frequency of breeding attempts. In the last 10 years, Yellow-legged Gull

has become an almost regular breeder with pairs raising young from sites in Dorset and Hampshire, whilst in some counties further north, mixed pairings with Herring Gull have also been noted. Could breeding Yellow-legged Gull pairs increase in number and follow the trend set by Mediterranean Gull, which first bred in 1968, and has spread further north and become an established breeding species in many counties.

Having first been identified in the UK as recently as 1973 the Ring-billed Gull soon went from mega status to a regular and expected visitor each autumn and winter. Up to 84 birds have been noted in a single year (1983) and over the years several returning birds could be found at favoured locations. Although numbers recorded in the UK have recently taken a dramatic fall, the occasional bird has remained for the summer months and mixed pairs of Ring-billed and Common Gulls have been found in colonies in both Scotland and Northern Ireland. In 2008 a colour-ringed

hybrid Ring-billed/Common Gull was identified in Northern Ireland and the rings indicated that it was a chick ringed in that colony in 2004, proof that breeding must have taken place.

There can be few more attractive gulls than a summer-plumaged Little Gull dressed in their jet-black hoods, pink-flushed underparts, and pure white wingtips. Its status in the UK is primarily a spring and autumn passage migrant but the number of wintering individuals has increased in recent years. A westward expansion in its range has been coupled with recent breeding attempts and between 2014–15 a pair attempted to breed at the Loch of Strathbeg in Scotland before successfully raising two young in 2016. Other breeding attempts have occurred across the UK and, with several birds spending the summer months, here it is likely that a repeat of the successful breeding of 2016 is not too far away. With previous nesting attempts occurring in Common Tern and Black-headed Gull colonies,

these are the best places to keep a lookout for prospecting birds.

Black Terns once bred in large colonies in the UK but wide-scale draining of their favoured breeding locations led to them becoming extinct as a breeding species. The timing and locations of their occurrence here are similar to Little Gull and often the two species can be found side by side in spring and autumn as birds migrate through the UK. Breeding attempts have been even more sporadic than those of Little Gull with the most recent attempt being as far back as 1975 in both Britain and Ireland, although suspected breeding was noted in 1983 when an adult bird was seen with three very recently fledged young at a site in eastern England.

It is not just gulls and terns that have attempted to breed; some other species that have spent the summer months here have either tried to establish a territory or attract a mate.

Three different Barolo Shearwaters have been found in the colonies of their larger Manx Shearwater cousins. The most recent was a male bird heard calling from a burrow on Lundy in 2010, and having also been present the previous year (although no notes were submitted to the British Birds Rarities Committee). It returned in 2011 but seemingly failed to attract a mate.



Could your gull or tern colony host a Little Gull or two?

Little Gull: Marcc/stock.adobe.com

Some may recall the events that unfolded in 2013 when not one but two Swinhoe's Storm Petrels were trapped and ringed during Storm Petrel ringing sessions on Fair Isle. Unbelievably, one of these birds was trapped again in 2016 and 2017, mirroring a similar event further south when a bird was caught in Tynemouth in 1993 and 1994. However, it is worth noting that there is no evidence to suggest this species has held territory, built a nest or laid any eggs in the Britain or Ireland.

Many of us made the pilgrimage to see the Black-browed Albatross that spent

the last couple of summers at RSPB Bempton Cliffs. This southern ocean wanderer has a bit of a reputation for turning up in Gannet colonies often returning year after year. Previous to the Bempton bird, individuals spent the summers of 2005–07 on Sule Sgeir, and the famous 'Albert' visited Hermaness, Shetland between 1974–95. Whilst nest building has been observed, no real breeding attempts have been made but with at least two adult birds and an immature wandering the North Atlantic and North Sea in the last couple of years it is conceivable that their paths may one day cross and who knows what the outcome may be!

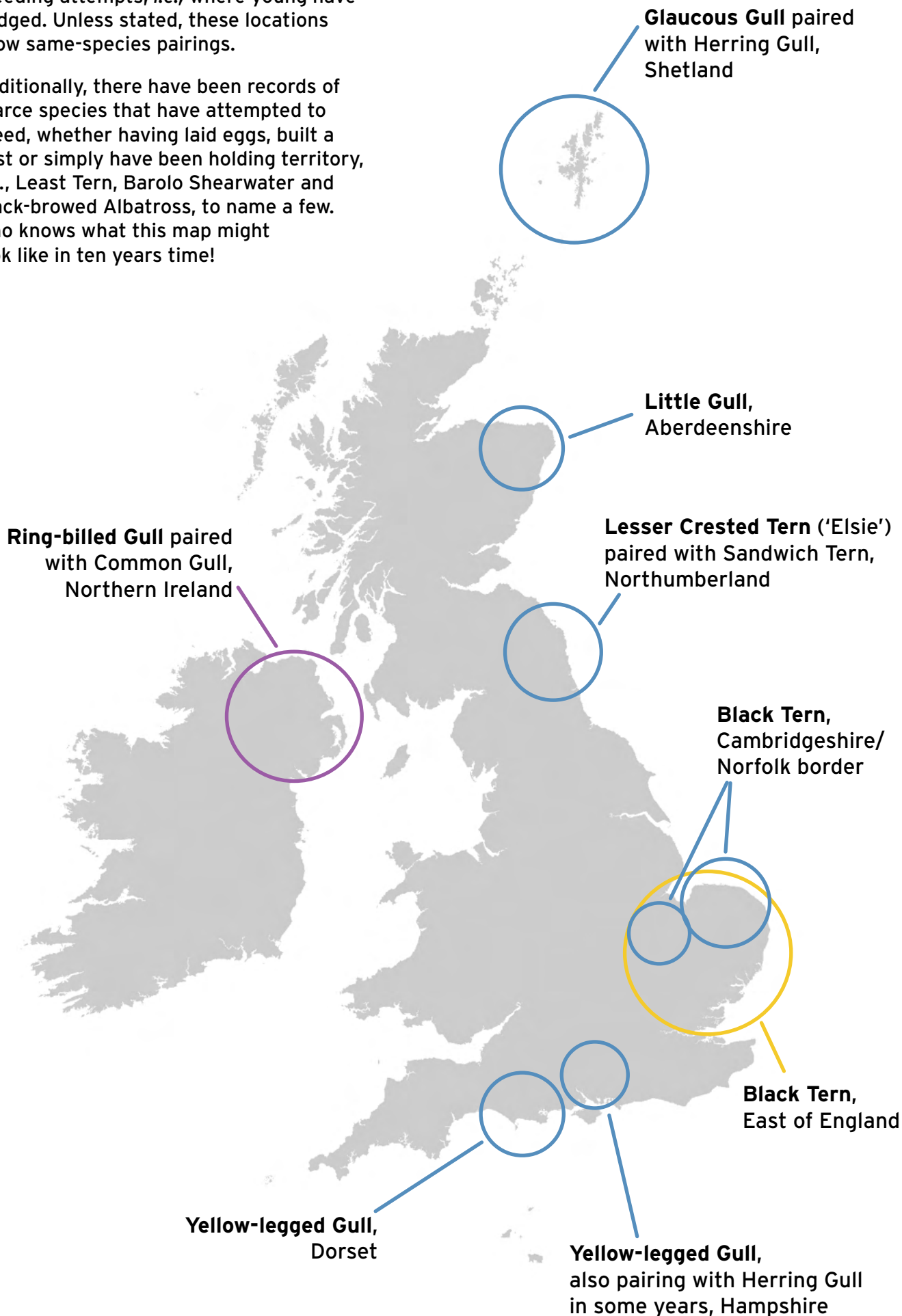


Black-browed Albatross: Tom Wright

## SCARCE BREEDING BIRD MAP

Illustrating locations of successful UK breeding attempts, *i.e.*, where young have fledged. Unless stated, these locations show same-species pairings.

Additionally, there have been records of scarce species that have attempted to breed, whether having laid eggs, built a nest or simply have been holding territory, *e.g.*, Least Tern, Barolo Shearwater and Black-browed Albatross, to name a few. Who knows what this map might look like in ten years time!



Could nesting  
Caspian Gulls be  
coming our way?



Caspian Gull: Sergey Ryzhkov/stock.adobe.com

**But what about potential future breeding species?** Caspian Gull, like Yellow-legged Gull, has undergone a westward expansion in its range and breeding has been confirmed as close as the Netherlands. The first pure pair bred in the Netherlands in 2014 and by 2021 the number of pairs had ballooned to around 90, showing just how quickly they can become established.

With climate change pushing seabirds further north, those seabirds that traditionally breed further south could start turning up in Britain and Ireland during the breeding season.

Elegant Tern already has a small toehold in Europe with pure pairings nesting in Sandwich Tern colonies in Spain (since 2009) and France (2021) and

young have successfully fledged from both countries. In the last 10 years, records of Elegant Tern in the UK have increased slightly, and with several large Sandwich Tern colonies around Britain and Ireland it is not beyond the realms of possibility one may hang around and attempt to breed.

And what about an off-the-wall, or should that be off-the-cliff, potential breeder; Brown Booby? The frequency of records in the North Atlantic and North Sea has seen a huge jump in the last few years; the first accepted record for Britain and Ireland was a juvenile at sea off the west coast of Ireland in 2016 and since then there have been multiple records not only here but also from across Europe. How long before one pitches up in a Gannet colony?

### **RBBP**

The Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) encourages and supports the recording and reporting of rare breeding birds in the UK. It collates breeding data on all species with fewer than 2,000 breeding pairs in the UK in order to report annually on their numbers, trends and distribution, and maintain a secure archive to support conservation and research for these species. Please report scarce and rare breeding birds to RBBP via the local County Bird Recorder.

[www.rbbp.org.uk](http://www.rbbp.org.uk)

# Turning terns easy!

By Sarah Harris, BTO

Here, we look at the identification of tern species in adult breeding plumage – how you would likely see them during the breeding season here in the UK. Hopefully, identifying adult birds in a mixed colony will be far less daunting with this short guide.

Starting with our largest breeding tern species, the **Sandwich Tern**. So named because of the mustard from their sandwich lunch, stuck on the tip of their beak... no, so named because they were first discovered in Sandwich, Kent. They breed on beaches and on wetlands adjacent to coastal areas. Although the majority of UK breeding birds spend the winter months off the west African coast, occasionally birds are seen around the UK coast of all year round.

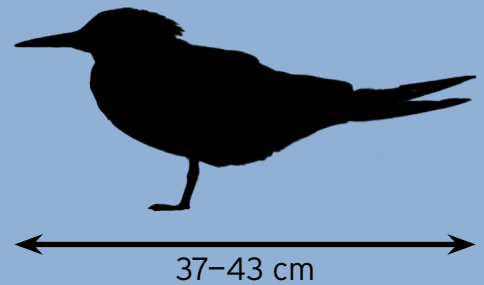
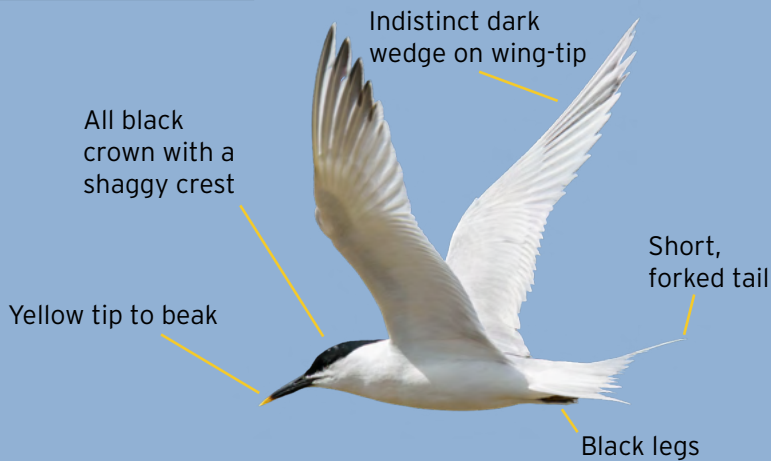
From the largest UK nesting tern to the smallest; **Little Terns** are little by name and little by nature. They are also fairly distinct from the other tern species. They nest on shingle and sand around UK coastlines but interestingly, outside of the UK, they are known to nest inland too. UK populations spend the winter months off west Africa. Little Terns have the distinctive behaviour of persistent hovering before diving to catch their prey.

The next three species are often seen as trickier to separate: Common, Arctic and Roseate Tern. Here we need to think about structure as well as plumage. Think about how compact they look when standing – are they compact and bull-necked like the Arctic Tern? Do they have tail

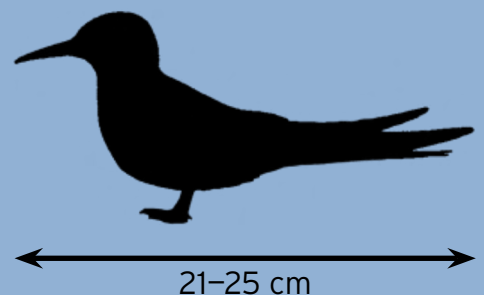
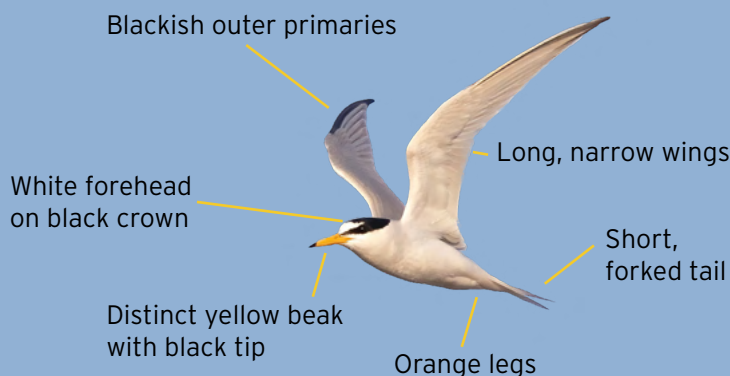
streamers projecting beyond their wing tips, like the Arctic and Roseate Terns? Are their legs short (Arctic), medium length (Common) or long (Roseate)? Is their head rounded (Arctic) or more 'flat-topped' (Common and Roseate)? **Common Terns** are fairly... common, and with smudges on their outer primaries and a dark tip to their bill, some even say they are 'common as muck' – looking less pristine (and more mucky) than the Arctic and Roseate Terns. Common Tern is the only species listed here to nest properly inland (from a UK perspective) on artificial rafts and lake islands, as well as at coastal sites. UK nesting birds winter off the coast of west and southern Africa.

The **Arctic Tern** has a name starting with the letter 'A', so too does the phrase 'All red' which perfectly describes this species' beak. Cherry red, same as the legs – unlike the beaks of Common and Roseate Tern, which have a black tip or are mostly black, respectively. Arctic Terns are

## SANDWICH TERN



## LITTLE TERN





compact and look as though they could almost topple forward and roll away (did someone say 'Arctic Roll'?!). The majority of Arctic Tern breeding colonies are in the north, but some are further south too. This species has an impressive migration, wintering off the coast of South Africa and down into Antarctica!

**Roseate Terns** are the rarest of the UK nesting tern species, with a restricted breeding range, however,

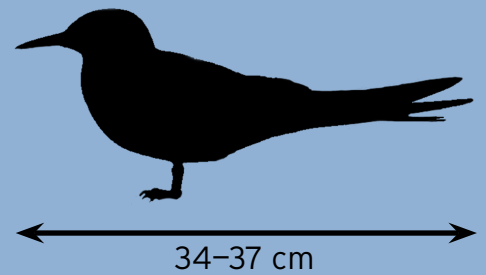
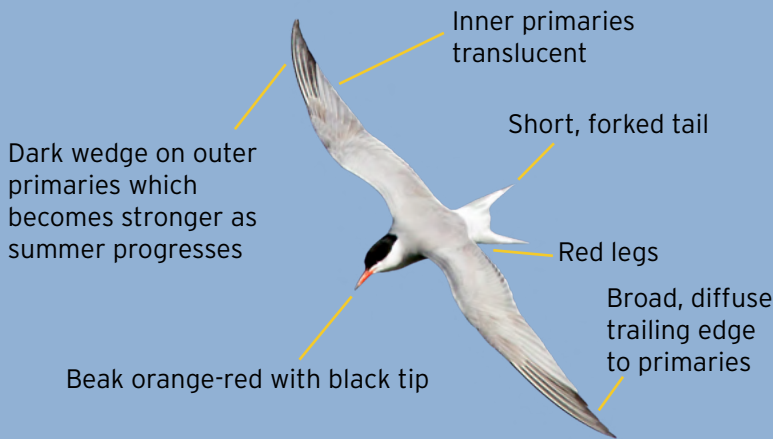
they can visit the colonies of the other tern species too. Shorter-winged and longer-tailed and legged than the Common and Arctic Terns, with pale grey, almost white, plumage above and rosy flush below, this species is slightly easier to distinguish from the Common and Arctic Terns than those two are to one another (sometimes known as 'Commic Tern' when ID is not possible). Roseate Tern nests on maritime coasts and UK populations winter off the coast of west Africa.

## ID VIDEOS

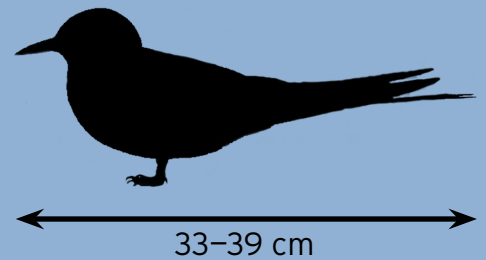
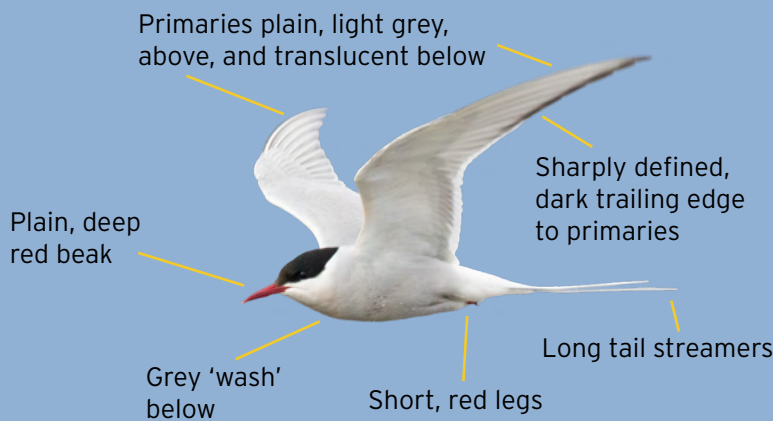
The BTO Training Team have created ID videos which are freely available online. These include tern identification. Access these at [www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/bird-identification/videos](http://www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/bird-identification/videos)

To learn tern calls, visit [www.xeno-canto.org](http://www.xeno-canto.org)

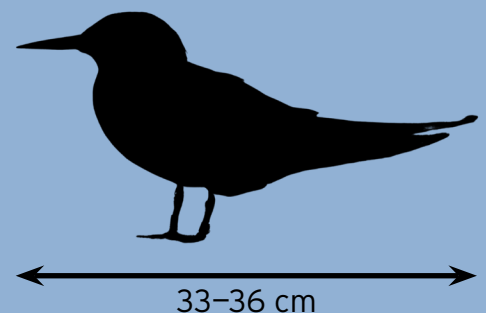
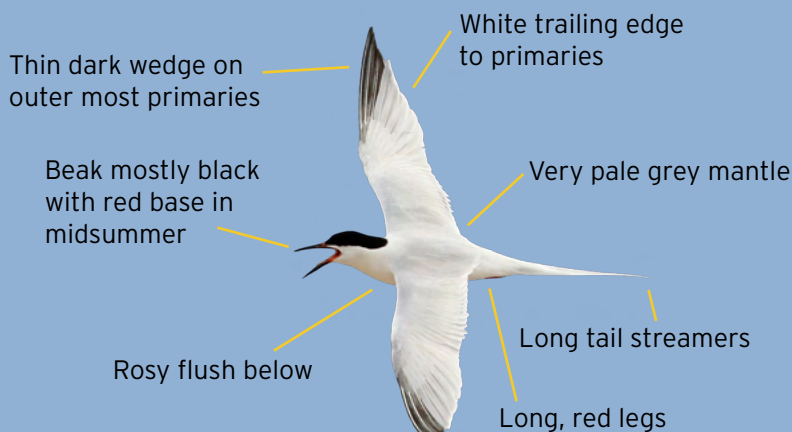
### COMMON TERN



### ARCTIC TERN



### ROSEATE TERN



# The SMP team

The SMP team at BTO includes Sarah Harris as SMP Organiser and first point of contact for SMP queries. Sarah is responsible for the running of the scheme, liaising with professional and voluntary participants, maintaining the databases, promoting the scheme, and producing the annual report, newsletter and other outputs. Nina O'Hanlon, Research Ecologist in the Wetland and Marine Research Team is responsible for the data analysis and annual trend production. Katherine Booth Jones supports the Seabird Network in Northern Ireland, and Dawn Balmer is Head of Surveys, which includes SMP among other monitoring schemes. Niall Burton (Head and Principal Ecologist) and Liz Humphreys (Principal Ecologist – Seabirds), also of the Wetland and Marine Team, are responsible for strategic development of the scheme and marine research at BTO. James Pearce-Higgins is the Director of Science and therefore responsible for all survey and research work at BTO.

Representatives from the Partnership organisations include Tim Dunn, Seabird Monitoring Manager, Helen Baker, Marine Species Team Leader, both at JNCC, and Mark Bolton and Tom Evans, both Principal Conservation Scientists at RSPB. The SMP 'family' runs wider than this though with representatives from a total of 24 organisations, including from the four SMP Key Sites, included in the SMP Advisory Group. Each newsletter, we'll meet new faces from this passionate mix of seabird enthusiasts!



Introducing:  
**Sarah Harris**



Stevenson lighthouses, Calf of Man, Sarah Harris

## Where are you based and what do you do?

I live in The Brecks, Norfolk, and work at BTO HQ in Thetford as the SMP Organiser in the Surveys Team.

## What is your experience in working with seabirds?

As a kid, I helped my local bird ringing group monitor the Common Tern rafts at RSPB Rye Meads in Hertfordshire – now mostly a Black-headed Gull colony! After university, I worked on the Calf of Man Bird Observatory and then Skomer and Skokholm, where we carried out a whole variety of seabird monitoring. During my time at BTO, I have worked on tagging projects including large gulls, but mainly focused on Arctic Skua tracking on Fair Isle.

## What was your first environmental/conservation job?

Calf of Man Bird Observatory Estate Warden for a couple of months before returning as Ornithological Warden for two seasons. It was amazing!!

## Did you volunteer prior to gaining a job this sector?

Alongside attending the ringing group sessions weekly for as long as I can remember, I volunteered with the RSPB at Rye Meads to gain reserve wardening experience.

## What is your favourite thing about your career, and your role now?

I get to think about cool birds in cool places and do what I wanted to concentrate on: monitoring birds so that we can understand their challenges and inform decisions to aid their conservation.

## If you had a warning label, what would yours say?

'Gets easily overexcited and animated about birds and other wildlife'.

## Do you have a favourite seabird experience?

There's so many but probably the time when Arctic Skuas zoomed around my head on the airstrip on Fair Isle in thick

fog. They were zipping around calling and you didn't know where they were going to appear from, or disappear to!

## What are your hobbies?

Birding, bird ringing, Wetland Bird Survey, volunteering for the Rye Meads Ringing Group and Spurn Bird Observatory Trust, DIY, being creative, gardening, yoga and, finally, I need to get back into mountain biking in flat (it's not flat!) Norfolk and out in my kayak.

## What is your current (non-work) passion project?

At the moment, I'm collating what each UK and Republic of Ireland Bird Observatory does so that they can see what each other are doing, can share ideas (from monitoring to fundraising) and potentially do joint projects. I am also Chair of the Spurn Bird Observatory Science & Research sub-committee, which is a really exciting group working to continue existing – and introduce new – monitoring, increase outputs and encourage research.

### If money were no object, how would you spend your time?

Birding, taking part in monitoring schemes and working on solving my own bird-related ponderings! Maintaining a wildlife garden and importantly, giving my Border Collie all the (birding) walkies he wants!

### Why do you think the SMP is an important scheme?

Seabirds are in genuine trouble and they are also indicators of the wider marine environment. For many seabirds, large proportions of their world populations nest in the UK so we have that responsibility for them. SMP holds data back to 1960 and has an army of willing surveyors – so it is a crucial resource for seabird (and marine) conservation.

### What is your favourite book; favourite song and what one item would you choose if you were stranded on a desert island?

**Favourite book:** tricky, if just one, I need to eliminate *all* field guides for ease! I enjoy flicking through

*A Lighthouse Notebook* by Norman McCanch and reminiscing about living in remote places alongside wildlife.

**Song:** Dancing in the Moonlight by Thin Lizzy.

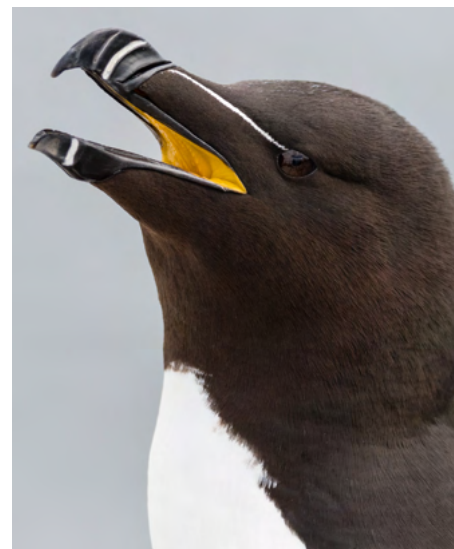
**Desert Island item:** Binoculars!

### What did you want to be when you were growing up?

According to my mum, a “ballerina farmer” ... but as my love for birds developed, I just wanted to work at the Calf of Man Bird Observatory as past wardens told me all about it when I was growing up, and I could monitor birds and other wildlife every day!

### How do you stay motivated in your work?

Thinking like a surveyor (being a volunteer yourself helps) drives me to ensure the surveying experience is positive and information is fed back to participants in a timely manner so there is that drive to carry on taking part. Enjoying birding in my spare time also makes me feel very protective towards them! So I want to ensure they stay around long-term.



Razorbill: Philip Croft/BTO

### Lastly, and most importantly, what are your top two seabirds? (because just one isn't enough!)

Razorbill – that brilliant apricot mouth, smart suit and the beak! I also love how the chicks look like mini versions of their parents when it comes to cliff-jumping time – and Storm Petrel because they are so tough surviving in the open sea storms, smell great and chatter away very sweetly when you are holding them for ringing.



Puffins on Sule Skerry: Nina O'Hanlon

### Where are you based and what do you do?

Although I am based at the BTO Scotland's Stirling office, I work from home up in Caithness and am a Research Ecologist in the Wetland and Marine Research Team.

### What is your experience in working with seabirds?

My first proper experience of working with seabirds was during my Masters where I spent two months on the Calf of Man. Being surrounded by seabirds everyday fully ignited my love for them leading to a PhD at the University of Glasgow on Herring Gull diet and

resource use, and then a post doc at the University of Highlands and Islands looking at the impact of plastic and oil pollution on seabirds – leading to my current role at the BTO.

### What was your first environmental/conservation job?

Bizarrely my first environmental-based job was working as an Information Assistant for the RSPB showing people the amazing inland breeding Kittiwakes on the Tyne bridge in Newcastle. I then had a few years of more terrestrial ecology jobs, such as such as a countryside ranger and ecologist at a local record centre, before getting back to seabirds.

### Did you volunteer prior to gaining a job this sector?

Yes, lots – from the odd day and week volunteering with the National Trust and RSPB before university, to spending six months full-time doing a whole range of practical conservation work and people engagement at the BTCV (now TCV) in Leeds.

### What is your favourite thing about your career, and your role now?

I love spending time outside enjoying birds and their behaviour, it's such a privilege getting glimpses into their lives, with the same being true of working with tracking data and seeing the amazing



movements of individuals whether it is Herring Gulls scavenging from a chip shop to Arctic Skuas making vast cross-hemisphere migrations!

### If you had a warning label, what would yours say?

‘Will get angry protecting a gull’s honour – be warned and be nice about gulls!’

### Do you have a favourite seabird experience?

I have a few but one that particularly stands out is joining the ringing trip to Sule Skerry. On my last night we’d been ringing Storm Petrels until early in the morning, and so whilst the others went back to bed I stayed up until dawn to start Puffin ringing, surrounded by thousands of Puffins circling the island with a beautiful sunrise.

### What are your hobbies?

Most (all?) of my hobbies revolve around birds, birding the local patch, sea watching, ringing, or nice long walks where there are birds. Though I also love curling up with a good book.

### What is your current (non-work) passion project?

I’ve recently moved to the east coast of Caithness so my current project is planting up the garden and deciding where to dig the pond to create a little migrant hotspot.

### If money were no object, how would you spend your time?

Converting all the land around our house into a nature reserve and setting up a long-term monitoring project with lots of little offshoot research projects.



### Why do you think the SMP is an important scheme?

The UK is so important for seabirds, with them being amazing in their own right as well as an indicator for the health of the wider environment. It is therefore vital that we understand the trends and drivers of change of these species to inform policy and conservation actions to maintain these important populations.

### What is your favourite book; favourite song and what one item would you choose if you were stranded on a desert island?

**Favourite book:** *Owls of the Eastern Ice: A Quest to Find and Save the World’s Largest Owl* by Jonathan C. Slaght.

**Song:** Feeling Good – the Muse version

**Desert Island item:** Binoculars!

### What did you want to be when you were growing up?

I’ve always wanted to work with birds with initial dreams of being a nature reserve warden, or working with owls (which I was particularly obsessed with when I was little).



### How do you stay motivated in your work?

Knowing that the work the BTO does is so important for birds, and people, is a huge motivation, plus my role is so varied which helps, as does knowing that I am doing what I’ve always wanted to do!

### Lastly, and most importantly, what are your top two seabirds? (because just one isn’t enough!)

Razorbill as they are just stunning (definitely the best auk!) and Herring Gull, I love how opportunistic and tenacious they are.

# SMP update

By Sarah Harris, BTO



With the support of both volunteer and professional fieldworkers across the UK, the SMP aims to track population changes for 25 seabird species annually. For some species, this is easier than for others. However, without the backing of those out at the colonies recording each breeding season, this aim would be totally impossible!

## COVERAGE

Below, we present four graphs illustrating SMP coverage. *Whole Colony Counts* have remained fairly stable since the mid 2000s, as can be seen in the graph excluding years with additional coverage due to the periodic seabird census years. Between 2010 and 2014 (pre-Seabirds Count census), an average of 630 sites were monitored for Whole Colony Counts annually. For *Plot Colony Counts*, i.e. plots counted

within a larger site, there has been a very slight drop-off in coverage in recent years, from the peak of 31 in 1987 and 1991 to less than 20 sites at which Plot Colony Counts have been recorded since 2016. These data are currently stored separately from the SMP database, but there is some concern that counts may have been entered into SMP Online as Whole Colony Counts and work to not only rectify this, but also to build a Plot Colony Count recording system into SMP Online database is underway. The final graph shows site coverage by year for *Breeding Success* monitoring. This is particularly concerning, with a decrease in coverage from 304 sites in 2008 to 116 in 2018 and 162 in 2019.

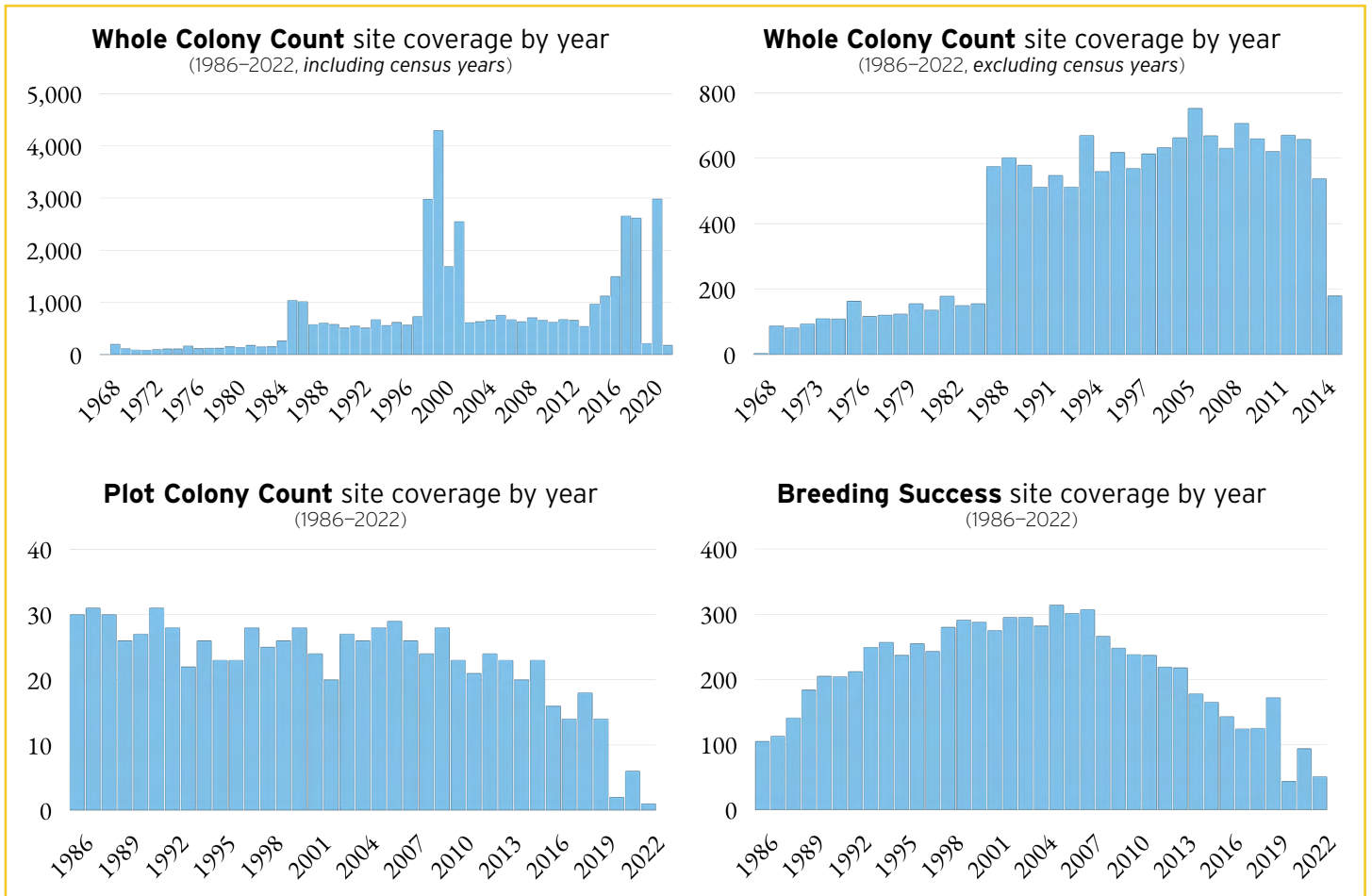
It has been a challenging time for surveying in recent years, with COVID-19 taking a hold, followed by

HPAI (bird flu) more recently. There are also outstanding data for the most recent years of 2021 to 2022 to be loaded into the SMP database. This includes RSPB datasets and the SMP team at BTO are working closely with RSPB to align sites and input data from reserves across the UK, generously monitored by RSPB staff and volunteers. Therefore, we fully expect coverage to increase as we collate and load data for these more recent years into the SMP database.

## PARTICIPANTS

There are 170 registered fieldworkers on the SMP Online system allocated to at least one site. Some participants are still to transfer from JNCC to BTO for GDPR compliance and we look forward to reactivating SMP Online accounts as participants request to move across to BTO's system. Email [smp@bto.org](mailto:smp@bto.org) if you are unable to login to SMP Online or if you are not allocated the sites you are expecting.

Thank you to all who record and submit both Abundance data via Colony Counts and/or Breeding Success information.



# Frequently Asked Questions

By Sarah Harris, BTO



## How can I see site locations and if a site is being covered or available?

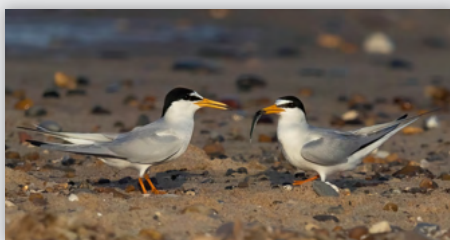
On the SMP website ([www.bto.org/smp](http://www.bto.org/smp)), you can click through to the SMP Online data entry system using the yellow button on the right of the page. Once on SMP Online, an interactive map appears where you can zoom in and out, and search locations. A key also displays, showing you what the colour coding on the pin points mean. By clicking on a pin, the site name and ID displays and you can request a site. Note: as of spring 2023, the allocation status for some sites is out of date, so if you are interested in a site, get in touch to find out more about it! We are working to ensure accurate site allocation status currently.

## Can the SMP team extract my seabird data from published site-specific or county reports?

Unfortunately, there is no budget or staff capacity available for finding or receiving SMP data via a published report, *e.g.*, a local study group, county bird club or site-specific report, and rekeying those data into the SMP database. Please ensure all data are entered directly into the SMP Online system to ensure all the information required reaches the database, and in a format which will allow for its use in trend production and seabird-related research. Thank you.

## What can I do to find out more about seabirds before taking part in SMP?

The BTO Training Team are running a series of seabird ID and ecology courses in the summer of 2023. Check these out at [www.bto.org/events](http://www.bto.org/events). You could also try and find a local SMP participant to shadow. Contact the SMP team to see if they know of anyone near you.



## Do you want zero counts from colonies? Why?

Yes! This is *essential* information – as important as counts. If a species at a colony or site has become extinct from said site, this information recorded as a ‘nil return’ allows our Research Ecologist, Nina O’Hanlon, to properly access population changes for the species during the trend production.

It is important that these zero counts are recorded every year, especially for terns which can frequently move colonies. This also allows us to record zero productivity values for these sites and species.

A zero count is the difference between a species no longer being present and a species simply not being surveyed.

## What core data does the SMP collect annually?

The two main pieces of information SMP collects annually is Abundance (the number of adult breeding birds) through Colony Counts, and the Productivity (how many young were successfully raised in a breeding season) through Breeding Success recording.

Additionally, four Key Sites distributed around the UK also collect information on Phenology (timing of the breeding season), diet and adult survival.

## Do seabird counts I've submitted to BirdTrack, or sent to a County Bird Recorder, feed into SMP?

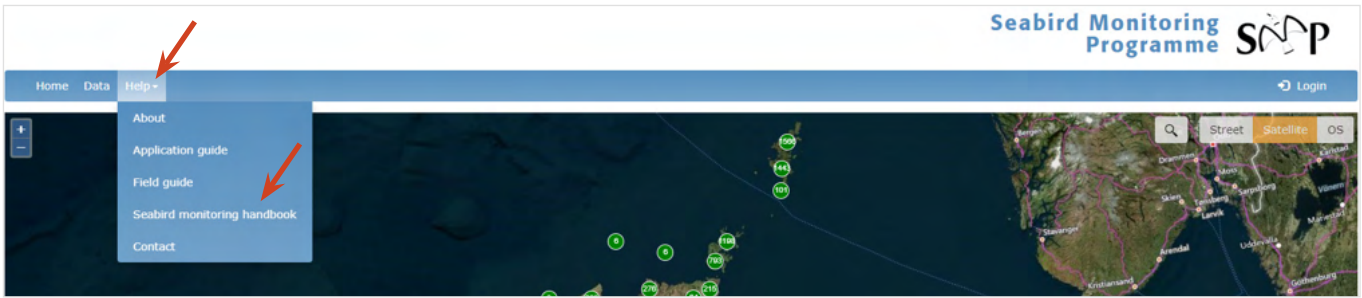
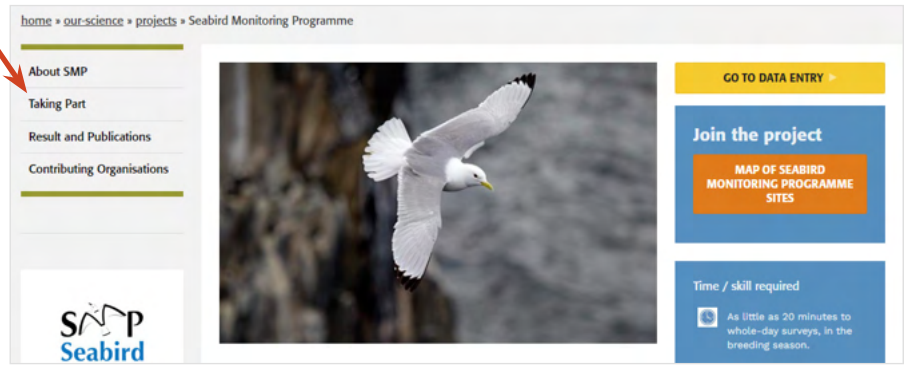
No. Like most structured surveys, SMP has bespoke data needs and therefore, transferring data from one place to another often does not cover all the survey-specific details needed.

Please enter SMP data into the SMP Online system and complete all the sections required in the SMP form.

Data are available to County Bird Recorders from the SMP Online system or via a BTO Data Request. Please continue to add your breeding seabird records to BirdTrack and/or send them directly to your County Bird Recorder if you wish, these data can then be used in a variety of ways from each database.

## Where can I find the SMP handbook?

The SMP handbook of methods can be found in two locations: on the main SMP webpages ([www.bto.org/smp](http://www.bto.org/smp)), under the 'Taking Part' tab; and on the SMP Online data entry application, under the 'Help' dropdown ([app.bto.org/seabirds](http://app.bto.org/seabirds)).



## Do I have to register when I already have a BTO username and password?

Currently, yes. The SMP was previously coordinated by JNCC. Therefore, all contact details of SMP participants were stored outside of the BTO's supporter (volunteers and members) database. As a consequence, you will need to Register for the SMP even if you have an existing BTO account.

We are now working to merge the SMP accounts with any existing BTO accounts and move all the contact details over to the BTO system. At this point, existing participants will be informed as to what is happening and what they need to do to help with this process.

## I have a potential site that's not part of SMP, what shall I do?

Please get in touch! We can add chosen sites to the SMP system for monitoring. Historic data can also be entered into the database if there is any. Email [smp@bto.org](mailto:smp@bto.org) to arrange this.

## Where can I find guidance on using SMP Online?

In the image above, you can see the SMP Online data entry system ([app.bto.org/seabirds](http://app.bto.org/seabirds)). Here, there is a tab labelled 'Help', under this tab is the option for 'Application Guide', click here to access guidance on using the SMP Online system.



## Is anything on the horizon with regards to a new SMP handbook of methods?

Yes! The BTO are looking to fundraise in the near future to allow us to review and modernise the SMP handbook.

Species experts will be invited to assist with chapters of this handbook, and considerations are underway with regards to the inclusion and guidance for new technologies, e.g., drone use. Watch this space!

## Does SMP just monitor coastal nesting seabirds?

No, you can contribute data from inland sites too! For example, Black-headed Gulls or Common Terns on tern rafts and gravel pit islands, Lesser Black-backed Gull or Common Gull colonies on moorland, or Cormorant colonies. Methods for monitoring urban, roof nesting gulls are due for review, but data submitted from existing SMP sites is welcome.

## Is there an SMP Twitter account?

Yes! Follow us at [@smp\\_seabirds](https://twitter.com/smp_seabirds) and check out some of the hashtags used on the account so far by searching:

#SMP  
#SMPfaq  
#seabirdquiz  
#seabirdeggs  
#MondayMotivation  
#seabirdID  
#SMPdyk  
#SuperSeabirdSunday

...and remember to tag us in your SMP-related tweets!

# Backchat...

## Key Sites

SMP Key Sites are Canna, Fair Isle, the Isle of May and Skomer Island. Key Sites are geographically dispersed around the UK and conduct more detailed annual studies on adult survival, diet and phenology. SMP funding contributions are provided to support this additional monitoring. Each site employs staff and volunteers who either assist with Key Site monitoring operations as part of a wider role, or, as with Canna, monitoring is carried out completely by volunteer effort.

Funding contributions are, and will continue to be, provided by JNCC and from 2022 onward and contracts are arranged by BTO. We are looking forward to continuing to work alongside Key Site staff and volunteers and aim to have a new Key Site webpage within the SMP website, to include Key Site feedback within the main SMP Report, and together reassess the annual Key Site Reports to ensure they deliver for everyone.

## Your newsletter, your say

This is the very first Seabird Monitoring Programme newsletter. We are, therefore, inviting feedback to shape our future newsletters and ensure engaging and informative content that is of interest to you. It does not matter if you are an existing SMP participant, a new participant, a volunteer, a paid professional, or someone simply interested in seabirds, the marine environment or wildlife in general – we want to hear from you. An online survey form has been created in order to gather thoughts in a succinct way, please follow this link to submit your views: [bit.ly/SMPnews\\_feedback](https://bit.ly/SMPnews_feedback)

Thank you for reading this issue of the annual *SMP news*.



## Contact details

Full details of the SMP Team can be found on page 18, and we will meet different team members in each issue of *SMP news*. However, below are details for the main point of contact for the scheme:

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