

# Fulmar Investigation 1959

## Title

Fulmar Investigation 1959

## Description and Summary of Results

The population of the Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* in the boreal and sub-boreal regions of the North Atlantic was continuing to increase and had done so for well over 200 years. It was known to be one of the most remarkable population explosions recorded among bird populations, partly at least because it was well documented having been subject to several surveys, mostly run by the BTO.

Prior to 1959 breeding Fulmars had been specifically surveyed in Britain and Ireland five times:

- 1) J.A. Harvie-Brown collected information to the end of the 1911 season;
- 2) George Waterston (with later help from James Fisher), in 1934, surveyed the species as one of the first of the then newly-formed BTO's co-operative enquiries;
- 3) James Fisher in the 1939 season for the BTO;
- 4) James Fisher in the 1944 season for the BTO with the aid of the educational staff of the armed services;
- 5) James Fisher in the 1949 season for the BTO.

The 1959 survey was run in conjunction with the Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* survey running at the same time and which covered many of the same sites.

485 observers contributed observations directly, and the observations of others reached the enquiry via the reports of societies and observatories. In all over 600 people took part. The published report contains a full list of the colonies counted and the history of the sites in terms of numbers recorded, as well as describing the overall history of the species in Britain and Ireland.

The number of breeding colonies found in Britain and Ireland was 486 and a further 222 sites were noted with birds found at least prospecting. The overall total number of occupied nest sites was probably nearly 100000 with around 40000 of these on the St Kilda archipelago – the first and for a time the only colony in Britain and Ireland.

Overall, birds were still largely concentrated in northern Britain, but there were breeding stations recorded on nearly all the more cliff-bound coasts all around Britain and Ireland. Both the number of sites and the numbers in them had increased geometrically since the previous surveys although the rate seemed to have slowed in the 1950s in most areas, and rather earlier in the more northern parts than in the southerly more recently colonized areas.

The British and Irish spread was thought to have been primarily the consequence of the provision of trawler-offal, within operational range of all colonies.

## Methods of Data Capture

The survey was conducted using a questionnaire sent to observers. This asked for details including:

Position of "breeding station" (with National Grid references of extremes if possible); approximate height of cliff; position of the birds on the cliff; type of ledge used; distance to low water mark and presence/absence of a beach; history of the site (if known); other species using the cliff; and then for each visit the number of birds at each "nest site" and whether or not they contained eggs or young if this was visible.

A breeding station was defined as one or more birds on a cliff at least 200 yards (ca 200m) from another one.

### **Purpose of Data Capture**

To estimate the total number of breeding Fulmars along the coasts of Britain and Ireland, and to compare with earlier counts.

### **Geographic Coverage**

All of Britain and Ireland.

### **Temporal Coverage**

The breeding season of 1959.

### **Other Interested parties**

The survey was run as a Trust-aided enquiry by James Fisher, and was run in conjunction with and at the same time as a Kittiwake Survey organised by John Coulson.

### **Organiser(s)**

James Fisher (as part of his long standing interest and surveying of the species).

### **Current Staff Contact**

archives@bto.org

### **Publications**

The main report of the survey and which includes a history of the species in Britain and Ireland as well as an appendix listing all known colonies is:

Fisher, J. 1966. The Fulmar population of Britain and Ireland, 1959. *Bird Study* 13: 5-76.

The survey was noticed in *Bird Study* issues for December 1958, all four for 1959 and March 1960.

### **Available from NBN?**

No.

**Computer data -- location**

None.

**Computer data -- outline contents**

N/A.

**Computer data -- description of contents**

N/A.

**Information held in BTO Archives**

2 large, 5 small archive boxes and 1 Transfer Case contain many papers, drafts and correspondence relating to James Fisher's Fulmar surveys of 1940s and the 1950s.

**Notes on Access and Use****Other information****Notes on Survey Design****Specific Issues for Analysis**