

# Kittiwake 1979

## Title

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## Description and Summary of Results

A review of published records, which was accumulated with information for past years when the results from the survey in 1959 were analysed, showed that the Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* had started to increase quite substantially in numbers around the beginning of the 20th Century and that this was continuing through 1959 at about 3-4% per annum. A 1969 survey (carried out as part of 'Operation Seafarer') showed that this rate had continued. At first it was the expansion of existing colonies, but from 1920 some new ones were formed although there was little expansion into previously unoccupied areas. As a result and unlike some other species the increase was not that obvious without specific counts. Hence it was decided to have another look in 1979 and a survey was organised on the same lines as previously.

Coverage in England, Wales and the Isle of Man was nearly complete but areas counted in Ireland and much of northern Scotland could only be considered samples. In England, Wales and the Isle of Man the number of breeding pairs increased from about 57000 pairs in 1969 to about 113000 pairs in 1979, an increase of about 98% (and this had followed a 57% increase between 1959 and 1969). Almost all the increase occurred at the very large colony on the cliffs between Bempton and Flamborough in North Humberside (30800 nests in 1969 to 83000 in 1979). This colony is difficult to census, but there had clearly been a large increase which had probably started with the cessation of extensive egg collecting. Kittiwakes breeding elsewhere in England, Wales and the Isle of Man increased by 14% overall during the 1969-1979 decade, or just over 1% per annum, although many colonies actually decreased in size on the south and west coasts. Between 1969 and 1979 twelve new colonies were formed, but six of them disappeared again during the period and five colonies extant in 1969 also disappeared, giving a net gain of only one colony (total 63). Five regions showed population decreases, ranging from -3% to -56% (Kent to N Devon, S Wales and Lundy, N Wales to the Solway including Isle of Man, west coast Scotland and S coast of Ireland) with the large colonies on Ailsa Craig and St Kilda showing decreases of 80% and 61% respectively; and three others (east coast of Scotland, east coast of England excluding the Bempton area, and the east coast of Ireland) showed significant decreases in the rate of population change although numbers increased overall. Essentially, Kittiwake numbers decreased in SW England, throughout Wales, at St. Bees Head in Cumbria (the only Kittiwake colony in NW England), in SW Scotland and in southern Ireland. In Orkney and Shetland some colonies increased and others decreased. The decline did not occur simultaneously everywhere, but the majority of those for which there were data showed an appreciable decrease in the 1973-1975 period with some later showing a minor recovery.

**Methods of Data Capture**

The methods used in 1979 were essentially the same as used in the previous surveys of 1959 and 1969. The census was based on counting the numbers of nests in June or July. Some non-breeding Kittiwakes build incomplete, platform nests and such were excluded. Observers were encouraged to count colonies in sections and this was often useful to identify the consistency or otherwise of any change in numbers throughout the colony, and they were also encouraged to count each section more than once to confirm accuracy. Counts were made of whole colonies and new colonies were recorded. For the analysis data for St Kilda (Western Isles) and east Caithness (Highland Region) were taken from recent published sources.

**Purpose of Data Capture**

The aim was to count the number of breeding pairs at all colonies around the coasts of Britain and Ireland and the constituent smaller islands.

**Geographic Coverage**

All colonies in Britain and Ireland.

**Temporal Coverage**

The breeding season of 1979.

**Other Interested parties**

The survey was organised and run by John Coulson as a volunteer although doing it as part of his long term research studies on Kittiwakes.

**Organiser(s)**

John Coulson

**Current Staff Contact**

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**Publications**

The report of the survey is:

Coulson, J.C. 1983. The changing status of the Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) in the British Isles, 1969-1979. *Bird Study* 30: 9-16.

The survey was also noticed in *BTO News* numbers 97, 100 and 111.

**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**

None. The data and correspondence were lost many years ago, as were the computer files when Durham University's computer systems were upgraded.

**Notes on Access and Use**

**Other information**

**Notes on Survey Design**

**Specific Issues for Analysis**