

Flynn J, Mr, 6 Linkfield Court, 78 Auckland Rd, LONDON SE19 2DQ.  
Milius N, Mr, 3 Elm Close, Poynton, STOCKPORT, Cheshire SK12 1QH.  
Richardson C, PO Box 50394 DUBAI, UAE.

**Change of Address**

Wattel J, Dr, Pr Irenelaan 9, 1911 HT Uitgeest, Netherlands.

**LIBRARY MEMBERS**

**New Members**

Marr B A E, Mr, Two Hoots, Old Hall Farm Barns, Cley Next the Sea, Norfolk NR25 7RY.

Weinberg J, Apartado #1, San Rafael de Heredia 3015, Costa Rica, Centro America.

**Change of Address**

Huntingdon C E, RFD 2, Box 357, Harpswell, Maine 04079, USA.

**NEW EXCHANGES**

Grup Balear d'Ornithologia Defensa de la Naturalesa (GOB) Veri 1, 3R.07001, Palma de Majorca, Espanya  
Ornithologische Mitteilungen, Schlossallee 10a, D-65388 Schlangenbad, Germany.

# Royal Naval Birdwatching Society



REGISTERED CHARITY No 206719

BULLETIN No 136

FEB 2004

The 50th AGM was held in the Main Lecture Theatre of the Royal Geographical Society, South Kensington on Friday 6 December at 1400. Capt M K Barritt RN was in the chair, and over 50 members, wives and guests were present. The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming members, especially those who had travelled from overseas, representatives of the MOD Conservation Office, Capt Graham Robinson (DNPTS), AOS and BOU members, and Dr Robin Pellew, Director of WWF/WWFN. He also called for an accolade for Mrs Beal, widow of RNBWS founder - Major Noel Beal, and 2 of the 9 initial members of RNBWS - Col Peter Smith and Capt Sir Thomas Barlow. Several letters of congratulation on the Jubilee were read out during the meeting, including a message from Dr John Croxall, President of the BOU.

## THE MINUTES

**Item 1. Apologies.** The Patron was overseas, and the Earl Howe had also been despatched to India at short notice. Apologies were also received from The Venerable Archdeacon Basil O'Ferrall, Dame Marion Kettlewell, Rear Admiral Ritchie, Gp Capt Springett (Chairman RAFOS), Capts Chilman, Hutchings, Littlewood and Young, Lt Cdrs Hall and Maclure, Major Gallagher, Radio Officer Finn, Professor Voous and Messrs Hales, Snow and Wilsdon.

**Item 2. Minutes of 49th AGM.** The minutes of the 49th AGM, which had been circulated in Bulletin 134, were put to the meeting. Approval and adoption were proposed by Cdr Casement, seconded by Lt Cdr Lewis and carried unanimously.

**Item 3. Matters arising.** Matters arising had been reviewed by the Executive Committee who considered that all were complete or would arise in the remainder of the current agenda.

**Item 4. Chairman's Report.** Capt Barritt stated that his report would be brief. The 50th AGM was a time to hear from active members in the field and for tributes be paid to key figures who had built up RNBWS. He reported partial success with the initiative of last AGM to spread the load of administration; the names of 2 new Executive Committee members would be tabled for approval later. A Working

Group was leading the second initiative, and a trial of PC-based software for organising and presenting incoming reports and reducing the load on expert analysts would be conducted during 1997. The Chairman stressed the vital importance of full recording of key sightings. RNBWS members continue to penetrate areas where few others go. He noted the importance of good liaison with the professional sector, and paid special tribute to our Hon Adviser, Dr Bill Bourne, stating that it was impossible to overstate his contribution to RNBWS work. He congratulated Dr Bourne on the award of the Pacific Seabird Group Lifetime Achievement Award.

**Item 5. Financial Statement.** The Financial Statement for 1995, issued with Bulletin No. 133, was put to the meeting. Acceptance was proposed by C/Sgt Carr, seconded by Capt Sir Thomas Barlow, and carried without dissent. The Hon. Secretary and Treasurer presented the following unaudited figures for 1996:

	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>
Current A/C	£96.73	£1101.33
Deposit A/C	2138.41	1131.98
NSB A/C	4969.92	5225.64
	<hr/> 7205.06	<hr/> 7458.95
Less creditors	381.85	400.00
	<hr/> £6823.21	<hr/> £7058.95

The 1996 figures reflected a grant of £1075 from the Sailors' Fund and the Fleet Amenities Fund towards the cost of the Jubilee *Sea Swallow*, the efforts of Cdr Case ment to control costs and boost sales, and the work of Cdr Ward in producing the B ulletins during the year. Next year there would be a special charge against the fund s of c£600 to cover costs of the Jubilee AGM. Finally, the Hon. Secretary thanked WO Bailey for his help in producing a new list of members and associates at neglig ible cost to the society.

60 3. £25.00. This Atlas is the first breeding bird atlas for any South American country and has been produced in association with Falklands Conservation. It is the result of the first countrywide biological survey in the Falklands. The maps and tables are based on records from about 160 named observers, including 47 military personnel (many of whom are RNBWS members) and 29 visitors to the Falklands. It will be an essential starting point for studies associated with Falkland fisheries and planning for industrial development, especially offshore oil exploration. RNBWS members, and all those with first-hand knowledge of the Falklands will wish to have a copy of this important book, but only 1,000 copies are being printed, so the first edition is likely to become a scarce collector's item! Members are advised to order advance copies by writing to: Anthony Nelson Publishers, P0 Box 9, OSWESTRY, Shropshire, SY1 1BY (Tel: 01691 828447. FAX 01691 828898)

### **AMENDMENT 1 TO LIST OF MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS 1996**

#### **MEMBERS**

##### **New Members**

Bray S, CPOMEA, HMS OCEAN, BFPO 350, BARROW IN FURNESS.

Kirk J, Esq., Victoria Cottage, 32 Bury Rd, GOSPORT, Hants PO12 3UD.

Lister S, Mr, 31 Lisle St, LOUGHBOROUGH, Leics. LE11 0AY.

Morrison S J, Mr, c/o 9 Holt Rd, Branksome, POOLE, Dorset BH12 1JQ.

Ohlman L, Lt, Lilienweg 38, 53359 RHEINBACH, Germany.

Pentreath J, Mrs, Springwell, High Down Lane, TOTLAND, IOW PO39 0HV

Shannon C B, Mr, 2 Chesterfield Rd, Copnor, PORTSMOUTH, Hants PO3 6LZ.

Young M S, Esq., 27 Broad St, PORTSMOUTH, Hants PO1 2JC.

##### **Change of Address**

Cutts M, LSA, D213362F, 4F1 Mess, HMS FEARLESS, BFPO 283.

Dixon J G W, Capt MN, Oaklands, Hightown Hill, RINGWOOD, Hants BH24 3HE.

Sullivan A P, Esq., Lower Tilmore, Tilmore Rd, PETERSFIELD, Hants GU32 2 HR.

Todd A H, Mr, 12 Whiteacres Close, GOSPORT, Hants PO12 4DX.

Warner R A, Mr, 32 Mottram Close Grappenhall, WARRINGTON, WA4 2XU.

##### **Correction**

Dalgleish D G LVO OBE, Surg Capt RN, Farmstone, HALWELL, nr Totnes, S Devon TQ9 7JF

##### **Resigned**

Calderwood I

Wynne Edwards V CBE

##### **Deceased**

The Secretary reports with regret the deaths of P Hier De Meeth and V C Wynne - Edwards CBE, Professor.

#### **ASSOCIATE MEMBERS**

##### **New Associate Members**

Jun 96, Devonport - Norfolk VA - Wilmington NC - Puerto Rico - Martinique-Belize (6).

LSA M A J Cutts & Lt Cdr M G Hudson RN, HMS FEARLESS 19 Jan - 2 Mar 97, Portsmouth -Piraeus-Port Said - Djibouti - Goa - Borneo (13).

Captain T Johannsen German MN, MV ANNA OLDENDORFF 23 Mar - 9 Apr 96, Manila-South Australia (1); with Lts S Ohmann & M Waldmann FGS FREIBERG, 6 - 20 Oct 96, Wilhelmshaven - Durres (Albania) - Wilhelmshaven, Med / E. Atlantic (2)

LJH (Comms) A H Todd RFA, and CPO (Comms) G H Walton RFA, RFA FORT GRANGE, 16 Apr - 7 Jun 96 (N. Atlantic - deployment to USA) (4); 7 - 20 Jun 96, (Atlantic - Scottish waters) (4).

Kevin Morgan, detailed notes and RNBWS record forms from four cruises with "Marine Expeditions" to Antarctica as Ship's Naturalist aboard MV PROFESSOR MULTINOVSKIY. 17 - 30 Nov 95, Ushuaia - Falklands & Antarctica - Ushuaia (9); 30 Nov - 13 Dec 95, Ushuaia - South Georgia & Antarctica - Ushuaia (8); 13-21 Dec 95, Ushuaia- Antarctica - Ushuaia (4); 21- 29 Dec 95 Ushuaia -Antarctica - Ushuaia (2).

Stephen Hales & Derek Hallett, MV VAL DE LOIRE, 27- 29 Oct 96, Plymouth to Santander and return (2 census + 4 pages notes).

Stephen Hales fishing boat off coast of Goa, 19 - 30 Nov 96. (1).

LA (METOC) Chris Patrick RN, HMS ENDURANCE, Jan to May 95, Antarctica - Chile, Falklands - Cape Town - Ascension - Canary Is. to UK - 17 pages of seabird records + summaries and BEH forms (5)  
Mrs Judith Pentreath, Racing Yacht MAKIMA, 4 -16 Feb 97, Caribbean (3 census sheets)

LWEM Stockwell RN, HMS EDINBURGH, 27 Aug - 21 Dec 96, Suez - Persian Gulf - Seychelles - Durban (5).

## LANDBIRDS

LSA Mark Cutts, RN. HMS FEARLESS 7 - 8 Mar 96 English Channel (1+1 BEH); 17 Apr - 22 Jun 96, Devonport - Norfolk VA - Wilmington NC - Puerto Rico - Martinique - Belize (1+IBEH); 11 Nov 96 North Sea (2).

LSA M A J Cutts & Lt Cdr M G Hudson RN, HMS FEARLESS 19 Jan - 2 Mar 97, Portsmouth - Piraeus - Port Said - Djibouti - Goa - Borneo (4).

LA (METOC) Chris Patrick RN, HMS ENDURANCE, 22 Apr -3 May 95, E. North Atlantic (1) LH (Comms) A H Todd RFA, and CPO (Comms) G H Walton RFA, RFA FORT GRANGE 16 Apr - 7 Jun 96 (N. Atlantic - deployment to USA and return) (2); 7 - 20 Jun 96 (Atlantic - Scottish waters) (1).

LWEM Stockwell RN, HMS EDINBURGH, 27 Aug - 21 Dec 96, Suez - Persian Gulf - Seychelles - Durban (2 + 8 photos).

## Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Falkland Islands

By Robin and Anne Woods, illustrations by Geoffrey McMullen. This is now hot off the presses of Anthony Nelson Publishers. c200pp. ISBN 0 904 614

**Item 6. Membership Statement.** The Hon. Secretary drew the attention of members to the following table:

	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>
Ex officio	4	4
Honorary	9	7
Ordinary	184	179
Associate	37	44
Library	40	50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>284</b>

The jump in library members was due to a reorganisation of the Ships' Library Service which made individual shore establishments responsible for purchasing *Sea Swallow*.

**Item 7. Executive Committee and Honorary Appointments.** Under the terms of the Charities Act 1960 and 1985, the Executive Committee, who are the Trustees of the Society, offered themselves for re-election, together with the new post of Treasurer which would be filled by Lt Cdr G D Lewis, whilst C/Sgt Carr would relieve him as Exped and Fieldwork Member. Election of the following officers was carried unanimously:

Chairman	Capt M K Barritt RN
Vice Chairman	Captain Sir Thomas Barlow RN
Hon Sec	Col P J S Smith RM
Hon Treasurer	Lt Cdr G D Lewis RN
Editor <i>Sea Swallow</i>	Cdr M B Casement RN
Exped and Fieldwork Member	C/Sgt P Carr RM
Co-opted	Cdr F S Ward

The Chairman noted that the post of Vice Chairman (MN) was vacant since Capt Chilman had asked to stand down after a long and distinguished tenure. The Executive Committee had asked him to write to invite Capt Cheshire to consider

accepting the post. He concluded by calling for acclamation of the work of the Hon Sec which underpinned all the endeavours of RNBWS.

**Item 8. Honorary Auditor.** Capt Barritt thanked Lt R Hollins RN for auditing the 1995 account, and asked for help in 1996. After the meeting Cdr M Winter RN offered his services, which were gratefully accepted.

**Item 9. Local Representatives' Reports.** The following area reports were given:

*Dartmouth.* Dr Porter reported on the very good opportunities in the South Hams and along the Devon coast around BRNC. A bittern had been heard at Slapton Lea during ringing. At South Huish a new wet area had been created which was excellent for migrating waders. Berry Head had been visited at Easter. He had plans for further work in the Falkland Islands, but competition for airbridge places was severe.

*Devonport.* Ken Partridge regretted that no seafaring members had made contact with him, but he continued to represent RNBWS in the HMS CAMBRIDGE Conservation Group and the Plymouth Area MOD Conservation Liaison Committee. Two visits had been made to the Mewstone to survey the extent of rat infestation. Further work had been precluded by the growth of vegetation, but a more intensive programme was planned in 1997. Help from members would be most welcome for this work, and for kittiwake monitoring at Start Point and Hailsands. In answer to a question on survival rates for oiled auks brought in to the Plymouth centre, he stated that there was a 6% failure rate during rehabilitation but that insufficient evidence was available for success after release.

*Portsmouth.* Lt Cdr Witts reported on activities of the Portsmouth Harbour Conservation Group and Solent Shorebird Study Group. There was great pressure on wader habitats because of harbour extensions and the Whale Island pontoons were being used as a high water roost. A report of unexploded bombs had frustrated work to provide roosts on Peewit Island. The local Shore Establishments were being involved in a new Brent Geese project. Lt Cdr Witts could be contacted by visiting members in the Curator's Office at the Whale Island Heritage Centre.

*MOD Bird Count.* The Hon. Secretary reported that 19 sites were covered in 1996, which represented rather less than 50% of RN Establishments. However, well over 50 observers took part and 133 species were recorded, adding a further 5 new species to the total of 153 recorded over the last 5 years. The most unusual were a Golden Oriole near Yeovilton and a Marsh Warbler at Plymouth. Little Egrets were now

### **Dead Cormorants**

Dead Cormorants are required by D Carss, Banchory Research Station, Hill of Brathens, Glassel, BANCHORY AB31 4BY. Alternatively cut off 1 gm of muscle tissue and put in 70 ml of alcohol (Tel 01330 823434).

### **Ringling**

Great Black - backed Gulls, *L.marinus*, on the Channel Islands have been ringed with an inscribed Darvic ring on one leg and a combination of 2 coloured and one metal ring on the other. Sightings including date, activity and whether associating with other Gulls to Ian Buxton, Societe Jersiaise, 7 Pier Rd, ST HELIER, Jersey TE2 4XW Channel Islands.

### **Recent Publications**

Oiseaux de la Reunion, by Barre, Barau and Jouanin is published in Paris by Les Editions du Pacifique, 62 Rue de la du Couedic, 75014 Paris. For anyone fortunate to visit Reunion this excellently presented guide to the local birds can be used without difficulty even if you cannot read French, English names are provided. However lack of French would deny you the excellent background of the vegetation and the history of birds on the island.

Who's Who in Ornithology by John Pemberton, Buckingham Press is intended to advance ornithology by recording the specialisations and activities of individuals as an information source and act as an aid to communication by providing personal details. ISBN 0 9514965 8 1.

### **MoD Bird Count 1997**

This years MoD Bird Count will be held from 17 - 27 May inclusive. Do please have a go at the birds in your establishment if you are based ashore. This years form allows for more detail than previous surveys.

### **Obituary. P H de Meeth**

Piet Meeth was an active member of the society for nearly 20 years, a retired manager of Ned Lloyd, he was particularly keen on Photography and it is a great shame that he died just before Sea Swallow 45 which featured one of his photographs.

### **RECORDS RECEIVED**

Since the publication of Bulletin 135 the following Seabird and Landbird Reports have been received, together with numerous letters. These are gratefully acknowledged, and will be summarised in the next annual report, *Sea Swallow 46*.

### **SEABIRDS**

LSA Mark Cutts, RN. HMS SCYLLA, 15-21 Oct 93, Falklands - Valparaiso, Chile Panama. (7); HMS FEARLESS 7-8 Mar 96 English Channel (1); 17 Apr - 22

record of the North American form. Single adults thought to be of the small dark-eyed form of the Yellow-legged Gull, *L.c.barabensis* were seen in Feb and Mar. Better knowledge of the immature plumages of the Slaty-backed Gull, *L.schistisagus*, has shown that this species is a regular winter visitor. The fourth appearance of the Kittiwake, *L.tridactyla* was recorded in March and the seventh Great Crested Tern, *S.bergii* occurred on 15 Apr. Only 3 Roseate Terns were seen and once again they did not breed, but Black-naped, *S.sumatrana* were more successful. The fifth record of a Sooty Tern, *S.fuscata* was on 3 Oct. An important paper reviews the status of Common Gulls in Hongkong and finds that there are 3 distinct forms of plumage (at all ages) kamschatschensis, heini and brachyrhynchus; mitochondrial DNA tests support the existence of at least 2 species, p.134 - 149.

Also gratefully received were **Seevogel Dec 96** and the Supplement to the **EMU Vol 96 No 3 Sep 96**.

### 16mm Films of Birds

The late Colonel Comyn, a member of RNBWS, has left a large number of 16mm films which his widow is anxious to pass to a good home. A volunteer is needed to catalogue and assess whether they could be of use to the society or others. Anyone prepared to help please contact Hon Sec.

### Landlubbers Corner

BTO enquiries which are continuing or just starting include:

Breeding Bird Survey

Common Bird Census. 20 new plots of farm and woodland needed each year.

Garden Bird Watch. You pay £10 towards running costs.

Grassland Plover Survey. Pilot scheme winter 97 / 98, full scale studies to follow.

Heronries Census.

Project Barn Owl. Finding nests and confirming occupation.

BTO breeding Skylark Survey, starts 97.

BTO wintering Skylark Survey.

Water Birds Survey. Stretches of river or canal.

WeBS Core Counts. Monthly water fowl counts.

WeBS Low tide counts. Winter counts on estuaries.

WeBS Non estuarine Coastal Waters Survey. Another monthly winter count on shorelines.

Woodlark Survey. Visit sites Feb to end May for singing birds.

Anyone interested should contact the BTO at The Nunnery, THETFORD, Norfolk IP24 2PU.

being recorded at all suitable sites along the SW and S coasts. In answer to a question he said that detail from individual sites was too variable to draw any but the most general conclusions.

*Overseas.* LSA Mark Cutts gave an excellent account of the reward of contacting an RNBWS Local Representative. Whilst visiting North Carolina during a major UK/US exercise, he had joined Dr Bob Wolk during ringing and studies in the habitats of the Cape Fear estuary, sighting a wide range of interesting species. A high-light was a visit to Ferry Ship Island where 2000 pairs of Royal Tern, *Sterna maxima*, 300 pairs of Sandwich Terns, *Sterna sandvicensis*, and 150 pairs of Laughing Gulls, *Larus atricilla* were seen, together with a Black Tern, *Chlidonias niger* which is very unusual in January.

The Chairman noted the importance of personal contact, quoting from a letter from Capt Young, Humber Local Secretary, who paid tribute to the encouragement which Capt Gerald Tuck had always given to new members.

**Item 10 Exped Member's Report.** C/Sgt Carr said that he was opening with an advert for the opposition! RNBWS had been offered a place on an AOS expedition to Senegal and the Gambia in February 1997. Cost to individuals would be of the order of £1,000. Interested members should contact him or Major Tim Hallchurch. During 1996 RNBWS had mounted 2 expeditions. Last minute postings for prospective team members, and atrocious weather on the first day, had limited effort on Lundy to 2 man weeks. However, ringing was conducted successfully and local ornithologists were delighted by the re-recording of a Manx Shearwater, supporting the view that this species is breeding on the island. The expedition to Sanda would be reported later in the AGM. Turning to plans for 1997, he reported that clearance had been obtained for a RNBWS team to work in Diego Garcia in August, building on previous ornithological studies, including several reports by members published in *Sea Swallow*. 4 RNBWS members would be joined by an AOS and a RAFOS member. Participants would have to raise c£250 each towards a total cost of c£4000. RNBWS was underwriting £1000. C/Sgt Carr noted that expeditions had been shown to attract new members, and they merited maximum publicity.

**Item 11. SEA SWALLOW.** Cdr Casement said that Volume 45 and the new Check List were on display and available for purchase. He noted the Society's indebtedness to our new publisher, Mr Martin Smith of Designline, who had personally designed the new cover. Mr Smith, who was present, was greeted with applause. Cdr Casement stated that whilst Volume 46 would not be in colour, the new cover design would be retained. The Journal could only be as good as its contents, and he welcomed further contributions. The Chairman commended to the meeting the dedication of Cdr Casement in the significant roles which he had

played in the life of the society, noting that the RNBWS reputation was founded above all else on the reputation of *Sea Swallow*. This was followed by sustained applause from the floor.

**Item 12. Any other business.** The Chairman noted the following:

- a. *UK Dependent Territories Conservation Forum*. Since the joining fee was £250 the benefits (e.g. expedition planning) would be assessed with AOS and RAFOS, and a case would be prepared for submission to individual Service Funds.
- b. *Millenium Bird Count*. Field Marshal Sir John Chapple, President of AOS, has proposed a world-wide count by the UK services to mark the Millenium. The Executive Committee of RNBWS have asked the Chairman to indicate support for this plan.

**Item 13. Date and place of the next meeting.** The 51<sup>st</sup> AGM will take place on Friday 5 December 1997 at 1400. The Chairman stated that the venue would be the MOD Cinema in Northumberland House, Whitehall.

**Item 14. Presentations to mark the Jubilee.** The second part of the meeting opened with the presentation of the AOS Trophy, which the Chairman hailed as a most generous and imaginative gesture to mark the RNBWS 50th anniversary and to cement affiliation. He invited Colonel Ian Nason, Chairman AOS, onto the podium. Col Nason noted the common challenges faced by the Service Societies, welcomed even closer bonds, and displayed the superb carving of a "Sea Swallow". This was received on behalf of RNBWS by LA(METOC) Chris Patrick. The Chairman stated that the trophy, together with a Field Guide purchased by RNBWS, will be awarded each year to the ship in the Fleet submitting the best environmental observations, including bird reports. The meeting then heard a series of presentations by members. The Society was honoured by the attendance of HRH The Prince Andrew during this period:

- a. *Sanda Island Exped.* Lt Cdr John O'Connell-Davidson described the survey of breeding seabirds which had been carried out by an RNBWS team on behalf of the Seabird Study Group on Sanda and Sheep Islands off the Mull of Kintyre. His account of the adventurous crossing to the islands in craft of Comacchio Group Royal Marines, and of the subsequent census work, was illustrated by fine photographs taken by Cdr Chris Peach.
- b. *Motley Island Exped.* Cdr Peach himself took the podium for an account of the expedition reported fully in *Sea Swallow* 44. The

season on the Oregon coast was poor for many species including Western Gull, *L.occidentalis*, Pelagic Cormorant, *S.pelagicus* and in particular for Common Murre, *U.lomvia* which was hit by food shortages just as the young were leaving the nest. None of the chicks are believed to have survived and there was a massive die off of breeding birds, p.21. Northern California was also affected. During the last 3 months the following species normally found off the Galapagos and Peru have been sighted for the first time in the California Current, Light - mantled Sooty Albatross, *P.palpebrata*, Savin's Albatross, *D.salvini*, Parkinson's Petrel, *P.parkinsoni*, Dark - rumped Petrel, *P.phaeopygia* and Swallow - tailed Gull, *C.furcatus*, p.22. Also on this page Honolulu have been trying various methods of colony counting to find the best method and the Fish and Wildlife service are now focusing efforts on ecosystem management of specific islands. The effects of boating and tourists on seabirds breeding on Gull Island, Newfoundland are mainly felt by Razorbill, *A.torda*, p.24. A full report on the breeding population of Northern Gannet, *M.bassanus* in Newfoundland is due out in 1997, also a major analysis of seabirds on Labrador which covers 423 colonies, 500,000 individuals and 13 species, p.24. Implanting Murres with transmitters has worked well for tracking but only at the expense of their sex life, none succeeded in breeding, p.28. Comparison with counts and photography showed that better quality photographs gave up to, or better than 95% of visual counts. Digital 35mm or video cameras that can provide sharper images for enlargement are recommended, p.29. In Northern California a long term study is being carried out on the effect of dumping dredge spoils on marine life, p.31.

**Oman News 20** includes a separate ringing report and an index to Nos 1 - 20. There is an unusual sighting of 2 Masked Booby, *S.dactylatra* at Ras Al Hadd 1 Nov, this species seldom occurs in N. Oman.

**BTO News No 207** contains a copy of the latest "Birds of Conservation Concern". In Europe the only seabird on the Red List is the Roseate Tern, *S.dougalli* which is not surprising. However nearly all UK seabirds appear in the Amber List, i.e. species which are in moderate decline, rare breeders, internationally important and localised species and those of an unfavourable conservation status in Europe. Only Black - headed Gulls, *L.ridibundus*, Common Tern, *S.hirundo* and Cormorant, *P.Carbo* are absent.

**Hongkong Bird Report 1995** records the first Brown Booby, *S.leucogaster* seen off Cap D'Aguilar, not entirely a surprise as the species breeds in Japan and possibly the Paracels. Attempts were made to establish the presence of Swinhoe's Storm - petrel, *O.monorhis* with 4 night time tape luring sessions at Cap D'Aguilar but there was no success. At least 10 Great Black - headed Gulls, *L.ichthyaetus*, were present during the year. Saunders Gull, *L.saundersi* reached a peak of 131 in March. Brown - headed Gulls *L.brunnicephalus* were seen on 4 occasions. In 1994 a 'Mew' Gull, *L.canus.brachyrhynchus* was identified at Mai Po, the first

proportion of the casualties. Short-tailed Shearwaters, *P.tenuirostris*, are prone to wrecks when the El Niño southern oscillation leads to drought and to the disappearance of krill, lastly Little Penguins, *E.minor* may suffer high mortality off Victoria when sea temperatures and sunlight are maximum and combine with high nutrient outfalls to produce toxic algal blooms. Dyed Buller's and Black-browed Albatross, *D.diomedea* bred on Campbell, Solander Islands appear to feed mostly between the Snares and the New Zealand mainland, p.28 - 29. Research is taking place on the sustainability of the Maori harvest of Sooty Shearwater, *P.griseus*, p.30.

**PACIFIC SEABIRDS Vol 23 No 1** has a mass of interesting abstracts from which I will try and pick the more interesting. Page 5 suggests the term "gathering ground" for the socialising area adjacent to seabird colonies. In Canada the majority of rats have been cleared from Helgara Island, whilst racoons have been cleared from Helgesen and East Limestone Islands so it is hoped that the seabird colonies will begin to recover. The reduction of Newfoundland Black-legged Kittiwakes, *R.tridactyla* appears to be due to a combination of Herring Gull predation, hatching before the arrival of the capelin and the latter being smaller, p.12. Helicopters over flying 4 Murre colonies had a disastrous effect on their breeding success. Investigations (p.13) are being carried out on how the physical characteristics of species affect observation at sea and on techniques to estimate seabird populations from surveys at sea. In northern California gillnet casualties are assessed at 100 birds per boat per season, p.14. Rockhopper Penguins, *E.chrysocome* lay 2 eggs some 4 days apart, the second egg is 25% larger and hatches first, possible factors are discussed, p.27. An item on global conservation of Gulls and Terns, p.34, suggests that the Chinese Tern, *S.bernsteini* may still survive, a species to keep a look out for, p.34. Six years after the EXXON VALDEZ oil spill Black-legged Kittiwake breeding is still at a low level probably due to the lack of food, p.37. Examination of Midway's albatrosses show that Laysan's, *D.immutabilis* and Black-footed, *D.nigripes*, both have PCBs in their eggs but only the Laysan's approach the low adverse effect level and the percentage affected does not appear to pose a threat. The source of the contamination is not known, p.41. A modified gillnet with 10 inch opaque mesh in the upper portion has been found equally effective as the standard net for catching salmon but significantly reduced seabird losses, p.42. Least Terns, *S.antillarum* in South Carolina are turning to roof nesting which has now reached 61%, p.43. In the Mediterranean a study of the effect of the trawler ban on gulls, p.45, has shown no decline in clutch size however mean egg volume has decreased significantly in Lesser Black-backed Gulls, *L.fuscus*. Periodic nesting of Steller's Eider, *P.stelleri* near Barrow, Alaska seems to correlate with lemming years which provide ample food for predators and maximise the Eiders chance of breeding success, p.48. **Vol 23 No 2** starts with a major article on long line fishing, p.3 - 6. A second on the scavenging habits of the Waved Albatross, *D.irrorata*, p.10 - 12 suggests that this may cause casualties as fishing increase in their feeding area. The 1996 breeding

memorable photography covered the full range of the avifauna of the archipelago.

c. Observations from HM ships. Lt Cdr Gary Lewis and LA(METOC) Chris Patrick, both veterans of extensive deployments in HMS ENDURANCE and vessels of the RN Hydrographic Squadron, then presented a magnificent voyage from tropics to polar regions, with breath-taking slides of seabirds and land-birds observed around and onboard HM ships. Their testimony to the rewards of observation at sea was compelling and inspiring.

d. IUCN work in Cambodia. C/Sgt Carr rounded off the series with a resume of the memorable talk to the 49th AGM in which he described his survey work in Cambodia during service with UNTAC and in a subsequent visit under the auspices of the IUCN. His account of the discovery of unsustainable harvesting of rare stork species again had a profound impact.

The meeting closed with an address by Dr Robin Pellew, who had been asked to launch *Sea Swallow* 45. He paid tribute to the enthusiasm of RNBWS members, evident both in the ground covered during the AGM, and in the pages of the Journal. He suggested a number of routes for RNBWS in its second half-century. First he suggested forming links with other organisations to achieve Cdr Casement's vision of computerising the valuable observations of the Society. He underlined the importance of the accurate positioning associated with RNBWS members, and he stressed the value of anecdotal evidence. Secondly, he noted that Service expeditions represented value for money, with unique opportunities for access and transport, and talented people. He proposed to recommend to WWF/WWFN that £500 be allocated to support the 1997 Diego Garcia expedition. Thirdly, he encouraged RNBWS members to use their access and quality positioning to ground-truth the large volumes of data which were becoming available, not least through remote-sensing. Fourthly, he encouraged members to take a catholic interest in the whole environment, and to play a part in monitoring all endangered species. Finally he noted the WWF link with the Cadland BRITANNIA, in which it was proposed to place a scientist to co-ordinate basic marine research, and suggested use of the RNBWS organisation for data-gathering. His ideas prompted much fruitful discussion over tea after the meeting.



M K Barritt  
Captain Royal Navy  
Chairman



P J S Smith  
Colonel Royal Marines  
Honorary Secretary

#### DATA PROTECTION ACT

Hon Sec has now put the list of members with their addresses on computer. RNBWS is defined under the Data Protection Act as an un-incorporated members club with members contributing by subscription to the club funds. As a member of such a club you are now formally asked if you wish to object to the club holding personal data about you, in this case your name and address. There is no need to reply unless you object in which case your name will be removed and kept on paper.

#### Congratulations on RNBWS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Our thanks to the North Sea Bird Club, British Birds and the Oman Bird News for their congratulations and kind remarks.

#### NEWS OF MEMBERS

Congratulations to Capt J W G Dixon MN on his promotion.

#### New Zealand representative.

Mr C R Jowett has kindly offered to act as our New Zealand Representative, his address is 30 Parawai Crescent, PONSONBY, Auckland.

#### Impact of the Sea Empress disaster on breeding seabirds.

The results of follow - up studies of the impact of the tanker - stranding off Milford Haven on 15 February 1996 are now becoming available. An Initial Report of the Sea Empress Evaluation Committee describes the incident and states the RSPCA received 3,155 oiled birds, including 2,559 Common Scoter and 420 Guillemots, of which over 2,000 (63.5%) were cleaned, ringed and released, a magnificent achievement (especially since their long term ringing recoveries indicate a survival nearly as good as that of healthy birds). The Dyfed Wildlife Trust and Countryside Council for Wales report breeding surveys show a local decrease of 3,403 (17%) Guillemots and 400 (7%) Razorbills, while the Shags have almost disappeared, when elsewhere in South Wales the birds have continued to increase. Fortunately there was no detectable damage to the Puffins and largest known breeding population of Manx Shearwaters, which had not yet returned to the colonies at the time of the disaster. WRPB

#### Seabird Conference in Glasgow.

number of threatened Mediterranean species including Fea's Petrel *P.fea*, Pygmy Cormorant *M.pygmeus* and Audouin's Gull.

**The Annual report of GOB (Group Balear d'ornithologia I defensa de la Naturalesa)** refers to the 2 sub species of Puffinus shearwaters, mauretanicus the western race, which breeds on Fomentera and yelkouan found in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, which is related to the Indo - pacific species and calls for an urgent conservation plan, p3 - 14. Other items deal with the monitoring of *P.y.mauretanicus*, p.51 - 3, of Cory's Shearwater, *C.diomedea* and of the European Storm - petrel, *H.pelargicus* in the Cabrera National Park, p.54 - 7. A report on beached birds on Mallorca for 1993 produced only 0.1 birds per Km but oil was found on a number of birds, p.58 - 60. The first records for Common Gull, *L.canus* were accepted. The 1994 report discusses the identification of yelkouan and mauretanicus, the latter can be recognised by the presence of a breast band however some birds do not have one, p.13 - 20. The 1995 report has 2 items on Cory's Shearwater, the first notes that the breeding parameters for the Balearic population are similar to other Mediterranean populations, p.19 - 24, and the second refers to the recovery of a bird aged 20 years, p.35. A new breeding colony of Audouin's Gull was found on the Isle of Conillera in Eivissa, p.41 - 3. All articles are in Spanish with a brief English summary.

**OSME's SANDGROUSE Vol 18(2)** reviews the birds of Barr Al Hikman, Sultanate of Oman, p.19 - 29. This is an important area of mud flats and islands for wintering species in particular the Slender - billed Gull and over 100,000 Yellow - legged sp Gulls. Breeding species include Roseate terns, *S.dougalli*, White - cheeked, *S.repressa*, Bridled, *S.anaethetus* and Saunder's Tern, *S.saundersi*. Unconfirmed records include an exceptional count of 1450 Pygmy Cormorants in the Meric Delta, Turkey 22 Feb 96, 3 Pomarine Skua, *P.pomarinus*, south of Tarsus, 22 Mar and a count of 6500 White -eyed Gulls, *L.leucothalmus* at Hurghada rubbish dump. In the UAE a Little Gull, *L.minutis* was recorded at Khor Kalba, a new national record if accepted.

**Australian Seabird Group Newsletter No 31** stars with unconfirmed reports mainly from Wollongong with a few from Perth. These include a Black - bellied Storm - petrel, *F.tropica* 18 Nm SW of Sydney and possible Black Petrels, *P.parkinsoni* in Jun and Jul 96. Rarities seen included Royal Albatross, *D.sanfordi*, Chatham Island Albatross, *D.ereimita*, Buller's Albatross, *D.bulleri*, Light - mantled Sooty, *P.palpebrata*, Southern Fulmar, *F.glacialoides*, Herald Petrel, *P.arminjoniana*, Little Shearwater, *P.assimilis*, Audouin's Shearwater, *P.lherminieri* and White - bellied Storm - petrel, *F.grallaria*. The beached bird survey has restarted with the first years results in line with population distribution and no signs of oiling, p.8 - 13. Notes on beached birds in Bass waters, p.14 - 25, comment that recoveries depend on onshore winds and that the length of time a carcass will remain afloat is not known, so beached birds can only represent a

Legged Gull, *L.cachinnans* seen on a tip at Geldermalsen, Gelderland 11 Dec 91. It was found to have been ringed as a pullus in the Ukraine. Without examination in the hand or high quality photography it could not have been safely distinguished from other Yellow - legged subspecies, p.304. Unconfirmed records include a juvenile Great Black Headed Gull, *L.ichthyaetus* near Caligari, Sicily in late Sep. A Laughing Gull at Cleraine Northern Ireland 3 - 16 Nov, a Franklin's Gull, *L.pipixcan* was reported at Cap Breton, Landes 23 Nov and Bonaparte's gulls, *L.philadelphia* were seen at Loch Foyle, Scotland Oct / Nov, at Groomspout, County Down and at Sennen Cove, Cornwall in Dec. Finally a Ross's Gull was reported at Getteron, Halland, Sweden 7 Nov.

**SULA Vol 10 No 4** has an article on Fulmar *F.glacialis*, feeding off St Kilda, p143 - 9, mainly on trawler discards. Yellow - legged Gulls, *L.cachinnans* inter breeding with Lesser Black - backed Gulls, *L.fuscus* at Ijmiden, p151 - 5. A report of a Sandwich Tern, *S.sandvicensis* trying to catch a Bumblebee p.156 and an entertaining article by Dr Bourne on the past status of Gulls and terns in Britain which concludes that the larger *Laridae* were unlikely to have been common until the era of game preservation allowed them more scope for scavenging and that this tended to be confirmed by their absence from medieval banquets p.157 - 60. **Vol 10 No 5** has a series of articles on the Little Auk, *A.alle* reviewing the information available on wrecks and on mass movements from the European (SE Greenland to Russia) and the America (SW Greenland) populations which at the moment appear to be independent. **Vol 10 No 6** is an index for Vols 1 - 10.

**ALAUDA Vol 64 No 3** has an interesting account of providing protection for young Audouin's Gulls, *L.audouinii*, using an open ended v shaped multiply wood cloche with an additional notch cut half way along one side. Nestlings under cover were un-molested by Yellow Legged Gulls patrolling above, p.333 - 38. **Vol 64 No 4** has an article on birds of Madagascar which includes an unexpected sighting of Common Tern, *S.hirundo* in Oct (normally Dec / Jan), Saunders Tern, *S.saundersi* in Oct which is early and of Crested Tern *S.bergii*, a possible record for the island, p.438 - 39.

**ARDEOLA Vol 43(2)** has brief reports on the breeding of Bulwer's Petrel, *B.bulwerii* in the Canary Isles and of Leach's Storm - petrel, *O.leucorhoa* sightings in the bay of Cadiz 14 and 30 Dec. An Arctic Skua, *S.parasiticus* was seen at Puente de la Cerrada, Ubeda 7 Sep. A Sabine's Gull was seen off Cape Higuer 12 Nov 95. Several Slender - billed Gulls, *L.genei* were recorded in Cadiz province in 95 and at Gerullos (Almeria) March 96. A visit to the island of Alboran (Almeria) in Jan 96 produced 162 breeding pairs of Audouin's Gull and 190 were counted at Los Lances, Tarifa (Cadiz) in Dec 96.

**LA GARCILLA** reports that agreement with the European Union, the Council of Europe and most Governments concerned, action plans have been drawn up for a

A conference on "Seabirds in the marine environment" organised by the International Council for Exploration of the Sea, Joint Nature Conservation Committee and Seabird Group was held in the Zoology Department at Glasgow University on 22-24 November 1996. It was attended by 106 delegates from 14 countries and ICES to consider 24 talks and 25 poster papers of a rather academic, grant-raising nature mainly related to oceanography, seabirds and fisheries of limited interest to RNBWS, and a discussion of a "Birdlife International Global Seabird Project" being organised by Dr Euan Dunn to achieve more effective action over threats to seabirds. The proceedings will be published by Academic Press as a special volume in the series ICES Journal of Marine Science. WRPB

## NEWS FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS

**Army Ornithological Society Newsletter No 1/97** has the usual interesting variety including a visit to Portland in Oct 96 which was unlucky with sea birds apart from an Arctic Skua, *S.parasiticus*. There was a sad tale from Pendine, S. Wales about the local handling of the oiled birds from the Milford Haven spill. There was no shortage of volunteers and the RSPCA turned up with a special van with orders that nothing should be done for the birds until the van had taken them to the Milford cleansing centre. The van's driver was also told not to leave until the van was full which took all day. How many survived is not recorded. There was a plea for the service societies to organise emergency procedures locally. Also included was a brief report on birds seen in the Gulf of Suez near Tarvila Island and an account from an AOS member of RAFOS Exercise GENTOO to Pebble Island, Falklands in 1995.

**RAFOS Newsletter No 62, Autumn 96** has an article on a pelagic trip from Vancouver Island to the continental shelf taking in Cleland Island reserve and Clayequot Sound.

**World Bird Watch Vol 18 No 4** has a short item on the Chatham Island Petrel, *P.axillaris*, which failed to breed in 1996.

**Birdlife Network News, Sep 96** gives the revised structure of the secretariat and the name of the new Director and Chief Executive, Dr Michael Rands.

**RSPB Winter 96** reports that the Gannet colony at Bempton, N. Yorks has increased by 11% since 1994 and now has 1,820 pairs. RSPB and Birdlife International have given their support to global co-operation to cut the slaughter of Albatross by longline fishing, another species badly affected is the Spectacled Petrel, *P.conspillata*. 9 pairs of Mediterranean Black - headed Gulls, *L.melanocephalus* produced 12 young on Elmley Marshes, N. Kent.

**RSPB Birds Spring 97** p12 suggests that observers on the South coast should keep a sharp lookout for Slender - billed Gulls, *L.genei*, following a breeding boom on the Camargue. RSPB are contributing to rat control and wardening on Madeira where only 2 Zino's Petrel, *P.madeira* were raised in 96. Only Japan and Panama opposed a motion to develop techniques to reduce longline mortality in seabirds when it was put to the World Conservation Congress in Montreal.

**Seabird Group Newsletter No 75, Sep 96**, refers to the new Birdlife International initiative which includes appointing a seabird conservation officer to help with co-operation between seabird groups throughout the world and to identify problems such as long lining, p1-2. The results of the 1996 UK beached Bird Survey were over 50% more than in 1995. Oiling was worst in the east and south, though the Pembroke coast which was affected by the SEA EMPRESS oil spill was excluded, p2-3. The Norwegians have produced a device to deploy longlines underwater which should reduce seabird losses but it is expensive and there has been no serious drive to market it, p4-5.

**Seabird Group Newsletter No 76** summarises the results of the 1996 breeding season, p5-7. An article by Ken Partridge reviews an item written by Dr Sharp in the USA which states that Auks which have been oiled and then rehabilitated only survive about 3 weeks after release. The figures appear to be based on a small sample of oiled birds recovered from major oil spills between 1969 - 94. In the UK most birds are suffering from chronic poisoning from small spills and it is considered that UK rehabilitation procedures have significantly improved over this period. The absence of any significant numbers of recovered birds despite a number of large scale releases must cast doubt on the applicability of Dr Sharps findings to UK birds. However a proper investigation is needed in UK and this should include stress factors, clinical effects and minimum recovery weights. Work is in hand to try to establish the minimum hypothermic condition for recovery, p7 -9.

**North Sea Bird Report 1993/4**. Most of the individual records of interest have already been reported but the overall picture shows a tendency for the number of most seabirds sighted to decrease in 1994. Their quarterley bulletin

**Fulmar No 81, winter 96**, reports 3 sightings of a Ring - billed Gull, *L.delawarensis* off LOGS on 5 Jan, 2 and 5 Feb and an unseasonable Storm - petrel was seen there 12 Jan. An Arctic Tern, *S.paradisea* was seen at BRAE on 9 Apr.

**Scottish Birds, Winter 96** has an article on the Troup Head gannetry, the only mainland colony in Scotland, p.214 - 221. *M.bassanus* started breeding there in 1988 and the rate of growth points to strong immigration with the colony reaching 530 nests by 1995.

**Scottish Bird News December 1996** has a general article on the work of the UK Seabird Monitoring Programme based at Aberdeen, p.1 - 2. A brief article on the

diving depths achieved by auks records depths of 180m for Common Guillemot, *U.aalge*, 120m for Razorbill, *A. torda*, 60m for Puffins, *F.arctica* and 50m for Black Guillemot, *C.grylle*. p11.

**Dutch Birding Vol 18 No 4** is devoted to revising the Dutch Bird List.

Unconfirmed reports include a Black - browed Albatross, *D.melanophris* off Cape Clear, Ireland 22 Aug. A Soft - plumaged Petrel sp was seen off Porthgwarra, Cornwall 11 Jun and another off Galley Hd, Cork 27 Jul. Single Wilson's Storm - petrel, *O.oceanicus* were seen off Cape Clear 17 - 18 Aug and the first Swinhoe's Storm - petrel, *O.monorhis*, for Norway was trapped at Rogaland 14 Aug. A pair of Mediterranean Gulls, *L.melanocephalus* bred in Ireland for the first time, at Wexford and there were 543 breeding pairs in the Camargue together with 859 pairs of Slender - billed Gul, *L.genei*. A Little Gull, *L.minutus* ringed in Sweden 7 Jul 95 was found near Pittsburg, Pennsylvania USA Jul 96. A Lesser Crested Tern, *S.bengalensis* was seen off Scilly 5 Aug and at Ballycotton, Cork (first record for Ireland) and the usual female returned to the Farne Island with the hybrid. There are now 3 colonies of Roseate Tern, *S.dougalli* in Ireland and numbers have increased 10%. Molecular studies suggest that the Manx, *P.p.puffinus* and the Yelkouan Shearwaters, *P.p.yelkouan*, are genetically distinct (the Balearic, *P.p.mauretanicus* was not studied). **Vol 18 No 5** describes the unusual appearance of a Bulwer's Petrel, *B.bulweri*, off Wesplaat, Holland in 1995. The bird flew low over the tidal sandbanks looking like a large swift, when feeding it raised it's wings, spread it's tail and tiptoed with it's feet like a Leach's Storm - petrel, *O.leucorhoa* (English p.225). A study of White - faced Storm - petrels, *P.marina*, feeding in the Madeira area some 450km from any known breeding sites showed birds flying with a slow butterfly action with feet trailing in the water, repeatedly plunging like a Kestrel, *F.tinnunculus*. Birds were also seen with wings and tail spread horizontally while treading water with their yellow feet possibly to stir up or attract prey, p.234 - 6. Brief English summaries are given on the 3rd record of a Ring - billed Gull, *L.delawarensis* in Belgium Apr p.239, and of a 4th on the Belgian - Dutch border Jan 95, p.241. An interesting article on trends in systematics uses 2 species of Bustard to demonstrate the risks involved by classifying on a biological basis as opposed to considering intraspecific variation and phylogenetics, p.248 - 54. Unconfirmed records include a big influx in the autumn of Sooty Shearwater, *P.griseus*, with 3350 sighted off Britain, 600 off Holland and 350 off Schleswig - Holstein. A Bulwer's Petrel was seen off Montrose, Scotland 12 Oct and several were seen in pelagic trips off Portugal in Aug. The trips also produced 2 Wilson's Storm - petrel, *O.oceanicus*, a White - faced Storm - petrel and a Little Shearwater, *P.assimilis* plus a flock of 1100 Grey Phalarope, *P.fulicaria*. Laughing Gulls, *L.atricilla* were reported from Dornoch, Scotland, Plymouth, Devon, Bude, Cornwall and Coleraine, Derry. Over 100 Sabine's Gull, *L.sabini* were recorded off UK and Ireland in Oct. The first possible Ring - billed Gull for Finland was seen at Pyhajoki on 27 Aug. A Ross's Gull, *R.rosea* was seen at Ditmarscher Speickerkoog, Germany, 11 Oct. **Vol 18 No 6** discusses a Caspian Yellow -