

Royal Naval Birdwatching Society



REGISTERED CHARITY No. 206719

BULLETIN No. 137

SEPTEMBER 1997

THE FIFTY FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM will take place at 1400 on Friday 5 December in the MOD Theatre in Northumberland House, in Northumberland Avenue just off Trafalgar Square. As shown on the accompanying map, the nearest London Underground Stations are Charing Cross and Embankment.



AGM

After the meeting there will be a presentation of the Diego Suarez EXPED given by the team.

All members, their friends and relatives are welcome, but for security reasons we have to provide a nominal list of those attending before the meeting. **Members are requested to let Hon Sec know if they are attending and the names of any guests not later than 28 November.**

SPECIAL REDUCED OFFERS TO RNBWS MEMBERS

British Birds. In news from other organisations members can see a selection of seabird articles from recent editions. Apart from papers on identification, ecology, behaviour and conservation there are now monthly reports on migrants, breeding birds and rarities plus numerous other features. Good value at £34.50 a year (£33.50 direct debit).

Bird Watchers Yearbook. This is offered at £11.00 (normal price £12.50). It includes articles, news of books and papers published during the year, a list of reserves and observatories and a directory of County, National and International

bodies. It also has Sunset and Tide Tables. I find it very handy to have. (overseas postage £1.00).

RNBWS TIES AND LOGOS

Navy blue ties with a multiple Sea Swallow motif are available from Hon Treasurer at £6.00 each including postage. Shield shaped logos suitable for windcheaters etc. are also available at 50p each plus postage (20p in UK).

PRIZE FOR THE BEST ARTICLE FOR *SEA SWALLOW* BY A NEW CONTRIBUTOR

It is intended to offer a prize each year of £20 for the best article submitted to the Editor during the year by a member whose work has not previously been published in *Sea Swallow*. The conditions of the award are as follows:

- Articles must be about seabirds at sea, seabird colonies, or landbirds at sea.
- Articles should be between 1,500 and 2,000 words long, typed double-spaced on A4 paper, and accompanied by appropriate maps and illustrations. It would be helpful, though not essential, if the text could also be supplied on 3.5" diskette, specifying the word-processing software used. ASCII back-up is also desirable, in case of incompatibility.
- Entries must reach the Editor by 31 May.

Entries will be judged by a panel consisting of the Editor and 2 other members of the Executive Committee, who will only make the award if they are satisfied that an article of sufficiently high standard has been submitted.

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Members are requested to advise the Hon Sec if they do not want their name and address to appear in the next computer generated List of Members.

NEWS FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS

RAFOS Journal No 26, has a description of an EXPED to Gibraltar Point Lincolnshire (no seabird records) and an interesting article on seabird migration off Sagres, South West Portugal, p13-19. The bulk of the journal is given to a major list of identification references to the birds of the Western Palaeartic 1977-96. p20-107.

World Birdwatch Vol. 19 No 2, has a brief note on the Bermuda Petrel *P.cahow* which had a very successful breeding season in 1996 with 52 pairs raising 26 young.

Birdlife International, April 97 has a request for bird records from anyone who has visited Vietnam. Please send them to Dr Nguyen Cu, Birdlife Vietnam Programme, 293B Tay Son, Dong Da, HANOI, Vietnam.

RSPB Summer 97 has an item on Sooty Shearwaters, *P.griseus*. According to unquoted US sources a 0.5°C rise in seawater temperature has led to a 70%

reduction in plankton levels and a subsequent 90% drop in the Sooty Shearwater population between 1987-94. Brief items in the Autumn edition refer to summer storms sweeping young off the breeding cliffs at Bempton and on the Farnes. At Bempton 80% of young Kittiwake, *L.tridactyla* and 90% of the young Guillemot. *U.aalge* were killed. The toll on the Farnes was thought to be 75% or higher. The Foreign Office has commissioned the RSPB to survey Ascension Island and prepare a plan of action to protect the seabird colonies from predators. The EU Life Fund is paying for 2 small Greek islets, breeding grounds for Audouin's Gull *L.audouinii*, to have wardens for 2 years. Lastly Birdlife International and the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh are to make a joint survey of the island of Socotra.

Seabirds Group Newsletter 77 reports the recovery in Victoria, Australia, of a juvenile Common Tern *S.hirundo*, ringed in Finland which had averaged 120km a day since fledging; in practice probably nearer 200km a day. Pages 2-3 discuss the possibility that the Jamaica Petrel, *P.caribbaea* still breeds in the mountains of Jamaica. Expeditions are planned to search for nest sites and to watch for it at sea. Members passing through the West Indies area should keep a special watch for this species. Page 5 mentions an experiment with oiled carcasses released off the SW coast of Wales in which 5% reached SE Ireland. In the Shetlands wintering Great Northern Divers, *G.immer* appear to have suffered severely from the ESSO BERNICA oil spill in 1979 with only some 30 wintering in Yell Sound. Numbers in the Unst-Yell-Fetlar area have fallen from 50-60 in the 1970s to less than 10. Pages 7-10 are devoted to seabirds in the Azores perhaps including Fea's Petrel, *P.m.fea*. The Madeiran Storm-petrels, *O.castro* have 2 separate populations, one breeding in the spring and the other in the Autumn. On Corvo which is inhabited and has cats and rats, Cory's Shearwater, *C.diomedea*, Manx Shearwater, *P.puffinus* and Little Shearwater, *P.assimilis* still manage to breed on the more inaccessible cliffs. Cory's actually have a colony in the boulders at the foot of the cliffs near the village.

British Birds. We have recently received a selection of British Birds with articles on seabirds. **Vol. 90 No 1-2** includes population estimates of birds in the UK, including seabirds, p1-22 and a useful article on the identification of Yellow-legged Gulls in the UK. The main point made is that it is unwise to rely on any single feature to distinguish species but that much can be done by a combination of head shape, appearance and wing tip plumage especially when they are in company with other gulls. The use of the term 'white-headed gull' is misleading as although an adult *michahellis* may stand out amongst Herring Gulls in late October to December most UK birds in UK are post breeding with fine streaking on the head and seen late July to early November. Head streaks are also unlikely on older Herring Gulls, p25-26. **No 3** discusses the chance of a rare migrant actually being sighted in UK and assesses this as 1 in 2. It also includes a list of rarities, 1994-96 confirmed by European bodies p79-93. **No 7** includes 2 letters, one remarking on the movement of White-billed Divers, *G.adamsii* up either coast of England and Scotland in April and June, p292-3, the other on Fulmar, *F.glacialis* feeding on Jellyfish and their parasites, p293. **No 8** deals at some length with the mystery Storm-petrel seen of the Scillies in

1988 and illustrates the difficulty of identifying lesser known species. Despite the presence of 12 experienced observers and a number of photographs it has been impossible to identify the species with sufficient confidence for an acceptable record. The general opinion supports a Matsudaira's *O.matsudairae*, but this assumes that the white carpal patches are not readily seen or are sometimes absent, p305-13, 329-335 and 339-342. Another article discusses the identification of the North American Herring Gull, *L.a.smithsonianus* in company with European species, once again there is no single solution but an immature with a dark rump and black tail merits further study, p314-324.

The North Sea Bird Club's Fulmar, Spring 97, has an account of a Little Auk, *A.alle* being killed and eaten by a Fulmar at AUK A rig 18 Nov.

Scottish Bird News No 46 pages 4-5 praises Easter Ross for birdwatching and the Tarbetness Lighthouse for seabird watching. Counting seabirds in Shetland is described p8-9. A pair of Roseate Terns, *S.dougallii* nested on the Isle of May in 1996.

Dutch Birding Vol. 19 No 1 lists some taxonomic changes in the Dutch Bird list, p21-25. The Dutch Committee are in agreement with the classification of Gannets and Boobies in the RNBWS Check List, but consider that Cormorants should be divided into 9 genera (Siegel-Causey, 1988). The Balearic Shearwater, *P.mauretanicus* was considered specifically distinct from the Yelkouan, *P.yelkouan*. In the Yellow-legged Gulls, *michahellis* and *cachinnans* are provisionally retained as conspecific. Unconfirmed reports include 1500 Leach's Storm-petrel, *O.leucorhoa* seen flying past Larache, Morocco in 2.5 hours. Brown Boobies, *S.leucogaster* were seen off Eilat in February. A great Black-headed Gull, *L.ichthyaetus* was seen at Syracuse, Sicily 6 Jan. A Laughing Gull, *L.atricilla* was recorded at Ramtha Lagoons, UAE on 27 Jan and a Franklin's, *L.pipixcan* at Antibes, Alpes-Maritime on 9 Feb. No less than 9 Ring-billed Gulls, *L.delawarensis* were seen in France in December and 7 in January, one was also seen at Caligar, Sicily, Sardinia. An American Herring Gull, *L.a.smithsonianus* was recorded at Louth, Ireland and first winter birds were seen at Belfast, Northern Ireland 27 Dec - 12 Feb and on 15 February. A second Caspian Yellow-legged Gull, *L.c.cachinnans* was photographed at Pas de Calais 1 Feb. A Thayer's Gull, *L.g.thayeri* was found in Belfast Lough (p47-48) 1 March. Rosses Gull, *R.rosea* were seen at S. Uist, Western Isles 3 Jan, at Fraserburgh, Grampians 1-10 Feb and Dun Laoghaire, Dublin 15-27 Feb. Four Ivory Gulls, *P.eburnea* were present in Iceland in early January. **Vol. 19 No 2** has an article in Dutch on a successful breeding pair of a hybrid Roseate x Common and a Common Tern, the offspring would have been very difficult to identify in the field p64. Unconfirmed reports include a Soft-plumaged Petrel, *P.mollis/feae* at Eilat, 25 March and 10 Yelkouan Shearwater, *P.yelkouan* with Balearic Shearwaters, *P.mauritanicus* off Gerona, Catalonia 6 Apr. Finland's first Laughing Gull was seen at Vastanfjord on 1 May and Frances third Franklin's Gull was seen at Boulogne, Pas de Caais 16-17 March. Bonaparte's Gull, *L.philadelphia* were recorded from Norway, Plymouth Sound and Saltjarnarhes, Iceland. No less than 12 Ring-billed

Palmer, S, Canon, The Vicarage, Portsdown Hill Rd, Cosham, PORTSMOUTH PO6 1BE.

Patrick, C, LA(METOC), 12 Goldcrest Rd, WEYMOUTH, Dorset DT4 0DZ.

Pepper, G M, Mr, 168 Copperfields, LAINDON, Essex SS15 5RZ.

Petrie, M, Mr, c/o Melville Swire Beverages Head Office, GPO Box 1, HONG KONG.

Richardson, C, Mr, Emirates Bird Records Committee, PO Box 50394, Dubai, UAE.

Simpson, J B, Captain RN, The Coach House, Frylands Lane, Wineham, HENFIELD, West Sussex BN5 9BT.

York, D A, CCMEA, 50 Pool St, Crossens, SOUTHPORT, Merseyside PR9 8HZ

Correction

Gray, J D, Captain MN (delete MNI)

Lost Touch

Hart, K E, Chief Eng. Murphy, P, 2nd Eng.

Lisher C R Roberts, C M

Deceased

The Hon Sec regrets to report the death of Miss M Tierney. An ex PO WREN who has been a generous supporter of the society for nearly 30 years.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Change of Address

Thiede, Walter, Dr, An Der Ronne 184, D-50859, KOLN, Germany.

Resignation

Brown, R G B, Dr (due to ill health)

colour, some rings are striped. Reports to David Max EGI, Dept of Zoology, South Parks Rd, OXFORD OX1 3PS.

Shags, *P. aristotelis*. Juveniles on the Isle of May are being given white rings engraved with 3 letters and adults of known age are being given red rings with 3 letters. Reports to Mike Harris, Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Hill of Brathens, BANCHORY, Kincardineshire AB31 4BY. Tel 01330 823434.

RECORDS RECEIVED

The following Seabird and Landbird Reports have been received since the publication of Bulletin 136, together with numerous letters. These are gratefully acknowledged, and several of these are already summarised in *Sea Swallow* 46.

SEABIRDS

CPO(Comms) G H Walton RFA, RFA FORT VICTORIA, 21 Jan - 5 Apr 97, Plymouth, Clyde areas, N. Atlantic, Irish Sea, Scottish waters and N. Sea (8).

Capt P W Jackson MN, MV SEKI CEDAR, 8 Mar - 25 May 97, N. Sea - W. Med and return (2).

Capt T Johannsen German MN, MV MARINE RANGER, 19 May - 8 Jun 97, Rotterdam to River Plate (2 census); 19 Jun - 7 Jul 97, River Plate - Amsterdam (2 census).

Mrs Judith Pentreath, 14 - 18 Mar 97, seabird observations at Eilat, Red Sea, (1 census)

Mrs Jean Abbott, MV HORNBREEZE, 4-25 May 97, Guadaloupe - Costa Rica (1)

A comprehensive list of seabirds from the South Romanian Black Sea Coast has also been received from Gabriel Banica.

LANDBIRDS

CPO(Comms) G H Walton RFA, RFA FORT VICTORIA, 30 Mar - 6 Apr 97, English Channel - SW Approaches (3)

Capt P W Jackson MN, MV SEKI CEDAR, 8 Mar - 25 May 97, N. Sea - W. Med and return (2)

Mrs Jean Abbott, MV HORNBREEZE, 4 -25 May 97, Guadaloupe - Costa Rica (1)

AMENDMENT TO MEMBERSHIP LIST dated 1996

MEMBERS

New Members

Lock, R F, CCWEA(WDO)SM., SSA/DISM/SM551, Foxhill, BATH BA1 5AB.
Mayoh, C, Lt RN, CS2A2, Room 117 AFPAA(C), Centurion Bldg, Grange Rd
GOSPORT PO13 9XA.

Turner, H, Mr, PO BOX 184, Garrison, NY 10524, USA.

Change of Address

Blackburn, D A J, LVO, Vice Admiral, Lythe House, Selbourne, ALTON, Hants
GU34 3JA.

Currie, J K, Capt MN, 4 Danefield Ave, LARGS, KA30 8RU

Gulls were at Sandymount Strand, Dublin Bay 22 March. Common Gull, *L. canus* was seen at Oued Souss estuary, Morocco. A first winter's Gull was seen again at Belfast. A Rosses Gull, *R. rosea* stayed at Bullock Harbour, Dublin from 15 Feb to 29 Mar. The second record for a Royal Tern, *S. maxima* was at Punta De Abona, Tenerife 28 Mar. **Vol. 19 No 3** is mainly devoted to a review of rare birds in the Netherlands during 1995. Unconfirmed reports include a Fea's Petrel, *P. feae* apparently seen of Norfolk 26 Jun, Yelkouan Shearwaters seen in the Atlantic off North West Spain early June and a Wilson's Storm-petrel, *O. oceanicus* was seen 60 miles Northwest of Uist, Shetland. The Helgoland colony of Gannets, *M. bassanus* has increased to 12 pairs. Finland had a series of unusual visitors including Shag, *P. aristotelis*, 10 May, Laughing Gull, May - Jul, a Bonaparte's Gull *L. philadelphia*, 12 May and a Franklin's Gull. *L. pipixcan* 31 May, the latter the first for Finland. Iceland's first American Herring Gull was reported from Sandgerdi on 31 May. A Black-tailed Gull, *L. crassirostris* was reported from Sable Island, Nova Scotia 9 May, the first for Canada if accepted. A Rosses Gull was off Tynemouth 2 May and later off Northumberland. The Netherland's third Ivory Gull, *P. eburnea* was seen near Egmond 17 May and finally the Lesser Crested Tern, *S. bengalensis* mated with a Sandwich Tern, *S. sandvicensis* returned to the Farnes for the 14th year, two other mixed pairs were reported in Spain.

SULA Vol. 11 No 1 deals with the varied diet of the Fulmars of Bear Island, p1-9. On pages 17-20 is a report of around 1000 Little Gulls, *L. minutus* feeding with Terns and Cormorants at a coastal front 8-10 km of Noord-Holland 16-18 Apr. The flocks of Little Auk, *A. alle* and Fulmars off Disko Island, West Greenland, were observed to have a distinct rhythm in their appearances, p21-23.

ALAUDA Vol. 69 No 1 describes how 2 unpaired male Mediterranean Gulls, *L. melanocephalus* helped a pair of Black-headed Gulls, *L. ridibundus* with nest construction and rearing the young. The following season cooperation ceased at the nest building stage possibly due to the arrival of 3 pairs of Mediterranean Gulls, p7-12. **No 2** notes one of the consequential effects of the expansion of the Yellow-legged Gull, *L. cachinnans* in the Mediterranean where roof-top nesting birds have taken to adding roosting Swifts, *A. apus* to their diet, p197-8.

ARDEOLA, Vol. 44(1), June 97 reviews beached bird surveys in Portugal 1990-96. During this period some 2660 birds were recovered mainly in the central area. The main species affected were Razorbill, *A. torda*, Gannet, Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, *L. fuscus*. Deaths from oil and entanglement with fishing debris appeared to be significantly lower than in earlier surveys and were not thought to be a serious threat, p9-17. A second article examines the movements of Yellow-legged Gulls in the Northwest of Spain and compares them with birds in the Mediterranean. The 2 populations appear to be isolated. Unlike the Mediterranean birds immatures moved further from their colonies than adults.

La Garcilla No 97, 1996 has a two page description of the first year Rosses Gull comparing it with Black-headed and Little Gulls. (Spanish only, p22-23)

Seevogel, March 97 tables the results of breeding on the North Sea coast in

1995, and in the Mecklenberg and Velpommern reserves, p11-25. There is an article on Herring Gull predation on Shelduck, *T.tadorna* ducklings; Black-headed Gull and Terns also suffered severely, p26-8. The June edition reports on changes in seabird breeding on Helgoland 1952-96, p38-44, and on coastal migration off the Algarve 1995-6, p53-59. Pages 60-64 compared beached bird surveys Jan - Apr 1995 and 96, in most years the majority are pelagic species but in 96 the Waddensee froze over and there was a high incidence of inland waders and songbirds, p60-64.

Emirate Bird Report No 19 mainly deals with 1994 although the water bird census for 1995 is included, p89-93, the latter includes Gulls, Terns and 37250 Socotra Cormorant, *L.nigrogularis*. Interesting seabird records include a White-eyed Gull, *L.leucophthalmus* at Khor Kalba 9 May and 2 Lesser Noddies, *A.tenuirostris* 14 Sep. Three Long-tailed Skua, *S.longicaudus* were at Ras Dibba 22 Sep. More recent records include a first Little Gull at Khor Kalba 15 Mar - 3 May 96. A Sabine's Gull, *L.sabini* was recorded off Fujeirah beach 8 May 95 and a first Mediterranean Gull on Ramtha tip 20 Jan 95. A Common Noddy, *A.stolidus* appeared off Ras Dibba 16 Jun 95, another first. There is a useful article "Large White-headed Gulls in the UAE" which concentrates on the birds structure (build), wing moult and wing tip patterns to give 6 possible types *Heuglini*, *taimyrensis*, eastern and western *cachinnans*, *barabensis* and *fuscus*. It is possible that Vega, *L.vega birulae* and Armenian, *L.armenicus* may also occur in this area, p94-103. A report on Abu Dhabi islands breeding survey in 1994, p104-14 and a note on White-cheeked Tern, *S.repressa* breeding on Das island in 1996, p115 conclude this interesting edition.

Sandgrouse Vol. 19(1) has a photospot showing White-eyed Gull and Sooty Gull, *L.hemprichii* in different plumages, p18-21. Pages 22-9 cover visits in June and August 1994 to the islands of North and South Geisum, Tawila, Umm el Heimat Saghira and Umm Agawish el Kebir at the mouth of the Gulf of Suez. Species breeding included Brown Booby, *S.leucogaster*, White-eyed Gull, Caspian Tern, *S.caspia* and White-cheeked Tern, *S.repressa*. Sooty Gulls, Swift Tern, *S.bergii*, Lesser Crested Tern, *S.bengalensis* and Bridled Tern, *S.anathetus* could be breeding in the area. Amongst new species reported from Bahrain are Roseate Tern, *S.dougalli* and Sooty Tern, *S.fuscata*, p39-40. A pelagic trip off Al-Mukalla, S. Yemen on 2 Nov produced 125 Jouanin's Petrel, *B.fallax* and 9 Pale-footed Shearwater, *P.carneipes*. A Sooty Shearwater, *P.griseus* was seen off Aqaba 9 Apr, Audouin's Gull, *L.audouinii* is now a regular visitor in autumn to Zaranik and the UAE's 2nd Little Gull was seen near Sila harbour 3 May. An enclosed copy of **Phoenix, No 13 Dec 1996** sponsored by the National Commission for Wildlife and Conservation, PO BOX 61681, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia reports hundreds of Masked Boobies, *S.dactylatra* on Qibliyah Island, Mar 95, p2. Aerial surveys of 310 islands revealed the presence of Red-tailed Tropic Bird, *P.aethereus*, Brown Booby (including over 500 nesting pairs). Sooty and White-eyed Gulls, Swift, Lesser Crested and White-cheeked Terns were mainly found on the Farasan Bank. Bridled Terns were the most numerous and widespread with at least 20,000 counted. Brown Noddy, *A.stolidus* were nesting on the Farasan Bank and Archipelago over 8,700

being counted, p5-6.

Pacific Seabirds Vol. 24 No 1 starts with a call to review the organisation of the society as they are getting increasingly involved in environmental research and face the need for a small secretariat. Bill Bourne's message, p8, that an understanding of the effects of natural phenomena based on solid fieldwork is essential before we start making decisions is underlined by such reports that predation by the Western Gull, *L.occidentalis* threatens to wipe out the SE Farallon Islands population of the Ashy Storm-petrel, *O.homochroa*, p20 and that mouse predation on Xantus's Murrelet, *S.hypoleucus* on Santa Barbara Island will lead to Quasi-extinction in 20 years, p24. Also a study of ways of reducing the seabird bycatch in salmon drift nets shows that the problem is far from simple with different species being affected by different factors such as the time of day, p18. There is an interesting contrast between a large scale reintroduction of Atlantic Puffins, *F.arctica* to 2 sites in Maine involving the release of nearly 2000 chicks and which resulted in 2 colonies of around 20 and 40 pairs respectively, and the restoration of a Common Murre, *U.aalge* colony at Devil's slide Rock where decoy birds, eggs and a sound system resulted in 6 pairs nesting for the first time in 10 years, p17 and 20. Amongst many other interesting papers reviewed is one reporting that the Dark-rumped Petrel, *P.phaeopygia* is not necessarily a nocturnal feeder but is often found with flocks of species associated with opportunities provided by subsurface predators, p21. There is a suggestion that Black-capped Petrels, *P.hasitata* appear to track the Gulf Stream's position, p27 and finally a report that the Rhinoceros Auklet, *C.monocerara* have expanded their range south from Washington to the Channel Island near Los Angeles, California, p29.

LANDLUBBERS CORNER

BTO News No 209 is asking for more volunteers to help with 1997/8 non-Estuarine Coastal Waterfowl Survey. Contact BTO, The Nunnery, THETFORD, Norfolk IP24 2PU.

MoD Bird Count. Due to a reorganisation, MoD Lands (Conservation) has been forced to move and as a result I am a bit behind with collating the MoD Bird Count. There has been better support this year with at least 21 teams taking part and I expect on or two more to come. This year has added 7 more species to the MoD(N) list, these include at least one Osprey at Plymouth (2 sightings), a Corncrake at RNAS MERRYFIELD, Wood Warbler at HMS DRYAD, a pair of Dartford Warbler with young at RM. POOLE and Common Crossbill at HMS FOREST MOOR. A Woodchat Shrike was seen at RNAS PREDANNACK and a White-Billed Diver off Straight Point Range S. Devon. In addition a Golden Oriole was seen at OFD THANKES and outside the period a Jack Snipe at an outstation of RNAS YEOVILTON. Definitely and outstanding year.

RECENT RINGING

Common Tern, *S.hirundo*. Birds have been given a metal ring on one leg and 2 coloured rings on the other. It is important to get the correct position and the