

Royal Naval Birdwatching Society



REGISTERED CHARITY No. 206719

BULLETIN No. 138

APRIL 1998

The 51st AGM was held in the MoD Theatre, Northumberland House, Whitehall, on Friday 5 December at 1400. Capt M K Barritt RN was in the chair, and the President, Vice Admiral Sir David Dobson KBE, Vice Chairman, Captain Sir Thomas Barlow RN, and 15 other members and guests were present.

THE MINUTES

Item 1 Apologies. Apologies for absence were received from Rear Admiral Watson, Col Smith, Col Nason (Chairman AOS), Gp Capt Springett (Chairman RAFOS), Capts Hall, Peach and Renshawe, Cdrs Plummer and Ward, Lt Cdr Witts, W02 P Carr RM, Dr Bourne, Dr Porter, Dr Wolk and Mr Hales.

Item 2. Minutes of 50th AGM. The minutes of the 50th AGM, which had been circulated in Bulletin 136, were put to the meeting. Approval and adoption were proposed by Lt Cdr O'Connell-Davidson, seconded by Mr Howe and carried unanimously.

Item 3. Matters arising.

Item 7. The Chairman was delighted to report that Capt Neil Cheshire had accepted the invitation to be Vice Chairman (MN).

Item 12.

a. UK Dependent Territories Conservation Forum. Following consultation it had been decided not to pursue joint association.

b. Millennium Bird Count. RNBWS, with RAFOS, will be supporting AOS in a plan to highlight the contribution of service-people to data collection by joining in the BirdLife International World Wide Millennium Bird Count. A volunteer was needed as RNBWS point of contact for Major Hilary Nash, the AOS Co-ordinator. The President agreed to write to First Sea Lord to seek his championship once plans were firmed up.

Hudson M J, MBE, Lt Cdr, 31 Whitebeam Close, Colden Common, WINCHESTER SO21 1AJ.

Jackson P, Capt RN, British High Commission, PO Box 679, BRIDGETOWN, Barbados.

Kuiken B H, Mr, De Hingst 14, 8862TZ HARLINGEN, Netherlands.

Murgatroyd A C, MBE, Cdr RN, Strawberry Fields, Hedge End, SOUTHAMPTON SO30 4QY.

Rankin NE, CB, CBE, RAdm, Nettlefields, Coat, MARTOCK, Somerset TA12 6AR.

Change of Address

Baulch P S, Mr, Postcode changed to BS30 9BS.

Brand A G, Capt MN, 4 Beatty Close, Caldy, WIRRAL, Merseyside L48 2JT.

Lock R F, CCWEA(WDO)SM, 2 Sycamore Close, HONITON, Devon EX14 8XP.

Rankin M N, Dr, 15 Copperclay Walk, EASINGWOLD, Yorkshire YO6 3RU.

Todd A H, Mr, 21 Whiteacres Close, GOSPORT, Hants PO12 4XD.

Why T, CPOWTR, c/o Unit Personnel Branch, HMS OSPREY, PORTLAND, Dorset DT5 1BQ.

Lost Touch

Sharp A, Mr

Resigned

Bird J D S, Capt MN. Carr A, PO RN

Palmer S, Canon Smith P W, Mr

Associate Members

New Member

Tierney J, Mr, 419 Victoria Rd, GLASGOW G42 8RW.

Change of Address

Boswell J, Mr, Birotswell, Wraxall, BRISTOL BS19 1 JZ.

Gale E A, Mrs, 5 Wavell Rd, Wilton Park, BEACONFIELD, Bucks HP9 2RN.

Resigned

Wilkinson A, Mrs

Library Member

Change of Address

Hongkong Birdwatching Society, GPO Box 12460, HONGKONG, China

Item 4. Chairman's Report. Capt Barritt referred to his foreword in *Sea Swallow* 46, and reported steps that had been taken during 1997 to encourage ship-borne observation of marine life and natural phenomena. He highlighted opportunities in forthcoming Fleet deployments and asked RNBWS members to inspire their colleagues. He then appealed for younger members to step forward and take on some of the administrative load of the Society, asking volunteers to contact him. He also reported discussions with his fellow Chairmen of AOS and RAFOS, and the proposal that they meet at the MoD Conservation Office to explore avenues for administrative economies.

Item 5. Financial Statement. The Financial Statement for 1996, issued with Bulletin No. 135, was put to the meeting. Acceptance was proposed by Capt Sir Thomas Barlow, seconded by Cdr Furse, and carried without dissent. The Hon. Treasurer reported an unaudited balance creditor for 1997 of £8,100. He stated that the Deposit Account had been closed because it attracted less interest than the Current Account. The NSB Account had been retained. He tabled a detailed Statement of Account for the Diego Garcia Expedition, noting the generous sponsorship from the WWF and Service sources. The Chairman would now write to WWF and to those Establishments that had contributed. It had not proved necessary to use the £1000 of RNBWS funds that had been set aside at the last AGM. There remained an excess of Income over Expenditure of £234.18. It was decided that this should be reserved for use in the next RNBWS expedition to the archipelago (see Item 10). This was proposed by Lt Cdr O'Connell-Davidson, seconded by the President, and carried unanimously.

Three administrative matters were addressed:

- a. **Data Protection Registry.** The Hon Treasurer reported that this did not apply to RNBWS. Any members who did not wish their names to be held on any RNBWS database should contact him.
- b. **Financial Control.** The Executive Committee sought authorisation to spend up to £1000 between AGMs, any such expenditure being reported at the next AGM. This approval was proposed by Cdr Casement, seconded by Rear Admiral Harris and passed unanimously.
- c. **Winding-Up clause.** The RNBWS Constitution does not contain a winding-up clause indicating a beneficiary for outstanding funds. Executive Committee undertook to seek advice on this matter and to report back at the next AGM.

Item 6. Membership Statement. The Chairman drew the attention of members to the following table:

Wildlife Expeditions with Tony Soper

RNBWS member Tony Soper has provided details of a number of voyages for which he will lead a team of distinguished lecturers and excursion leaders. They will cover Antarctica, Spitsbergen, East Greenland, and the islands of the Celtic fringe of the British islands. Full details can be obtained from Noble Caledonia on 0171 409 0376 (Fax: 0171 409 0834). Tony Soper is also publishing a Video-Journal of his ornithological activities. For details write to Tony Soper, Freepost 1155, CANTERBURY, CT3 4BR, UK.

Farne Islands boat trips

J Dawson, 29 Kippylaw, SEAHOUSES, Northumberland NE68 7YH, UK (Mobile 0860 706863) is offering specialist birdwatching and photographic trips in the area. Call, write or Fax 01665 720865 to discuss your requirements.

RECORDS RECEIVED

The following Seabird and Landbird Reports have been received since the publication of Bulletin 137:

Seabirds

Stephen Hales and Derek Hallet, MV VAL DE LOIRE, Plymouth – Santander - Plymouth 20-22 Aug 97, 5 pages of notes.

Lt Ohmann and Lt Cdr Waldmann FGN, FGS FREIBERG, Lisbon, Puerto Rico, Nassau, Norfolk VA, Boston USA, 20 Apr – 23 Jun 97, N. Atlantic (3 census sheets).

Mrs Judith Pentreath, Yacht Salvation Jane 1 May – 15 Jun and 8 Sep – 21 Oct 97, Ionian, Adriatic (8 seabird census sheets, including a number of landbirds).

Bill Curtis, (with Ch Off R S Jay) RFA BRAMBLELEAF 10 Jul – 13 Sep 97, UK to Puerto Rico, 61 sheets of seabird record cards (10 mins counts).

Landbirds

Stephen Hales and Derek Hallet, MV VAL DE LOIRE, Plymouth – Santander – Plymouth 20-22 Aug 97, 5 pages of notes.

Mrs Judith Pentreath, Yacht Salvation Jane 1 May – 15 Jun and 8 Sep – 21 Oct 97, Ionian, Adriatic (a number of landbirds on seabird census sheets)

PO S C Copesey RN, HMS YORK, 6-27 Oct 97, E. Med. (3).

Capt David Simpson has written of his bird sightings on a recent trip to the Yamdena Tanimbar group of islands, in the Indonesian Archipelago, which will appear in the next *Sea Swallow*. He is now back on what will probably be his last trip to the Fly River, PNG, from where we hope to have further reports.

Amendment No 3 to RNBWS Members List October 1996 New Members

European countries and any sightings should be reported as follows:

White rings: Peter L Meininger, National Institute for Coastal and Marine Management / RIKZ, PO Box 8039, 4330 EA Middleburg, The Netherlands.

Black rings: Ukraine 1994, Turkey and Greece 1997. Inform R Flamant, 23 Rue de l'Orme, B-1040, BRUSSELS, Belgium.

Green rings: Inform P Raavel, 87 Rue du General de Gaulle, F-59660, MERVILLE, France.

Red rings: Inform L Varga, Ringing Centre, Hungarian Ornithological Society, Kolto u 21, H-1121, BUDAPEST, Hungary.

Dark blue rings: Inform Ringing Centre IBNS, 9 Via Ca Fornacetta, I-40061 Ozzano Emilia, BOLOGNA, Italy.

Pale blue rings: Inform M Boschert, 18 Wiedigstrasse, D-77815 BUHL / BADEN, Germany.

Yellow rings: P Findley, 75 Gladstone Rd, WALMER, Kent CT14 7ET, UK.

	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>
Ex officio	4	4
Honorary	7	7
Ordinary	189	196
Associate	44	39
Library	<u>50</u>	<u>44</u>
	<u>294</u>	<u>290</u>

RNBWS Seabird Report Sheet

The RNBWS standard reporting Forms have served members well for many years. However, the Executive Committee have been considering whether one standard Seabird Report Form, in a format which might lend itself to reproduction on personal computers (PCs) would be less forbidding, particularly to those non-members to whom RNBWS formats are commended e.g. in RN instructions. The enclosed example is broadly based on the form developed by Captain Neil Cheshire. As is evident, it is intended for completion in manuscript. Indeed since sketches should be a component part of a good field record, we should not discard manuscript lightly. However, the form should also be relatively easy to reproduce on a PC, where the traditional RNBWS landscape format may be preferable to assist logging of positional data. Members' comments are invited, and should be addressed to the Chairman.

Landlubbers Corner

The next MoD Bird Count will be on 23-31 May inclusive, please participate in any organised count and if there isn't one, record what birds you see in your establishment plus any information you can get on nesting and send the notes into me. Last years count was a great success, lets make this year even better.

I wonder how many of you have noticed the loss of birds reported by the BTO on your local patch ? Grey Partridge, Lapwing, Woodcock, Grasshopper Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Tree Sparrow, Turtle Dove, Tawny Owl, Skylark, Tree Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Song Thrush, Redpoll, Bullfinch, Reed and Corn Bunting are all listed. In Hampshire, locally, Bullfinch and Corn Bunting seem to be hanging on but all the others are noticeably fewer. On the credit side Woodlarks seem to be making a comeback.

In addition we exchange SEA SWALLOW for the publications of 22 other Societies. The Chairman recorded the thanks of the meeting for WO Bailey's work in maintaining the List of Members.

Item 7. Executive Committee and Honorary Appointments. Under the terms of the Charities Act 1960 and 1985, the Executive Committee, the UK-based members of which are the Trustees of the Society, offered themselves for re-election: This was proposed by POSA Cutts, seconded by Rear Admiral Harris, and carried unanimously.

At this point the Chairman called for a formal vote of thanks for the outstanding work of the Hon Secretary, the Hon Treasurer, and the Editor of *Sea Swallow*. He reported that the Hon Sec had asked specifically for assistance with

Chairman	Capt M K Barritt RN
Vice Chairman	Captain Sir Thomas Barlow RN
Vice Chairman (MN)	Captain N Cheshire MN
Hon Secretary	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	W02 P Carr RM
Co-opted Member	Cdr F S Ward RN

distribution of *Sea Swallow* and the Bulletins, and requested that volunteers either contact him or the Hon Sec direct.

Item 8. Honorary Auditor. Cdr M Winter RN had carried out the 1996 audit, and the Chairman reported that he would convey thanks from the AGM. The Hon Treasurer reported that Lt D Twist RN is auditing 1997 figures. The Chairman noted

that the Service Funds Accountant based in NELSON may be available for future audits.

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

Caradon (E Cornwall). Lt Cdr G D Lewis reported a proposal that Caradon Society seek affiliation as an RNBWS Library Member. The AGM welcomed this development.

Devonport. Ken Partridge reported that an area had been set aside within CAMBRIDGE for management by the RSPB. It was used for cereal growing, and the winter stubble was attracting Cirl Buntings. Offshore, the 2-year survey of the rat population on the Mewstone was complete, and it was hoped that a report would be rendered by spring 1998. Copies of the English Nature Tamar Estuary Conservation Plan had been made available for members to read. Mr Partridge reported his concern at the exclusion of the Plym Estuary, where he anticipated the recovery of the migrant wader population when the nearby tip closed in 5 years time. Finally, Mr Partridge proposed a RNBWS promotion effort at future Navy Days. The AGM recorded its appreciation of Mr Partridge's representation of RNBWS.

Portland. It had been a quiet year. Mr Cade looked forward to seeing visiting RNBWS members.

MOD Bird Count. The Hon Sec had reported that more RN and RM establishments had taken part this year, and the number of new species was notable. These included Honey Buzzards over RNAD Gosport.

Overseas. POSA Cutts reported forays ashore in Goa and in Burma (Myanmar) and Malaysia. He was encouraged to render a short report for the Journal. The Hon Treasurer had sighted 113 species in 3 days during a trip to Port Canaveral in Florida. Captain Sir Thomas Barlow had continued his voyaging with a passage along the Pacific coast of Canada and the USA. He was delighted to sight the Aleutian Tern *Sterna aleutica*. He reported that Captain Tuck's Field Guide was in use on the bridge of the WORLD DISCOVERER.

Item 10. Exped Member's Report. The Hon Treasurer delivered a comprehensive report from W02 Carr. In 1998 it was planned to return to Lundy to help the Field Society with their annual Breeding Seabird Census. Proposed dates are 9-16 May, and the cost will be £100 per person. The Hon Treasurer will lead the trip, and would be delighted to hear from applicants to take part (Tel: 01752 846723). Tentative enquiries were in hand to assess the feasibility of returning to the Chagos Archipelago in 1999, possibly to survey the western islands, if logistics allowed.

with calicivirus on Cabbage Tree Island, off the coast of New South Wales. Rabbits were originally taken to the island for trials of a pox to destroy them. In practice they have multiplied and are destroying the undergrowth, which protects the only known breeding colony of Gould's Petrel, *P.leucoptera*.

Identification of the Bermuda Petrel, *P.cahow*. A valuable paper on this subject written by Wingate, Hass, Brinkley and Patteson and recently published in 'Cahow' discusses recent sightings off Bermuda and Cape Hatteras (May 96). It is distinguished from its nearest relative the black-capped Petrel, *P.hasitata* by the following:

A dark eye-patch surrounded by deep grey merging into a grey crown and nape rather than a black cap.

A narrow arc of white bordering the black rump or an entirely black upper tail as opposed to black tipped white upper tail.

A diffuse area of pale grey or grey brown down the side of the neck and breast giving a cowled or hooded appearance as against a narrow dark elongate mark at the side of the breast.

Relatively smaller head and bill with less overall arch in the nail of the maxilla.

Underwing patterns are similar but the Bermuda has more dark relative to the light centre of the wing.

At sea overall size is noticeably smaller with more buoyant flight, wings held slightly bowed and near the horizontal as opposed to the vertical (one wing pointing up, the other down) of the black-capped.

1996 Storms and their associated birds. The 1997 Fall Issue of 'Field Notes' gives an account of 4 hurricanes and a tropical storm off the eastern seaboard of USA with associated sightings and their locations. Interesting points include the displacement of unprecedented numbers of Black-capped Petrels, Band-rumped Storm-petrels, *O.castro* to New Jersey and 2 Herald Petrels, *P.arminjoniana* to Virginia. EDOUARD produced over 2100 Leach's Storm-petrels in the Cape Cod area as well as hundreds of other species especially Northern Gannet, *M.bassana*. FRAN is believed to have displaced some 6000 birds including numbers of gadfly petrels, especially Black-capped Petrels to the Lake Erie region, while HORTENSE, on one day alone, deposited a massive fallout of 22 species at First Encounter Beach, Massachusetts on 18 Sep. Sooty Terns, *S.fuscata* appeared particularly susceptible being affected by relatively distant storms.

Ringling

Shags, *S.aristotelis*, breeding on the Isle of May were ringed last year. The young were given white rings with 3 letters and adults of known age given similar red rings. Sightings should be reported to Alastair Duncan, 12 Cairncry Ave, ABERDEEN, AB16 5DS.

Mediterranean Gulls, *L.melanocephalus* have been ringed in several

Penguins, *E.minor*. Apparently the Wandering Albatross sub-species Antipodean, *D.antipodensis* and Gibson's, *D.gibsoni* are being regarded as separate species, p.52.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

Our thanks to Dr Bourne for recent Ornithological Literature Nos 73 and 74, Supplements to the Auk and Ibis. Also to the Grup Balear d'Ornitologia I Defensa de la Naturalesa for their excellent Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Mallorca and Cabrera. To the Army Ornithological Society for their Autumn Bulletin, and to the Oman Bird Group for their Breeding Atlas of Oman. The latter shows a number of locations where Jouanin's Petrel, *B.fallax* are suspected to breed but as yet no nests have been found.

The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Mallorca and Cabrera

This is a very comprehensive review of the breeding birds of the Islands and their associated islets with their physical features, rainfall and vegetation. The degree of endism is examined and species are compared with those on other Mediterranean Islands. Although written in Catalan the authors have very considerably provided a basic Catalan to English vocabulary and an English introduction. The text is supported with easy to read distribution maps, photographs of the major types of habitat and many of the birds. It is reasonably light to if you are flying! ISBN: 84-921579-5-X.

A Provisional Bibliography of the Procellariiformes or Petrels

This fully keyworded listing of 12,830 papers and books on these birds is now on the Internet at – <http://www.zool.canterbury.ac.nz/jwbibpl.htm>. It is in ASCII format and intended to be down-loaded into the users' PC for searching by their own systems. The work covers published material from Aristotle to 1995 inclusive. In due course a revised version will incorporate some of the estimated 4000 citations evidently with data on Petrels but not yet seen by me. These will be listed in a 'WANTS' file at the above address. The finished version will also include indexes tying each keyword to all the citations bearing that keyword – in the style of the Zoological Record. The bibliography is available without charge (by me, anyway).

John Warham, Zoology Dept., University of Canterbury, P.B. 4800, CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand.

E-mail – j.warham@zool.canterbury.ac.nz

Interesting Cuttings

Our thanks to Dr Bourne who has sent three cuttings which have been summarised below:

Gould's Petrel threatened by rabbits. An Australian newspaper cutting reports that the Australian National Parks Wildlife Service has released rabbits infected

Item 11. SEA SWALLOW. Cdr Casement explained the remarkable achievement in holding down costs of production over the last 9 years and reported messages of appreciation for the continued standard and interest of the Journal. However, he noted with disappointment the dearth of contributions by young and active sea-going members. He noted that 90 copies were still being purchased for Ship's Libraries, but urged members to make suggestions for increasing circulation, and also for good use of back numbers. This led to several suggestions by members that RNBWS should be represented at Bird Fairs and other conduits. The Hon Treasurer undertook to look into this area and to report back at the next AGM. The Chairman asked members to promote RNBWS within any suitable societies, clubs or associations to which they belonged, and undertook to write an article for the Nautical Institute journal. He would particularly stress the value of RNBWS for cruise ship staff and passengers. Cdr Casement also proposed that a volunteer should be sought to promote links with the Editor of SANCTUARY, the MoD Conservation magazine. The Chairman would be delighted to hear from any member willing to undertake this task. Cdr Casement indicated that he had given formal notice that he would be resigning as Editor after production of the next edition, which would be the 18th that he had produced. However, he was willing to continue with the analysis of landbird reports. The Chairman noted that this would be a most significant landmark in RNBWS history. Cdr Casement had followed in Capt Tuck's footsteps in providing a journal that had been the major source of instruction and encouragement to sea-going amateur observers. This had only been achieved by self-sacrificial commitment and by forward-looking adoption of desk-top techniques. He appealed for volunteers to assist with future editing and production of *Sea Swallow* to contact him as soon as possible during the coming year. He concluded by calling on the AGM to show their appreciation for Cdr Casement's continued dedicated work.

Item 12. Report of the Working Group on use of PCs for data analysis. Mr Howe spoke for the corresponding Working Group. He reported that, since the last AGM, he had captured observational data from the first 12 of the 46 volumes of *Sea Swallow*, representing some 5000 records of over 750 species. With the other members of the group he expected to maintain good progress with the remaining volumes of the Journal. If it were decided to tackle the original observational records it would clearly require more hands at the pump. He demonstrated the facility of PC processing for rapid production of an informative index. He also showed how the mapping facility provided distributional plots, which quickly bowled out erroneous positional data.

Mr Howe urged that RNBWS start now with PC-processing of new reports from members. The Chairman noted this advice, restating his concept that members acting as data managers for specific oceans should perform an initial sorting and quality control of reports, high-lighting interesting or dubious data before passing both the reports and the PC products to the Editor of the Journal for comment by our ornithological advisers. He asked the Working Group to confer and report to him

formally their recommendation that *Bird Recorder for Professionals* be used by RNBWS. He would then act on the recommendation of the last AGM and authorise purchase or upgrade of software for the volunteer data managers. He recorded Lt Cdr Bailey's willingness to join the team. He suggested that the result of the Group's efforts was timely in view of the need to review the way ahead for editing and production of the Journal, and he particularly thanked Mr Howe for his determined efforts.

The Hon Sec had suggested that RNBWS should consider whether Internet offered opportunities. A number of members at the AGM commented on the mechanism for setting up a Society web-site. Specifically, Lt Cdr O'Connell-Davidson offered to report back at the next AGM on experience in another small society which would be exploring costs and implications during 1998.

The Chairman reported the outcome of consultation on production of a single reporting form in a format that lent itself to PC generation. A sample was passed round, and it was agreed that a completed example should be circulated with the next Bulletin, inviting comment.

Item 13. Any other business. The following matters were discussed:

- a. DNPTS. A letter had been sent to Capt Robinson on his retirement, thanking him for his support of RNBWS.
- b. BirdLife Associate Status. The Chairman outlined key points from a definition of Associate Status, and noted the agreement of the AGM that RNBWS should continue the joint subscription with AOS and RAFOS.
- c. Scottish Seabird Centre. The meeting agreed unanimously to a donation of £50 to an appeal chaired by Rear Admiral Rankin to set up the new centre. This was proposed by Mr Howe and seconded by the President. It was agreed that the Hon Treasurer should ask Admiral Rankin to recommend new Local Representatives for the Faslane and Rosyth areas.
- d. Mr Howe reported that UK and American ornithological societies would meet in St John's Newfoundland in 2000. The AGM noted that he and the Chairman would watch for opportunities to flag up RNBWS in that forum.
- e. Major Bond brought the greetings of AOS, and invited an RNBWS representative to attend their AGM during the weekend 8-10 May at Stanford in Norfolk. Any member who would like to represent the Executive Committee is asked to contact the Chairman.

A lack of knowledge of their breeding biology migration and wintering habits make the preparation of a conservation plan difficult, p.80. The Long-billed Murrelet, *B.perdix* found in Asia has been recognised by the American Ornithological Union as a separate species from the Marbled Murrelet, *B.marmoratus*, p.84. Murrelets and Guillemot have been caught at night using spotlight techniques, p.88. Radar has been found the most accurate method of counting Marbled Murrelets, p.91.

Australasian Seabird Group Letter No 32 is a bumper edition. The first part deals with unconfirmed reports from pelagic trips off Australia. The more notable sightings from a 6 day trip to the Ashmore Reef Western Australia in Oct 96 include possible Leach's Storm-petrel, *O.leucorhoa*, Bulwer's Petrel, *B.bulwerii*, Jouanin's Petrel, *B.fallax*, Tahiti Petrel, *P.rostrata* and Streaked Shearwater, *C.leucomelas*. Southport, Queensland reported a Soft-plumaged Petrel, *P.mollis*, unusual for this area, 26 Oct. Sydney produced Black Petrel, *P.parkinsoni* and Buller's Shearwater, *P.bulleri* on 31 Oct 96, a Black-winged Petrel, *P.nigripennis* on 14 Dec and 2 Grey Ternlets, *P.albivitta* on 18 Jan 97. Wollongong, NSW had a possible Murphy's Petrel, *P.ultima* (a first for Australia if confirmed), Cook's Petrel, *P.cookii*, Westland Petrel, *P.westlandica*, Manx Shearwater, *P.puffinus* and Audubon's Shearwater, *P.lherminieri* all on 27 Oct 96, possibly these were caught up in a big movement of Mottled Petrel, *P.inexpectata* and Short-tailed Shearwater, *P.tenuirostris*. The 24 Nov produced a Little Shearwater, *P.assimilis*, unusual for this area and on 26 Jan 97 a Tahiti Petrel and Grey Ternlets were sighted. Finally a Great Shearwater, *P.gravis* was seen off Sydney 20 Apr. The second part deals with extracts from the papers presented at the Seabird Group Symposium "Seabirds in the Marine Environment". A number of these dealt with the part played by fishing discards as a seabird food source. The last section deals with research in New Zealand where trials of 2 contractors devices for baiting hooks two metres underwater have shown promise and are now being tested in more representative sea conditions, p.50. On Chatham Island the number of breeding burrows of the Magenta Petrel (Taiko), *P.magentae* have been reduced from 6 to 4 but at the time of writing it was hoped that all would be successful. Work was also proceeding on the Chatham (Island) Petrel, *P.axillaris*, which although more numerous suffered unusually high chick mortality in 1997, p.51. Over a period of 6 years Fluttering Petrels, *P.gavia* have been transferred from Long Island to Maud Island, both in Marlborough Sound. Breeding has now begun on Maud; this is the first successful translocation of a procellariform. In another lengthy study of Grey-faced Petrel, *P.macroptera gouldi* in West Auckland there has been limited success with a captive rearing trial which could lead to a programme which would apply to rarer species, p.51. Showing "you cannot win all the time" removal of rabbits from Motunau Island, Canterbury has resulted in the growth of boxthorn thickets with a possible decline in Fairy Prions, *P.turtur* and Little

SANDGROUSE Vol 19 No 2 has a recommendation that the Socotra Cormorant, *P.nigrogularis* should be placed in the highest threat category by ICWN/BirdLife. This species is not protected in the UAR and at least 5 major colonies have disappeared in recent decades; the largest colony on Sinaiya Island reputedly failed in 1995 due to people driving through at a critical point in the breeding season, p.108. An article on *L.fuscus/cachinnans/argentatus* type gulls in Bahrain, p.111-121, considers that *fuscus*, *heuglini*, *taiomyrensis* and *cachinnans* were present in Dec 92, mainly *cachinnans*. Wide variations in the dark markings on the bill and in the colour of the legs were recorded. It was not found possible nor practical to separate *taiomyrensis* from possible *birulai* or *barabensis*. Because of the wide variation in bill markings in this group the black bill band cannot be regarded as identification of *armenicus* unless supported with a detailed description of the bird and preferably a good photograph.

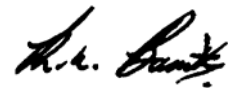
PACIFIC SEABIRDS Vol 24 No 2 is packed with information as usual. There is an interesting and hard-hitting history of seabird groups by Bill Bourne, which stresses the need for more research on the effect of weather on seabirds, the need for independent funding and also for more careful targeting of research, p.54-56. Pages 58-61 review the relationship between seabirds and fisheries summarising current research in Europe and the USA. Pages 62-8 deal with an abortive search for the Long-tailed Murrelet, *B.perdix* on Hokkaido Island, Japan, the search was unable to rule out the possibility of breeding. The first breeding record for the Slaty-backed Gull, *L.schistisagus* at Cape Romanzof, Alaska occurred in 1996, p.70, all previous reliable records have been Asiatic. Over the page is an account of the first Caspian Tern, *S.caspia* to nest in Alaska in 1994, also near Cape Romanzof. In 1996 it was noticed that Thick-billed Murres, *U.lomvia* at Coats Island, North West Territories, were apparently affected by a disease, p.71 and Newcastle disease was found in chicks of the Double-crested Cormorant, *P.auritus* on the Columbia river, p.89, while a big die-off of seabirds in Alaska with a number of separate incidents affecting different species is thought to be due to unusually warm and stratified water, p.77-8. Washington State Fish and Wildlife have instituted a number of measures to reduce entanglement, a reduction of corks by the bunt of the purse net so that birds can escape over the top, a panel of white twine immediately below the cork line of gill nets, no gill net fishing during morning and evening change of light and no fishing within 1500ft of the shore in areas nominated as high seabird density, p.75-6. A survey of Galapagos Penguins, *S.mendiculus* and Flightless Cormorants, *P.harrisi* was carried out in 1997. There was a 27% increase in the former but Cormorants were down and breeding seems to be affected by the recent high sea temperatures, p.76-7. The activities of the Circumpolar Seabird group are reported, p.79-80, these include Conservation and Action Plans for Eider and Murres. The Pacific Seabird Group reports its concern at the apparent decline in Eider, Harlequin, *H.histrioniocus* and Old Squaw, *C.hyemalis*, seabird.

Item 14. Presentations. The AOS Trophy for the ship in the Fleet which had submitted the best environmental observations during the year including bird reports, was awarded to Naval Party 1016, which operates from the MV PROUD SEAHORSE in the North Sea and English Channel. The Chairman noted that the judges had awarded the trophy to the party because of steady improvement in the quality of their data during the year. Lt Adam James, CO of Naval Party 1016 received the trophy from Major Bond. Lt James remarked on the need for field guides and clear forms to assist and encourage observation.

There were no new contributors to *Sea Swallow* from amongst the RNBWS membership during 1997, and the prize for the best article for the Journal was not awarded.

Item 15. Date and place of the next meeting. This would take place on Friday 4 December 1998, in the MoD Theatre, Northumberland House, Whitehall.

Item 16. Presentation on the Diego Garcia Expedition. Cpl Colin Shannon RM opened the presentation with a clear exposition of the location of the expedition area, an introduction of the team members, and a summary of the 5 field-work aims. Excellent slides illustrated the logistical challenges as members swam in through surf from RM Rigid Raiders to conduct a census of East, Middle and West Islands. Census work and study of rat and cat predation on the main island of Diego Garcia involved penetration of densely overgrown areas. LA (METOC) Chris Patrick provided an authoritative commentary to his own splendid slides illustrating the birds which they had encountered, including Brown Noddies *Anous stolidus* and Red-footed Boobies *Sula sula* which they had ringed, measured and weighed. Cdr John Topp added his great knowledge of the archipelago to the discussion of introduced species and the extent of predation. He agreed to act as point of contact to enable the team to check reports of earlier expeditions. He also suggested that RNBWS consider making the Chagos Archipelago an area for regular expedition work. Cpl Shannon concluded the presentation by highlighting the way in which undertakings to WWF on publication of results would be honoured. Thanking the two presenters the Chairman remarked that members would all look forward to publication of the full expedition report in *Sea Swallow* in 1998.



M K Barritt
Capt RN
Chairman

G D Lewis
Lt Cdr RN
Honorary Treasurer

NEWS FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The **Army Ornithological Society's "Adjutant" Vol 26 1996/97** includes a report on Exercise BOOBY V the fifth expedition to Ascension Island. All the Sooty Tern, *S.fuscata*, fairs were surveyed and a total of 388,000 birds calculated. Masked Boobies, *S.dactylatra* were found breeding for the first time for several years. Some action has been taken against feral cats but the promised eradication programme against cats and rats had not formally started. A heavy toll continues to be exacted but in this particular season, which was a good one for Sooty Terns, it did not reduce the numbers below seasonal numbers. Young Frigate Birds, *F.aquila* are also taken by cats. The team noted that a few Frigate Birds had developed a technique of pushing brooding Sooty Terns off the nest and taking their chicks whilst still remaining airborne. The team considered that Sooty Terns would almost certainly make use of the LETTERBOX area if a cat proof fence could be provided; other species were already starting to breed in the area. DNA samples were taken for most species of birds on the island and ringing also took place.p.4-23.

RAFOS Newsletter No 64 Autumn 1997 includes articles on birdwatching trips to the Varanger Fjord, Norway and a visit to Guinard Bay, North Scotland where they found the point at Rubha Beag very good for seabird watching.

BIRDLIFE Annual Review 1996 outlines the considerable progress in world-wide conservation activities. The establishment of the Tuscan Archipelago National Park will protect some 200 pairs of breeding Audouins Gulls, *L.audouinii*. Their **Bulletin No 4** gives a brief note on a survey of Mocha Island, Chile as part of an investigation of a decline in the numbers of Pink-footed Shearwater, *P.creatopus* found on their colony on Juan Fernandez (1983). The expedition in 1997 found some 25,000 pairs of Pink-footed. Two islets to the south held the most southern colony of Peruvian Pelican, *P.thagus* and the most northerly colony for Cormorant, *P.atriceps* (p.4). There is also a mention of a change in the wintering habits of Sooty Shearwater *P.Griseus* possibly linked to climatic change, p.1. **Bulletin No 5** notes that the American Bird Conservancy is studying the damage caused by cats and would welcome any new papers on this subject p.2. Page 6 refers to the possibility of the west coast of Abu Dhabi and its islands being accepted as a World Heritage Site. It includes one third of the breeding population of the Bridled Tern, *S.anaethetus* and around half that of the Socotra Cormorant, *P.nigrogularis*.

RSPB Birds, Winter 1997 reports that Roseate Terns, *S.dougallii* had a good year at Croquet Island and a pair bred at Green Island, Carlingford Lough for the first time. The Bempton breeding cliffs had a second disaster after the summer gales when an oil spill caught many of the birds unable to fly, over 600 were washed up. However the Gannet, *M.bassanus*, colony has increased. RSPB

may be partly related to the local fishing industry (Spanish) p.183-9. Interesting records for 1997 are summarised (Divers to Cormorants, p.243; Skuas, Gulls, Terns and Alcidea, p.254-6). Recent sightings of Mediterranean Gulls in the north (Cantabria) seem to indicate that more birds are wintering in this area. Sabine's Gulls were seen off Pontevedra (Ons Islands) and off Cape Finisterre. A Slender-billed Gull, *L.genei* was seen off Asturias in 1993 and in 1994 at Donana National Park, finally a juvenile Audouins Gull was seen at El Abra, Getxo (Viscaya) 7 Jul 97.

La Garcilla No 98 1997, deals mainly with conservation in Spain but has a review of rare birds added to the list for Spain and the Canaries up to 1995, p.24-27. **No 99** describes an Elegant Tern, *S.elegans* found in a party of Sandwich Terns, *S.sandvicensis* on 24 Apr 93, the first record for the Iberian peninsula, p.26-27.

Annuari Ornitologic de les Balears Vol 11 1996 has a major article on the breeding birds of Formentera. Cory's Shearwater, *C.diomedea* and Balearic Shearwater, *P.y.mauretanicus* are both breeding and the European Storm-petrel, *H.pelagicus militensis* is thought to breed. Gulls are represented by Yellow-legged, *L.c.michaellis* and a single offshore colony of Audouin's, *L.audouinii*, p.13-34. A Cory's Shearwater was recovered in the Cabrera National Park 22 years after being ringed as a chick, p.45 and a partly albino European Storm-petrel with white on chin, forehead and the webs of both feet was caught off Cabrera, p.47-9. The latest status of species for the area is listed, p.57-117. Visitors reported in 1996 include Arctic Skua, *S.parasiticus* and Long-tailed Skua, *S.longicaudus*. Ringing recoveries including Cory's Shearwater, European Storm-petrel, Audouin's Gull and Yellow-legged Gull are given p.142-50.

SEEVOGEL Sep 97 reviews work on the island of Griefswalder Oie which lies in the Baltic near Rugen and which is very important for songbird migration, p.71-4. An article on species breeding between Flensburg and Lubeck lists breeding numbers from 1984-1995, seabirds are represented by several species of gulls and terns, p.82-98. The December number starts with a classification of birds by chemical analysis of Bürzeldrüsensekret p.105-109 (German only). A study of birds found on the beaches of the East Friesian island of Langeoogs shows some reduction in the number of deaths by oiling between 1988 and 1996, p.117-122. A count of Little Gulls, *L.minutus* in Eastern Schleswig-Holstein during the 1996 spring passage recorded 29,500 probably most of the Baltic breeding population, p.123-125.

Oman Bird News No 21 records their first South Polar Skua, *C.maccormicki* at Masirah 10 Oct 95. Other records include Jouanin's Petrel, *B.fallax* seen in the evening of 29 May at Ras Al Khabbah, possibly nesting nearby. On the same day 180 Pale-footed Shearwaters, *P.carneipes* and 1200 Audubon Shearwaters, *P.lherminieri* were seen heading south. The results of the 1997 Winter Waterfowl Count are on pages 21-23.

SULA Vol 11 No 2 is a special issue devoted to a study of beached birds in Holland over a period of 30 years and concludes that combining European beached bird counts could provide a reasonable indication of pollution. There has been a gradual reduction of oil pollution off Holland over the last 15 years but there is no room for complacency as far too much oil continues to be discharged at sea and there is the continued risk of massive oil spills. **Vol 11 No 3** deals with the recovery of oiled seabirds. From a number of articles it is clear that a high proportion of oiled birds die shortly after release, probably 70-75%. However there is evidence that some birds treated in Holland have returned to the Isle of May to breed successfully, p.183-5. In general a bird's chances improve significantly if it survives the first month after release. There is also evidence that improved techniques of treatment are improving the survival rate. Much more data is needed. Size may also be a factor as a Great Black-backed Gull, *L. marinus* which was released heavily oiled and untreated in Holland was shot 2 years later in Helgoland in perfect condition, p.203. On page 200 a paper warns researchers not to treat 1997 as a typical year because of the severity of the effects of El Nino.

SULA Vol 11 No 4 has an important article by Bourne and Simmons describing a dark-rumped Leach's Storm-petrel found in the South Atlantic which was similar to the Eastern Pacific race but intermediate in size between that and a Swinhoe's, *O. monorhis*. The identification was confirmed by DNA analysis. A number of birds with unusually dark rumps have been recorded and unless the colour of the primary shafts can be seen their identity seems to be uncertain, p.209-215. In an article on Fulmars, squid and annelids, Dr Bourne notes that two thirds of a sample of Northern Fulmar, *F. glacialis* had parts of deepwater squid and annelids in their stomachs. It is suggested that these are caught at night when they rise nearer to the surface. Fulmar are quite capable of diving, p.217-222. A corpse of a second year Great Shearwater, *P. gravis* was found on the Netherlands coast at Petton, it is suspected that this species is commoner off the Netherlands than realised, p.223-7. An article on prey selection by Dr Bourne, p.230-32 notes that round fish are taken for preference, then small flat fish and finally large flat fish. Cormorants, *P. carbo* and Herring Gulls, *L. argentatus* will both take the smaller flat fish. However the larger they are the more difficult they are to swallow and this increases the risk of birds being harassed and losing their catch.

ALAUDA Vol 65 No 3 has an extensive article on the spread of rooftop nesting by Herring Gulls, *L. argentatus*, Lesser Black-backed, *L. fuscus*, Yellow-legged Gulls, *L. cachinnans* and Great Black-backed, *L. marinus*, p.209-227. **Vol 65 No 4** has no seabird articles.

ARDEOLA Vol 44(2) Dec 97 discusses the behaviour of Audouin's Gull breeding in the Columbretes Islands (Castellon, E. Spain) unlike similar birds at other colonies large numbers of 3 year old or more adults winter in the area. It

are campaigning for tight regulation of fishing on the Wee Bankie just off the Firth of Forth to prevent the sand eels being decimated.

British Birds Vol 91 No 3 has a useful article on second year Ring-billed Gulls, *L. delawarensis* comparing them with second year Common Gulls, *L. canus*. Apart from size and shape of the bill the former has a much greyer mantle and wings and much less white on the primaries. The adult Ring-billed has more white on the primaries but there are plenty of other factors such as the pale irides which should prevent confusion with the second year Common, p.90-92. A remarkable observation was the killing of 2 Black-head Gulls by a Cormorant, *P. carbo* which found them swimming together entangled by a line; it made no attempt to eat them, p.109.

The **BTOs 63rd Annual Report** reviews the progress of their numerous activities which includes the computerisation of their records starting with ringing. One item, which may have a parallel in seabird breeding, noted that the number of waders on an estuary was related to the amount of disturbance by predators. Waders were more affected by the highly visible Peregrine than the stealthy Sparrowhawk p.7-8.

BTO NEWS No 213 gives the ringing highlights of 1995 (p.5) which include the retrapping of a 32 year old Common Tern, *S. hirundo*. On page 13 there is a review of the JNCC's Seabird Monitoring Programme, current practices are described in the Seabird Monitoring Handbook for Britain and Ireland 1995. Studies of breeding show that Kittiwake, *R. tridactyla* breeding success in Shetland (one per pair) is twice that of colonies in the Southern Irish Sea. A decline in Guillemots, *U. aalge* and Razorbill, *A. torda* attending colonies in South Eastern Scotland and South Wales has been noticed in recent years. **BTO News No 214** page 5 reviews the BTO's research into the fate of oiled birds, which have been cleaned up. Out of 79 Guillemots 83% died in the first month, 14% died in the second and only one was known to be alive a year later. This is broadly in line with the Dutch experience (See **SULA Vol 11 No 3** further on). Experience with larger birds in South Africa such as Cape Gannet, *M. capensis* and Jackass Penguin, *S. demersus* have been much more successful.

SEABIRDS 19 has the usual range of interesting articles starting with a review of information about different seabird/wader species laying in the same nest. Usually this is just one egg laid mid-clutch which seldom survives as far as hatching, p.3-4. Kittiwake numbers in Shetland are reviewed against Skua predation, since 1995 this is thought to be a major contributor to the fall in numbers, p.12-21. There are 2 articles on counts of Storm-petrel, *H. pelagicus*, by playing back the male 'purr' outside the breeding burrows, p.22-30 and p.40-46. Other articles include ringing recoveries from Guillemots breeding in the Isle of May, p.31-39, a first record of gannets breeding on the Kola Peninsula, Russia p.54-57, and the discovery that male and female Razorbill, *A. torda*, catch different species of prey, p.58-9.

SEABIRD GROUP Letter 78 starts with a proposal to replace SEABIRD and the Dutch seabird group SULA with a single journal published jointly twice a year. Eradication of Handa's rats was started in 1997 and preliminary results were encouraging, p.5. Cory's Shearwater, *C.diomedea* and Manx Shearwater, *P.puffinus* counts from Cape St Vincent and Pinto do Sagres are on pages 6 and 10 together with other species seen. Breeding on Foula in 1997 was moderately poor with most species breeding late; Kittiwakes continued to decrease and Arctic Terns, *S.paradisaea* had a poor season, and supplies of food were only moderate, p.11-12.

FULMAR No 83 Autumn 97 has less seabird reports than usual, there were late Glaucous Gulls, *L.hyperboreus* on 3 Jan. At KOMMANDER SUBSEA the 2 May produced Long-tailed Ducks, *C.hyemalis*, Black-throated Diver, *G.arctica*; and a Great Northern Diver, *G.immer*. Manx Shearwaters appeared off MORECOMBE C from 16 June. It was a good year for landbirds on the offshore rigs.

Scottish Birds Vol 19 No 2. Fulmars, *F.glacialis*, ringed as chicks in the Firth of Forth appear to return in their 5th or 6th years. Most recoveries occurred in the first year, mainly on the East coast of England and from the Low Countries, p.86-92. Unusually for the UK Razorbills, *A.torda* have been found breeding over 100m inland on the Isle of May. Kittiwakes and Puffins, *F.arctica* had overspilt on to the shores of a freshwater loch and in 1995 Razorbills were seen standing on old Kittiwake nests. Fledglings would have to circumvent the dam wall and cross 50m of loose soil and rock containing several Herring Gull, *L argentatus* territories. It is not known if any survived to reach the sea, p.121-2.

LONDON BIRD REPORT 1995 has the usual mixture of seabirds turning up including Pomarine Skua, *S.pomarinus*, Ring-billed Gull, *L.delawarensis* and Long-tailed Skua, *S.longicaudus*. The Cormorant colony, *P.carbo*, at Walthamstow increased to 152 nests. Kittiwake were recorded in every month of the year and the number of visiting Mediterranean Gulls, *L.melanocephalus*, rose to 79 between January and May and to 30 between July and September.

DUTCH BIRDING Vol 19 No 4 has unconfirmed reports starting with a Fea's Petrel, *P.fea*, photographed on 7 July off Sable Island, Nova Scotia, a first for Canada. A Cory's Shearwater, *C.diomedea* was seen off Camperduin, Holland 21 Aug and a Swinhoe's Storm-petrel, *O.monorhis*, was trapped at Revekaaien, Rogoland, Norway on 9 Aug, the second caught here, but not the same bird. Another was caught at Cabrera, Balearics 16 Aug. A Red-billed Tropic Bird, *P.aethereus* was present off Madeira 23 July. In Eastern Canada a Black-tailed Gull, *L.crassirostris* was present during the summer. Ringed Mediterranean Gulls, *L.melanocephalus* on the Pas de Calais were found to be mostly from Belgium and the Netherlands with a few from Hungary, Germany and Italy. First records of Laughing Gull, *L.atricilla* occurred at Dragsfjord,

Finland and Groningen, Netherlands 22 Jul and 22 Aug respectively. A Bonaparte's Gull, *L.philadelphia* was at St Andrews, Scotland 21 Aug and the first Audouin's Gull, *L.audouinii* for the North Sea was seen 20km east of Helgoland 16 Jul, p.200-205. In **No 5** an article describes the different species of seabirds seen off Wollongong during pelagic cruises throughout the year, p.235-241. Unconfirmed reports include Soft-plumaged Petrel, *P.fea* / *madeira* off Cape Clear, Cork in Aug and off Portland Bill and Cley, Norfolk in Oct. 1500 Great Shearwater, *P.gravis* flew past Cape Clear on 25 Aug and 5285 the following day. Four Cory's Shearwater were off Denmark 3-5 Oct bringing the years total to 12. A Wilson's Storm-petrel, *O.oceanicus* seen off Gdansk Bay will if accepted, be the first record for Poland. There was a large influx of Leach's Storm-petrel, *O.leucorhoa* in NW Europe Sept-Oct. Nearly 4000 Pomarine Skuas, *S.pomarinus* were seen off Galicia 11-13 Oct and there was a large influx of Sabine's Gull, *L.sabini* in Western Europe Aug-Oct. A Lesser Black-backed Gull, *L.fuscus greall* ringed in the Netherlands in 1991 was seen near New York on the 7 Oct. A Royal Tern, *S.maxima* at Grande Briere, Loire-Atlantique in early Oct and a first year Aleutian Tern, *S.aleutica* at Revtingen, Rogoland 28 Sept will be firsts if confirmed. **Vol 19 No 6** discusses the variability of the field characteristics of the Pontic Yellow-legged Gull, *L.c.cachinnans*, p.277-9. Most birds had a pale eye with a pale orbital ring, but 25% had a dark orange ring. In 2-3% the eye was dark with a red orbital ring. Leg colour varied from pale greyish yellow to deep yellow and 50% had markings on their gonys. This stresses the need to have several characteristics before attempting to get identification. In a letter the description of a Tern as a 'well marked' Common Tern, *S.hirundo* is queried, the writer points out that if European birds can fly to Australia there is a possibility that Far Eastern subspecies could turn up in Europe and that the bird was indistinguishable from *S.h.minussensis*, p.283-4. A brief synopsis of the 2nd International Large Gulls Meeting in Denmark last September, p.318-9 promises further papers on the results of mtDNA research and of a new approach to ageing gulls by counting the generations of primaries. Unconfirmed reports include a late Bulwer's Petrel, *B.bulwerii* off the Canaries on 6 Nov and 559 Leach's Storm-petrel on 4 Nov. Two Slender-billed Gulls, *L.genei* were seen off the Canaries on 9 Nov and 250 Great Shearwater, *P.gravis* on 21 Nov. An unseasonable Bulwer's Petrel was seen off Camperduin, Noord Holland 5 Dec. If accepted, a Great Black-headed Gull, *L.ichthyaetus* seen off Corsica 3 Nov will be the first record for France, another was seen off Sicily 28 Dec, the 10th or 11th for Italy. There was an increase in the number of 'Pontic' Yellow-legged Gulls in Holland, Germany and other parts of Europe possibly including England probably due to the increased information on field characteristics. An Ivory Gull, *P.eburnea* was seen near Barry, South Wales on 2 Jan, p302-304.