

Royal Naval Birdwatching Society



REGISTERED CHARITY No. 206719

BULLETIN No. 143

SEPTEMBER 2000

THE FIFTY FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM will take place on Friday 8 December in the MOD Theatre in Northumberland House, Northumberland Avenue just off Trafalgar Square. The nearest underground stations are Charing Cross and Embankment.

Business at the AGM will include:

- Election of committee members.
- After the meeting there will be a demonstration of the capabilities of the RNBWS data base given by Mr S. Howe.

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 the Hon Sec know if they are attending and the names of any guests not later than 1 December.

CHANGE OF HON. TREASURER.

Lt Cdr D.L. Griffiths RN has kindly volunteered to take over as Hon, Treasurer. His address is—Health Physics Group Manager, HM Naval Base, Devonport, Plymouth PL2 2BG.

SPECIAL REDUCED OFFERS TO RNBWS MEMBERS.

British Birds. This includes behaviour, conservation, ecology and identification not to mention reports on migrants, breeding birds and rarities. Very good value for money. Subscription Rates are £40 in UK, £44 overseas surface mail and a further £1.00 can be saved by paying direct debit.

Bird Watcher's Yearbook. This is offered to UK members for £12.50 (Normal price £14.00) and 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 includes Sunset and Tide Tables. I find it very useful (see

enclosed flyer)

RNBWS TIES AND LOGOS

Navy blue ties with a multiple Sea Swallow motif are available from Hon Treasurer at £6.00 each including postage within UK, postage overseas will be additional. Shield-shaped logos suitable for windcheaters etc, are also available at 50p each, plus 19p postage 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 land birds at sea. Articles should be between 1,500 and 2000 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 be supplied on Floppy disk, specifying the word-processing software used. Text File 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 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 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.

The Army Ornithological Society's **ADJUTANT Vol. 28** is the last before it merges with the RAFOS magazine and becomes the OSPREY. There is a major article on the Status of the Sooty Tern, *S.fuscata*, p.4-13, reviewing past expeditions and suggesting cautious optimism for the future. There are numerous other articles on land species from France, Finland, Sweden, India and the Northern Territories of Australia.

BIRD WATCH ARTIST OF THE YEAR AWARD.

The four competition categories are as follows: Colour; Black and White; Identification and Young Artist of the Year. Each category winner will be awarded prizes to a value of £850: These comprise a pair of top quality Swarovski SLC binoculars, £250-worth of HarperCollins books and a three-year subscription to *Birdwatch*. In addition, the artwork judged to be of the highest quality overall will gain a further cash prize of £1000.

Artists are free to choose their own subject matter as long as the theme is wild birds. Entrants should write immediately to the following address for a registration form and full rules; Birdwatch Artist of the Year 2000 Awards, 3D/F Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, London NI 3QP. Entries must be submitted by 30 November 2000.

AMENDMENT NO 3 to LIST OF MEMBERS 1999

New Members.

Burlton, T, Mr. MOD, Capital CFSS, Room 87, Block A, Warminster Road, Bath, BA1 5AA.

Chippis, A, Mr, ELECTRICAL officer, C/O Pentow Marine, P0 Box 1339, Cape Town, RSA.

Change of Address

Fenton, J.M.C, Lt Cdr, Rashiefauld, Glenfarg, Perthshire PH2 9PB.

Finn, M.G, Radio Officer MN, 60 Roebuck Road, Dundrum, Dublin 14, Ireland.

Jackson, P.W, Captain MN, 68 Albert Street, Warwick, Warwickshire, CV34 4JX.

Waldmann, M, Lt Cdr GE-Navy, Klein-Ostiemer Weg 16, 26419 Schortens, Germany.

Change of Address- Exchanges.

BIRDLIFE MALTA, 57/28 Marina Court, Abate Rigord St, Ta' xbiex, MSD 12, Malta.

Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, Room 625, Beverley Commercial Building, 87-105 Chatham Road, Tsi'm Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hongkong.

North Sea Bird Club, C/O Andrew Thorpe, Cultery Field Station, University of Aberdeen, Newburgh, Ellon, Aberdeenshire, AB41 OAA.

BIRDLIFE UPDATE April 2000, page 3, reports that the African Penguin, *S.demersus* has been listed for co-operative action in addition to the albatrosses. The July edition notes that 16,000 African Penguins on Dassen Island were captured, some cleaned and then all moved to Port Elizabeth for release in the hope that the oil would have cleared before they got back to Dassen Island. Unfortunately there is a possibility that bad weather may release more oil from the wreck.

WORLD BIRDWATCH Vol. 22 No. 2, remarks that Sacheon Bay, Korea, an important site for Relict Gulls, *L.relictus* and Saunder's Gull, *L.saundersi*, is still unprotected. Also on page 5 there is a note that gill net entanglement is a serious threat to Yellow-eyed Penguins, *M.antipodes*, off South Island, New Zealand. Old Malta hands will be pleased to hear that the Ta'Cenc cliffs on Gozo have been saved for breeding Cory's Shearwater, *C.diomedea*, p6.

RSPB BIRDS, Summer edition, 2000, p.61 states that the Society is pressing the Nordic countries to produce a national plan of action to reduce the bycatch of Fulmar, *F.glacialis* in longline fishing. The EU has banned Sandeel fishing off the East coast of Scotland while the stock is monitored, it is proposed to use the Isle of May Kittiwake, *R.tridactyla*, colony as an indicator.

BIRD WATCHING's August issue has a note on page 30 that global warming may be responsible for a surface layer of warm water only a few centimetres thick which keeps the Sandeel at a depth where they are inaccessible to surface feeders such as Kittiwake and that this is leading to the breeding failures.

Scottish Birds, Vol. 21, No 1 has an article on wintering seafowl in Scapa Flow, p.6-14. The Flow is used by a large number of Divers, sea duck and *Alcidae* including Black Guillemot, *C.grille* and Little Auk. *A.alle*.

Scottish Bird News No 58 notes that the spring passage of Long-tailed Skua, *S.longicaudus* and Pomarine, *S.pomarinus* was disappointing with the best numbers off North Uist, 17-23 March (12 Long-tailed and 163 Pomarines) and at Wat's Ness, Shetland, 18-19 Mar (41 Long-tailed and 22 Pomarines).

The North Sea Bird Club's Fulmar No 90 celebrates the club's 21st birthday. Page 4 has a brief but interesting history of the Great Skua, *C.skua* one of which was recently reported as knocking a Gannet, *M.bassanus*, into the sea. Unconfirmed reports include a Storm-petrel, *H.pelagicus* at FPSO SCHIEHALLION, 14 Dec. Long-tailed Duck, *C.hyemalis* were at MAESK CURLEW from the end of November into December and a single Smew, *M.albellus*, was at BERYL A 5 Oct

MAERSK CURLEW also had a Pomarine Skua 28 Nov and saw in the Millennium with an Iceland Gull, *L.glaucoides*. Another was at BUCHAN A 18-31 Jan, while Glaucous Gulls, *L.hyperboreus* were seen at FPSO SHIJEHALLION 28 Dec, BUCHAN A on 23 Jan and MAERSK CURLEW on 2 Feb. No 91 records a Storm-petrel at ALBA N, 7 May. The only Skuas reported were 2 Pomarines off MAERSK CURLEW on 3 May. The first Lesser Black-backed Gulls, *L.fuscus*, were seen off MAERSK CURLEW 24 Mar and 6 Little Gulls, *L.minutus* were present on 3 May. Glaucous and Iceland gulls were present off BUCHAN A between Jan and mid-April.

ATLANTIC SEABIRDS Vol. 1 No 4 begins with a paper on the staging areas in use by Roseate Terns, *S.dougalli*, around Cape Cod, Massachusetts, p145-158. This is followed by a paper on the Sooty Terns, *S.fuscata* of Ascension Island. It is thought that food shortages rather than predation by feral cats is the most likely cause of poor breeding years but at least 10 years records will be needed to confirm this, p.159-168. A study of breeding success in a Common Gull, *L.canus*, in West Scotland showed that early breeders got the best nest sites and were the most successful. However predation by Herring Gulls, *L.argentatus*, and Peregrine, *F.peregrinus* resulted in less than half being successful and most of these only raised one. Eventually the colony was abandoned when it was reached by Mink, p. 169-181. Short notes include a group of 3800 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, *L.fuscus* taking trawler discards for their young, however they were also recorded in mixed flocks with Herring Gulls and Kittiwake well away from trawlers. One such flock had 1100 Lesser Black-backed, 560 Herring Gulls and 1000 Kittiwake, p.182-186. A second note records Cory's Shearwater, *C.diomedea* preying on Flying Fish flushed by the ship's bow wave, p.186-188. Finally an article by Bill Bourne deplores the current vogue for other countries to independently rename seabirds and points out the confusion it can lead to, p.191-193.

SEABIRD GROUP Newsletter 85 begins with an account of the 7th Sea Bird International Conference, p. 1-4. Amongst the numerous papers on seabird breeding was one on the importance of social factors in the reproduction success of Auklets in Alaska. Another paper showed that despite an effort to prove the contrary the success of breeding in Common Terns, *S.hirundo* did not decrease with old age! Another showed that Great Skuas under stress tended to produce more males. On Skomer off SW Wales, the reproductive success of Guillemots, *U.aalge* has been shown to

trip on 27 Nov produced 7 Gould's Petrel, *P.leucoptera*, 5 Black Petrels, and a Buller's Petrel. The 25 Mar produced a Buller's Shearwater, *P.bulleri*, 2 White Terns and 2 Grey Ternlets, *P.albivitta*.

- Portland, Victoria. A trip on 5 Dec found 4-5 White-chinned Petrels and one on 30 Jan saw 4 Buller's Albatross, *D.bulleri*, 2 White-chinned Petrels and 10 Grey-backed Storm-petrels, *G.nereis*.

LANDLUBBERS CORNER.

As usual I am still waiting for some of this years MOD Bird Count to come in. This year for the first time we have returns from RMB Chivenor and DM Crombie. The highlights so far are a Yellow-legged Gull at Devonport and Bearded Tits at HMS SULTAN, both new species. Species recorded breeding for the first time include Hawfinch at DM Dean Hill and Kittiwake at Straight Point range, S. Devon. Outside the count there were Snow Buntings at RNAS CULDROSE and a Sinew and a Black Tern at CTCRM LYMPSTONE.

Don't forget this is the second year for the BTO winter farmlands count.

A new service for UK rare bird sightings has been set up. "Bird News" claims to provide news to your mobile phone plus an Email service more cheaply than the old pagers. For information leave your name and address at email info @ birdnews.co.uk or phone 01603 763388

6TH MEDITERRANEAN SYMPOSIUM on SEABIRDS

Benidorm, Spain 11-15 Oct 2000. The biology of Mediterranean Seabirds and their relationships with human activities (especially fishing) will be debated at the 6th Mediterranean Symposium on Seabirds and conference on Fisheries, Marine Productivity and Conservation of Seabirds at Alicante. This event is organised by MEDMARAVIS and SEO/Birdlife and will be structured around the following topics:

- Conservation of Seabird Populations
- Theoretical Population Models as a Management Tool
- Management of Seabird Metapopulations
- Fisheries and Seabird Conservation
- Seabirds and Local Economy

Further information from Elsa Gheziel. SEO/Birdlife. Delegacio Territorial de Valencia, Estacio Ornitologica L'Albufera, Avda de los Pinares 106,46012 Valencia. Phone and Fax: 34 961 627 389. E-mail: Valencia@seo.org.

up the coast of KwaZulu Natal where the shoals break up and inexperienced birds are washed ashore weak from lack of food. Three articles discuss the African Penguin, in particular the colonies on Possession Island, p 129-38 and Robbens Island, p 139-47. Pages 150-5 look at the problems of trying to identify predators from bite marks and finds considerable difficulties. An article on the after effects of cleaning African Penguins supports rehabilitation and concludes that that it has little effect on overall lifespan, p 177-80. There are also two papers on the effects of eco-tourism, on Gentoo Penguins, *P.papua*, p 195-7 and on Yellow-eyed Penguins, *M.antipodes*, p 205-10 both of which suggest that eco-tourism need not have an adverse effect on breeding.

AUSTRALIAN SEABIRD BULLETIN No 36 provides advance information of papers given at the 2000 Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress last June covering basic biology and ecology of seabirds, p. 2-9. One paper discusses the effect of fisheries on the seabird populations of South Africa, apart from the obvious long term effect of reducing the food supply the short term effect from trawler discards is to bring more seals into the area where they displace breeding colonies and kill many of the birds, p. 4. Investigations into oil spills off South Australia indicate that the main victims are Little Penguins, *E.minor*, fortunately these respond to cleaning and rehabilitation, p.5. A new Rockhopper Penguin, *E.chrysocome*, colony has been found at Staten Island, Tierra del Fuego, it appears to be a major colony with over a quarter of a million pairs, p. 7. Albatross taxonomy is discussed on pages 13-16. It seems that many organisations have accepted a new proposal by Robertson and Nunn to recognise 24 species of Albatross, however there has been no new data and the proposals are not consistent with Biological Species Concept (no interbreeding) or of the Phylogenetic Concept; no useful purpose is seen. Unconfirmed reports from pelagic trips include:

- Southport, Queensland, 17 Jun, Kermadec Petrel, *P.neglecta*, Antarctic Prion, *T.antarctica* and Arctic Tern, *S.paradisaea*.
- Sydney, NSW. 3-4 Black Petrels, *P.parkinson*, on 13 Nov '99 and another 3 on 11 Dec. the latter trip also produced White-chinned Petrel, *P.aequinoctialis*, Buller's Petrel, *P.bulleri*, White-tailed Tropicbird, *P.lepturus* and a Long-tailed Jaeger, *S.longicaudus*. A trip on the 12 Feb produced a Tahiti Petrel, *P.rostrata*. A trip on 8 April saw a Kermadec Petrel, a Westland Petrel, *P.westlandica* and 3-5 White Terns, *G.alba*.
- Woolongong, A trip on 20 Oct had a Black-bellied Storm-petrel, *F.tropica*. A

increase with the growth of the colony. The breeding biology of Storm-petrels, *H.pelagicus*, in Brittany may be linked to oceanographic and food factors and finally it has been recorded that Gannets, *M.bassanus*, deep diving off Newfoundland pursued the Capelin under water using their wings. Pages 5-6 appeal to ornithologists generally to wake up to the seriousness of the threat posed by Mink to the seabird population of Western Scotland. A count of Black Guillemot in Shetland gave a figure of 16000, however for various reasons this cannot be compared with the 1982/4 count of 12000, p.7. The French Authorities have issued figures for birds, dead or recovered for cleaning, from the ERIKA oil spill. The majority of birds, 88%, were alcids, but the total figure of 61678 is undoubtedly an underestimate of the total, p.8-9.

DUTCH BIRDING, Vol. 22, No I has an article on the sighting of a Lesser Frigate Bird, *F.aerial*, the second for Eilat, 6 May '99. Unconfirmed reports include Finland's third European Storm-petrel, *H.pelagicus* found dead Porvoo 12 Jan. An Atlantic Great Cormorant, *P.carbo carbo* was reported at Heel, Limburg 14-5 May. A record 7-8 Great Black-headed Gulls, *L.ichthyaetus* wintered at Lentini Lake, Sicily. The first Heerman's Gull, *L.heermani*, for Eastern Canada was recorded in Toronto Docks, Nov-Dec. A Laughing Gull, *L.atricilla*, was at St Mary's, Scilly 7-20 Jan. Franklin's Gull, *L.pipixcan*, was recorded at Zingen and at Nazareth near Ghent, Belgium, 4-5 Feb possibly moving on to Kampen Overijssel, Netherlands 19 Feb. One was at Huchet-plage, Landes 5 Feb and another at Weymouth, Dorset mid Feb-Mar. At Suchon, S. Korea, 811 Saunder's Gulls, *L.saundersi* and 8 Relict Gulls, *L.relictus* were seen 1-2 Feb. Bonaparte's Gull, *L.Philadelphia* appeared at Heist, West Vlaanderen, Belgium, Dec-Mar, and a second was at Clare, Eire, Jan-Mar and a third at Penzance until March. A Black-headed Gull, *L.ridibundus*, ringed in Finland turned up at Fort Worth, Texas in the 1998/9 winter and again 24 Dec 99-9 Jan 00. Nine Ring-billed Gulls, *L.delawarensis*, were at Arcachon 27 Dec. A Thayer's Gull, *L.g.thayeri*, photographed at Bergen will, if accepted, be the first record for Norway. An adult Heuglin's Gull, *L.heuglini* at Siracusa in Feb could, if accepted, be the first record for mainland Italy. Sicily's first Glaucous Gull, *L.hyperboreus*, was seen at the mouth of the Simento river 8 Dec. The first Black-legged Kittwake, *R.tridactyla* recorded in Belize was seen at Caye Caulkar 7 Jan.

Vol. 22 No 2. Unconfirmed reports include Belgium's first Surf Scoter, *M.perspicillata*, near Nieuwpoort 26 Feb-8 Mar, others were seen off Finisterre, France and off Ireland, Scotland and Wales. A record 111 Great Black-headed Gulls,

L.ichthyaetus, were counted off Kuwait 3 Feb, Franklin's Gull, *L.pipixcan* were seen in the Netherlands 19 Feb —11 Mar, in France in Feb and April and at Weymouth. Twenty-one Relict Gulls were at Nakdong Estuary, S. Korea 22 Feb. A Bonaparte's Gull, *L.philadelphia*, stayed at Zeebrugge until April, another at Dublin stayed into May and one in SW England stayed on the Teign estuary until 30 April. Two Slender-billed Gulls, *L.genei* appeared for the second year running at Cley, Norfolk on 15 Apr. A Pontic Gull, *L.cachinnans* stayed at Amsterdam until at least mid-April. A Great Black-backed Gull, *L.marinus*, was seen near Cap Bon, Tunisia 9 Mar. The Forster's Tern, *S.fosteri* remained in Essex Mar-early May and finally a Brunnich's Guillemot, *L.lomvia* was seen at Dungeness 25 Apr.

Vol 22 No 3 opens with an account of Pygmy Cormorants, *M.pygmeus*, seen near Utrecht in Jan '99, p.133 (English summary). Since then there has been a further unconfirmed report from North Brabant in May. Pages 151-3 discuss an unknown Petrel seen off Oostende 7 Feb '99, possibly a Herald Petrel, *P.a.armiinjoniana*, any further suggestions welcome. Pages 153-6 warn against diagnosing Skuas solely by bill size or the presence of a pale nose band or white blaze at the base of the bill, bills are highly variable and a pale area can appear in most species during some part of the year. Unconfirmed reports include a Yellow-nosed Albatross, *D.chiororhynchos*, was seen off Penikese Island, Mass, 9 May, off New Jersey and in June up by Nantucket. A Swinhoe's Storm-petrel, *O.monorhis*, was trapped on Gt Skelling Island, Kerry, Ireland 1 July. A Laughing Gull, *L.atricilla* was found dead in Sweden 26 May. Bonaparte's Gull occurred at Ile de Re, Charente-Maritime, 19 May to 8 Jun and a first summer bird was at Seaforth, Merseyside. Slender-billed Gulls appeared at Cley on 5 May and a single was at Dungeness 30-31 May. The first Elegant Tern, *S.elegans*, recorded in Denmark was seen at a Sandwich Tern, *S. sandvicensis*, colony on Langli near Esbjerg 30 May 11 Jun. The Forster's Tern was still present in Essex in June.

ALAUDA Vol. 68 No.1, pages 1-9 examines the interaction of Cormorant, *P.carbo* and Shags, *P.aristotelis*, on their breeding grounds. Although the Cormorants outnumber the Shags and may force them to move to other sites there appears to be no obvious overall adverse effect.

VOL 68 No 2 mentions that some 1500 Cormorants were ringed in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov. Any seen contact Gerard Grolleau, INRA, Bat. A, Route de Saint Cyr, 78026 Versailles.

AVES ICHNUSAE, Vol.2 has an article on bird watching in the Stintino area of

Sardinia including sea bird watching from the cliffs of Capo Falcone, p. 91-101. Recent records include a Velvet Scoter, *M.fusca*, in the north and the discovery of a colony of about 250 pairs of Audouin's Gull, *L.audouinii* on the Isola Piana off Stintino.

ARDEOLA, Vol. 47(1) reporting on rare birds accepted for 1998 includes the sighting of a Franklin's Gull, *L.pipixcan* at Lanzarote 14 Jan.

LA GARCILLA. No 107 reviews conservation activities in Spain. but has little reference to seabirds.

SEEVOGEL, March 2000. An article on pages 11-12 reviews the results of oiled birds recovered from the North Sea and confirms that illegal discharges of sludge residue from ships is the main source of pollution. In some cases individual sources were identified. Pages 18-26 cover an ornithological history of Sylt. In the 18th century Sylt was a major breeding centre for Gulls and Terns, but fortification, lighthouses and an increase in population led to breeding being restricted to the Konigshaven area where it suffered severely from foxes and tourist disturbance. The June edition has an article on contamination from the Elbe, Rhine and Weser in the winter 1995-6, p.47-53. Although pollution levels in the Elbe have fallen since 1990 they were still the highest of the three. Herring Gull, Common Gull and Black-headed all showed some level of contamination but it was not high enough to threaten reproduction. Breeding results in reserves during 1999 are on p.62-66. Fulmar, Gannet and Kittiwake are all doing well on Heligoland.

SANDGROUSE Vol. 22(1) includes a report on Turkey giving a status report on all species of birds. Cory's Shearwater, *C.diomedea* and Gannet, *M.bassana* are both thought to be under-recorded.

MARINE ORNITHOLOGY Vol. 27 covers the 3rd International Penguin Conference held at Capetown in 1996. The first paper tries to rationalize the differing behaviours of the numerous species and speculates that there are two groups. First the resident species which feed inshore and only fast briefly ashore, breed at an early age and have a low divorce rate. The second group feeds offshore, fasts longer, breeds at a later age and has a high divorce rate, p. 1-12. However there is considerable variation within species and a paper shows that two Magellanic Penguins, *S.magellanicus*, from the same colony can adopt totally different feeding strategies, p 59-65. There are several papers on the feeding habits of different species, followed by an article on shipboard observations calls for more work in this field, p 10 1-10. Pages 110-3 discuss how young African Penguins, *S.demersus*, follow the sardine run