

Royal Naval Birdwatching Society



REGISTERED CHARITY No. 206719

BULLETIN No. 145

SEPTEMBER 2001

THE FIFTY FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM will take place on Friday 7 December at 1400 in the 8th Floor Conference Room of Castlewood Hse, 77 New Oxford St (next to Centre Point). The nearest underground is Tottenham Court Rd on the Northern Line. Many buses pass by including the 24, 73 and 38. Business will include:

- Election of committee members.
- After the meeting there will be a talk by Dr Ben Maughan, Marine Biologist on the staff of the UK Hydrographic Office about data-basing of marine life reports in the UKHO Marine Environment Information Centre.

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 Deputy Chairman Cdr Frank Ward (020 78298584) know if they are attending and the names of any guests not later than 1 December.

HON. TREASURER—CHANGE OF ADDRESS.

Lt Cdr D.L. Griffiths RN Home address is now 80 Otterfields Rd, Yiewsley, WEST DRAYTON, Middlesex UB7 8PF.

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 £42 in UK, £48 overseas surface mail and a further £2.00 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 new inter service Journal "**OSPREY**" makes an excellent start. The first article is on a return trip, Falklands- South Georgia on the RFA GREY ROVER, describing the birds seen and discussing some problems of identification, p.4-6. Other articles cover expeditions to Zimbabwe, Bordeaux and the Pyrenees, Jambi Province. Indonesia, the Millennium Bird Count, also the Congo, a survey of the River Lossie in Scotland, and Akamas, North Cyprus. Then there is the AOS ringing Report and finally birding from SS ORIANA from Southampton to Tasmania.

LANDLUBBERS CORNER.

Hampshire Ornithological Society reports the first occasion of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, *L.fuscus* breeding in Hampshire. They have been using the roofs of warehouses in Southampton. Portsmouth based members are asked to keep a sharp lookout in their area. DM GOSPORT's Little Egret colony has risen to 13 breeding pairs. There was the usual passage of Skuas through the Solent Apr-Mar but on June 2 an unprecedented 418 Manx Shearwater, *P.puffinus* were counted passing Hurst Castle. The MOD Bird Count for 2000 was the most successful for several years with the highest proportion of establishments ever taking part. Unfortunately although the report went in for typing last year it did not emerge until July and was accompanied by 4 major reports none of which had reached me. This meant a virtual rewrite and further delay. It now includes Black Grouse a first for an RN establishment and several new breeding records. As this year's count was cancelled for foot and mouth and then revived at the last minute on a "do what you can" basis it remains to be seen.

Gulls, *L.brunnicephalus* were seen at Fujairah port, UAE 7 Mar. No less than 56 Ring-billed Gulls were seen OH the beach at Praia da Vitoria, Terceira, Azores on 18 Feb. The fourth Kittiwake, *R.tridactyla* for the UAE was seen at Khor Kalba 27 May. **Vol. 23 No. 4** includes the following unconfirmed reports. A Black-browed Albatross was at Dungeness on 4 May, another in Sweden in NW Skane and coastal Halland 19-20 May. An adult off Vlieland, Friesland on 20 July, will if accepted, be the first for the Netherlands. Yet another sighting was On the 29 July in Oslo fiord. Fea's Petrel, *P.fae* were seen off Scilly 8 July, off Hope's Nose and Berry Head, Devon 17 July and at Biggars Bank, Cumbria 2 July. Persecution of Great Cormorants, *P.carbo* in Sardinia has reduced the numbers to 3 or 4 breeding pairs on a rock offshore. The Laughing Gull staying in the Black-headed Gull colony at Zwillbrocker Venn made a nest and was still present 3 July. If accepted a first summer Sabine's Gull, *L.sabinii* seen near Porto Tullio in the Po delta will be the first record for Italy. A record 4500 breeding pairs of Slender-billed Gulls, *L.genei* were discovered in a colony near Cagliari, Sardinia. A Ross's Gull was seen at Ohrid Lake, this is the first record for Macedonia, others were seen in Iceland, Germany, Sweden and Norway.

ALAUDA Vol. 69 No 1, pages 165-6 includes a letter on the changing habits of the Yellow-legged Gull, *L.michahellis* which has been expanding in the Mediterranean and which has now turned to urban scavenging, attacking pigeons, opening rubbish sacks and robbing open containers. **Volume 2** is as interesting as ever, but has no reference to seabirds.

La GARCILLA No. 109 notes the formal acceptance of Spain's first Madeiran Storm-petrel, *O.castro* seen off Demia, Alicante in June 1997. This is also the first record for the Mediterranean.

SEEVOGEL, June 2001, has articles on breeding in reserves on the Schleswig-holstein coast in 1999, p.39. A comparison of breeding results on the German North Sea coast 1998-1999 shows an increase in Sandwich Terns, *S.sandvicensis* and a fall in Arctic Terns, *S.paradisaea*, p. 41-48. Finally there is a summary of breeding on the reserves in 2000, Fulmar are up to 82 pairs and Gannets up to 93, both on Heligoland.

SANDGROUSE Vol. 23(1) on page 2 notes that the Government of Bahrain is being asked to make the Hawar Islands a sanctuary. The islands support up to 10% of the population of Socotra Cormorants, *P.nigrogularis* as well as numerous Caspian Terns, *S.caspia* and White-cheeked, *S.repressa*. Observations from the Iranian coast, p. 46, include a large flock of 4620 large white-headed gulls at Azini Khor on 27 Jan. Caspian, L. and Heuglin's Gull, *L.heuglini* were identified with 2 possible Armenian Gulls, *L.armenicus* near Bandar Rig. Unconfirmed reports include 9 Sooty Shearwater, *P.griseus* and 13 Leach's Storm-petrel, *O.leucorhoa* 4 Feb off Tel-Aviv. A Swinhoe's Storm-petrel, *O.monorhis* was off Ras Al Khabbah, Oman 22 Sept. A Long-tailed Skua, *S.longicaudus* was reported off UAE 24-25 Mar. 36 Audouin's Gull, *L.audouinii* were seen at Kara Burun, Turkey 27 Jan. and juvenile Kittiwakes, *R.tridactyla* seen off Tel-Aviv 4 Feb. A Common Gull, *L.canus* was seen at Seeb, Oman on 8 June and accepted as Oman's 6th record.

RAFOS Newsletter No 71 is an excellent issue covering experiences in Menorca, Portland, Germany, Israel and Turkey, not to mention Goa. Seabird interest lies in the discovery of a colony of very small Yellow-legged Gulls in Turkey, p.42 and in the activities in support of SEABIRD 2000 on North Uist, p.48-53

WORLD BIRDWATCH Vol. 23 No 2, has several items about seabirds. On page 3 intensive cat and rat control on Madeira is allowing a slow increase in Zino Petrel, *P.madeira* with fledglings reaching double figures for two successive years. On page 4 a census of Black-browed Albatross, *D.melanophris* has shown a massive decline of 86,000 breeding pairs since 1995 in the Falklands, probably due to longline fishing. Longlining off Peru is also threatening the Chatham Albatross, *T.erimito*, and the Waved Albatross, *P.irrorata*, p.5. On the same page it remarks that the feral cats on Ascension are to be removed. Pages 14-16 outline the problems facing the North Pacific albatrosses, although Laysan's, *D.immutabilis* are thought to be able to cope with the existing level of Longlining, the Black-footed, *D.nigripes* is at risk. At the moment the Short-tailed Albatross, *P.albatrus* is showing a slight increase. Finally pages 24-26 discuss the severe losses suffered by seabirds on the Cape Verde Islands and the need to warden these islands which have been declared a reserve.

BIRD WATCHING, September briefly reports a successful season for Roseate Terns, *S.dougalli* 42 pairs nested on the Coquet Islands off Northumberland helped by the provision of nest boxes, p.11.

SCOTTISH BIRD NEWS No. 62 spring sightings include a Bonaparte's Gull, *L.Philadelphia*, 7-9 May on South Uist. There was a good passage of Little Gulls, *L.minutus* off Angus, but the Skua passage off North Uist was limited to 16-18 May.

NORTH SEA BIRD CLUB, FULMAR No. 94 reports the last Arctic Skua, *S.parasiticus* of the year passing M/V ARIES 18 Nov and the last Great Skuas, *S.skua*

at S/V GEOBAY 9 and 15 Dec. There was an Iceland Gull, *L.glaucoides* at BUCHAN ALPHA 22 Dec and Glaucous Gulls, *L.hyperboreus* were seen at S/V GEOBAY and BUCHAN ALPHA in Nov. 3 more were at BUCHAN ALPHA in Jan and a single at MAERSK CURLEW in Jan, Feb and Mar. No. 95 notes that Fulmar, *F.glacialis* numbers picked up from mid-April and there was a peak of 100 Gannets, *M.bassanus* at BUCHAN ALPHA 28 Apr. A count of 68 Long-tailed Skua, *S.longicaudus* seen from S/V GEOGRAPH on 18 May was only a small part of the northward migration. Iceland Gulls were at MAERSK CURLEW 14 Apr and at BUCHAN ALPHA 27 Apr. Glaucous Gulls were at BUCHAN ALPHA 21 Jan. Large numbers of Kittiwake *R.tridactyla* were seen at MAERSK CURLEW and BUCHAN ALPHA in mid-April, but there were no juveniles present. Guillemots, *U.aalge* were the commonest Auk from January to June, Razorbill, *A.torda*. Puffin, *F.arctica* and Little Auk, *A.alle* only occurred in very small numbers. The 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*, p.6.

ATLANTIC SEABIRDS Vol. 2 No 3 (2000) is a special issue covering seabird monitoring in Great Britain 1989-1998. Overall, with the exception of Kittiwakes the population is recovering from a dip in the '80s, early '90s. The reason for the noticeable decline of Kittiwakes in many areas is not yet understood. Articles include Population Trends of Cliff-nesting birds in Orkney, p.103-132, of Sandwich Terns, *S.sandvicensis* and Little Terns, *L.albifrons* in Britain and Ireland, p.211-226, and Kittiwake, Black Guillemot, *C.grille* and Common Guillemot, *U.aalge* in Scotland, p.227-244. Cormorants, *P.carbo* breeding in Caithness and seabird monitoring on Canna are discussed on p.165-180 and 151-164 respectively. An article comparing the population of Loch Sunart and 50 years ago reveals an almost complete loss of Eider, *S.mollissima*. Common Gull, *L.canus*. Lesser Black-backed Gull, *L.fuscus*. Common Tern, *S.hirundo* and Black Guillemot mainly due to predation by mink, p.181-194. Lastly the Lams gulls at Skomer are showing a steady decline probably due to the closing of the fish docks at Milford Haven and the reduction of fishing discards at sea, p.195-210. **Vol. 3 No. 1** has an article on seabird observations from the tourist ship PROFESSOR MOLCHANOV in the south and Central Atlantic and the Antarctic to 30 degrees North in March/April 1998 and 2000. Observations were in line with expectations, p.1-15. Pages 15-30 review the causes of death in Northern Gannets, *M.bassanus* found dead on Dutch beaches. The number due to oiling fell significantly between 1970 and 2000, but there was an increase in birds caught up in fishing gear and fishing lines. Losses are considered acceptable. The last article deals with the attendance of Guillemot and Kittiwake at colonies with continuous daylight. Guillemot behaviour was similar to birds nesting further south but Kittiwake attendance was very variable and requires further study, p.31-48.

SEABIRD GROUP Newsletter 88 looks at the results of the actions taken to save the African Penguins, *S.demersus* which were threatened or oiled by the wreck of the TREASURE off Robben and Dassen Islands. Of 13,500 birds evacuated to Port Elizabeth a sample showed that at least 42% had returned and bred. Of 2744 oiled adults 24% had been re-sighted by December and 17 birds had been found breeding. 25% Of the juveniles cleaned had also been re-sighted. One bird had survived cleansing after both the APOLLO and TREASURE wrecks. These figures are minimums as it takes years to survey the whole population, p.1-2. Page 3 notes a slow spread of Black Guillemot breeding in North Wales. Pages 4-5 deal with a study of Sabine's Gull, *L.sabinii* in the Eastern Canadian Arctic. Like many Arctic species it can be subject to intense predation by Arctic Foxes and it's behaviour when the nest is threatened is much closer to that of the waders. Two oil spills occurred recently NE of Rio, both Spectacled Shearwater, *P.conspicillata* and Yellow-nosed Albatross, *D.chlorororynchos* are at risk in this area, p.6. On page 9 is a summary of Black Guillemots counted off Ireland 1998-2000. An extract from GISOM March 2001, reports that a complete survey of French breeding seabirds has been completed and

that most species, with the exception of Roseate Terns, *S.dougalli*, are stable or increasing as compared with ten years ago, p.11. Another extract this time from the Canadian Wildlife Service reports that the North Pacific driftnet industry has moved into Russian waters, presumably to avoid regulation. During the period 1993-1997 some 160,000 dead seabirds were recorded, p.12.

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY Report for 1998 paints much the same picture for seabirds as usual. Only one Arctic Skua, *S.parasiticus* and one Great Skua, *C.skua* were seen, more unusual was a very brief visit by Pomarine Skua, *S.pomarinus*. It was a good year for Glaucous Gulls, *L.hyperboreus*, and Iceland, *L.glaucoides* with 11 of each. Mediterranean Gulls, *L.melanocephalus* remained at around 66.

DUTCH BIRDING, Vol. 23, No 2. opens with a major article by Pierre Yesou which reviews the available information on the Mongolian Gull, *L.(cachinnans) mongolicus*, and argues that it is much closer to the Vega Gull, *L.vegae* than to cachinnans but that the separation between the 2 ranges, together with wing tip and winter plumage differences provides a case for considering *mongolicus* a separate species. In addition he argues that the Asian taxa, *armenicus*, *barbarensis* and *mongolicus* should be considered a separate species from *cachinnans*, p.65-82. Nevertheless reliable identification in the field is extremely difficult. Unconfirmed records include the winter record for Great Shearwaters, *P.gravis* off Iceland and a wintering Double-crested Cormorant, *H.auritus* in the Azores. A Franklin's Gull, *L.pipixcan* spent Jan-Mar in Tor Bay, Devon and a Bonaparte's Gull, *L.Philadelphia* spent Feb-Mar off Hinkley Point, Somerset. At least 143 Relict Gulls, *L.relictus* were counted at Song Island, South Korea on 3 Feb. Ring-billed Gulls, *L.delawarensis* were seen in the Azores in Feb. also 35 off Britain and 22 off Ireland in

Jan. The only Ross's Gull, *R.rosea* reported was off Peterhead, Scotland 4-5 Mar. France's second Forster's Tern, *S.forsteri* was seen at Carantec, Finisterre, 6 Jan-11 Feb. **Vol. 23 No 3** opens with a useful article on autumn seabird watching in Ireland. This is at its best with a Southwest wind for headlands east of Mizen Head in Cork and West or Northwest winds for Western Ireland headlands. Winds need to be Force 4-7. Malin in the north is not as good, p.19-130. Pages 136-9 discuss the finding of a Double-crested Cormorant found in an exhausted state at Ouessant, Finisterre, France and the likelihood of more records in the future. Unconfirmed reports include a Black-browed Albatross, *D.melanophris* seen off Skane, Sweden, the first Swedish record. Amongst birds counted at Bane d'Arguin, Mauretania were some 55 Long-tailed Cormorants, *M.afrieanus* and a Common Gull, *L.canus*. Breeding Mediterranean Gulls, *L.melanocephalus* in the SW Netherlands have now reached 930 pairs. Norway's second Laughing Gull, *L.atricilla* was seen over Utsira, Rogaland on March 10, others were seen at Donges, Loire-Atlantique Mar-Apr and Zwillbrocker Venn, Westfalen in April. Franklin's Gull was recorded from Devon Jan-Apr, the Pas de Calais 19 Apr and the Llobregat Delta, Catalunya, Spain 1-2 May. A Bonaparte's Gull was at Hinkley, Somerset 3 Feb-7 Mar. Brown-headed