

# Royal Naval Birdwatching Society



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OCTOBER 2007

## THE SIXTY FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year's AGM will take place on **Thursday 29 November at 1430 in Conference Room G1, HMS EXCELLENT, PORTSMOUTH. (not 6 December as previously detailed)** On completion of the AGM two of our members, Steve Copey and Mark Cutts will talk about the 'Birds of the Falklands'. Also Dr Russ Wynn will give an update on the Seawatch SW project. On completion light refreshments will be available. As our 2007 DG Team will have just returned, there will be the opportunity for a short debrief from Pete Carr, the expedition leader. All interested personnel and their guests are welcome to attend – For security, names of attendees should be forwarded to the Frank Ward, Fleet Charities Officer (Gen Sec RNBWS), MP1.3 Leach Building, Whale Island PO2 8BY – [frank.ward860@mod.uk](mailto:frank.ward860@mod.uk) or Home e-mail [francisward@btopenworld.com](mailto:francisward@btopenworld.com) by 23 Nov 07.

## 2008 FIELD TRIPS AND EXPEDITIONS

Field Trips. The 2008 programme has been compiled by Mark Cutts but has yet to be finalised. Please confirm the event is to go ahead before turning up. Updates will be published on the web. The outline programme is:

January 5 12:00 (Saturday) - New Forest

An afternoon /early evening jaunt through the New Forest starting at Eyeworth pond for possible Goosander, Mandarin and all the woodland specialities. Moving through the forest stopping at Crab Tree Earth/Holm Hill for the (hopefully) annual Great Grey Shrike and finishing at Blackwater Arboretum for Hawfinch, Brambling and Redpoll. Meet at the Car Park next to Eyeworth Pond SU229145

February 10 10:00 (Sunday) - Slimbridge

A day out at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve at Slimbridge in Gloucestershire. An excellent venue for Swans and Geese, Bewick's, White-fronted and possibly Tundra Bean should be present.

Please note that this venue has an admission charge for non-members of the trust.

Meet at the reserve Car park SO7204

April 18 to 20 - Portland

Our usual Spring weekend at this classic location. Summer migrants and more, with Warblers, Hirundines and the usual seabirds passing the bill. Hopefully the bonus of a few rarities.

Accommodation will be organised for those that require it, at the observatory. Early confirmation is appreciated.

June 8 to 10 - Farne Islands, Northumberland

A weekend in Northumberland, staying at Seahouses. The weekend will involve a visit to Holy Island and an all day pelagic to the islands of Inner Farne and Staple for close views of breeding Guillemots, Razorbills, Eider Ducks, 4 species of Tern and a staggering 70,000 Puffins (Give or take a few!)

Please note there is a charge for the pelagic and the National trust charge a landing fee on the islands.

More details to follow for those interested.

September 12 to 14 - Portsmouth – Bilbao Ferry

This will involve the weekend crossing through the Bay of Biscay, a few hours in Bilbao and return. In conjunction with the BDRP (Biscay Dolphin Research Programme) team the weekend pelagic should provide some autumn migrants, many varieties of seabirds and various cetaceans.

Cost and more information will be published on the web.

October 12 to 14 - Portland

An easy weekend with a weekend stay for those interested or just a one day meet on the Saturday to finish the year's outings. The usual fall migrants will be present alongside all the other attractions that Portland and Weymouth have to offer.

Expeditions. Nothing has been booked but it is hoped that during the 2008/9 period we can achieve trips to Gibraltar, The Falklands and Diego Garcia.

Details of RAFOS and AOS trips will be published on the web when available.

## **PRIZE FOR THE BEST ARTICLE FOR SEA SWALLOW**

A prize of £35 is offered each year for the best article submitted to the Editor during the year by a member whose work has not previously been published in Sea Swallow. The conditions of the award are as follows:

Articles must be about seabirds at sea, seabird colonies, or landbirds at sea. Articles should be between 1,500 and 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 article were e-mailed to the Editor, Gary Lewis at [gary@cornwt.demon.co.uk](mailto:gary@cornwt.demon.co.uk), in MS Word or similar. 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. Entries must reach the Editor by 30 June.

## **RNBWS WEB SITE**

As always contributions and suggestions gratefully received.

## **RNBWS BULLETIN**

Members are encouraged to contribute to the Bulletin, which at the moment is populated with information provided solely by the Gen Sec. Items of any relevance to members can be included and need not be as technical as that which goes to the Sea Swallow.

## **SEA BIRD DATABASE**

It is anticipated that a demo of the database will be available for viewing at the AGM.

## **REVIEW OF JOURNALS AND NEWSLETTERS**

**Alauda Vol 75.3 2007** (in French) [www.mnhn.fr/assoc/seof/](http://www.mnhn.fr/assoc/seof/)

La France est responsable de la conservation du Puffin des Baléares *Puffinus mauretanicus*. Pierre Yesou, Andre Barzic, Russel B Wynn and Patrick Le Mao. France has strong responsibilities for the conservation of Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*. Balearic Shearwater which breeds in the western Mediterranean, is critically endangered according to IUCN criteria and is listed under Annex I of UNEP Convention on Migratory Species. Its population is estimated at 2000 – 2400 breeding pairs or less than 10,000 individuals. Most birds migrate to the Atlantic after breeding and French coastal waters of Biscay and western Channel then regularly hold over 50% of the species population. Although conservation actions, studies and surveys have been undertaken in Spain, Portugal and the UK, a national survey and conservation programme still needs to be developed by France.

**Atlantic Seabirds Vol 7.3 2005** [www.seabirdgroup.org.uk](http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk)

Factors affecting the breeding success of Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* in a colony at Kaldbakshotnur, Faroe Islands. *Atlantic Seabirds* 7(3): 97-105. Schreiber, J. & Kissling, W.D.2005. Food shortage and predation are the main factors limiting the breeding success of many colonial seabirds. The aim of this study was to examine whether they influence breeding success of Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* in a colony of 99 breeding pairs at Kaldbakshotnur on the island of Streymoy, Faroe Islands. In 2003, we investigated clutch size, hatching success, food provisioning to chicks, kleptoparasitism, and predation, and the number of fledged chicks. Clutch size was on average 1.65 ( $\pm 0.48$ ) eggs/clutch with a hatching success of 100%. Food provisioning rates were low with 0.47 ( $\pm 0.18$ ) feeds per nest per hour. Most prey items were small (c. 32 mm long), and terns showed high rates of intraspecific kleptoparasitism. Attacks by avian predators were occasionally observed, mainly by Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus*, but were unsuccessful in all observed cases. Counts of fledged chicks indicated average breeding productivity of

0.22 chicks per pair. Our results suggest that breeding success in this colony was mainly affected by food shortage, possibly limited sandeel *Ammodytes* spp. availability. Predation appears to be less important, but could occur at a low rate. The results are consistent with recent evidence showing that seabirds that feed on sandeels currently have limited breeding success in the North Atlantic region.

Restricted nesting habitat and reproductive failure of Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens* in the Cape Verde Islands. *Atlantic Seabirds* 7(3): 107-120. López Suárez P., Varo Cruz N., Hazevoet C.J. & López Jurado L.F.2005. The islets of Baluarte and Curral Velho, off the island of Boavista, Cape Verde Islands, are the only two breeding sites of the Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* in the Western Palaearctic. This East Atlantic relict population was monitored from the summer of 1999 up to May 2006. Most surveys were conducted during the breeding season, i.e. from November to June. Total reproductive failure has been the rule over the last seven consecutive breeding seasons. Possible causes of nest failure are attributed to: 1) accidental egg loss during the incubation period; 2) hatching failure. The most plausible reasons explaining both causes are discussed. Human persecution and disturbance, restricted nesting habitat and isolation, and unsuccessful breeding has brought the population on the verge of extinction. The remaining population, thought to consist of 4-5 adult individuals (2 females and 2-3 males), is unlikely to survive on its own.

Large numbers of Cape Verde Shearwaters *Calonectris edwardsii* off Santo Antão, Cape Verde Islands, in July 2005. *Atlantic Seabirds* 7(3): 121-126. Horssen, P. van2006.

During systematic sea watching in the period 20-27 July 2005 at Ponta do Sol, Santo Antão, Cape Verde Islands, a total of 6653 Cape Verde Shearwaters *Calonectris edwardsii* were counted. Largest numbers were counted 2-2.5 hours before sunset. Main flight direction was east. Numbers of Cape Verde Shearwaters were low 1-1.5 hours after sunrise, with the main flight direction being west.

Double white lines on the bill of the Razorbill *Alca torda*: remnants of an association with the extinct Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis*? *Atlantic Seabirds* 7(3): 127-132. Lavers J.L., Muzaffar S.B. & Jones I.L.2005. One of the diagnostic features of the Razorbill *Alca torda* is the distinct white line running vertically across the bill. Here we report the presence of two white bill lines in 10 wintering Razorbills from Newfoundland, Canada in addition to a small number of unreported birds from museum collections and personal records. Populations of Razorbills across their range have been divided into two major subspecies based on morphological variation, although molecular studies do not support such a subdivision. Molecular phylogeny of the auks place Razorbills as the closest relatives of the extinct Great Auk *Pinguinus impennis*. Multiple white bill lines were a characteristic of the Great Auk and we speculate that this variation in the bill marking in the Razorbill is an atavism, reflecting their common ancestry.

Effects of supplementary feeding on provisioning and growth rates of Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica* chicks in North Norway. *Atlantic Seabirds* 7(3): 133-143. Dahl H.K., Barrett R.T. & Ims R.A.2005. After many years of a gradual change in chick diet and a supposed deterioration in feeding conditions, chicks of Atlantic Puffins *Fratercula arctica* were fed 50g supplementary food per day (capelin *Mallotus villosus*) to test if they grew faster than control chicks, thus indicating that conditions really were suboptimal. Growth rates were, however, approximately the same as for control chicks through a near halving

of provisioning rate by the experimental parents. This suggests that feeding conditions, despite a large change in diet composition, were still adequate for normal breeding.

**Bird Study Vol 54.3 Nov 07** [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

No Seabird content.

**British Birds Vol 100 455-516 Aug 07** [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)

Underwater images from bird-borne cameras provides clue to poor breeding success of Shags in 2005 p466. Yutaka Watanuki, Akinori Takahashi, Francis Daunt, Katsufumi Sato, Nobuyuki Miyazaki and Sarah Wanless. ABSTRACT. The first underwater digital photographs obtained by cameras carried by Shags *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* showed the birds diving in areas dominated by soft coral *Alcyonium digitatum* and feeding on Butterfish *Pholis gunnellus*, which were brought to the surface before being swallowed. Prey capture rates were markedly lower than previous estimates for birds feeding on sandeels *Ammodytes*. This reduced foraging performance probably contributed to the very poor breeding success at the colony on the Isle of May in 2005.

Autumn skua records in Somerset indicating overland passage p503. For some time it has been suspected that a small proportion of migrant skuas in autumn use overland routes in Britain, but there is little published evidence (though see McNery & Griffin 2007, below). This note gives details of observations off the Somerset coast in recent autumns (particularly 2002) and examines both historical Somerset records and contemporary records from elsewhere (especially Cambridgeshire). These provide strong evidence for use of an overland route from the Wash to the Bristol Channel, the shortest sea-to-sea crossing of the widest part of southern Britain.

**British Birds Vol 100 517-572 Sep 07** [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)

Population limitation in birds: the last 100 years. Ian Newton

ABSTRACT. Over the past 100 years, much has been learnt about what limits the numbers of birds, and many field experiments have been conducted to check ideas. Such understanding is essential for the effective conservation or other management of bird populations. All the main factors likely to affect bird numbers, whether food or nest-sites, predators, pathogens or competitors, have been found to limit the numbers of one species or another. The same species may be limited by different factors in different areas or in different years. Some species may be limited by a combination of factors, which interact in their effects on population levels. Long-term trends and/or year-to-year fluctuations suggest that some migratory bird populations are limited primarily in their breeding areas, and others primarily in their wintering areas. Other aspects of population regulation are also discussed, including demographic factors (births, deaths and movements), and the role of territorial and other aggressive behaviour in the limiting process.

The origin of 'Caspian Gulls' breeding in Poland. Grzegorz Neubauer and Magdalena Zagalska-Neubauer. The 'Caspian Gull' *Larus (argentatus) cachinnans* originally inhabited south-east Europe, where it bred on flat, sandy lagoons along the coast and at steppe reservoirs (Yudin & Firsova 1988). The population has increased significantly in the past 100 years, which has resulted in range expansion to the north and west, a trend

that is still clear in Ukraine, Poland and Belarus (Birdlife International 2004).

**British Birds Vol 100 573-636 Oct 07** [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)

Order or Chaos? Taxonomy and the British List over the last 100 years p609. Alan G Knox.

**British Birds Vol 100 637-692 Nov 07** [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)

100 years of bird behaviour studies – p665. Angela Turner. ABSTRACT. In the first half of the twentieth century, studies of bird species were influential in the evolution of the science of animal behaviour. Following the development of key theoretical ideas, behavioural research diversified in the second half of the century, with studies using birds as model species providing important examples and insights in such areas as optimal foraging, cognition, sexual selection, mating systems, co-operation, communication and navigation. Such single-species studies offer insights not possible from comparative studies. They have also had more practical applications, for example in wildlife management and in monitoring pollution and climate change.

**British Ornithologists' Club (BOU) V127.2 Jun 07** [www.boc-online.org](http://www.boc-online.org)

No seabird content

**British Ornithologists' Club (BOU) V127.3 Sep 07** [www.boc-online.org](http://www.boc-online.org)

No seabird content

**BTO News 270 May 07** [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

No Seabird content.

**BTO News 272 Sep 07** [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)

No Seabird content.

**Dutch Birding Vol 29.5 2007** [www.dutchbirding.nl](http://www.dutchbirding.nl)

Identification of American Sandwich Tern p273. Martin Carner, Ian Lewington & Jason Crook.

American Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis acuflavida* (hereafter *acuflavida*) is the North American counterpart of European Sandwich Tern *S s sandvicensis* (hereafter *sandvicensis*) and also known as Cabot's Tern. It has occurred as a vagrant in the Western Palaearctic twice but has only been detected through ringing recoveries. However, *acuflavida* has a sufficiently distinct appearance in a number of plumages to be 'potentially' identifiable as a vagrant in the field. Its identification is explored in this paper. The ability to age an individual bird as well as having an understanding of the effects of moult and wear are essential skills needed in the finer points of identifying this taxon.



Lost and found: Laughing Gull 'Atze' in Europe p288. Gert Ottens. From July 2000 to June 2002, an adult Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* was irregularly observed at several inland sites in the eastern half of the Netherlands and neighbouring Germany. During the breeding seasons of 2001 and 2002, this bird was present in a Black-headed Gull *L ridibundus* colony at Zwillbrocker Venn, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany, where it was ringed in June 2001 (right tarsus: plain white colour ring; right tibia: aluminium ring, Helgoland 5258506) and was nicknamed 'Atze' after the species' German name 'Aztekenrnowe' (Ottens 2004). These rings confirmed that a Dutch record of October 2001 concerned the same individual. The Dutch rarities committee (CDNA) consequently decided that all records mentioned in Ottens (2004) related to the same bird, which constituted the third record for both the Netherlands and Germany.

**Dutch Birding Vol29.4 2007 [www.dutchbirding.nl](http://www.dutchbirding.nl)**

Short-billed Gull on Terceira, Azores, in February-March 2003 and identification of the 'Mew Gull complex' p201. Peter Alfrey & Mashuq Ahmad. On 18 February 2003, Peter Alfrey was watching a pre-roosting site for gulls *Larus* on the beach of Praia da Vitoria, Terceira, Azores, when he came across a very unusual adult-type 'Mew Gull' *L canus*. It had a distinctive long-necked and small-headed appearance, showed a pale olive-yellow iris and, in flight, showed extensive white in the wing-tip. The distinctly pale iris was immediately obvious. With other birds in the vicinity including 33 Ring-billed *L delawarensis*, a first winter Bonaparte's *L philadelphia*, four immature American Herring Gulls *L smithsonianus* and a first winter Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*, PA's thoughts turned to the Nearctic (sub)species of the 'Mew Gull complex', Short-billed Gull *L c brachyrhynchus*. A second year Common Gull *L c canus* (only the fourth for the Azores) was present alongside the presumed Short-billed Gull, enabling direct comparison of size, posture and coloration. The next day, the presumed Short-billed was still present and could be photographed. On PA's return to Britain, various identification consultants were approached and after much discussion the bird was concluded to be, indeed, a Short-billed Gull - a new taxon for the Western Palearctic. Mashuq Ahmad visited Terceira the next month and relocated the bird on 16 March; he obtained a detailed videographic record, which was instrumental towards securing the identification. It was still present on 24

March. The observation was submitted to the Portuguese Rarities Committee (PRC) and, in April 2007, accepted as the first record for the Azores and the WP (Joao Jara in Litt). Adult American Herring Gull on Flores, Azores, in December 2005 p213. Pierre-André Crochet & Peter Adriaens. During the autumn of 2005, Pierre-André Crochet's parents decided to spend the next Christmas in French Polynesia. To replace the usual familial events, he thought of a better place to spend Christmas' eve than alone at home. Ignoring offers from friends to join their own family events, he decided to opt for Corvo, Azores, where visiting birders kept reporting long staying American vagrants after Peter Alfrey's groundbreaking visit in October 2005 (Alfrey 2005, Hering & Alfrey 2006). After this decision, he hastened to find himself a companion. He turned to Eric Didner and, after a round of difficult negotiations with his parents, ED agreed to come along. Plans were to spend c 12 days in the Azores, with a few days on Corvo and visiting as many of the other islands as possible. Among the target species, gulls were high on the list. Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* (a potential new species for PAC and ED) is remarkably rare in the Azores (see <http://azores.seawatching.net>) but at least two had been reported repeatedly during the autumn alongside much larger numbers of Laughing Gulls *L atricilla*. This unusually high number of rare gulls made PAC expect that the trip would be a good opportunity to find and study American Herring Gulls *L smithsonianus* (hereafter *smithsonianus*); several first-winters had been reported earlier that year on Flores and Sao Miguel. Besides, PAC was keen to study Atlantic Yellow-legged Gull *L michahellis atlantis* (hereafter *atlantis*) and amass photographic documentation. Of course, he was also expecting some additions to his Western Palearctic list. The day after their arrival on Faial, PAC and ED found an American Coot *Fulica americana* on Pico. Then they visited Graciosa, a seldom visited island where Joel Bried, a French ornithologist residing in the Azores, had found a Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon* in early December. PAC and ED relocated the bird, providing a second lifer for both. The diversity of American gulls, however, was still limited to Laughing Gulls, with two on Faial, two on Graciosa and one found on Terceira when they arrived there. PAC managed to lure ED into long sessions of gull watching in Terceira harbour and persuaded him to take many photographs of immature *atlantis* and Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L fuscus graellsii* but the only rewards were Great Black-backed Gulls *L marinus*. Even at the Terceira landfill, a renowned gull hot spot, the only scarce gulls were two first-winter European Herring Gulls *L argentatus* (of *argenteus* type).

### **Indian Birds Vol 3.1 Jan 07 [www.indianbirds.com](http://www.indianbirds.com)**

An ornithological expedition to the Lakshadweep archipelago: Assessment of threats to pelagic and other birds and recommendations. Satish Pande, Niranjan R. Sant, Satish D. Ranade, Shivkumar N. Pednekar, Premsagar G. Mestry, Sanjay S. Kharat & Vaibhav Deshmukh Pande, S., Sant, N. R., Ranade, S. D., Pednekar, S. N., Mestry, P. G., Kharat, S. S. & Deshmukh, V. 2007. An ornithological expedition to Lakshadweep archipelago: Assessment of threats to pelagic and other birds and recommendations. *Indian Birds* 3 (1): 2-12.

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Several previous reports have documented the avifauna of Lakshadweep Archipelago: Hume (1876), Alcock (1902), Gadow & Gardiner (1903), Ellis (1924), Betts (1939), Burton (1940), Bourne (1960), Ramuni (1962), Watson et al. (1963), Mathew & Ambedkar (1964), Bailey et al. (1968), Anon. (1970, 1991), Subiah (1978), Ripley (1982), Chapman (1984), Bhaskaran (1985), Livingstone (1987), Ali & Ripley (1989), Bourne (1989), Mohan (1989), Daniels (1992), Kurup & Zacharias (1994), Robertson (1994), and Santharam et al. (1996).



Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*

The last ornithological survey of the archipelago was in 1990-1991 (Santharam et al. 1996). The present 2<sup>nd</sup> Pelagic Birds Survey from 12-16.iii.2006, a joint effort of ELA Foundation, Pune and Ecological Society, Pune together with Indian Coast Guard, was carried out after a lapse of 16 years. The first part of this survey focused on pelagic bird life off the western coast of India, in the Arabian Sea, and was completed in October-November 2005 (Pande 2005). Here we present the findings of the second lap of our survey, which was

restricted to the Lakshadweep archipelago. Pitti Island, a part of the Lakshadweep archipelago, is an Important Bird Area (Islam & Rahmani 2004).

The Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* of Uppalapadu (Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh, India) Humayun Taher

Taher, H. 2006. The Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* of Uppalapadu (Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh, India). *Indian Birds* 3 (1): 13-16.

Humayun Taher, 2-B Atlas Apartments, Road No. 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, Andhra Pradesh, India. Email: [humauun.taher@gmail.com](mailto:humauun.taher@gmail.com)

In the middle of the 1970s, the pelicanry at Kolleru Lake in Andhra Pradesh (AP.) was reported to have over 3,000 nesting Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* (Gee 1960; Guttikar 1979). By the end of the 1970s, disturbed due to the upcoming fish farming industry and other factors, this huge pelicanry was abandoned by the birds (Guttikar 1979). In the latter part of the 1970s a few pelicans were noted at Vedanthangal Lake in Chengalpattu district of Tamil Nadu (Neginhal1977). It was presumed that these birds were part of the Kolleru pelicanry (Neginhal1977). In the early 1980s, a few pelicans were observed attempting to nest on the *Barringtonia* trees in the small lake at

Nelapattu in AP. (Nagulu & Rao 1983). The close proximity of Pulicat Lagoon (20 km from Nelapattu), a potential feeding ground, was a major attraction and the pelicanry at Nelapattu was established and grew. Currently there are over 310 Spot-billed Pelican nests here. (K. Mrutyumjaya Rao, *verbally*.) But the bulk of Kolleru's pelican population still could not be located, even though there were sporadic reports of pelicans nesting in West Godavari district up to Srikakulam district of AP. (T. Ramakrishna, *verbally*). No data is available on their numbers or breeding. Some birds may quite possibly have gone to Chilika Lake in Orissa (though no population studies have been done on the breeding pelicans at Chilika). Some others also probably joined the breeding pelicans at Kokkare Bellurin Karnataka (Guttikar 1979). In January 1999, a single adult Spot-billed Pelican was observed at Uppalapadu village tank. In January 2000, 40 pelicans arrived at Uppalapadu and 15 nests were built here. This was the start of the breeding of the Spot-billed Pelicans in Uppalapadu tank (Rao & Kumar 2000).

**Indian Birds Vol 3.2 Mar 07 [www.indianbirds.com](http://www.indianbirds.com)**

**A large breeding colony of River Tern *Sterna aurantia* in Chilika Lake, Orissa (India)**

P. Sathiyaselvam & S. Balachandran

Sathiyaselvam, P. & Balachandran, S. 2007. Largest nesting colony of River Tern *Sterna aurantia* in Chilika Lake, Orissa, India. *Indian Birds* 3 (2): 65-66.

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*Mss received on 31.viii.2006.*

River Tern *Sterna aurantia* distribution is restricted to tropical Asia-from Iran east through Pakistan, India and Thailand. It inhabits inland river systems, lakes and rarely, estuaries (Ali & Ripley 1983; Harrison 1983). Information on the breeding biology of the species is limited. During our waterbird population monitoring study at Chilika Lake (19°28'-19°54'N 85°05'-85°38'E), Orissa (India), between 2001 and 2005, a breeding colony of three tern species namely Gull-billed *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Little *Sterna albifrons* and River terns was recorded on Nalabana Island (19°42'36"N 85°28'48"E) located in Chilika Lake. We recorded nesting season, nest locations, nest materials, clutch size and threats to the breeding terns for three consecutive years (2002, 2003 & 2004). Nests were marked with 5 cm long, well-camouflaged sign strips, to avoid repeated counting and to confirm the clutch size and incubation period. The sign strips were numbered to identify individual nests and nest locations were marked with a Global Positioning System (GPS). To minimize disturbance to the nesting / brooding birds, surveys were mostly done early morning and late evening. Care was taken to minimize the disturbance while moving into the colony site.



River Tern *Sterna aurantia*

**Ornithologischer Anzeiger Vol 46. 1** (in German and English) [www.og-bayern.de](http://www.og-bayern.de)  
No Seabird content.

**Ornithologischer Anzeiger Vol 46.1** (in German and English) [www.og-bayern.de](http://www.og-bayern.de)  
No Seabird content.

**RAFOS Newsletter No 84 Autumn 07** [www.rafos.org.uk](http://www.rafos.org.uk)  
No Seabird content.

**RSPB Birds Vol 21.8 Nov 07** [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

Push for marine bill continues. Kim Barratt, *Safeguard our Sea Life Campaign Organiser*  
Thank you to everyone who has supported our Safeguard our Sea Life campaign this summer. We hope that all of our efforts will be rewarded with a UK Marine Bill in the Queen's Speech this autumn. We are pushing for better protection of the UK's seas and the wildlife that depends on them. While seabirds are protected when they are on land nesting, there is no such protection for them when they are out at sea. The Prime Minister's summer statement outlined a half-hearted commitment to introducing a draft UK Marine Bill, jeopardising the Labour Party's manifesto promise to introduce comprehensive marine legislation. Our campaign has received widespread cross-party support. Hundreds of thousands of people, many of them RSPB members, have pressed the UK Government to introduce a UK Marine Bill by writing letters, signing a pledge, sending postcards or through a petition on our website. Responsibility for our seas and coasts lies with the UK and devolved Governments. In a welcome step forward for Scotland, the Scottish Government has announced that it intends to introduce a Scottish Marine Bill. It is crucial that any legislation offers the protection that our marine environment deserves. We continue

to campaign hard for a Scottish Marine Bill and a UK Marine Bill that will adequately protect wildlife in the seas around England, Wales and Northern Ireland to be introduced in the 2007/2008 parliamentary session. For the latest, please visit [www.rspb.org.uk/safeguardoursealife](http://www.rspb.org.uk/safeguardoursealife).

More help for birds caught at sea. Thanks in part to pressure from British MEPs, the European Commission has started the ball rolling on the process of getting more strategic and effective protection for seabirds that are caught on fishing lines and killed (bycatch). The MEPs' interest was largely stimulated by the volunteer letter writers who wrote to their MEPs - thank you if you helped with this. The Commission has started gathering information and scientific advice with a view to completing a Community Action Plan for reducing seabird bycatch in EU waters in 2009. We have been campaigning for the plan to extend to European vessels fishing anywhere in the world beyond EU waters, which would provide protection for albatrosses. The Commission has yet to commit to such a global plan but, as a first step, we welcome the initiative it has agreed to take. In 1999, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) developed an International Plan of Action to tackle seabird bycatch in longline fisheries and urged fishing nations to translate this into national or, in the EU's case, regional plans. The EU presented a draft action plan in 2001, but has made little progress until now. When implemented, the plan should help reduce the needless slaughter of threatened seabirds such as Cory's shearwaters (above), Balearic shearwaters and other seabirds on longlines in the Mediterranean. Many thanks to those of you who wrote in support of this campaign. It's a great example of the power of the pen and the difference you can make.

If you would like to help spread the message about our campaigns by writing letters to politicians, please visit [www.rspb.org.uk/campaignwithus](http://www.rspb.org.uk/campaignwithus) or call the Campaigns Team on 01767 680551.

### **Sandgrouse Vol 29.2 2007** [www.osme.org](http://www.osme.org)

Skua (*Catharacta*, *Stercorarius*) occurrence in the OSME Region. VLADIMIR ARKHIPOV AND MICHAEL BLAIR. Records of skua (*Catharacta*, *Stercorarius*) occurrence in the OSME Region come from a wide variety of sources. Those we found in the English language are diverse, but those in the languages of the Region have been difficult, if not impossible, to consult until recent years. The geographic definition of the OSME Region now includes the Caucasus and Central Asian Republics, the majority of whose sources and of those in neighbouring Russia and Ukraine have been published only in Cyrillic languages. Offshore observations have been of particular value in suggesting passage trends. Overland passage from skua breeding grounds seems well established, probably as minor migration routes, representing a strategy that would balance better migration conditions against probably uncertain food supplies en route, whereas migrants travelling solely over the sea face poorer migration conditions but may have a guaranteed food supply. Observation of overland migration is rendered more difficult by the underlying trend of fluctuating skua numbers being in delayed lockstep with lemming population cycles. Overland migration between the breeding grounds and the open waters of such as the Aegean, Black and Caspian Seas and of the Gulf through to the Indian Ocean is substantiated by records. Other overland movements, such as across Turkey or

eastern Saudi Arabia probably occur, but remain largely undocumented because of low observer density. Furthermore, skuas that do migrate overland probably perform loop migration in at least the southern part of their journey. The recent warming trend of the Holarctic taiga and tundra zones is likely to alter the composition and proportions of their biological communities in an unpredictable and complex way, and probably non-linearly.

## **Scottish Bird News No 85 Sep 07**

No Seabird content.

## **Seabird Group Newsletter 104 Feb 07 [www.seabirdgroup.org.uk](http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk)**

Special Protection Areas In The Marine Environment. The Seabirds and Cetaceans section of the JNCC is made up of the Seabirds at Sea Team (SAST) and the Seabird Colony Team, both of which are based at the JNCC's Aberdeen office. Work is done on a very broad front carrying out, coordinating, commissioning, and supporting research and survey on seabirds, not just in the UK but in Europe and even globally. A major component of SAST's work programme involves the identification of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for various species of marine waterbird. European Union member states are obliged under the Birds Directive of 2 April 1979 (EU Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds) to classify SPAs for those species on Annex I of the Directive - generally those that are considered rare or vulnerable - and also for regularly occurring migratory species. In terms of waterbirds, the former includes divers, terns, storm-petrels, and various other seabirds; the latter includes all seabirds (except Black Guillemot) and many waterfowl, including seaduck such as Common Scoter.

SPAs are required to be classified both on land and in the marine environment. While the terrestrial network of SPAs has largely been determined, until recently very little progress had been made with the identification of SPAs with significant marine components. JNCC has recognised three possible types of marine SPA. These are:

- Marine extensions to existing seabird breeding colony SPAs.
- Inshore areas used by aggregations of non-breeding waterbirds outside the breeding season.
- Offshore areas used by seabirds in feeding or any other type of aggregations.

Identification of possible SPAs in each of these categories is being progressed within three associated thematic strands of work, though where appropriate, other types of marine SPA will also be considered.

Analysis is currently underway to determine marine SPAs for breeding Red-throated Divers (Ben Dean)

Marine extensions. There are currently 96 SPAs with qualifying seabird interests either classified or proposed. Birds breeding in 92 of these SPAs also use the waters immediately adjacent to the colonies to varying extents for a variety of purposes. Following the analysis of seabird distribution data collected from survey cruises around colonies, the functional significance of these waters was assessed for most species of seabird, and thereby linked to the original purpose for which these sites were classified. We have made generic recommendations on whether to extend existing colony SPAs into the marine environment and if so, by how much. To date, we have recommended that:

- Colony SPAs for which Atlantic Puffin, Common Guillemot, or Razorbill are interest features be extended by 1 km.
- Colony SPAs for which Northern Gannet or Northern Fulmar are interest features be extended by 2 km.
- Colony SPAs for which Manx Shearwater is an interest feature be extended by at least 4 km, or more where the available evidence warrants it; this recommendation derived from radio-tracking studies of the species around colonies in Wales and Scotland (see Newsletter 101) Fieldwork and analyses are either under way or planned for breeding terns, shags, and Red throated Divers. Possible SPAs identified during this work may be recommended as extensions to existing breeding SPAs for these species, possibly disjunctive from the breeding sites/colonies, or may be recommended as possible sites in their own right.

Inshore areas. Several species of migratory seaduck, divers and grebes form aggregations around the coast outside the breeding season. Such concentrations may be very large comprising several thousands of individuals; they may be aggregated at small scales, for example dense flocks of seaduck, or at larger scales (though still clustered), such as divers.

In this context, 45 coastal areas all around the UK have been identified as potential areas of search for qualifying numbers of waterbirds. Over the past 5 years or so these areas have been the targets for extensive, systematic surveys carried out from aircraft. We use distance sampling techniques to correct for birds that go undetected and estimate the total likely numbers of birds using each inshore area. If an area is likely to qualify as an SPA according to established guidelines for numerical thresholds, then further analyses may be carried out to define options for possible site boundaries. Data from several areas have been analysed. So far, this has led to the classification, in 2003, of Carmarthen Bay as the UK's first wholly marine SPA; this was done on the strength of its large population of Common Scoter (see Figure 1). Other areas for which analyses have progressed include Liverpool Bay, Aberdeen Bay, the Moray Firth, the Firth of Forth, Tay Bay, Scapa Flow, and extensive parts of south-east England including the Thames and the Wash.

Offshore areas. Offshore areas include any area of open sea, from close inshore to the limit of the UK continental shelf. Clearly, it is a mammoth task to identify important hotspots for seabirds over this vast area. However, our aim is to investigate the use of the European Seabirds At Sea (ESAS) database as a possible tool for doing so. The database contains around 2 million records of seabird distribution in the waters of the north-east Atlantic, records collected over a period of almost 30 years. We have commissioned a series of spatial analyses that aim to identify possible hotspots and the preliminary results are expected by the end of the year.

Jim Reid, Head of Seabirds and Cetaceans, JNCC. (Jim.Reid@jncc.gov.uk)

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee is the statutory adviser to Government on UK and international nature conservation. Its advice is delivered on behalf of the Countryside Council for Wales, Natural England, the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (Northern Ireland), and Scottish Natural Heritage. Its work contributes to maintaining and enriching biological diversity, conserving geological features and sustaining natural systems. Based in Peterborough, the JNCC also has offices in Brussels and Aberdeen.

Ailsa Craig: A Success Story. From some of the earliest written comment on Scottish seabirds, it is evident that the Puffin colony on Ailsa Craig was once vast. Some of the classic phrases often used to describe huge numbers of seabirds originated on Ailsa.

William Abercrommie in 1696 described the Ailsa Puffins thus - "when put upon the wing, they will darken the heavens above the spectator". Almost 200 years later, Robert Gray in 1871, *Birds of the West of Scotland* described them on the wing overhead in similar terms "their numbers seemed so great as to cause a bewildering darkness ". These descriptions may seem exaggerated but are probably not. The areas then occupied, and the known densities of Puffins on other islands today, show that half a million burrows could easily be accommodated on an island some 380m (1,114 ft) high and almost 6 km in circumference.

Following the finding of rats on the island in 1889, that all changed. Arriving from ships or shipwrecks and at a time when the lighthouse had just been built to prevent such maritime disasters, rats became established. Within a decade the effects of a resident rat population on the vast Puffin colony was both notable and visible. Other known breeding seabirds such as Storm Petrels quickly died out. The rat eradication programme has shown marked signs of success.

Dramatic Breeding Failure Among Norwegian Seabirds. Fieldwork in this year's SEAPOP programme revealed that food shortages have again caused breeding failures among pelagic seabirds breeding in mid and most of North Norway. Even more disconcerting was their populations also continued to decline. Only the coastal species that feed inshore and in the fjords succeeded to raise chicks in normal numbers.

Another Auk Wreck Begins. A wreck of several thousand starving Razorbills (and some Guillemots and Puffins) was reported in the inner areas of the Oslofjord and along the west coast of Sweden towards the end of September. Unusual numbers of razorbills (up to 3,000/day) had been noted heading east past Skagen into the Kattegat during the second half of September, more than a month earlier than normal. Of the auks in Oslofjord, razorbills outnumbered guillemots by 4:1, most were adults, and a sample of over 400 has been collected for biometric and other examinations. Two of the birds were adults, ringed on the Isle of May (in 2000) and the Shiant (1982). The 10M bird, a male, had been ringed as an adult, bred with the same mate for the past 8 years, taken a chick to sea in 7 of those years (5\_6<sup>th</sup> July this year), and therefore be considered a 'high-quality' individual.

### **Seevögel Vol 28 Booklet 3 Sep 07 (in German)**

An article concerning the Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

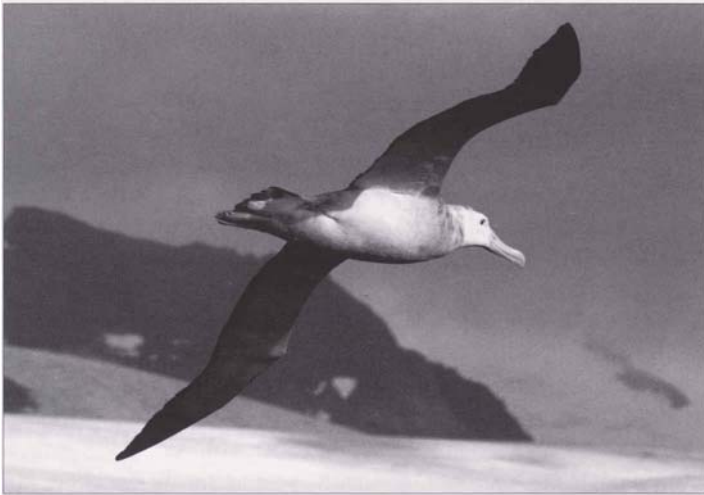
### **The Osprey Issue 7 2007**

Sooty Terns *Sterna fuscata* on Ascension Island South Atlantic – 16<sup>th</sup> Report. Major Andrew Bray. Summary: The expedition 18 Oct to 10 Nov 2005 completed a full census of the Sooty Terns *Sterna fuscata*. The colony size at the end of October 2005 was 183,000 AON. Predatory activities on our three study sites were recorded. Rat numbers have increased significantly and high levels of rat predation (35 rats per 100 trap nights) were measured. A further 2,000 Sooty Terns were ringed and 116 re-trapped. DNA and biometric measurements were taken from 66 ringed birds. The DNA was used to sex the terns and a paper on sexing Sooty Tern from biometrics is being prepared. Sooty Terns that were feeding large chicks were trapped and ringed, with green colour rings, with the

aim of re-trapping the birds next season so as to determine the length of the breeding cycle.

**UKOTCF Forum News 31, Oct 2007 [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org)**

The South Georgia Wandering Albatross. The South Georgia wandering albatross population has sustained another drastic decline. Information published on the South Georgia website and from recent television programmes has highlighted the plight of this species and forms the basis of the article. On Bird Island, where scientists have been monitoring the population for over 30 years, a total of 779 nests were counted in January 2007. After correcting for early season failures, this equates to an estimated total of 802 breeding pairs. That is a decline of 49 pairs compared to last season and of 125 pairs since this breeder group last bred in the 2005 season. (This species has a 2-year breeding cycle.) A similar trend was recorded in the Bay of Isles, also on South Georgia. Dr Richard Phillips from the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) said that analysis of long-term Bird Island data - from ringing-recovery records (both at sea and from other sites at South Georgia), fisheries observer reports, satellite tracking data and annual censuses - may provide some of the answers behind the drop. Given the routinely high breeding success of this species, it is unlikely that ocean regime shifts or changing availability of fishing discards is having an impact, and that an increase in adult and juvenile mortality on



*Wandering Albatross over its breeding grounds, against the glaciers of South Georgia*

longlines is almost certainly the root cause of the population declines. Robin Snape, BAS Zoological Field Assistant at Bird Island, reported that half of wandering albatross chicks on Bird Island had ingested longline hooks. Despite the achievements of the well managed South Georgia longline fishery succeeding in reducing mortality of seabirds to almost zero, a new diet sampling programme at Bird Island has highlighted the shocking extent of longline hook ingestion by wandering albatrosses. More than 50% of wanderer chicks had ingested long line hooks, fed to them by their parents. Diet samples contain large hooks from longline fisheries, usually with small pieces of line attached. These were most

likely to have been consumed in discarded bait and offal thrown overboard by longline vessels, which the adult birds routinely follow at sea. The hooks are then brought back and fed to the chick along with the other food.

Sadly, as wandering albatrosses are so wide ranging, they forage far outside of the South Georgia area and come into conflict with bad fishing practices that are responsible for the continuing decline in the South Georgia population, and the decline of seabird populations worldwide. Indeed, the Bird Island population has almost halved since the early 1970s when longline fishing began to operate at large-scale in the Southern Ocean.

In 2004 the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) adopted a conservation measure making removal of hooks from offal mandatory. Although compliance has taken some time to achieve, discard of hooks is now considered to be rare in CCAMLR waters. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case elsewhere, and the practice of irresponsibly discarding hooks in used bait may be typical of poorly governed fisheries. It is also likely that the vessels responsible are not employing other simple, cheap, and effective methods that help protect seabirds.

In South Georgia's regulated fishery the effectiveness of simple practices (such as: greater line weighting; only setting lines at night; and the use of a streamer or 'tori' line that discourages scavenging birds from coming close to the longlines during setting) has been clearly demonstrated. In the South Georgia Fishery Zone seabird mortality on longlines has been reduced to almost zero for a number of years now.

The introduction of mitigation measures in the pelagic and demersal fisheries around the Falklands and South Georgia has proved to be very effective in reducing seabird mortality. Adoption of similar mitigation by other regional fisheries management organisations would be of huge benefit to albatrosses and petrels, and would help stop the disastrous decline of South Georgia's wanderers. *For further information contact Sally Poncet, South Georgia Surveys Email: [sallyponcet@horizon.co.fk](mailto:sallyponcet@horizon.co.fk)*

**World Birdwatch 09.07 Sep [www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)**

**'Alarm-call' for China's rarest bird p8.** A recent study of Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bernsteini* suggests that the global population has fallen to less than 50 individuals, half what they were just three years ago. The study believes that the main cause of this decline is an unregulated rise in the trade for seabird eggs, a local delicacy, alongside the growing tourist community.