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Issue 9, December 2017

Seabirds

South West



Survey shows
Lundy's seabirds
are thriving

New marine
SPAs designated
in Cornwall and
Dorset

Isles of Scilly
Seabird Recovery
Project celebrates
success

Another great
season for
Dorset's little
terns

Lundy seabird success

Helen Booker

Lundy is one of the most important sites in South West England for breeding seabirds and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for Manx shearwater, puffin, guillemot, razorbill and kittiwake. It is also one of only two locations in England supporting breeding Manx shearwater and storm petrel (the other being the Isles of Scilly), and one of the few where puffins breed. Great black-backed, lesser black-backed and herring gulls also breed on Lundy.

In 2017, RSPB and Natural England staff and RSPB volunteers surveyed Lundy's breeding seabirds as part of a regular monitoring cycle and to contribute to the National Seabird Census. All species were counted apart from the gulls and storm petrels which will be surveyed in 2018. The Manx shearwater survey is currently incomplete and will also be finished in 2018.

Results for the surveyed seabirds were very encouraging, with guillemot, razorbill, puffin and fulmar all showing an increasing trend since the last national seabird census in 2000. Shag numbers remain generally stable and kittiwakes have recovered to their 2000 level, as shown in figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1
Recent populations of guillemot and razorbill

Ind = count of individuals

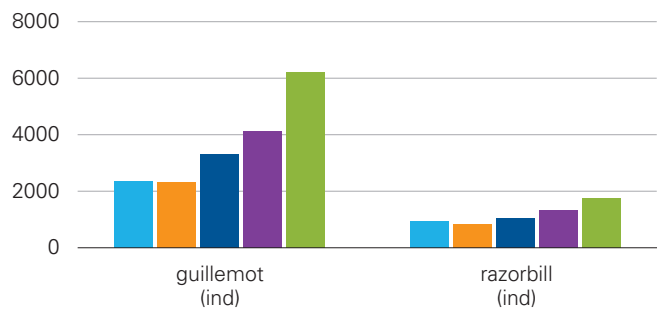
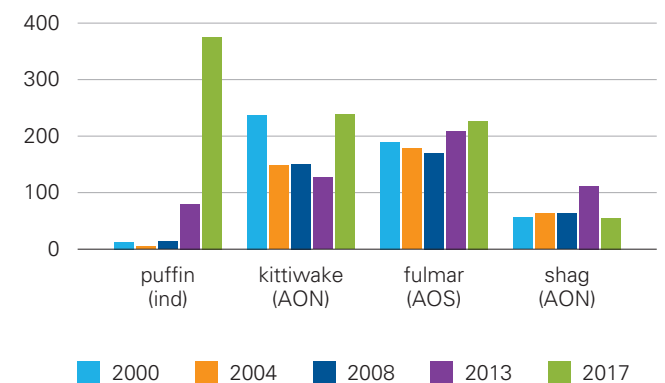


Figure 2
Recent populations of puffin, kittiwake, fulmar and shag

AON = count of Apparently Occupied Nests
AOS = count of Apparently Occupied Sites



The work of the Lundy Seabird Recovery Project (a partnership between Natural England, RSPB, National Trust and Landmark Trust), which cleared the island of rats by March 2004, alongside favourable foraging conditions for seabirds, has supported the increase in Lundy's seabirds.

New marine protected areas for South West England

Paul St Pierre and Renny Henderson

The RSPB worked for the last 25 years to clarify the seabird importance of the **Fal Bay to St Austell Bay** area and lobby for its inclusion in the SPA network. It is fantastic news that this internationally important area for wintering divers and grebes has received the recognition it deserves, protecting one of the premier sites for these species in the UK. We look forward to working with agencies,

businesses and communities to keep this area special.

On 31 October 2017 the UK government confirmed the extension of the **Poole Harbour SPA**. This extends the SPA to include the sub-tidal areas of the harbour and areas of Lytchett Bay, on the north side of the harbour, subject to tidal inundation. RSPB welcomes this extension and the addition of three new features: little egret, Eurasian spoonbill and Sandwich tern.



Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project – success and some highlights

Helene Jessop

The delivery phase of this five year project was completed to plan. Rats were eradicated from St Agnes & Gugh in 2013, Manx shearwaters and storm petrels are breeding safely, and the local community is wholly positive. Now local volunteers ensure biosecurity is effective but, should rats ever be detected again, there is a protocol to enable the RSPB to respond promptly to eradicate them.

Manx shearwater chicks fledged in 2014 for the first time in living memory and in 2017 more than 40 chicks were recorded. The number of occupied burrows increased from 22 in 2013 to 59 in 2017. Storm petrel chick calls were heard for the first time in living memory in 2015. Sample surveys of nesting sites

found the areas used had expanded, indicating recruitment of new breeding birds. Five chicks were recorded in 2017, while occupied sites increased from zero in 2013 to 14 in 2017.

People engagement and media activity was constant - the project talked to over 12,000 visitors, and gained awareness locally and world-wide. It worked with over 1,600 young people to encourage them to be seabird ambassadors, ran 75 school activities on Scilly, and 20 school and university field trips.

The project spoke to all 82 residents of St Agnes & Gugh at the start to explain the need for and process of rat removal and all the local community gave support. The project ran 58 local community events and, towards the end, interviewed all residents. All felt the project had benefited wildlife,

helped them appreciate seabirds, and that rat removal benefited their day-to-day lives and businesses, including fishing, agriculture and tourism, with some developing new products or expanding eg, wildlife boat trips. All were happy with the project team and actions.

More than 300 volunteers gave 24,000 hours, including mainland and Scilly volunteers, and resident seabird heritage volunteers.

An End of Project conference in 2017 was a great success with 145 attendees – from Scilly, the UK mainland and other seabird islands plus Biz Bell from Wildlife Management International (rat eradication contractors). Community and project team members showed delegates the biosecurity techniques. The legacy will be maintaining the islands rat-free - the seabird heritage volunteers undertake monthly monitoring station checks as part of this.

The project thanks all funders, partners, volunteers and the St Agnes & Gugh community for their constant support.

ios-seabirds.org.uk



Little terns continue to thrive at Chesil Beach, Dorset

Helen Booker

Supported by our partners and a dedicated team of local volunteers, we have protected the little tern colony at Chesil Beach for the past nine seasons. Little terns are one of our smallest seabirds and one of the most vulnerable as they nest on public beaches prone to disturbance and predation. They are on the UK's amber list of birds of conservation concern – the second highest category.

The colony at Chesil Beach is the only one in the South West and has been gradually recovering since its all time low of just 10 pairs in 2008. In 2017, 38 pairs bred on the pebbles, and up to 73 chicks fledged – the best ever productivity level at this colony. It continues a run of successful years which should help to bolster the colony in the future and allow its continued recovery.

In 2017 project officer Scarlett Hutchin dedicated her summer to protecting the birds, with volunteers again playing a

key role in the success of the season. Sixty local people signed up to volunteer, some devoting many hours to watch nests and help scare away predators while three residential volunteers spent sleepless nights over three months keeping the colony safe from dusk to dawn.

The Chesil Beach Little Tern Project is a partnership between RSPB, Chesil Bank and Fleet Nature Reserve, Natural England, The Crown Estate, Portland Court Leet, and the Dorset Wildlife Trust.

A huge thank you to our partners and volunteers for continuing to support this project.

Chesil's little terns are now wintering in Africa. When they return in spring 2018, the project partnership, staff and volunteers will again work to keep them safe.



So long Seabirds South West

Due to end of funding, this is the final edition of Seabirds South West but work by RSPB and others will continue to help the region's seabirds. Watch out for our seabird conservation news (see below).

Help us to help the marine environment

If there's no home for nature, there will be no nature. Safeguarding our marine environment requires adequate protection for its special species and habitats, and sustainable use of its resources. The RSPB and other wildlife charities rely on supporters to give us the voice necessary to save nature. Why not be a part of these amazing success stories? Seabirds can't campaign against threats to their environment but we can act on their behalf.

Please join the RSPB by visiting rspb.org.uk or call us to find out more on **01392 432691**. Find us on Facebook (facebook.com/RSPBSW) and Twitter ([@RSPBSouthWest](https://twitter.com/RSPBSouthWest)) and look out for seabird conservation stories on our website.

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The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.

Images: Puffin (cover photo) – Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com); Puffin and guillemot (Lundy article) – Andy Hay (rspb-images.com); Spoonbill (marine protected areas article) – Paul Morton, Birds of Poole Harbour; Project team and local community celebrates success October 2017 (IOSSRP article) – Ed Marshall; Little terns (little tern article) – Angela Thomas.