



giving  
nature  
a home

Issue 6, November 2014

# Seabirds

## South West



Juvenile little tern

The RSPB  
Beached Bird  
Survey needs you!

Chesil beach's little  
tern colony goes  
from strength to  
strength

New legal  
protection for  
our wintering  
waterbirds?

Chicks, chocolate  
and peanut  
butter wax!

Little terns (adult on left,  
juvenile on right).



# Chesil beach's little tern colony goes from strength to strength

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**Morgan Vaughan** RSPB Chesil  
Beach little tern Project Officer 2014

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Leading a team of staff and volunteers to protect the breeding little terns on Chesil beach this summer was a very rewarding challenge. Wardening these elegant and charismatic seabirds was an emotional rollercoaster, with danger around every corner for the vulnerable chicks and it was a real task coordinating the team's response to changing threats.

Providing 24/7 protection for the colony was no mean feat and only possible through the devotion of keen volunteers and committed staff. From watching for foxes to kestrels to people, there was rarely a dull moment in the brief but busy breeding season. It was amazing to meet so many different people who all helped the terns by becoming volunteer wardens; their dedication was admirable.

It was a real privilege to watch the terns from courtship to fledging their chicks, and experience all the drama. The team protected the birds from accidental disturbance and predation. Other crucial aspects to this year's success, the weather and the fishing were, as always, beyond our control but were outstanding. All this made for a fantastic experience for all involved and spectacular success for the terns. The colony had its most successful season on record: 60 chicks fledged!

The 33 pairs of little terns, up on last year's 25 pairs, were incredibly productive: 1.8 chicks fledged per pair is quite an achievement when you consider the colony was close to being lost just six years ago. The chance to observe the fascinating behaviour of the UK's second rarest breeding seabird in close quarters from the project hide was brilliant.

My summer on the project is one I will always remember. I feel incredibly fortunate to have been involved and hope this year's success continues, securing a bright future for Dorset's breeding little terns. It was a privilege to protect the birds but also to meet like-minded people. The experience renewed my passion for conservation and reminded me that there are many people as enthusiastic as I am about protecting vulnerable species who embrace the RSPB's mission to 'give nature a home'.

**Many thanks to our project partners, The Crown Estate, Natural England, Chesil Bank and the Fleet Nature Reserve, Dorset Wildlife Trust, PANACHE and the Portland Court Leet. These organisations are committed to restoring the colony to its former glory.**



# New legal protection for our wintering waterbirds?

We are delighted to see that many years after identifying its importance for wintering waterbirds, the South Cornwall Coast Important Bird Area (IBA) is set to become legally protected through the Fal Bay to St Austell Bay proposed Special Protection Area (SPA). The area holds important winter concentrations of divers and grebes which use the sheltered coastline, bays and rias to feed, loaf and roost. In particular it supports internationally important numbers of black-throated diver and nationally important numbers of great northern diver, black-necked, red-necked and Slavonian grebes.

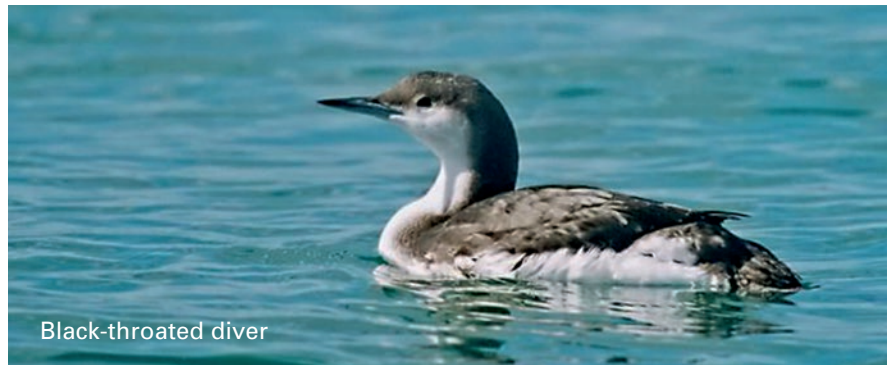
Natural England have just finished their formal consultation on the designation of this area as an SPA under the EU's Birds Directive and the final decision is due at the end of January 2015. This site is well known to many and has been a regular attraction as a winter trip to see these birds. The birds can be viewed from various locations and sightings are regularly reported from Swanpool,

Pendennis Castle, Looe beach, Feock, Mylor, Porthscatho, Pendower beach, Pentewan and Porthpean. Birds generally arrive October/November and can stay into May.

Progress to protect birds at sea lags many years behind action on land, and there is much more to be done to complete the network of marine sites for seabirds, but this is an important step and we look forward to seeing the area supporting these important populations for years to come.

## How you can help:

- ▶ Tell the local MPs about the importance of this site
- ▶ Use your bird identification skills by helping with the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) for the area [bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs](http://bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs)
- ▶ Report your ad hoc bird sightings to [bird-news@cbwps.org.uk](mailto:bird-news@cbwps.org.uk)
- ▶ Report any marine wildlife disturbance or harassment to the Cornwall Marine and Coastal Code Group 24 hr disturbance hotline on **0345 201 2626**



Black-throated diver

# The RSPB Beached Bird Survey needs you!

The Beached Bird Survey is one of the UK's longest running checks on the health of the marine environment and an effective way of estimating seabird mortality over an entire winter. Since 1971, hundreds of volunteers have monitored trends in oil and other pollution by walking allocated measured

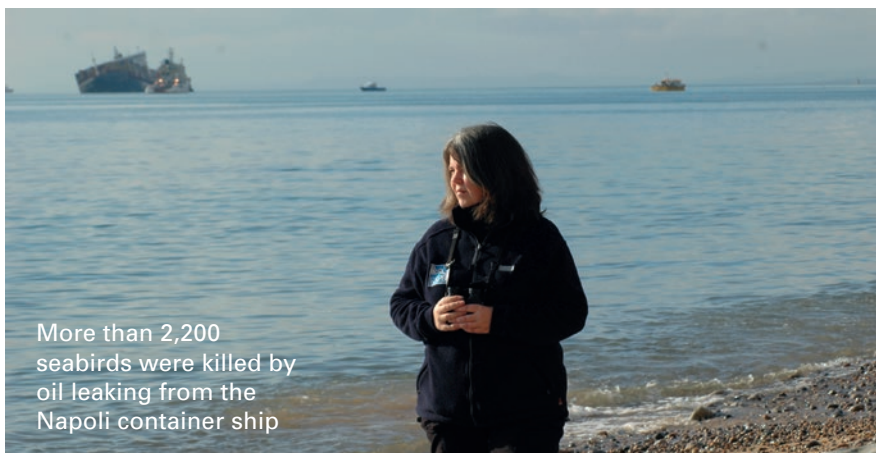
stretches of accessible beach on the last weekend in February annually and recording all 'beached birds' and evidence of pollution.

The results enabled us to track chronic oil pollution (caused by ships washing out tanks at sea, now illegal thanks to

RSPB and others' efforts). While this threat has declined, our seas are not safe.

Emergency Beached Bird Surveys helped us assess the impact of major incidents on seabirds in recent years (eg, oil spilled from the Napoli in 2007) and to take action (after the PIB incidents in 2013, we, in partnership with others, achieved a global ban on its previously legal discharge as tank washings at sea). The pollution risk remains and there are potentially new threats including possibly increasingly severe winter storms that can result in massive 'wrecks' (the one in early 2014 killed more than 50,000 seabirds).

Interested in volunteering for Beached Bird Survey? Please contact [natasha.simmons@rspb.org.uk](mailto:natasha.simmons@rspb.org.uk) [rspb.org.uk/volunteering/1705-beached-bird-surveyor-south-west-england](http://rspb.org.uk/volunteering/1705-beached-bird-surveyor-south-west-england)



More than 2,200 seabirds were killed by oil leaking from the Napoli container ship

# Chicks, chocolate and peanut butter wax!

It may seem an intriguing title to describe the Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project, but these words best describe the project this year. We are delighted to announce that 10 Manx shearwater chicks have been spotted peeking out from their burrows and 'wing-flapping' on St Agnes and Gugh. They are the first shearwater chicks to be recorded on either island in living memory, and their survival is due to the removal of brown rats.

This project aims to reverse the decline of the enigmatic Manx shearwaters and storm petrels, by keeping the islands of St Agnes and Gugh rat-free. Accidentally introduced

brown rats are the biggest threat to their chicks and eggs. During the winter removal phase, 1036 bait stations were put out across the islands by project contractors Wildlife Management International, staff and a wonderful team of volunteers. The baiting started on 8 November 2013 and by 30 November we had our last sign of a rat. Monitoring tools of chocolate, peanut butter and coconut wax and ink tracking tunnels were put out to detect any last remaining 'fussy' rats, which might be avoiding the bait. They gnaw on the flavoured wax blocks and leave footprints in the ink tunnels, and these tools were left out in permanent monitoring stations so we can remain vigilant for signs of any reinvading rats.



Project team



Juvenile Manx shearwater outside its burrow

In order to keep the islands rat-free we have set up the 'rat on a rat' campaign, which asks residents, visitors, boatmen and anyone visiting the islands to alert us if they find any sign of rats. Vigilance and fast response is key to the success of the project. If anyone does see a rat sign, they can call a number to report it. Partner staff and the community have been trained in how to monitor for suspected incursions, how to set up extra surveillance and how to respond in the event of an incursion.

Huge thanks go to everyone involved in the project so far and the continued support of every member of the community of St Agnes and Gugh. [ios-seabirds.org.uk](http://ios-seabirds.org.uk)



## 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.

Join the RSPB by visiting [rspb.org.uk](http://rspb.org.uk) or call us to find out more on **01392 432691**. Find us on Facebook ([facebook.com/RSPBSW](https://www.facebook.com/RSPBSW)) and Twitter ([@RSPBSouthWest](https://twitter.com/RSPBSouthWest)).

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