



giving  
nature  
a home

Issue 8, December 2016

# Seabirds

## South West



Lundy and Isles  
of Scilly celebrate  
seabird recovery

Dorset's little  
terns fly  
high again

Help to get better  
protection for  
seabirds at sea

The importance  
of biosecurity  
and volunteers in  
seabird recovery



# Seabirds thriving on Lundy

**Helen Booker**

We have further news on the amazing seabird response since Lundy was declared rat-free in 2006. The tenfold increase in Manx shearwaters from approximately 300 pairs to nearly 3,500 in 2013 was way beyond our expectations. Puffins too, which were on the brink of extinction, recovered over the same period from just five birds to 80. Assessments by the island's wardening team in 2016

suggest there are now an estimated 300 puffins, with at least 100 pairs breeding. A third burrow-nesting seabird, storm petrel, was first confirmed breeding on Lundy in 2014 with the unexpected discovery of a chick by experienced ringer Tony Taylor and his team, who were ringing Manx shearwaters. This was a remarkable discovery and the end of a long wait to find clear breeding evidence.

In 2016, I visited Lundy with colleague Mark Bolton, a storm petrel specialist,

to see if we could find more evidence of breeding storm petrels. This was no easy task on a big island with many areas of suitable habitat inaccessible. We scanned suitable areas at night with a torch and could see storm petrels flying in our beam. It is very difficult to get an idea of numbers, but we estimated between 10 and 100 pairs with perhaps many more. This is a very exciting time for seabirds on Lundy and future monitoring will continue to track the recovery of these special burrow-nesters.

## Manx shearwater and storm petrel numbers increase on St Agnes and Gugh

**Jaclyn Pearson**

We are thrilled these seabirds are thriving since rat removal. Manx shearwaters are up from 22 pairs in 2013 (before rat removal) to 73 pairs in 2016, and this September we recorded 32 'star-gazing' chicks outside their burrows. For storm petrels we now have a sample survey area within ideal nesting habitat of dry beach boulders



and have placed six storm petrel nest boxes. We recorded nine apparently occupied storm petrel breeding sites and heard six chicks peeping at night. Thanks to community members who joined this year's seabird surveys and our 'chick-check' evening walks. With their help we hope to monitor further seabird breeding success in future.



# Amazing breeding success for Dorset's little terns

**Helen Booker**

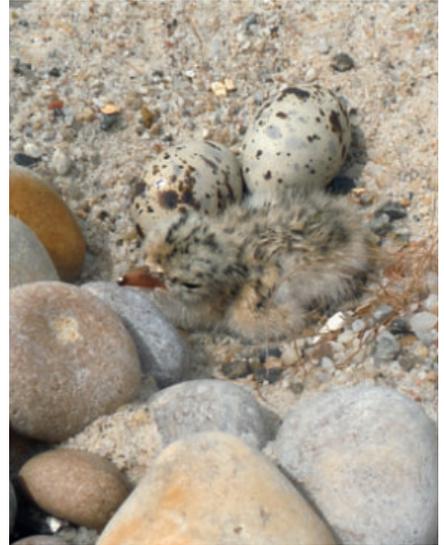
One of our smallest seabirds broke recent breeding records at its sole colony in South West England in 2016. Thirty-nine pairs bred on Chesil Beach's pebbles, and up to 71 chicks fledged – a healthy productivity level that indicates colony recovery.

Volunteers again played a key role in the success of Dorset's Little Tern Recovery Project, with 36 local people devoting many hours to watch nests and help ensure the vulnerable birds were not disturbed by people, pets, or predators. Ali Quinney, RSPB project officer for 2016, said: "It was brilliant to see that,

with the right management and a team of committed volunteers, these birds have been able to do well – hopefully their numbers will continue to increase."

As recently as the 1990s, 100 pairs regularly bred at Chesil Beach but numbers dipped to only 10 pairs in 2008. The colony's recovery and spectacular productivity in 2016 was the result of eight years' hard work by project partners RSPB, Chesil Bank and Fleet Nature Reserve, Natural England, The Crown Estate, Portland Court Leet, and the Dorset Wildlife Trust.

Chesil's little terns are now wintering in Africa. When they return in spring, we will keep them safe.



## Please help our coastal seabirds

**Paul St Pierre**

The RSPB is calling for the government to protect mobile species such as seabirds and cetaceans in Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) in English waters (the Conservatives' blue belt manifesto pledge) and has identified sites with the required evidence. In the south west this means that some of our most important coastal waters for seabirds, including marine extensions around important seabird colonies on Lundy, between Bideford and Foreland Point and in Torbay (along with its wintering divers and grebes) and in the Carrick Roads for its important population of wintering black-necked grebe, will get

the protection they deserve. Many of these sites are already identified as MCZs and were selected because seabirds were present. However, the government failed to include these seabirds when they were designated originally and therefore there is no requirement to monitor or put any management in place to protect seabirds. We have an opportunity to change this and need your support.

Our seabirds are struggling and need help. Please support our special seabirds campaign by contacting your MP (Saving Special Places blog) <http://www.rspb.org.uk/community/getinvolved/b/specialplaces/default.aspx>



## Keeping islands rat-free into the future

**Helene Jessop**

Once rats have been eradicated from islands and seabirds are breeding successfully again, some may think the work is done. No such luck! Biosecurity measures (to minimise the risk of rats ever returning and to raise an early alarm if re-invasion does occur) are needed in perpetuity. Teams of staff and volunteers on Lundy and on St Agnes & Gugh already undertake this important work. In early 2017 the RSPB will provide further training so, should any rat sign be detected on those islands, sufficient qualified and skilled people are available on stand-by and a 'rat response team' can be on site within 48 hours to start baiting to return the islands quickly to their previous rat-free status.

Seabird recovery and success entails constant vigilance, and all project partners, island communities, staff and volunteers are ready for the challenge.





# Volunteers are vital for seabird recovery success

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## Jaclyn Pearson

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Jaclyn, RSPB project manager for the Isles of Scilly Seabird Recovery Project, explains how committed and skilled volunteers are essential for the ongoing biosecurity measures to ensure long-term seabird success.

The resident volunteers on St Agnes and Gugh are now more important than ever, as this project will pass back to the community when completed in September 2017. The community are the guardians of *their* Manx shearwaters and storm petrels, ensuring the project's legacy and that the islands remain rat-free. There are 27 community members who are Seabird Heritage Volunteers (SHVs). Some will help the RSPB and Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust to monitor nesting Manx shearwaters and storm petrels

each spring, and all will continue to check between 5-10 permanent monitoring stations around the coastlines and at 'hotspots' on the islands. These are 'Protecta' boxes containing aniseed flavoured wax; if ever a rat reaches St Agnes and Gugh, it will be attracted to these smelly stations and nibble the wax. Volunteers will see tooth marks and carry out immediate deployment of bait before a team of mainland RSPB staff and volunteers arrives to carry out a full incursion response. Two residents, John and Trish Peacock, are the 'SHV coordinators', coordinating the wonderful island volunteers and liaising with RSPB.

Trish Peacock said "The seabird recovery project has been a great success so far, and we the community are excited to carry on the good work. The 'rat on a rat' number can be called by anyone who sees anything

'suspiciously ratty' on St Agnes and Gugh and we have a robust incursion plan in place. This year many of us joined 'chick check walks' to see the Manx shearwater chicks 'stargazing' outside their burrows and listened to cheeping calls of the storm petrel chicks in boulder beaches. It really is wonderful to know that these chicks are now surviving due to the removal of rats. We hope to protect our seabirds for a long time to come."

John Peacock said "As the owner of St Agnes Boating I carry bait boxes onboard the boats and the crew keep an eye out for rat sign at all times. I will also be passing on information each year to other boatmen who use the harbours, on how they can also reduce the risk of transporting rats. We have learnt so much about island restoration and we continue to learn more in this final year of the project."

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## 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](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)) 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 by Kevin Schafer (alamy.com); storm petrel by Andy Hay (rspb-images.com); volunteer installing nestbox for storm petrel on St Agnes by Amy Horn-Norris; little tern chick and eggs by Ali Quinney; black-necked grebe (winter plumage) by Steve Rogers, South West Optics; volunteer coordinators John and Trish Peacock receiving biosecurity training and resident volunteers Joss and Grace checking wax monitoring station by Nick Tomalin.