

FORTH ISLAND SEABIRD COUNTS 1971

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The 1971 counts show a continuing increase of many species. Kittiwake nests have increased by some sixty on each Fidra and Inchkeith and the latter island may soon displace Craigleith as the third largest colony in Forth.

Fulmar sites on Inchkeith have gone up by 20 percent in 1970. This island holds more Fulmar than all the other Forth colonies combined. Cormorants on the Lamb have reached a new peak of 280 nests (previously 240).

Since the start of the counts in 1969 every seabird except shag (terns excluded) has colonised at least one island. This year has seen the break-through for the shag with a pair breeding on Fidra for the first time. The shags are sadly overcrowded on Lamb and there will probably be a rapid increase on Fidra now that the first difficult colonisation step has been taken and a new 'tradition' started.

The major disappointment is Inchmickery. For several years no terns have been fledged there and this year only a very few common terns were present. When the island was made an R.S.P.B. reserve the numbers of terns ran into the thousands including several hundred pairs of Roseate Terns. Now, as a reserve, it is a disgrace to the good name of the R.S.P.B. The main trouble is probably that the numerous Herring Gulls have displaced the terns. A subsidiary cause is that rank grasses and nettles have spread through the finer grasses and the vegetation is now too thick for the terns to nest.

Herring Gulls -and to a smaller extent Lesser Black Backs -have now become a major pest on the Forth Islands. At the beginning of this century there were only a handful but now there are probably upwards of 20,000 pairs of Herring Gulls breeding in the Forth. Terns have been displaced from many of the islands and their last two strongholds are being invaded. They have practically gone from Inchmickery. Fidra lost its light-house keepers when the light recently became automatic. The keepers harassed the gulls in various ways over the years. Unless action is taken soon, it will be a matter of a very few years before the gulls completely dominate the island.

Fortunately a remedy, albeit a rather drastic one, is available in the form of a narcotic. This, spread in carefully measured quantities throughout a gull colony, would give a highly efficient and quick acting 'kill'. With reasonable care there is no danger to other species of bird or other forms of life. What is needed is a planned five to ten year programme to cover all the Forth islands aimed at reducing the breeding gull population to a few hundred pairs, eliminating them entirely on selected islands.

The main difficulty is that of public relations. The interested public must be informed of the damage caused by the big gulls due to their population explosion during this century. The pressure on other 'desirable' species, such as the Eider duck and terns, is well known but the effect on island vegetation is just as pronounced. Fidra has a wonderful show of Thrift while neighbouring Craigleith has none" being largely covered with the weeds of cultivation brought over by the gulls. Unless something is done soon this wealth of Thrift will wither away under the weight and mess of the increasing Herring Gulls. Adequate control measures now will help to restore a more natural and characteristic plant community to the islands.

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	Inch- mickery	Inchkeith	Fidra	Lamb	Craigleith	Eye- broughty
Fulmar		431	46	2	47	
Cormorant				280		
Shag			1	196	94	
Mallard	1					
Oyster Catcher	1	4	5			
Great Black-backed Gull					1	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	100+	circa 5	4	circa 400	
Herring Gull	100	500+	60+	250	several 1000's	162
Kittiwake		407	164	125	450	
Common Tern	circa 10		300-400			
Arctic Tern			20+			
Roseate Tern			100			
Sandwich Tern			300			
Razorbill		4		6+	28	
Guillemot		45 offshore		200 nests	700 on cliff	
Puffin		110			600+	

Please note that the numbers in this table may not agree with those in the main Forth Seabird Group tables. In some years some islands were counted more than once. When this happened the Forth Seabird Group figures reflect the main count.