

FORTH ISLAND SEABIRD COUNTS 1972

RWJ Smith

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After a lot of heart searching by the Nature Conservancy and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 1972 saw the beginning of the control of 'big gulls' on the Forth Islands. On the Isle of May a very efficient operation cleared some 15000 Herring and Lesser Black Back Gulls and even after one summer there is noticeable improvement in the flora of the cleared areas. Inchmickery was cleared with relatively few gulls being killed and the others deserting. Meanwhile on Fidra, a visit by the R.S.P.B. at the beginning of May showed that the central part, where the terns had bred last year, had been colonised by Herring Gulls. A hasty clearance programme for this small area was rushed through and all the gulls were eliminated. But the damage had been done and only 100 pairs of terns were prospecting another area in mid-June (when they should have been well settled) and there was a complete hatching failure on the island.

Fortunately Inchmickery was available to them and, obviously, most of the Fidra birds arrived there eventually and had a very successful season. Roseate Terns in particular do not seem to breed in numbers on the mainland of Forth and it is particularly important that these rare birds should have breeding space on some of the islands, in case we should lose them altogether. The policy of gull control will never be more thoroughly vindicated.

Having established a foothold on Fidra, the Shags are probably going to increase dramatically there. From one nest in 1971 there are 7 nests (and a pair building) this year. For the first time Guillemots (2 pairs) were on eggs on Fidra and a pair of Razorbills was prospecting there. Both of these species, along with Shags, are probably finding that the Lamb is becoming increasingly crowded and there is ample room on Fidra. Our Lamb visit, unfortunately, was very rushed due to bad weather -we were fortunate to get off when we did -and an accurate count of auks was not possible. On Inchkeith Razorbills were ashore in 5 areas and at least 1 egg and 1 chick were seen. Puffins there were much increased (from 120 to 350 round the island) and breeding in new areas. On Craigleith on the contrary numbers were well down. This could be due to chance, a visit when many birds were absent due to weather conditions. Next year's count will perhaps give us the answer.

Our visit to Fidra on 17th June produced a beautiful Black Tern in breeding plumage which fished the pools between the two parts of the island, for some five minutes. There was also a Pinkfoot Goose which led a party of duck Eider over the bay. Another unusual find was a very healthy specimen of Tree Mallow on Inchkeith. There seems no reason why it should not become established there as the habitat is very similar to that on Craigleith.

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	Inch- mickery	Inchkeith	Fidra	Lamb	Craigleith
Fulmar		449	50	2	53
Cormorant				245	6
Shag			7	225	99
Oystercatcher	1	4	6		
Ringed Plover			1		
Gt. Bl. Back Gull					1
L. Bl. Back Gull		x	5	5	x
Herring Gull	1	x	c 100	300	x
Kittiwake		c400	186	121	x
Common Tern	c450		c 80		
Arctic Tern			20		
Roseate Tern	c 60				
Sandwich Tern	211				
Razorbill		2(5)	(1)	6	c 36
Guillemot			2	200-210	c 900 birds
Puffin		350			c325

All figures refer to pairs or nests except Fulmar - nest-sites where birds are present but not necessarily breeding, the Guillemots on Craigleith which was a count of birds on ledges (over 1000 birds were on the water) and Puffins which are the number of individuals on or round the island. x means that birds were not counted.

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.