

FORTH ISLAND SEABIRD COUNTS 1974

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1974 was the 16th year of the Island counts and the most inauspicious. The Inchkeith and Inchmickery trips were first postponed because of the oil shortage and then cancelled because of bad weather. Fortunately I was able to visit both islands independently. The Inchmickery count is the final one made by the RSPB who have kindly allowed me to use it here.

In 1958, when the idea of annual visits to these islands was first mooted, we had a grandiose plan to tour the Forth in a borrowed boat. We were to sleep aboard and drop anchor as and when we pleased! The boat did not materialise and the first trips to Fidra and Lamb were made by Craig Tait and myself in a borrowed canoe. It took several years before the initial uncertainties of boat bookings and counting priorities were overcome. The trips have now become routine - except for our unpredictable Summer weather. There may be a feeling that counting too, is merely a routine undertaking and that, when the figures are jotted down in a field note-book, they are tucked away in a drawer, unused. Members who have been on the trips may be interested in some of the ways in which the counts have been used.

We provided information for the National counts of Fulmar and Kittiwake colonies in 1959 and for the ambitious Seafarer Survey of 1969, which attempted to count all of Britain's breeding seabirds. After the disaster when the Sandwich Terns breeding on the Dutch coast slumped from 40,000 pairs to 1,100 pairs in a few years because of poisoning by toxic substances, there was concern about the status of British breeding Sandwich Terns. Information on this species was asked for, and we provided it for the Forth for several years. Since then there has been increasing anxiety about PCBs (Polychlorinated Bi-Phenyls) and other toxins in the sea, about oil spillage and other hazards of modern civilisation. There is now a monitoring programme of breeding seabirds in selected areas of Britain and our island counts play their part. Data from the counts were used in my paper on Scottish Cormorant colonies and in a paper on Sandwich and Roseate Terns by G.L. Sandeman, both in *Scottish Birds*. Counts of Shags were provided for several years to D.R. Potts (now Dr.) at Durham University who was studying these birds. Information on Roseate Terns was sent to Dr. Cabot in Eire who is enquiring into the recent decline of these species in the British Isles. Our experience of the big gulls has been traumatic but useful. During the discussions that preceded the decision to cull the gulls, first on the May and then on Inchmickery, we feel that our opinions and counts helped, in a small way, to clarify the situation. The counts on the RSPB Reserves are, of course, submitted to the RSPB and, indeed, provide their only information on the Lamb and, until recently, on Fidra. Information was provided for the BTO Bird Atlas and is now helping the present Habitat (or Sites) Survey. The most recent appeal came from someone who was 'undertaking a dissertation for Part II of the Cambridge Geography Tripos'. Thanks to the figures in the field note-book it was easy to provide the required details.

Apart from the intrinsic interest of documenting the increase and spread of our local seabirds I hope that the above 'spiel' tends to prove that these counts have a definite conservation value and are of more than local interest. I trust that future boat-trips will have enough support to ensure that the routine counts may be continued.

The most interesting aspect of the counts this year is the continued increase of Shags. This is dealt with in the article which follows. Auks continue to do well with a small increase of Guillemots on Fidra and the first breeding there of Razorbills. On Inchkeith, Razorbills are slowly increasing;

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Guillimots were on the cliffs at two separate points though they have not yet been proved to breed. Puffins continue to do well and the RSPB reports a late egg on Fidra. This island is suitable for Puffins and there could be a substantial colony there in future years.

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	Craigleith	Lamb	Fidra	Inchkeith	Inchmickery
Fulmar	90	2	60	405	
Cormorant	22	206			
Shag	225	255	27	1	
Oystercatcher			6	3-4	1
Gt. Black Back	1				
L. Black Back	c350	c5	30	x	
Herring Gull	x	c550	c350	x	6 nest left
Kittiwake	c450	141	272	421	
Common Tern					750
Roseate Tern					80
Sandwich Tern					450
Razorbill	46	11	1	12	
Guillemot	c1000Bds	c400	9 + 12 bds	(6 bds ashore)	
Puffin	1170Bds			490Bds	

Fulmars - Occupied sites, not necessarily breeding

Craigleith Guillemots - birds on the cliff

Puffins - birds on the land and off-shore

All others - pairs or nests

x - present but not counted; c - about

The Inchmickery figures are the final RSPB counts.

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.