

FORTH ISLAND SEABIRD COUNTS 1988

RWJ Smith

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A hint in the 1987 report that a good spell of weather this year would 'maybe' provide all the answers was apparently considered a 'dare' by the gods of Olympia. For this year at least the weather was never **too** bad. A visit to Carr Craig in beautiful weather gave 158 Cormorant nests, 21 more than last year. The 213 total nest count for the East Lothian islands is standard for the last few years and it now seems that the Inner Forth group, based on Carr Craig and established as a separate entity, is rising steadily to the stability platform of 200-250 pairs (caution - Apollo may not yet have had his last word!).

Two visits to Craigleith in May gave (a) a head count of 355 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gulls which, with an estimated ca 10% error undercount (due to dead ground), yielded a total of around 400 pairs; (b) a 'sample' count following the NCC method as used in the 1987 counts gave between 20% and 25% of the total big gulls as Lessers - resulting in an estimate of 650-800 pairs of Lesser Black-backs. Is the oracle suggesting that the 1987 NCC numbers for Lessers on Inchkeith, Inchcolm and Craigleith could be more than twice the correct figures? Perhaps the sacrifice of an NCC warden or two is called for to propitiate the gods.

A true Delphic disinterest was shown when the party for the Craigleith trip arrived at North Berwick to find the boat high and dry in the harbour with four hours before it would be afloat. An alternative date found the gods in more conciliatory mood and we managed to land and get a good count. We located 5 pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls which, along with a pair on the Lamb and 3 pairs found by the RSPB on Fidra, shows a substantial increase of this fine predator. The RSPB count of Eider on Inchmickery gives an increase of 40 nests to a remarkable total of 159 on this small island. Once again the Roseates are holding their own but, sadly, Common and Sandwich Terns are again down.

As last year, we zoomed out to Inchkeith in style but this year in glorious sunshine and with an excellent count. The only small cloud on our horizon was one of the island dogs which followed us round. This animal was often seen to pick up small gull chicks, give them a nip with its teeth then drop them dead on the ground. A Fulmar egg was cracked and discarded by the same animal. Obviously the potential capacity for damage by this one dog could be enormous.

What of the overall result which was to provide all the answers? The Kittiwakes have lost some of last year's big gains. Fulmar numbers have regained some of their 1987 losses but were down on Inchkeith. The Auks are holding up generally in spite of outside suggestions of a decrease. Have things now reached the swings and roundabouts stage?

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	Craigleith	Lamb	Fidra	Eye-broughy	Inch-keith	Inch-mickery	Carr Craig
Fulmar	124	4	140		473	14	
Cormorant	83	57		73			158
Shag	435	250	86		9	24	24
Eider	x		190		x	159	
Great Black-backed Gull	5	1	3				
Lesser Black-backed Gull	400	x	115		x	81	
Herring Gull	x	x	575	x	x		43
Kittiwake	770	175	622		490		
Common Tern						146	
Sandwich Tern						383	
Roseate Tern						21	
Razorbill	62	29	53		40		
Guillemot	1300	2400	131		24 sites		
Puffin	1200	c.10 sites	350		1850		

x means present but not counted.

Guillemot and Puffin counts are of individuals. All others are sites or pairs unless indicated. My thanks to the RSPB for kindly allowing the use of their Inchmickery counts and some of their Fidra ones.

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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.