

# FORTH ISLAND SEABIRD COUNTS 1992

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This, the 34th year of the counts, must raise some questions in the minds of those Society members who were not even born when the first one was made. Apart from maintaining old traditions is there anything to be gained by them and is there anything new happening in the Forth seabird world? The avowed reason (in 1959) for counting the islands was to see (a) if there was any annual change in populations, (b) if there were, to find out why, and (c) to monitor these changes until the population reached an equilibrium. To these questions the simple answers are (a) yes there were, and are, annual changes, (b) we can postulate several reasons (including protection, fishing pressures, pollution and weather) as to why this is happening, and (c) perhaps in another 34 years we may find whether anything approaching an equilibrium is possible in a changing world.

The counts turn out to be a battle between the weather and the counters. We have about a four week "slot" from the last week in May when optimum numbers may be counted. This year we only just made it due to the almost continuous strong E/NE winds. Two of us got out to Craigeith on 22 June on the fourth attempt nearly a month after we struggled ashore, in a wild sea, on to Car Craig. Between times we visited Lamb and Fidra in thick fog reducing visibility to ca 30 yards in places and creating new counting problems.

The most interesting development was the discovery of the new Kittiwake and Shag colonies on Inchcolm. This island was last surveyed in 1987 and the feeling was that the Black Rat colony there would discourage more seabird colonisation. Presumably, however, Shags are able to defend their nests against rats and the Kittiwakes are probably safe on the steep cliffs. Elsewhere other colonists are the Cormorants which, with numbers down on Car Craig, were found to be nesting on Inchkeith and the Haystack. Their total numbers were down slightly in Inner Forth (203 nests, a drop of seven) and East Lothian (275 nests, a drop of 15) but counts were rather early and rather late, respectively, and just might have been on the low side. However, it again raises the interesting speculation that Cormorants have reached stage (c) above and at long last have peaked in Forth - and where do they go from here?

The overall Shag populations, on the other hand, after a spectacular increase of 20 per cent last year, might have been excused a pendulum swing decrease but overall there was a modest rise of some four per cent in East Lothian and perhaps similar in Inner Forth. With over 1,400 pairs in Inner Forth/East Lothian and as many more on the Isle of May it is interesting that this species continues to increase in numbers - an increase that started right at the beginning of the century some 90 years ago. The bird is penetrating further up the Forth and there is still Inchgarvie to colonise and perhaps the Railway Bridge, so there is still room for expansion.

The Kittiwake, too, seems to be more than holding its own. As well as the new Inchcolm colony of 38 nests (c. 20 were reported last year) we had a resurgence on Lamb doubling the numbers after last year's drop and also a 10 per cent increase on Inchkeith. News from Inchmickery this year (thanks to RSPB) is of low numbers of Sandwich and Common Terns but a pair of Razorbills bred and Puffins are prospecting. Possibly the most astonishing statistic there this year is of the 232 Eider Ducks who were sitting on eggs - testimony to the value of security and lack of disturbance enjoyed on this tiny island.

During the last two years our "basic" team has been augmented by a keen Fife contingent who have enabled us to improve coverage, notably this year on Inchcolm. The RSPB also have been taking an

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increased interest in their island reserves and are anxious to co-operate in getting full coverage of all of the Forth Islands with the possible exception of the difficult to count Bass Rock. The Isle of May is, of course, fully covered. Perhaps another 34 years is on the cards!

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	Craig-leith	Lamb	Fidra	Eyebr-oughty	Inch-keith	Car Craig	Inch-colm	Hay-stack	Inch-garvie	Inch-mickery
Sandwich Tern										122
Common Tern										98
Arctic Tern										1
Fulmar	141	5	191	0	564	0	163	0	115	24
Cormorant	89	186	0	0	14	187	0	2	0	0
Shag	665	318	255	0	23	23	21	3	0	36
Greater B-b Gull	3+	1	1							
Lesser B-b Gull	x	x	x	0	x	0	x	1	6	108
Herring Gull	x	x	x	x	x	45	x	23	140	
Kittiwake	x	223	489	0	678	0	38	0	0	0
Razorbills	46	40	72		38					1
Guillemots (birds)	x	c3250	245	52						
Puffin (birds)	x	c15	x	1600 sea / land	c50 close in off shore	4-6 off shore				

x = indicates birds were present but not counted.

Numbers are of nest sites or breeding pairs, unless otherwise stated

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.