

FORTH ISLAND SEABIRD COUNTS 1993

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Every once in a while fate intervenes in the best-laid schemes of men (and mice). 1993 was the first year of the combined coverage of the Forth Islands (not May/Bass) by our team and the RSPB. We had contingency plans, fail-safe cover, back-up, etc and yet we end up with so many ifs and buts that practically no comparison is possible with the counts of 1992.

Our star performer for many years has been the Shag, increasing and spreading as though there were no tomorrow. Last year on Craigeith we had 665 nests on a late count. This year, disaster, with some 155 nests total. At the end of May there were about 15 nests with eggs when most birds should have been sitting. Three-quarters of the 'nests' consisted of a few stipes of kelp criss-crossed to prove that they were nests. In Inner Forth the numbers had dropped by up to half. Apparently the Isle of May eventually had some half of their birds nesting in July although the number of eggs per nest was very low.

Nobody really knows what had caused the very late start to nesting and the low numbers, but the probable cause is food-shortage. Whether this is because of inclement cold weather or some other factor, we do not know. Cormorants too, suffered, but not to the same extent, with the Outer Forth population down by half and the Inner Forth birds only slightly down.

Due to inclement weather our party did not get to Fidra or Lamb and, indeed, the back-up RSPB were unable to land on the Lamb and counted from the boat. So direct comparisons are liable to error. Overall the auks seem to be holding their own and Puffin are even pushing further up the Forth, with several pairs breeding on Inchcolm and one on Inchgarvie.

Kittiwakes are having their ups and downs on the East Lothian islands but holding up well on Inchkeith, consolidating on Inchcolm and even prospecting Inchgarvie where we saw 2 sitting on suitable looking sites at the end of May.

Altogether a year to forget, but it is heartening to look forward to a calm, sunny four weeks in May/June next year.

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	Bass Rock 5/6	Craig- leith 29/5	Lamb June	Fidra June	Eyebr- oughty 21/6	Inch- keith 6/6	Carr Craig 28/5	Inch- colm 1/6	Hay- stack 6/7	Inch- mickery June	Inch- garvie 27/5
Fulmar	x	182	6	267		522		129		30	130
Cormorant	45	52				24	135		44		
Shag	c20	155	65	88		11	12	12	1	28	
Eider		x		142		x	1			251	57
Greater B-b Gull	1	3+		1							
Lesser B-b Gull	40	x	x	1472	60	c6850	47	x	15	196	10
Herring Gull	140	x	270								190
Kittiwake	x	1028	84	452		656		49			
Common Tern										91	
Arctic Tern											3 ^a
Roseate Tern										1	
Sandwich Tern										10	
Razorbill (sites)	x	61	13	65		64					
Guillemot (birds)	x	1416	3300	139 sites		44					
Puffin (birds)	x	1000	100	x		650		35 (3+ nests)		7 ^c /1 ^d	1 ^b

^a rail bridge pier ^b puffin with food (29/7/93) ^c occasional burrows ^d with food x = no count

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.