

Forth Seabird Group

Forth Islands Bird Report 1994

Compiled by Ian J. Andrews

November 1994

MAIN EVENTS OF THE 1994 SEASON

- late breeding of Kittiwakes and Cormorants
- gull and Eider count by SNH
- even lower numbers of Shags
- shift of Cormorants to Haystack
- normal Guillemot numbers, despite winter wreck
- successful habitat management on Inchmickery

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to the lead persons for each of the islands for completing Visit Forms (Bob Smith, Ronnie Morris, Dave Fairlamb, Mark Oksien, John Calladine and Mike Harris) and to all the others who took part in this year's counts.

Fife Regional Council, through its Charter for the Environment Conservation Fund, supported the Group by way of a grant to offset boat costs. This grant is greatly appreciated and will hopefully continue in future years.

Forth Seabird Group meetings

Each year it is planned to hold pre- and post-season meetings in March and October at either Vane Farm, Fife or 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh. Details will be circulated to interested parties.

The SNH gull and Eider count

A comprehensive count of gull nests on the Forth Islands was carried out over the period 25-27 May 1994. Results for each island are given in Table 1 with a summary, comparing the 1994 total population estimates with the 1987 census, shown below.

	1987	1994	%change
Herring Gull	10511	12795	+22%
Lesser Bl-b Gull	4157	7146	+72%
Combined total	14668	19941	+36%

(NB this table excludes Bass Rock figures).

The largest increases were noted on Fidra (a three-times increase) and Inchmickery and Inchcolm (both almost doubled). Only on The Lamb and Eyebroughy did the numbers decline.

Eider nests were also counted (see Table 1). Although not all of the islands had been counted in 1987, a comparison of totals for islands that did have counts in both years, shows an increase from 1047 to 1795 nests.

Information supplied by John Calladine

International Beached Bird Survey, February 1994

This year's Beached Bird Survey coincided with the "wreck" of an exceptionally high number of birds down the east coast of Britain. In the Forth very large numbers of corpses were counted, first on the north shore, in SE winds, and later on the south shore, following NE winds.

The overall total of corpses recorded was 4950. To this could be added the 50 birds removed by the Council at Bo'ness, giving a round tally of 5000. Guillemot was the species most affected, with 87% of corpses, Shag next with under 5%. Most birds were very thin or even emaciated and the incidence of oiling was low. Unusual species included a Great Northern Diver, two Slavonian Grebes and 14 Little Auks.

	Distance	Auks	Cormorant and Shag	Total	%oiled
North Forth	100km	1839	71	1975	0.2
South Forth	108km	1719	93	1984	1.5
North Sea	27km	919	37	991	0.3

Summarised from a report by Peter Gordon, RSPB.

Guillemots still in good numbers

After the huge wreck of seabirds, mainly Guillemots, in February 1994 counts of the local breeding colonies was carried out with interest. Would the mortality cause a sharp decline

in the numbers of local breeding birds, or, as it was suggested at the time, were they wintering birds from further north.

Although difficult to census Guillemot numbers in 1994 appear to be similar to those in 1993. The grand total for the Forth islands actually increased by 8%.

Even Lower Shag Numbers

The number of breeding Shags in the Firth of Forth continued to decline in 1993, following the sharp drop in numbers last year. Of the outer Forth islands, the Lamb has fared the worst:

	1992	1993	1994
Craigleith	665	155	165
The Lamb	318	65	36
Fidra	255	88	73
Isle of May	-	715	403

Although numbers are always lower in the inner Forth, these colonies have also declined.

Overall, the Forth now holds only 20% of the numbers present just two years ago.

Cormorants on Haystack and Carr Craig

Cormorants have colonised Haystack with a vengeance - from only 2 nests in 1992 to 133 nests in 1994! These were clearly the Carr Craig birds, which may have shifted to the more sheltered (west-facing) slopes of Haystack as a result of persistent easterly winds (Carr Craig is east-facing). Haystack was congested with birds and there was little room for additional numbers. In addition to the 133 nests with eggs or small young, about 5-6 lumps of seaweed could represent additional sites. A cream-coloured bird, christened "Baileys", frequented the middle of the colony, but did not breed.

Information supplied by Ronnie Morris.

Fidra: nest productivity study

Regular nest counts over the years give a good indication of population trends, but very little is recorded about breeding success from year to year. An ongoing study on Fidra gives the following, valuable information (site or nest sample size is given in italics):

	1992	1993	1994
Fulmar			
chicks/site	0.5	0.5	0.6
sample			<i>41</i>
Shag			
chicks/nest	1.6	0.5	1.3
sample			<i>24</i>
Kittiwake			
chicks/nest	0.5	0.1	0.1
sample			<i>110</i>
Razorbill			
chicks/site	0.3	-	0.6
sample			<i>21</i>
Guillemot			
chicks/site	0.3	-	0.5
sample			<i>30</i>

Information supplied by Dave Fairlamb, RSPB

Late Breeding of Kittiwakes

Visits to many of the islands in late May showed that most Kittiwakes were still in the early stages of nesting, and there was speculation whether most would attempt to breed at all. Unlike most colonies, that on Inchcolm was visited on several occasions during the season and progress was monitored. Whilst the number of nests did in fact increase later in the season, only about a half produced eggs or young. Counts on the other islands are therefore likely to be on the low side. The reason for this poor season may be the cool, easterly winds which persisted through much of May.

Most Cormorants were also rather late in nesting, with for example only eggs and empty nests on the Lamb on 29 May (when moderately large young could normally be expected).

Inchcolm information supplied by Ronnie Morris.

The Isle of May: 1994 season

Studies indicate a varied season with some species such as Shags being greatly reduced, apparently due to the loss of adults in the late winter wrecks along the length of the east coast of Scotland. Other seabirds such as Guillemot, Puffin, Kittiwake, Arctic/Common Terns, Herring and Lesser Black-backed

Gulls remained at about the same levels as last year. The only bird which has increased this year is the Razorbill.

Food appeared to be in short supply early in the season which resulted in reduced colony attendance (e.g. Guillemot) or even large numbers of pairs not laying (e.g. Kittiwake). Breeding was generally late and the earliest young Kittiwake only fledged at the end of July.

Auks had normal breeding success but few young Kittiwake are expected to fledge. This will be the 4th consecutive year that Kittiwake have experienced breeding failure. Shag will also have reared rather few young as many pairs that did return did not lay.

Many of the Common/Arctic Terns failed at the egg stage but those which survived this time did well. Overall, in excess of 500 young fledged from 700 pairs which is the best season since they recolonised the island in the early 1980's.

Although conditions late in the season had improved, the heavy mortality of Shags during the winter, massive non-breeding and many pairs failing early in the season, which of course resulted in low overall success for many species. This certainly reinforces the view that conditions in the Firth of Forth for seabirds are less than good. Expanding fishing for sandeels on the Wee Bankie just offshore is unlikely to help the situation.

Taken directly from SOC News (September 1994), based on information supplied by Mike Harris.

Management for terns on Inchmickery

After the poor 1993 season, the RSPB decided to undertake habitat management specifically for terns during the 1994 season. In one area black plastic sheeting was covered with shingle and in another vegetation was suppressed by covering the ground with plastic sheets early in the season. DF reports that terns used the area in which vegetation had been suppressed with 98 pairs of Sandwich Terns c.f. 10 unsuccessful pairs in 1993.

Information supplied by Dave Fairlamb, RSPB

East of Scotland Tern Conservation Group

This Group was set up in 1992 to monitor tern numbers on the east coast from Buchan Ness to the English border. For more information about the Group contact Peter Gordon (RSPB), address at the back of this report.

Pete collaborated with this report to ensure that the figures are consistent between reports.

Seabirds ringed on the Forth Islands, 1994

This year's seabird ringing trips consisted of 5 visits to Inchkeith and two visits to Craigeith (Table 2).

The first visit to Inchkeith on 4 June ringed a grand total of zero birds, since the Cormorants were still on eggs. Normally at this stage young birds are quite large (ca three weeks) and tend to wander seawards when disturbed. The Cormorant colonies on Long Craig and at the western end of Inchkeith produced 47 pulli which were ringed between 9 July and 6 August; there was no synchrony of hatching within or between the colonies. On Craigeith all 21 Cormorant pulli were ringed on the first visit of 25 June.

Shags had a dismal year with a total of 22 pulli ringed. This included a valiant piece of swimming by George Smith to a mini stack isolated from Inchkeith by the tide in order to ring an extra three pulli! Normally the number of Shag pulli is limited to 100 to attain a cost effective sample.

Puffins had a good year on both islands and there were in the order of 2000-3000 burrows on Craigeith and 800-1000 burrows on Inchkeith. Puffins were not ringed on the latter island since the surface is very friable and the burrows are very long. The two pulli ringed were both in collapsed burrows.

Kittiwakes fared better than the figures would suggest since the Inchkeith trip on the 16 July found that most of the birds in the southern colony had fledged. On

Table 2: Seabird ringing totals for Craigleith (Cr) and Inchkeith (Ik), Lothian Ringing Group, 1994

	Pullus		Adult		Retrap		New		Total	Target
	Cr	Ik	Cr	Ik	Cr	Ik	Cr	Ik		
Fulmar	0	145	0	3	0	4	0	148	148	100
Cormorant	21	47	0	0	0	0	21	47	68	100
Shag	9	13	10	1	5	0	19	14	33	100
Kittiwake	0	98	1	4	0	0	1	102	103	250
Razorbill	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	All
Guillemot	7	0	5	0	0	0	12	0	12	All
Puffin	128	2	80	0	15	0	208	2	210	250
Herring Gull	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
L B-b Gull	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0
G B-b Gull	8	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	All
Total	486		104		24				590	850+

this later visit pulli in some accessible nests in the northwest colony around Kirkcaldy Haven had been largely predated (by rats?). These birds had been too small to ring on 9 July.

Fulmars increased in numbers on Inchkeith and were present in reasonable numbers (ca 40+ pairs) on Craigleith. Great Black-backed Gulls raised four broods on Craigleith but were absent from Inchkeith. Razorbills and Guillemots were present in 'normal' numbers and we ringed more Guillemots than usual due to the second later visit to Craigleith.

Article supplied by Martin Moss, Lothian Ringing Group

Count dates, additional counts and comments

For consistency Table 1 shows counts on the *main count day only*. Additional counts (possibly with higher totals) are given below. Exceptions to this convention are the gull and Eider counts and other cases detailed below.

Bass Rock (Ba)

The planned SOC trip on 4 June was cancelled due to bad weather. Figures are given for a visit on 12 June (RWJS, EMS, IJA), but a count of Kittiwake and Guillemot was not attempted. As yet, no information is available on the Gannet census.

Craigleith (Cr)

Figures are given for SOC trip on 28 May (RWJS, EMS, BB, HB, IJA). 200 Guillemot and 35 Razorbill were also counted on the sea. The east cliff was recounted on 16 June (DF); Kittiwake 532 c.f. SOC's 420; Guillemot 980 c.f. SOC's 1820.

Lamb (La)

Figures are given for SOC trip on 29 May (RWJS, EMS, BB, HB, RM,

IJA). In addition DF noted 30 Puffins close inshore on 16 June.

Fidra (Fi)

Figures are given for SOC trip on 29 May (RWJS, EMS, BB, HB, RM). In addition on 16 June DF noted: 235 AOS Fulmar, 220 nests Eider, 1641 nests Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 330 nests Kittiwake, 72 AOS Razorbill, 151 AOS Guillemot, 370 AO burrows Puffin. DF made other visits on 30 May and 8, 20 July.

Eyebroughy (Eb)

DF counted on 26 May (gulls) and 20 July (terns).

Inchkeith (Ik)

RM visited on 2 May. Figures are given for visit on 5 June (RWJS, EMS, BB, HB), except for Cormorants which were counted on 11 June (RM). Of the 58 Cormorant nests 38 where on Long Craig and 20 where on the southern tip of the main island. On 5 June Eider numbered 160+mm, 106ff, 40 young with ?20+ ff from nests. 376 Puffins were also counted offshore on 2 May, with 312 on 11 June.

Carr Craig (CC)

RM landed on 25 May. He also circled in boat on 12 June and 28 June. All 4 Cormorant nests were unattended/deserted on 28 June.

Inchcolm (Ic)

RM visited on 21 April, 23 May, 25 May (main seabird count with RWJS, EMS, RM, BF), 28 May, 5 June (follow-up visit), 12 June, 28 June, 19 July, 25 July and 2 August. Kittiwake: 74 nests on 5 June, 82 (39 with eggs or young) on 12 June, 97 (50 with eggs or young). Puffin: minimum of 5-7 breeding sites (4+ nesting sites on 28 May, 1-2 birds bringing fish to nests on 28 June), 50-60 still present on 25 July and 2 August. Shag: 5 nests on 5 June. Razorbill: 2 at cliffs on 5 June, but no site found; 12 offshore on 19

July. Eider: several females still incubating eggs on 28 June.

Haystack (Hs)

RM landed on 25 May.

Inchmickery (Im)

DF counted on 25 May (Eider and gulls), 13 June (Fulmar, Shag and Puffin) and 23 June, 6, 27 July (terns).

Inchgarvie (Ig)

RM circled and landed on 28 May. The Common Terns in fact nested on a parapet of the Forth Rail Bridge and are included here for convenience.

Long Craig (LC)

On 1 June 16 Eider, 40 Common Tern and 111 Sandwich Tern were counted. The maximum Common Tern nest count was 48, and a minimum of 54 young hatched. A maximum of 31 Sandwich Tern nests were counted (8 June) and 17 pairs produced a minimum of 21 young.

Isle of May (May)

Figures are taken from a report to SNH by MPH (of ITE). Auks and Fulmar were counted on 1-3 June, Shag on 10 June and Kittiwake on 9 June. No complete count of Puffins was made, but numbers on monitoring plots were the same as 1993. Razorbill numbers are given in "pairs", the total number of birds counted was 3034. The Guillemot figure is "number of birds", which equates to 13,843 pairs.

Other comments received are: lowest Shag numbers since 1959; highest ever Eider numbers; Great Black-backed Gull fledged 13 young; Lesser Black-backed Gull produced 0.53 young/nest fledged, for Herring Gull the comparable figure was 1.16; about 600 commic terns fledged; Sandwich Tern were present daily in the tern colony, but did not breed.

Table 1: Summary of seabird counts for the Forth Islands, 1994 (x = no count, 0 = none breeding, see report for more details)

	Ba	Cr	La	Fi	Eb	Ik	CC	Ic	Hs	Im	Ig	LC	May	Total
Fulmar (AOS)	84	165	2	243	0	473	0	177	0	25	159	0	279	1607
Cormorant (nests)	0	108	131	0	0	58	4	0	133	0	0	0	0	434
Shag (nests)	13	106	36	73	0	10	0	2+	1	10	0	0	403	654
Gannet (nests)	?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	?
Eider (nests)	4	153	6	220	0	323	1	258	0	313	60	6	998	2342
Great B-b Gull (nests)	1	7	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	18
Lesser B-b Gull (nests)	60prs	934	55	492	0	2607	1-2	1669	0	108	11	0	1270	7207
Herring Gull (nests)	230prs	2385	130	1149	45	4977	38	1615	16	108	210	0	2122	13025
Kittiwake (nests)	x	564	160	326	0	440	0	62	0	0	0	0	3751	5303+
Common Tern (nests)	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	92	5	48	148	306
Arctic Tern (nests)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	540	540
Roseate Tern (nests)														9
Sandwich Tern (nests)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	98	0	31	0	129
Razorbill (sites)	x	76	36	85	0	55	0	0	0	0	0	0	2227	2479+
Guillemot (birds on cliffs)	x	1940	3200	304	0	59	0	0	0	0	0	0	19186	24689+
Puffin (birds)	x	550	1+	135+	0	c300	0	27-75	0	10 sites	0	0	x	1071+

Other seabirds and passerines

Dates as per seabird table, unless given.

Bass Rock

Rock Pipit (2 prs)
Pied Wagtail (1 pr)
Dunnock (1 nest, abandoned on 19 June)
Starling (4, a family?)

Craigleith

Mallard (3mm 1f, 1f flushed from nest)
Peregrine (1 imm)
Turnstone (5)
Feral Dove (many)
Carrion Crow (1 nest)
Rock Pipit (2 singles)

Lamb

Carrion Crow (2, visiting?)

Fidra

Mallard (1m)
Oystercatcher (c5 sites, also 3 nests on 16 June)
Common Tern (2 over)
Feral Pigeon (50)
Carrion Crow (1 nest)
Rock Pipit (1 pr, also on 16 June)
Pied Wagtail (1 pr with food)

Eyeboroughy

On 20 July the following were noted:
Oystercatcher (1 pr with 1+ young)
Common Sandpiper (2)
Curlew (80)
Whimbrel (1)

Inchkeith

The following were noted on 2 May (RM):
Greylag Goose (2 nests)
Mallard (10mm 1f plus f off a nest)
Oystercatcher (5+ prs present)
Ringed Plover (6)
Turnstone (15, also 5 on 5 June)
Purple Sandpiper (10)
Blackbird (4mm 3ff including one sitting, 1 on 10 June)
Robin (1)
Wren (1)
Linnet (5, also 4 on 5 June, 3 plus 1 nest on 10 June)
Willow Warbler (3+)
Meadow Pipit (4)
Starling (13, 1 on 12 June)
Swallow (2)
Carrion Crow (2 nests)
Feral Pigeon (numerous)

Old nests were also found of Blackbird (17), Song Thrush (1),

Robin (2), Wren (2), Linnet (5) and Carrion Crow (2).

Carr Craig

Turnstone (8)
Sandwich Tern (4 over)
Carrion Crow (2, visiting?)
Feral Pigeon (2)

Inchcolm

All 21 April, unless stated:
Cormorant (1 ad on 5 June)
Turnstone (9)
Mallard (3mm, 3ff from nests, plus a further nest on 28 May)
Greylag Goose (2 reported on 3 June)
Shelduck (16 birds, in pairs, 2 on 28 May; no nests found)
Red-breasted Merganser (2 over)
Velvet Scoter (18-20 E on 25 May)
Guillemot (1 imm inshore on 5 June)
Oystercatcher (1 nest on 23 May, 2 further nests 25 May, late nest 28 June)
Great Black-backed Gull (1 imm on 1 June)
Black-headed Gull (2 over on 5 June)
Sandwich Tern (2 over 19 July)
Common Tern (6 offshore on 25 July)
Blackbird (1 terr m, 1m on 25 May, pr on 5 June, f and juv 25 July)
Dunnock (2, also 1 on 5 June)
Wren (1 sm, also 5 June and 19 July, 1 brood seen 28 June)
Robin (1+ frequently reported)
Pied Wagtail (1 pr, 1 on 23 May, 28 May and 5 June, 1 brood seen 28 June, pr 19 July, 3 on 25 July, pr 2 August)
Carrion Crow (2-3 prs incl 2-3 nests, 2-4 on 25 May, include b/5)
Rook (1 over)
Woodpigeon (first seen 28 June, 3 nests on 19 July, 2 further empty nests on 2 August)
Rock Pipit (1-2)
Jackdaw (8+ prs nest building, 20+ on 19 July)
Feral Dove (numerous)
Sparrowhawk (1)
Linnet (2 on 23 May and 25 May, pr on 5 June)
Chaffinch (female on 28 June)
Starling (1 on 25 May, ad with young on 5 June, 18 (include 6+ juvs) on 28 June, 12-15 on 19 July)
Swallow (1 on 25 May)

Haystack

Carrion Crow (1)

Inchmickery

Other breeding birds recorded:
Shelduck (2 prs)
Mallard (1 pr)
Oystercatcher (4 nests)
Blackbird (1 pr)
Wren (1 pr)
Also reported were:
Glaucous Gull (3rd-yr on 20, 25 April)
Turnstone (up to 33 in April-June, 120 on 27 July)

Inchgarvie

Robin (1 singing)
Carrion Crow (1 visited)
Cormorant (2 immes resting)

Long Craig

None.

Isle of May

No data.

Table 2: Breeding status of wildfowl, waders and passerines on the Forth Islands, 1988-94 (compiled from observations by R.W.J. Smith, D. Fairlamb, R. Morris) This information has been sent for inclusion in the SE Scotland Tetrads Atlas.

	Ba	Cr	La	Fi	Eb	Ik	CC	lc	Hs	Im	Ig	LC	May
Tetrad	68D	58N	58I	58D	48Y	28W	28A	18W	18R	28A	17J		
Greylag Goose						D							
Shelduck								D		D			
Mallard		D		B		D		D		D			
Oystercatcher				D	D	D	C	D		D			
Feral Pigeon		D		D		D	B	D	B	C	D		
Woodpigeon								D					
Rock Pipit	D	B		D		B		B					
Pied Wagtail	D	B		D				D			B		
Wren		B				D		D		D			
Dunnock	D	B						B					
Robin						D		B		B	B		
Blackbird		B				D		B		D			
Song Thrush						D							
Starling	D			B		D		D		B			
Carrion Crow	B	D	B	D		D	B	D	B	B	B		
Jackdaw								D					
House Sparrow	C												
Linnet				C		D		C		C			

Key: D = confirmed by nest or recently fledged young, C = pair in suitable habitat, B = singing male or bird(s) in habitat

In addition, the following birds were observed, but were assumed to be migrants. Bass Rock: Swallow, House Martin and Willow Warbler. Fidra: Swallow. Inchkeith: Swallow, Willow Warbler, Meadow Pipit. Inchcolm: Chaffinch.