

Forth Seabird Group

Forth Islands Bird Report 2011

Compiled by Bill Bruce

March 2012

SEABIRD SPECIES SUMMARIES

Note: AOS / AOB / AON / AOT = Apparently occupied sites / burrows / nests / territories

FULMAR

Number of AOS on the various islands varies up and down but the total this year is the same as for the previous two years.

CORMORANT

This species peaked at over 450 AON in the mid-1990s. Since then numbers have been decreasing and have been just over 250 for the last 3 years. This year they are up slightly at 281 AON.

SHAG

Breeding numbers are up again (+4%) this year, the sixth year since numbers halved over the winter of 2004-5.

GANNET

Not counted this year.

EIDER

This species starts breeding earlier than our main seabird count trips so is not counted regularly. On the islands where a count was done this year numbers of AON would suggest that there were fewer breeding. Alternatively this may have been an early season.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

Last year numbers were slightly down but this year sees an increase in AON over 2009. This continues the steady increase of approx. 9% every year since 1994.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL

None of the main islands counted this year.

HERRING GULL

None of the main islands counted this year.

KITTIWAKE

The numbers for this species peaked in the mid 1990s when there were over 11,000 AON. There was then a big drop in 1998 which has been followed by a more gradual, steady decrease of approx. 5% each year. Last year reversed this trend (+30%) but that increase has been largely wiped out by a 20% decrease this year.

COMMON TERN

May Isle saw numbers drop by 80% last year and then numbers have recovered slightly (+53%) this year. On Long Craig the number of AON is down slightly (-4%) with 4 fewer nests.

ARCTIC TERN

Very few on May Isle last year but much better numbers this year though they are still down 21% on 2009's counts.

ROSEATE TERN

There was a report of a nest containing 3 eggs thought to be from a female common tern paired with a male roseate. One of these eggs was later hatched. Another nest was reported with a single cold egg but no adults were seen.

SANDWICH TERN

No recorded attempts at breeding.

RAZORBILL

Since the mid-1990s breeding numbers of this species have varied between 3,000 and 4,000 AOS. 2009 was a low point with 2,842 pairs but since then numbers have shown increases of 6% in 2010 and 8% in 2011.

GUILLEMOT

Numbers reached a peak in 2001 with 37,800 birds being seen on the breeding ledges. Since then numbers have been decreasing. Last year 23,500 birds were counted and this year numbers are down by another 7%.

PUFFIN

The intention had been to do a count of puffin burrows on Craigleith and Fidra. Unfortunately it turned out to be an early season so the planned dates would have caused too much disturbance and the counts were cancelled. There were no counts of AOB on any of the islands this year.

Table 1: Summary of seabird counts for the Forth Islands, 2011

2011	Bass Rock	Craigleith	Lamb	Fidra	Eyebr-oughty	Inchkeith	Carr Craig	Inchcolm	Haystack	Inch-mickery + Cow & Calves	Inch Garvie / Forth Bridge	Long Craig	May Isle	Total
Fulmar (AOS)	43+	174	13	182		205	0	261	0	32	243	0	306	1,459+
Cormorant (AON)	0	60	72	0		77	72	0	0	0	0	0	0	281
Shag (AON)	25	281	66	191		186	15	15	0	62	0	0	505	1,346
Gannet (AON)	x	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	x
Eider (AON)	5	x	x	x		x	0	x	0	28+	52	4	x	89+
Great B-b Gull (AOT)	1	23	1	1		7	1	1	1	1+	1	0	41	79+
Lesser B-b Gull (AOT)	2	x	x	x		x	9	x	10	x	35	0	x	56+
Herring Gull (AOT)	0	x	x	x		x	44	x	8	x	222	0	x	274+
Kittiwake (AON)	313	542	140	204		306	0	82	0	0	0	0	2,685	4,272
Common Tern (AON)	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	105	26	131
Arctic Tern (AON)	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250	250
Roseate Tern (AON)														1-2?
Sandwich Tern (AON)	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Razorbill (pairs/sites)	94	185	70	108		63	0	14	0	0	0	0	2705 (3,012 b)	3,239
Guillemot (birds on cliffs)	c2000	1705	2040	332		133	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,691 (14,955 pr)	c21900
Puffin (birds unless otherwise stated)	c6 b	1830 on sea	x	c400 b		413 b	0	14 on land & sea	0	30 on sea	0	0	x	2693 b

AOB/AON/AOS/AOT=Apparently occupied burrows / nests / sites / territories; x=birds present but not counted; 0=none breeding; c=circa; b=birds; pr=pairs

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF VISITS AND SIGHTINGS

Inchkeith – 29 May 2011

Oystercatcher	6 pairs; nest with one egg at Leith Harbour
Rock pipit	4 territories
Mallard	1 pair west side, 1 pair and one male east side
Blackbird	3 males
Black Guillemot	1 bird in ad plumage in east rocks
Manx Shearwater	two off west side
Large White butterfly	
Small White butterfly	
Grey Seal	2

Craigleith – 30 May 2011

Greylag goose	-17 flying offshore to south of island; 1 ad. 2 juv. and 2 ad. 4 juv. at north side of island
Rock pipit	5 pairs
Linnet	c4-5 pairs
Peregrine	no sign of birds but evidence of nesting
Pied wagtail	1-2 pairs, including 1 male feeding juvenile
Eider	present
Raven	reliable reports of successful breeding earlier in the season
Grey seal	2 yearlings hauled out;
Rabbit	2 seen
Gannet	1 dead bird at top of Glen

Lamb – 30 May 2011

Rock pipit	1 pair
Common seal	1
Grey seal	1 adult plus 2 juv

Inchgarvie – 31 May 2011

Wren	1 seen plus 1 singing
Mallard	1 female flushed from vegetation
Cormorant	2 ashore (not breeding)

Haystack – 31 May 2011

Oystercatcher	1
Shag	1 immature
Grey seal	9

Inchmickery – 31 May 2011

Oystercatcher	1 pair
Shelduck	3 dead chicks
Tortoiseshell butterfly	1
Grey seal	3

Carr Craig – 31 May 2011

Carrion crow	2
Oystercatcher	1
Common seal	10

Inchcolm – 31 May 2011

Carrion crow	2
Jackdaw	12
Blackbird	1 singing; 1 male
Oystercatcher	10 territories including 1 nest with 3 eggs
Chaffinch	2 male, 1 female
Wren	several, including 1 singing; nest in wall in custodian's garden
Pied wagtail	1 male
Shelduck	4
Blackcap	1 singing
Sandwich tern	4 flying off island
GBB gull	nest with 3 eggs at east end
Swallow	3 nests in visitor centre; 1 nest in shed in custodian's garden
Willow warbler	1 singing
Rock pipit	1+ territories
Dunnock	1
Robin	1
Wood pigeon	1
Feral pigeon	

13 Greylag geese flying over
10 Gadwall flying off south side

Large white butterfly 1

Grey seal 3

Craigleith – 5 June 2011

Greylag goose	- 2 adults with 7 large juv.; another 3 large juv.; 1 adult
Rock pipit	one seen carrying food
Grey seal	3 in sea

Bass Rock – 5 June 2011

Peregrine - pair sitting in castle walls

Fidra – 12 June 2011

Peregrine pair seen early in year,
 Rock pipit 3+ territories inc 1 adult feeding a
 juv
 Shelduck 1 bird in east bay
 Pied wagtail 1
 Eider not counted but 7 nests seen with
 eggs
 Carrion crow 2 birds

Inchkeith - 13 November 2011

Arctic Skua (from boat) 1
 Blackbird 21
 Carrion Crow 3
 Chaffinch 1
 Cormorant 2
 Curlew 19
 Dunnock 3
 Fieldfare 1
 Goldfinch 30+
 Grey Heron 1
 Guillemot (from boat)
 Kestrel 1
 Linnet 1
 Long-tailed tit 7
 Magpie 1 (1st sighting)
 Merganser 2 (male)
 Oyster Catcher 53
 Peregrine 1
 Pinkfoot (flying) 47
 Redwing 1
 Robin 7+
 Rock Pipit 10+
 Shag 46+
 Shelduck 2(pair)
 Snipe 1
 Song thrush 2
 Wren 4
 Ginger cat 1
 Mouse 4
 Rabbit 10

Tree mallow seedling 1

Carr Craig – 13 November 2011

Carrion Crow 2
 Cormorant 4
 Curlew 1

Herring Gull 3
 Oyster Catcher 3
 Rock Pipit 1
 Shag 30

Seen from boat:-

Scoter 8
 Arctic Skua 1
 Guillemot 8+

Inchmickery – 13 November 2011

Pigeon +
 Shag 68
 Wren 1

Also: seakale

Inchcolm – 13 November 2011

Blackbird 3 (inc 1m)
 Buzzard 1 (dead)
 Back-headed Gull 1
 Carrion Crow 3
 Chaffinch 13
 Common Gull 1
 Cormorant 1
 Dunnock 3
 Goldfinch 1
 Guillemot 1
 Herring Gull 8
 Oyster Catcher 1
 Pigeons c200
 Robin 11
 Rock Pipit 3
 Shag 3
 Short-eared Owl 1
 Song Thrush 1
 Wood Pigeon 1
 Wren 7

Peregrine – evidence of feeding point

Inchkeith – 4 December 2011

Blackbird 11
 Buzzard 2
 Carrion Crow 3
 Chaffinch 3
 Cormorant 3
 Curlew 15
 Eider 22 (1 dead male)
 Gannet 1
 Goldeneye 4
 Goldfinch 65
 Greater Black Backed Gull 4

Guillemot	2
Linnet	c50
Magpie	1
Oyster Catcher	41
Peregrine	2
Redshank	2
Robin	5
Rock Dove	2
Rock Pipit	9+
Shag	17
Twite?	5
Wren	2

FSG FOOTNOTES

Reports and monitoring figures for previous years can be found on the group's website:

www.forthseabirdgroup.org.uk

DATES FOR MAIN ISLAND COUNTS

Bass Rock	5 June 2011
Craigleith	5 June 2011
The Lamb	30 May 2011
Fidra	12 June 2011
Eyebroughty	no count
Inchkeith	29 May 2011
Carr Craig	31 May 2011
Haystack	31 May 2011
Inchcolm	31 May 2011
Inchmickery	31 May 2011
Inchgarvie	31 May 2011
Long Craig	through breeding season
Isle of May	through breeding season

Bass Rock was counted from boat; Craigleith, Lamb, Fidra and Inchgarvie were counted partly from boat and remainder after landing; all other islands were counted from ashore.

Tree Mallow Project – SOS Puffin

For further information about this project go to the Scottish Seabird Centre website at www.seabird.org or for information on tree mallow go to www.abdn.ac.uk/treemallow

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David Pickett
David Ross
Maggie Sheddan
EJ Shields
Peter Wright

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Seabird Ringing 2011 – Short Report

This summer was a disappointing seabird ringing season with only 254 birds ringed (16 full grown & 238 pulli) of five species with 25 retraps/recoveries. There were five trips to three islands, but none after the end of June and no Kittiwakes or Fulmars were ringed. John Davies and Alan Leitch were out injured most of the season and Martin Moss moved to a new job in Copenhagen in July.

Seabird ringing totals 2011

	Full grown	Pulli	Retraps	Total
Cormorant	0	10	0	10
Shag	15	174	25	214
Common Tern	0	43	0	43
Razorbill	0	9	0	9
Puffin	1	2	0	3
Totals	16	238	25	279

There were three trips to Craigeith on 30th May and 5th & 12th June. 10 Cormorant pulli, 75 Shags (12 fg, 47 pulli & 16 retraps), 9 Razorbill pulli and 3 Puffin (1 fg & 2 pulli) were ringed. At Leith Docks on 14th June, 43 Common Tern pulli were ringed while the colony was counted (779 nests). Lastly, Martin Moss and Francis Daunt (CEH) had a very successful day on Inchmickery on 30th June and ringed (& colour ringed) 136 Shags. All Cormorant and Shags were colour ringed as well as metal ringed and the resightings/recoveries reported have made the effort worthwhile.

Thanks to Alan Leitch and Martin Moss and the other seabird ringers, the island owners for their permission and our boatmen. With both Alan and John fully recovered from their operations and Martin back in Edinburgh for the summer, we hope to have a more successful season in 2012.

John C. Davies

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Long Craig Island 2011

Mark Oksien

In February SNH reviewed the site's SSSI notification and removed some Operations Requiring Consent.

The island maintenance visit made on 21st March with the usual clean up and re-marking of recording areas carried out. Mayweed considerably reduced and any emergent Mayweed growth found was grubbed out.

Eider

This year a 20% decrease in nesting Eider with only four nests present. As usual successful breeding was unconfirmed and no ducklings were observed in the vicinity of the island this year.

Oystercatcher

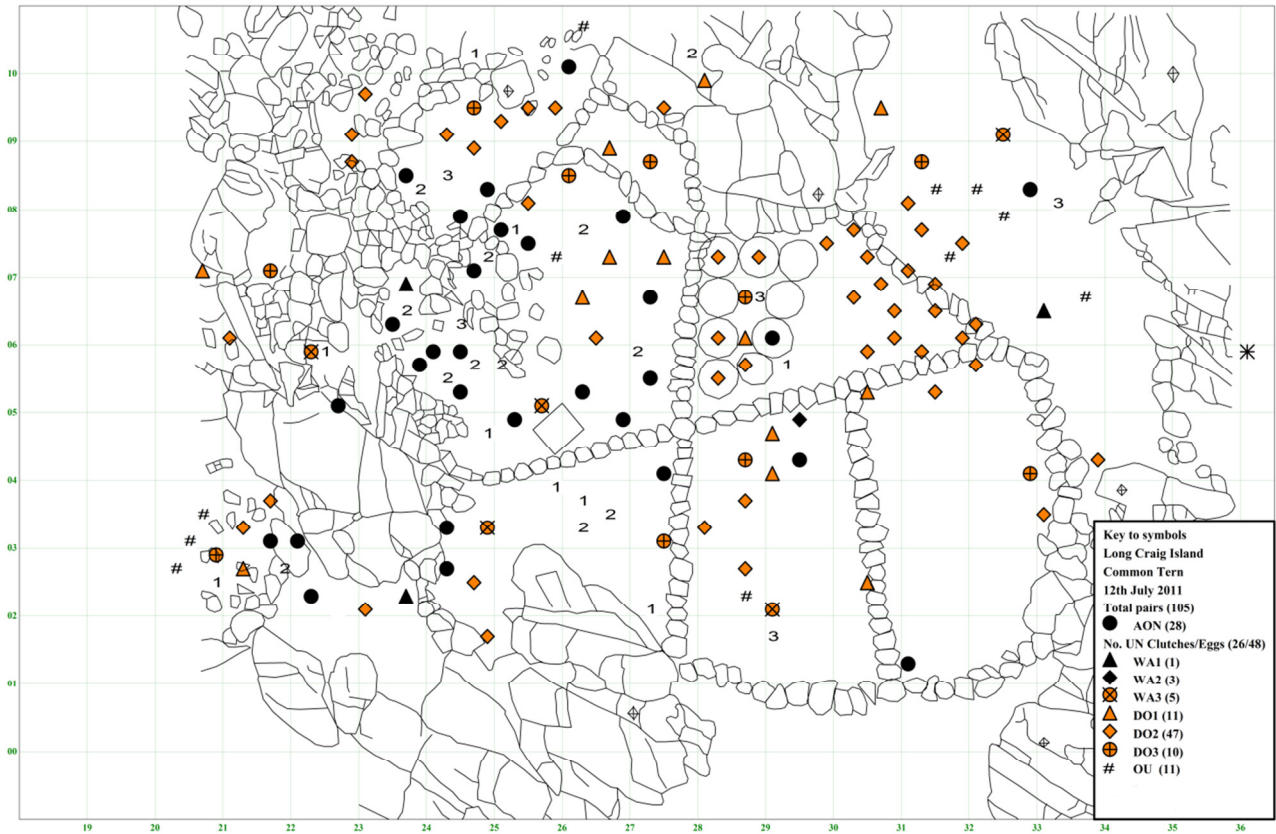
For the second year running a pair of Oystercatchers nested. The nest site was at the same location as the previous and it is presumed to be a returning pair. Two chicks were hatched but their fledging is unconfirmed.

Common Tern

Counts indicate a slight decrease in the total number of pairs nesting but still a good year. The tyres were again well favoured for nest sites.

Overall a good breeding year despite a low hatching success rate with only 134 chicks hatching from a minimum of 289 eggs laid the fledging success was very good with only 12 dead chicks found.

Long Craig Island	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Breeding pairs	139	90-100	122	109	105
Clutches	172	163	163	124	162
Eggs laid	249	285	218	163+	289+
Eggs Hatched	117	73	177	c120	134
Eggs Un-hatched	132	170	28	38+	141
Eggs outcome unknown	~	43	13	38	14
Young Fledged	91	42	152	c100	122
Young Died	26	31	25	27	12



Map showing a snap shot of Common Tern breeding on 12th July

Ringling

During the island visit on 16th July 46 Common Tern chicks were ringed (SR29639-684 & SR29700) of which three fully winged youngsters (SR29657, SR29659 & SR29665) were recovered dead on the island on 1st September.

Development

The use of welded mesh gabions to stabilise the tidal scree areas of the island has been discussed. Preliminary work associated with the provision of the new Forth Crossing is beginning to become more apparent. The "Beamer" light has been dismantled and removed.

FIFE SEAL GROUP - REPORT 2011

Ron Morris

The annual grey seal pup monitoring trips to the inner Forth islands took place on Sunday 13th November and Sunday 5th December, with Inchkeith being the main focus for the counts. The first trip involves making a count of all the pups present, both whites and moults, as well as any dead ones encountered. A 21 day period between the visits is observed as far as possible in order to assess numbers of pups born between the visits by using the rough guide of "whites" present.

The season's estimate of pups born is calculated by adding the number of "whites" (including any dead ones) from the second visit to the total number of pups from the first visit. Although the moults are also counted during the second visit, the numbers are not taken into account for calculating the season's total as these pups are considered to have been counted as "whites" during the earlier visit.

A total of 285 pups were counted on 13th November, including five dead ones, and a total of 55 whites, including two dead ones, were counted on 5th December, giving an overall total of 340 for the two visits. From this season's observations it appears the pupping season was at least one-two weeks in advance of earlier years and the number of moults counted on the first visit (47) suggests the probability that some pups may have left the island prior to the first visit.

Although pupping continues after the second visit, in the past numbers have proven to be small (single figures), which has not justified a third visit. However, Bill Simpson (boatman) visited Inchkeith on 7th January 2012 and took a photograph of a "white" in the harbour area, which was estimated to be less than one week old, indicating that with the expansion of the colonies at the island, the pupping season may also be extending. This additional pup gives a **season's total of 341 pups**.

The first trip also includes a visit to the other inner Forth islands of Inchcolm, Carr Craig, Haystack and Inchcolm. As numbers of pups recorded are usually insignificant there is no need to repeat this exercise during the second trip.

On 13th November at Inchcolm, 3 bulls, 9 cows and 3 pups (all whites) were counted. A single bull was recorded at Inchmickery. This completed the seal data for these other islands.

During the visit of 5th December, two dead moults were found at North Bay (Zone 2 – Kinghorn Harbour). Both animals had suffered the type of corkscrew injuries that have been reported in recent times. The freshest corpse was recovered for post mortem examination into the cause(s) of these deaths. These corpses were found at the same location as another corpse (moult) which had been discovered two years previously and had suffered similar injuries.

Details for both trips to Inchkeith are listed below.

Inchkeith - 13th November

	Bulls	Cows	Pup (white)	Pups (moults)	Total Pups
Zone 1 – Whole of West side	8	30	11 (incl. 1 dead)	1	12
Zone 2 – North Bay	5	27	41 (incl. 1 dead)	12	53
Zone 3 – N.E. Bay	5	38	44	15	59
Zone 4 – East Bay	4	24	45 (incl. 1 dead)	15	60
Zone 5 – SE Bay	5	50	87 (incl. 2 dead)	3	90
Zone 6 – South Tip	4	32	11	1	12

Totals	29	201	238	47	285
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INCHKEITH - 5th December

	Bulls	Cows	Pups (white)	Pups (moult)	Total Pups
Zone 1 – Whole of West side	3	11	4	1	5
Zone 2 – North Bay	2	8	15 (incl. 2 dead)	10	25
Zone 3 – NE Bay	2	5	8	19	27
Zone 4 – East Bay	3	7	9	25	34
Zone 5 – SE Bay	5	11	16 (incl. 2 dead)	47 (incl. 1 dead)	63
Zone 6 – South Tip	2	4	3	1	4
Totals	17	46	55	103	158

RECOVERED TAGGED GREY SEAL PUP - INCHKEITH.

During the pup monitoring trip to Inchkeith on 5th December 2011 some group members came across a tagged weaner/moulted pup in the midst of the seal colony on the south east beach (Zone 5). It was established the tag number was ???? which was quickly identified as a rehabilitated pup tagged at SSPCA Middlebank Farm Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, by Inverkeithing, Fife.

This pup which was named Orion by the SSPCA staff was found at Cellardyke, Anstruther, in Fife on 6th November 2011, when it was seen to have several injuries to its flippers, but was otherwise in a good condition.

Orion weighed 30kg on arrival at Middlebank and once its injuries had healed it was released at Silver Sands beach, Aberdeen on 28th November, weighing 31 kg.

When approached on Inchkeith Orion was seen to be in a very good condition and displayed all the natural characteristics of aggression. A good testimony to the sensitive care this pup received during its period of convalescence.

It is possible that Orion was born on Isle of May during the autumn of 2011.

CRAIGLEITH - Grey seal count, 0930 hrs Sunday November 20th 2011

(including Scottish Seabird Centre (SSC) Craigleith camera seal pup count, 1000 hrs Monday December 12th 2011)

By: Maggie Sheddan, James Leyden.

Craigleith Island visit seal count, 0930 hrs Sunday November 20th 2011

Total number of pups: 27

8 white

10 partial moult

8 full moult

1 dead

20 cows (including one in water)

3 bulls (including two in water)

SSC Craigleith camera seal pup count 1000 hrs Monday December 12th 2011

Total number of pups: 9

2 white
0 partial moult
7 full moult
0 dead

Total number of new born combining both counts: 29 (see comments)

Comments

- Weather and conditions (both counts): calm, clear, overcast. Generally however the wind and swell during the 2011 breeding season has been unusually extreme with few calm days recorded.
- Craigleith does not have a flat haul out area. The seals have fairly steep slippery rocks on which to manoeuvre in order to reach the main area of safety - the central southern "Glen" area. If there is a constant swell running along the front of the island it makes haul out difficult.
- There was one area of seal population: the Glen. The remainder of the island was clear. The intra-island sites of elderberry tree, SW corner, and north part of the Glen, normally accounting for four or five pups, were not observed to present as expected this year.
- SSC Observer note (M. Sheddan): 4 pups not included in the above figures are known to have been washed off the island. For instance, witnessed from the SSC guide boat were 2 pups washed off the island within 10mins of each other. It was not an extreme weather day but there was a rolling swell and a rising tide. One of the pups was in the sea and helpless, the other was not able to manage back up the steep slippery rocks and shortly thereafter a wave rolled in rising to about a half metre taking the pup with it. During the breeding period it is expected there would have been other pups washed off the island. As witnessed on the Isle of May if a pup enters the water the cow will try to herd it back onto the shore. This is nearly impossible on Craigleith.
- The first Craigleith grey seal pup born for the 2011 season was estimated, as a result of SSC camera images monitoring, to have occurred on 19th October.
- Due to a combination of weather and transport availability a second visit to the Island did not take place.
- The SSC camera count took place within the recommended 21-28 days range from the first count (island visit) which took place 4 days later than the equivalent 2010 count.
- It is felt the final figure would be at least in the high thirties taking into consideration the first new born date, the pups washed off the island, and best efforts SSC observations - during most of this period the SSC camera was down and therefore no ongoing observations were possible.

Pathology Account/Report (James Leyden)

In June 2011 I had a very interesting experience with a distressed seal which unfortunately died. Afterwards the carcass was recovered and pathologically examined. The procedure which proved highly beneficial to myself which I will share here for the benefit of others.

An apparently distressed seal was noticed by members of the public on North Berwick's east beach (grid ref: NT 567 853) about 1800 hours with a call to the Scottish Seabird Centre about half an hour later. I arrived on scene at 1900 hours - following a call from Maggie Sheddan who was then on the Bass Rock- by which time the seal had returned to the sea.

Reports from bystanders suggested the seal had returned to the water of its own volition. However, by 2030 hours it had died in the sea about 50 yards from the rocky foreshore.

From the time the seal was first sighted its behaviour was regarded as unusual, with dipping swings of its neck and head into the water, followed by stretching of its neck and pointing its head skywards, as if gasping for air. This behaviour was repeated regularly for about two and half hours or so until it died.

Fortunately it was a calm evening and the tide was receding, allowing the carcass to be easily recovered by a local shore fisherman using a rod, line, and hook.

I made the recommended call to SAC (01463-243030) with regards to their Sea Mammal Strandings' Scheme, however a whale on the Isle of Lewis was taking priority. The out-of-hours recorded message eventually directed to Andrew Brownlow who was covering for the Stranding Scheme organiser Bob Reid. Andrew advised I take what photographs I could and send them to him. This I did.

The last chance for the seal to avoid Council disposal was SMRU's Callan Duck. Callan stated he would need until the following day to see if he could arrange something, so the seal was secured and wrapped in black bin bags further up the shore, away from the tide. A notice displaying "*Please not touch as authorities are aware*" also put in a clear bag and pinned to the ground next to the seal. Time 22:30 hours.

The following morning I received a call from PhD student pathologist Johanna Baily of the Moredun Research Institute (linked to the Royal Dick Vet School?) requesting pick up of the seal and by about 10:30 the seal was uplifted by Johanna's PhD supervisor Mark Dagleish for post mortem that afternoon (carried out by Johanna). The initial results were received by email from Johanna at about 18:00 hours, less than 24 hours since the seal's death. A rather impressive response!

Johanna kindly took the time to provide us with an initial account of what happened to the seal.

During the post mortem it appeared the seal had had a condition called necrotising laryngitis (more technically necrotising pharyngitis) – it's something quite often seen in calves if hard hay/straw damages their larynx leading to infection – or sometimes can be caused by viral damage which lets secondary bacteria get through the mucosa and cause necrosis.

The entire left neck and shoulder region was massively swollen with oedema and haemorrhage and smelt nasty, probably due to spread of infection or toxin release from the pathogens in the lesion. The lungs didn't look too happy either but I guess he'd just inhaled some nasties from the larynx rather than being a primary lung problem. I've kept a canine tooth so we can try to age him, otherwise he's a – 35kg, 137cm long male grey seal.

I experienced a terrific piece of communication, fascinating, and an opportunity to gain some context to the conservation work we do. I hope you find it just the same.

Now, onto the subject of identifying the species as a grey or harbour seal. There was no obvious Roman nose to go by, which grey seals don't properly obtain until they're a bit older, and I've never been convinced with the parallel to V-shaped nasal slits idea (I think they're both V-shaped really), and as far as pelage differences go I think someone's having a bit of fun with that one! I appreciate experience helps, and classic cases aside, for me there's just too much variance intra-species, inter-species, wet coat, dry coat, partial wet coat/dry coat and any combination of the above to make a quality call. However the teeth indicator is excellent (photographs available from myself). I suppose it's mainly applicable to dead seals but you never know what glimpses of live ones you might get – hopefully not too close.

One tip I did find out relating to nasal slit difference which does seem to make a lot of sense to me is this: Greys are \ / shaped (not meeting at the bottom) and harbours are Y shaped.

Johanna later provided the following findings.

The histological findings correlated with the gross diagnosis of necrotising pharyngitis and fasciitis with additional changes in the liver, spleen, testes, lymph nodes and brain to suggest septicaemia or endotoxaemia.

The exact origin of the pharyngeal lesion still remains unclear (as so much is superimposed onto the initial lesion). A small amount of plant material (foreign body) was present within the lesion but this was relatively superficial and unlikely to be sufficient to cause a lesion of this amplitude. Several small structures, reminiscent of viral inclusion bodies were seen in the remaining pharyngeal mucosa though. A Panparapoxvirus PCR was carried out on the tissue but was negative, ruling out involvement of this virus at least.

We also found a parasitic gastritis, as seen at gross PM and a mild verminous pneumonia in the lungs, but no evidence of any other underlying pulmonary pathology.

Bacteriology of the lesion was pretty mixed – I think *Arcanobacterium phocae* and *Streptococcus phocae* were isolated in large numbers (and some other bugs) but it's hard to say which one actually was the culprit. It's likely they were just secondary invaders but probably ended up actually leading to the death of this seal.

I hope you enjoy your crash course in seal pathology!