



Forth Seabird Group

Forth Islands Bird Report 2012

Compiled by Bill Bruce

March 2013

SEABIRD SPECIES SUMMARIES

Notes:

- AOS / AOB / AON / AOT = *Apparently occupied sites / burrows / nests / territories*
- *Our counting season started off as normal at the end of May however by the time we moved into June the weather had deteriorated and prevented any trips from North Berwick. By the time we eventually managed to get out to Lamb and Fidra it was really getting too late in the season and there were very few guillemots to be seen.*

FULMAR

For the last three years this species has been steady at approx. 1460 AOS. This year numbers are down on all islands except Inchkeith.

CORMORANT

Inchkeith and Carr Craig were the only islands where we got good counts. On Inchkeith numbers were up 39% while on Carr Craig they were down 19%. Accurate counts were not possible on Craigeith and Lamb.

SHAG

There has been a steady increase since 2005 when numbers dropped to half the previous year's figure. May Isle, Lamb (where the count was late), and the inner-Forth islands all show increases, while the other East Lothian islands show a decrease. Overall the count is up by 5%,

GANNET

Not counted this year.

EIDER

This species is not counted on all islands but Inchmickery and Inchgarvie had a few more nests than last year while on May Isle they were down by approx. 10%.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

While breeding numbers on some islands vary up or down when compared to last year, the total is only one AOT less than last year.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL

This species is only counted regularly on a few islands. Bass Rock is the same as last year, there was an increase on Haystack (+6 AOT) and a decrease on Carr Craig (-1 AOT). May Isle shows a decrease of 66 AOT (-3%) compared to the last count which was carried out in 2010.

HERRING GULL

Again, this species is not counted regularly on all islands. On Carr Craig numbers are down 21 AOT (-48%) while that are up on Haystack (+4 AOT or +50%) and Inchgarvie (+24 AOT or -11%).

Compared to the 2010 count May Isle shows an increase of 66 AOT (+2%)

KITTIWAKE

Some of the islands show increases: Bass Rock (+82 AON, +26%), Craigeith (+78 AON, +14%), Inchkeith (+19 AON, +6%) and Inchcolm (+24 AON, +29%). The other islands where this species breeds showed decreases: Lamb (-45 AON, -32%), Fidra (-13 AON, -6%) and May Isle (-220 AON, -8%). Overall this species is down by 75 AON or 2% which continues the slow decline of recent years.

COMMON TERN

May Isle was the only island to see this species managing to breed this year and numbers were down (-6 AON, -23%). On long Craig birds were around as normal in May but there were no attempts to breed. It is thought that the poor weather was the reason but there could also have been some disturbance from the nearby bridge construction works.

ARCTIC TERN

May Isle is our only island where this species breeds. Although this year's count is up (+15 AON, +6%) compared to last year this is just about a third of the numbers breeding in 2000.

ROSEATE TERN

There are no reports of this tern breeding on the islands this year.

SANDWICH TERN

There are no reports of this tern breeding on the islands this year.

RAZORBILL

This is the third year that breeding numbers for this species have increased: 2010 saw an increase of 6%, 2011 an increase of 8% and this year an increase of 10%. This brings numbers of AOS back to where they were in 2006.

GUILLEMOT

Because the bad weather prevented us getting out to Lamb and Fidra until the end of June, the majority of the guillemots had already left by the time we eventually managed to get out so were not counted this year. Numbers on May Isle and Inchkeith are up compared to last year while numbers are down on Bass Rock and Craigleith. Overall numbers are probably similar or slightly up on last year.

PUFFIN

Fidra is the only island where a burrow count was carried out. The count of 750 AOB is well down on

the last count which was c1150 AOB in 2010 and slightly down on the c800 AOB in 2009.

Table 1: Summary of seabird counts for the Forth Islands, 2012

2012	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)	14	114	5	118		233	0	166	0	28	237	0	290	1,205
Cormorant (AON)	0	30+	x	0		107	58	0	0	0	0	0	0	195+
Shag (AON)	11 (FSG) 21 (SSC)	258	77	172		242	19	24	0	71	0	0	545	1,319+
Gannet (AON)	x	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	x
Eider (AON)	?	41+	x	x		x	0	x	0	37	55	3	902	1,038+
Great B-b Gull (AOT)	?	18	?	3		8	1	1	1	?	1	0	40	73
Lesser B-b Gull (AOT)	2	x	x	x		x	8	x	16	x	c27	0	2,282	2,335+
Herring Gull (AOT)	x	x	x	x		x	23	x	12	x	c246	0	3,281	3,562+
Kittiwake (AON)	395	620	95	191		325	0	106	0	0	0	0	2,465	4,197
Common Tern (AON)	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	20
Arctic Tern (AON)	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	265	265
Roseate Tern (AON)														0
Sandwich Tern (AON)	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Razorbill (pairs/sites)	106	157	66	70		93	0	12	0	0	0	0	3068	3,572
Guillemot (birds on cliffs)	c1600	c1650	x	x		225	0	0	0	0	0	0	16,991	20,466+
Puffin (birds unless otherwise stated)		1840 b on sea	65 b on land	750 AOB c780 b on sea		c650 b on sea	0	28 b on sea	0	38 b on sea	0	0	x	3,401 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

Craigleith – 17 March 2012

Greylag Goose 4 birds
Linnet 10+
Rock Pipit present
Fulmar, Cormorant, Shag, and GBB gulls all present
Grey seal 2 yearlings

Fidra – 3 May 2012

Oystercatcher
Rock pipit
Mallard nest with 8 eggs
Puffin c200 birds seen on land and sea

Inchkeith – 6 May 2012

Great Cormorant - At least 60+ nests (87 birds) seen. Possibly some more present.
Shelduck – Two pairs present
Eider – many on nests, however one duck with 5-6 newly hatched ducklings on sea near harbour.
Wigeon – One pair on sea just off the south end
Mallard – One pair present
Peregrine – One bird alarm calling north of harbour.
Rock Pipit – 1 plus seen
Turnstone – Three at south end
Robin – two birds near lighthouse (former keepers' gardens)
Dunnock – Two present as above
Crow – One present
Blackbird - 6 birds (5 male + one female)
Grey Seal – 65+ present (50+ on Iron Craig and 15+ on Seal Carr)

Butterflies:

Small White – 1+
Green-veined white – 1+
Small Tortoiseshell - 1+

Bass Rock – 26 May 2012

Peregrine 1 bird (♂?) seen
Common seal 1

Craigleith– 26 May 2012

Greylag goose –2-3 pairs seen
Canada goose –evidence of roosting (droppings and primary feather)
Rock pipit several pairs
Eider 41+ nests
Gannet 1 bird seen roosting just above high tide mark on north side of island
Oystercatcher 1 bird
Carrion crow 1 bird
Grey seal 5
Common/Harbour seal 3
Rabbit seen
Silver Y moth 1

Inchkeith – 27 May 2012

Peregrine pair west of harbour
Blackbird 4 birds east side plus others elsewhere
Rock pipit 5 pairs east side plus others elsewhere
Shelduck 1 in Leith Harbour, pair near Long Craig
Greylag goose 1 in NW bay
Gannet 1 injured bird on east side
Feral pigeon

Grey seal 4 on Seal Carr, 80+ on Iron Craig
Ginger cat 1 around buildings near harbour
Rabbits

Butterflies:

Green-veined white
Small white
Small tortoiseshell

Inchgarvie – 29 May 2012

Carrion Crow – One nest in bush at north side of the ridge. Contained one addled (?) egg. Brood possibly fledged? This is a “first” breeding record for this species at this island.
Rock Pigeon – Present in numbers but not counted.

Common Tern – Several flying about (from Long
Craig?)
Cormorant – One ashore

Buzzard 2
Peregrine 2
Kestrel 1-2

Haystack – 29 May 2012

Grey seal 10 present

Rabbit 6+
Mouse 2

Inchcolm – 29 May 2012

Oyster Catcher c7 territories
Shelduck 1 pair + 1 individual
Mallard 1 pair
Jackdaw colony of 4+ pairs. 1 nest with
chicks in old engine room (east side)
Great Black-backed Gull – 1 pair nesting at east
point
Swallow 1+ seen
Blackbird 2+ seen
Grey Seal West rocks. 40+ and 14 = 54+

Inchkeith – 10 November 2012

Shag 36
Oystercatcher 9
Peregrine 1
Red-throated Diver 2
Guillemot 6
Rock Pipit 19
Blackbird 13
Curlew 3
Cormorant 3
Wren 3
Chaffinch 1
Eider 12
Robin 2
Fieldfare 3
GBB Gull 3
Buzzard 2
Goldfinch 12
Gannet 1
Common Scoter 14
Rock Dove 3
Woodcock 1

Meadulse Rocks (midway between Inchcolm
and Fife coast) c30 Grey seals.

Inchmickery – 29 May 2012

Mallard 1 pair
Shelduck 1 pair
Oyster Catcher 2 birds
Great Black-backed Gull – 3 birds
Linnet 1 heard singing

Rabbit 8

Inchkeith – 21 October 2012

Eider 6
Grey Heron 5
Shag 54
Oystercatcher 46
Song Thrush 3-4
Pinkfoot Goose 120
Red-throated Diver 1
Guillemot 39
Rock Pipit 21
Curlew 14
Linnet 30
Goldfinch 25
Carrion Crow 2
Robin 6
Blackbird 5
Cormorant 4
Greenshank 1
Wren 3

Peacock butterfly 2

Carr Craig – 10 November 2012

Common Scoter 5
Shag 16
Cormorant 1
Hooded Crow 1
Carrion Crow 1
Curlew 1
Turnstone 6
Oystercatcher 1
Eider 15
Guillemot 1
Razorbill 1
Redshank 2

Inchcolm – 10 November 2012

Buzzard	1
Rock Dove	58
Shag	13
Blackbird	1
Cormorant	3
Eider	2
Carrion Crow	5
Curlew	1
Chaffinch	1
Woodcock	1
Short-eared Owl	1
Common Scoter	43
Peregrine	1
Robin	1
Oystercatcher	1
Heron	1
Guillemot	4

Inchmickery – 10 November 2012

Red-breasted Merganser	1
Oystercatcher	2
Shag	103
Eider	3

Carr Craig – 13 November 2012

Oyster Catcher	3 birds
Carrion Crow	2 birds

Inchkeith – 29 November 2012

Sea eagle seen by Bill Simpson

Inchkeith – 1 December 2012

Cormorant	2
Red-breasted Merganser	2
Guillemot	2
Long-tailed Duck	1
Goldfinch	100
Linnet	20
Greenfinch	2
Shag	7
Blackbird	19
Rock Dove	2
Carrion Crow	2
Rock Pipit	6
Oystercatcher	9
Robin	3
Eider	16
Wren	6

Peregrine	2
Kestrel	1
Buzzard	3
Sea eagle	1
Pink footed goose	c40 flying over

Also seen:

Rabbit	4
Charlies Cat	

Inchkeith – 29 December 2012

Peregrine	2
Eider	23
Shag	6
Rock Pipit	14
Robin	4
Goldfinch	70
Buzzard	1
Blackbird	8
Kestrel	1
Cormorant	2
Oystercatcher	5
Curlew	4
Wren	1

Rabbit	3
Pipistrelle bat	1? (unconfirmed)

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	26 May 2012
Craigleith	26 May 2012
The Lamb	30 June 2012
Fidra	3 May 2012 (puffin burrows) 30 June 2012 (main count)
Eyebroughty	no count
Inchkeith	27 May 2012
Carr Craig	29 May 2012
Haystack	29 May 2012
Inchcolm	29 May 2012
Inchmickery	29 May 2012
Inchgarvie	29 May 2012
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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Seabird Ringing 2012 – Short Report

Last summer was another disappointing seabird ringing season with only 262 birds ringed (9 full grown & 253 pulli) of four species with 3 retraps/recoveries. There were five trips to three islands and Leith Docks, but again none to Inchkeith. Although John Davies and Alan Leitch were fit again and Martin Moss was around, the season was a washout!

Seabird ringing totals 2012

	Full grown	Pulli	Retraps/ Recoveries	Total
Fulmar	0	66	0	66
Shag	9	182	2	193
Common Tern	0	5	0	5
Puffin	0	0	1	1
Totals	9	253	3	265

During the trip to Craigleith on 26th May for the annual Forth islands seabird count, 13 Shags (5 fg, 8 pulli & 2 retraps) were ringed. At Leith Docks on 14th June, after the 582 nests were counted (2011: 779 nests), John Davies & Alan Leitch only ringed 5 Common Tern pulli due to lack of time and manpower. Alan Leitch and Francis Daunt (CEH Edinburgh & the Isle of May) had a very successful day on Inchmickery on 19th June and ringed 178 Shags (4 fg & 174 pulli). All Shags were colour ringed where possible, as well as metal ringed, and the resightings/recoveries reported made the effort worthwhile. On Inchgarvie on 31st July, John & Fiona Davies and Martin Moss ringed 62 Fulmar pulli. And finally on 8th August, Alan Leitch and others had a very disappointing trip to Craigleith, only ringing 4 Fulmar pulli.

Thanks to Alan Leitch and Martin Moss and the other seabird ringers for their help, the island owners for their permissions and our boatmen for safe passage. After two very disappointing seabird ringing seasons, we hope for a better summer this year.

John C. Davies

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Long Craig Island 2012

Eider

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

Oystercatcher

No birds nested on the reserve this year

Common Tern

As normal birds were around and present on the island in early May however no Common Terns bred this year in all probability due to the extremely adverse weather at the wrong time although it is also possible that disturbance from the new bridge workings could also have had a contributory effect on this years failure.

Near complete tern colony failure to breed has previously occurred due to similar adverse weather conditions to this year however this is the first time that total tern failure has occurred at such an early stage.

Ringling

Nil recoveries

Mark Oksien

Honorary Warden

May Isle

(A brief summary that Mark Newell, Field Manager for Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, (CEH) wrote for the island blog updated by David Pickett)

As the Isle of May researcher's 2012 field season draws to a close now seems a good time to provide a brief summary of how the season fared. This year was my eighth season working for the CEH and every year continues to throw up surprises. The weather this spring and summer has dominated the national news headlines and the island blog and it certainly had a considerable impact on our working lives on the isle and for the birds we have been studying.

Living on an island we have to be adaptable but this year has taken things to extremes as the weather has prevented us from getting a lot of things done when we would like. The conditions have often been far from appropriate for wandering over the wet rocks let alone ringing birds. So it has been a case of making the most of the good days and knuckling down to the more dull, paperwork tasks on the bad days. However, at least we can retreat indoors away from the rain but the seabirds have no choice. Obviously they live in the sea and so are used to water but as explained in previous blog entries (<http://isleofmaynr.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/wetter-than-normal.html>) many puffin burrows have been flooded, shag nests waterlogged and it is impossible for the cliff nesters to sit on eggs or chicks with a waterfall descending upon them.

So how have the seabirds fared in these atrocious conditions? CEH monitor the return rate of adults to the isle and their diet on an annual basis and these results take a little longer to analyse. There are still some birds within the monitoring plots yet to complete their breeding season but preliminary results suggest a mixed season for the different species. Razorbills had a fairly average season from the number of young which fledged with guillemots faring slightly better. Shags also had a slightly above average breeding season despite the somewhat harrowing scenes of chicks that had perished in some of the more extreme wet days. As mentioned before it was puffins which have suffered the most with a below average breeding season but it was not the catastrophic failure reported in places such as the Farnes and over half the puffin burrows checked managed to fledge young. The fulmers seemed to have had one of the least productive years on record with many pairs failing at the chick stage, possibly due to the heavy rain events of the later summer. The island gull count was carried out this year with numbers of herring and lesser black-backed gulls going up slightly while the pairs of eiders counted at the same time were down. A small success was the arctic and common terns. They had their most productive year since 2008 and while still a poor year it was good to see peak fledged chick counts of 30 arctic terns and 6 common terns. So that leaves the big success story of 2012: kittiwakes. Despite some nests being blown off the cliffs back in May and chicks and nests washed away in the downpours kittiwakes still had an exceptionally good year. If the last chicks successfully fledge it could turn out to be one of the best breeding seasons for kittiwakes in two decades.

David Pickett
Warden

FIFE SEAL GROUP

Grey Seal Pup Survey 2012

This survey involves assessing numbers of grey seal pups born on all of the islands in the Firth of Forth, with the exception of Isle of May, which is monitored by Sea Mammal Research Unit at St. Andrews University and also Scottish Natural Heritage. These islands are divided into two groups, i.e. the Inner Forth islands of Inchkeith, Inchcolm, Inchmickery, Carr Craig and Haystack and the East Lothian islands of Bass Rock, Craigleith, The Lamb, Fidra and Eyebroughty.

Inchkeith is the main colony in the Firth of Forth other than Isle of May and Craigleith is the main site within the East Lothian group of islands. Apart from Inchkeith and Craigleith, the other islands in the two groups collectively yield very small numbers of pups. Therefore the main focus falls upon Inchkeith and Craigleith, but principally the former island due to colony size and therefore importance.

INCHKEITH

During the survey in 2011 it was noted that pupping had begun at least one – two weeks earlier than previous years. This apparently happens from time to time and need not be a permanent trend. However, as the first visit to count pups is timed to account for all or most pups born up to that time, consideration was given to altering the dates of the main counts.

Furthermore, Bill Simpson, our obliging boatman visited Inchkeith on 7th January 2013 and took a photograph of a solitary pup, only 2-3 days old on the beach in the harbour area. He did not check the rest of the island. Although it has always been appreciated that a very small number of pups are born after the last survey visit, this along with the expanding colony size prompted consideration for a later visit.

It was eventually decided against moving the normal weekends in November and December for the two main counts as during previous years these had been blessed with favourable weather conditions and weekends in between had proved to be not so fortunate. Therefore, for the 2013 survey four visits were planned to include an early season and late season visits, on a trial basis.

Trips were basically planned to incorporate a three week period in between visits, although the last visit involved a four week period as three weeks following the second main count fell immediately before Christmas, when it would be difficult to have sufficient numbers to accompany the surveying party. The four trips took place on 21st October, 10th November, 1st and 29th December.

Early season visit - 21st October 2012

A total of 42 pups were counted, which was more than expected. However they were all “whites” with the great majority being less than one week old and only two or three being marginally older. No dead pups were seen.

Ninety seven cows and 21 bulls were also counted.

2nd Visit and 1st Main Count - 10th November 2012

As usual this visit also involved visiting Inchcolm, Carr Craig, Haystack and Inchmickery which followed after the visit to Inchkeith. Brief details follow at the end of the Inchkeith report.

At Inchkeith a total of 306 pups were counted, comprising 271 “whites” (of which 6 were dead) and 35 moults. Also a small number of the whites were nearing complete moult.

As it was felt that the 35 moults and those approaching moult more or less corresponded with the 42 pups seen during the earlier visit, it was decided to ignore the numbers from the previous visit and use the total number of pups from the 1st main count.

A total of 265 cows and 24 bulls were also counted.

3rd Visit and 2nd Main Count - 1st December 2012

Eighty nine “whites” (including 10 dead ones) were counted along with 139 moults (overall total = 228 pups). All of the dead pups are believed to have arrived after the last visit.

A total of 82 cows and 16 bulls were present.

4th Visit – 29th December 2012

Seven “whites” including 3 dead ones were counted. It was believed all three corpses had appeared since the previous visit. A total of 11 moults were also counted. However, this visit took place some 4 weeks after the previous visit and it was considered that one of the moults was less than 4 weeks old, so was added to the 7 whites to give an estimated total of 8 new pups for this visit.

A part count between the harbour and North Bay returned 12 cows and 4 bulls. One of the bulls and 8 of the cows were on the offshore rock, Seal Carr.

INCHCOLM, CARR CRAIG, HAYSTACK and INCHMICKERY – 10th November 2012

At Inchcolm two “whites” each less than 14 days old were counted. At least three weeks previously a report had been received that a white pup was seen at the usual colony. This pup had obviously left the island prior to this visit, but is included in the island’s total of 3 pups for the season.

A total of one bull and 13 cows were counted at Inchcolm, with 7 of the cows being seen at Swallowcraig rocks.

No seals were present at Carr Craig, 3 cows were at Haystack Rocks and five cows were at Inchmickery. However, no pups were seen at these locations.

CRAIGLEITH

This year an estimate of pup numbers was made by using the CCTV cameras located on the island and operated from the Scottish Seabird Centre at North Berwick. Whilst the benefits of this system are considerable there are certain areas of the seal colony which remains obscure and therefore some undercounting may take place. However, only a small number will be overlooked.

The first pup was recorded from the island on 22nd October and is thought to have been born overnight. By 26th October there were 6 pups.

On 8th November 28 pups were counted along with 39 cows and one bull. As some areas were out of sight, Maggie Sheddon, camera operator estimated there were likely 30-35 pups present.

A further count on 29th November revealed 8 new “whites” and 19 moults, 11 cows and 1 bull. No new births appear to have occurred up to 29th December. This gives a total number of 36 for pups actually seen, however the real figure is likely to have been 40-45. No obviously dead pups were noted during the surveys.

The other East Lothian islands were not surveyed. However, only Bass Rock is a regular pupping locality with two or three pups born most years. So far pupping has not been recorded at The Lamb or Fidra and only occasionally is a solitary pup recorded from Eyebroughty.

The total number of pups estimated for the islands in the Firth of Forth for 2012, excluding Isle of May is as follow:

Inchkeith	403 pups
Inchcolm	2 pups
Craigleith	36 - 45 pups
Bass Rock	0 – 3 pups
Total	441 (actual) – 453 (estimate)

A total of 19 dead pups, all “whites” and all on Inchkeith, were counted during this year’s survey. Out of a total of 403 pups estimated for Inchkeith this represents a casualty rate of less than 5%.

R. Morris 2013