



# NEWSLETTER 111

June 2009

## SEABIRD GROUP CONFERENCE

**10<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL SEABIRD GROUP CONFERENCE, BRUGGE, BELGIUM. 27-30 MARCH 2009**

The imposing, neogothic Provincial Palace of West-Flanders dominates the Markt, or market square of Brugge (Bruges), and as people gathered in the foyer on a blustery Friday afternoon, it became clear from the list of participants how truly international Seabird Group conferences have become, the 102 delegates coming from 17 countries: UK (35), The Netherlands (11), Belgium (9), Germany (7), Norway (7), Australia (6), France (6), Denmark (4), Italy (3), USA (3), Greece (2), Ireland (2), Canada (1), Greenland (1), Iceland (1), Portugal (1) and Spain (1).

The conference was organised locally by Eric Stienen, Wouter Courtens and Marc van de Walle of the Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO), and by Jan Seys and Ingrid Dobbelaere of the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), and opened by Eric Stienen, who welcomed everybody to the historic city and Dr Jurgen Tack.

Chris Perrins (EGI, Oxford) then delivered an entertaining and thoughtful speech on the history of the Seabird Group, after which a minority of delegates attended the AGM (see minutes on page 22) in a side room while the majority got stuck into the Icebreaker Reception, which lasted late into the evening.



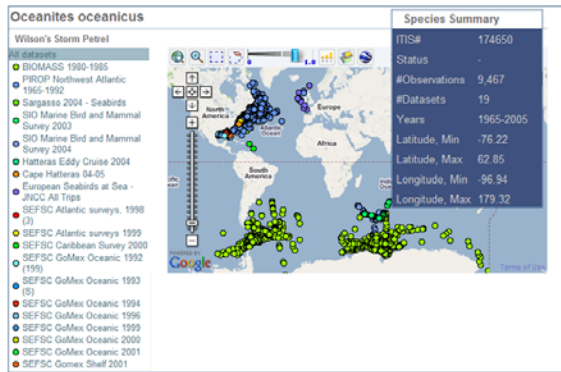
Chris Perrins (Jan Seys)

The first session on Saturday morning (theme - **Breeding Ecology**) consisted of four very diverse talks. Yuri Albores-Barajas compared the breeding ecology of European Storm-petrels at a cave colony on Marettimo Island, Sicily in 2007 and 2008, finding variation in body condition and breeding success in different parts of the cave within and between years. We then moved to the intensively studied Common Tern colonies at Wilhelmshaven, where Alexander Braasch had manipulated hatching sequences of eggs to investigate whether chicks benefited from the combination of an increased level of maternally deposited testosterone across the laying sequence, and being first to hatch, but found no clear effect of laying position on chick growth or testosterone levels.

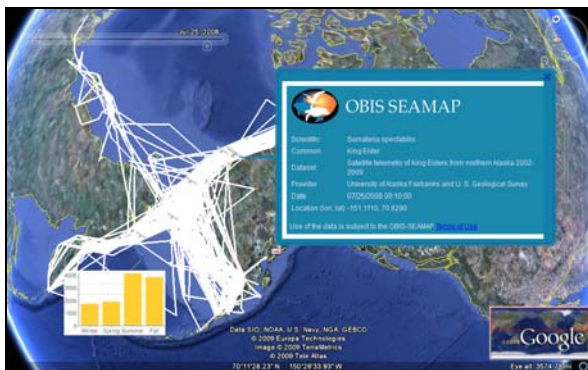
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can be easily extracted for cross-dataset comparisons.



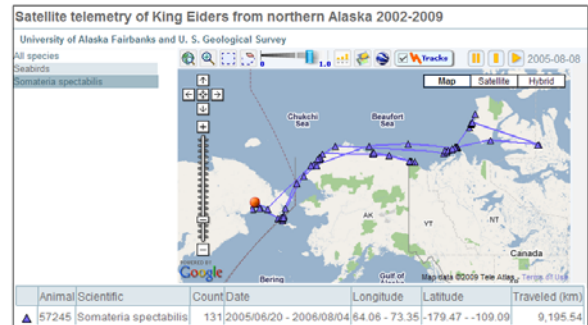
Furthermore, observation points can be used to sample concurrent environmental data such as sea surface temperature when available. All available data for a dataset or species, or a subset of data that meets the user's interest criteria, can be downloaded as various formats (i.e., kml, shp, csv) along with Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) compliant metadata. These formats provide greater usability within other software platforms, such as Google Earth, ESRI ArcGIS, or Excel.



Data collected from shore surveys and satellite telemetry have specialized options within the OBIS-SEAMAP interface beyond those available for viewing traditional aerial and shipboard survey sightings. The OBIS-SEAMAP project currently has over 2,700 records for nesting seabird colonies from shore based surveys in which the locations of the nesting seabird colonies are mapped as individual points and the species and site names are listed. Users can select a single site location to highlight the species within the larger list of species recorded for the whole dataset for quick access on species abundances for a specific colony. Alternatively, a single or group of

species can be selected on the list to highlight all of the sites that observed those that were selected.

For satellite telemetry data, users have the added capability of selecting an individually tagged animal within the full dataset and viewing an animation on the map that tracks its path through time and space based on recorded locations.



The OBIS-SEAMAP project has recently expanded to include a geo-referenced bibliography, model outputs on species density and habitat preference, sea turtle nesting sites, and marine mammal photo-identification management. By collaborating with partners to develop these unique megavertebrate data analysis tools, spatial and temporal data were incorporated to take advantage of value-added services within OBIS-SEAMAP. Other features in development are the integration of bioacoustics data, the overlay and animation of multiple oceanographic layers, and filtering tools for ARGOS telemetry data.

It is essential that we continue to collate data already collected in the field on marine megavertebrates and to make them known to the public in a centralized repository such as the OBIS-SEAMAP website. A more complete inventory supporting a better representation of available distribution data on these taxa may facilitate prioritization of data dissemination, direct future investments to fill in spatial and temporal gaps, as well as provide guidance on conservation issues regarding these species. Participation from the seabird, sea turtle, and marine mammal research community is important not only for the advancement of the OBIS-SEAMAP project but for the public community it serves. We look forward to partnering with you and welcome your data contributions, inquiries, comments, and suggestions.

For more information on OBIS-SEAMAP, please visit: <http://seamap.env.duke.edu/>

#### References

Halpin, P.N., Read, A.J., Fujioka, E., Best, B.D., Donnelly, B., Hazen, L.J., Kot, C., Urian, K., LaBrecue, E., DiMatteo, A., Cleary, J., Good, C., Crowder, L.B., and Hyrenbach, K.D. 2009. OBIS-SEAMAP: The World Data Center for Marine Mammal, Sea Bird, and Sea Turtle Distributions. *Oceanography* 22(2):96-107.

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## 2008 BREEDING SEASON NEWS

### SKOMER ISLAND

The 2008 season on the whole was below average with some species having low breeding success including Razorbill, Guillemot, Fulmar and Lesser-black Backed Gull.

#### Puffin

The maximum spring count of 10,487 was down 11.2 % down on the 2007 figure which was the highest ever recorded. Given the census difficulties (and erratic nature of spring attendances), it would seem that the Puffin population on Skomer is fairly stable. Puffins seemed to have had no problem in finding plenty of Sandeels and Sprats, only one Snake Pipe-fish was seen being carried down a burrow. Productivity was a bit on the low side at 0.63.



Puffin on Skomer Island (Jo Millbrow)

#### Razorbill

The whole island mean total of 4973 individuals was a 2.6% increase on 2007. Despite the difficulty in accurately censusing Razorbills (many nest in enclosed sites which are not visible), there seems to have been a general increase in numbers, with over 4000 counted every year since 2001, before which the species never broke the 4000 mark. The largest ever population within study plots was recorded with a 15.4% increase on 2007 figures. The mean productivity was just 0.17 and this is the lowest recorded since monitoring began in 1993.

#### Guillemot

A mean total of 17,088 birds were counted, a 2.6% decrease on 2007, although study plots showed the second highest population since monitoring began. The mean productivity was 0.59 and this is the second lowest on record since 1989.

#### Fulmar

A mean total of 565 AOS were counted, which is 7.5% down on 2007 and is the lowest since 1987. The breeding success of 0.26 per AOS is a decrease on 2007 and the second lowest on record.

#### Kittiwake

A mean of 2282 AON's were counted, a 17.5% increase on 2007 figures. The mean productivity of 0.55 is a large improvement on 2007 results. Big swells washed nests and chicks off lower ledges at the end of June, with predation of chicks by Great Black-backed Gulls also a major factor in chick survival. Predation by great black-backed gulls did not end at the fledging stage, as fledglings were also observed being taken by the gulls.

#### Lesser-black Backed Gulls

10,419 breeding pairs. This is the lowest estimate since this method was implemented and is a 12% decline on 2007 figures. The breeding success was just 0.04 and this is the poorest year yet. This figure is based on a mark:recapture technique where approx 300 large fledglings are ringed and then a ratio of ringed:unringed birds



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<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/seabirdgroupforum/>

The Newsletter is published three times a year. The editor welcomes articles from members and others on issues relating to seabird research and conservation. These should be received by 15th May (for June edition), 15th September (for October edition) or 15th January (for February edition).

The Seabird Group promotes and helps co-ordinate the study and conservation of seabirds. Members also receive the journal *Seabird*. The Group organises regular conferences and provides small grants towards seabird research. Current membership rates are:

Standing Order £9.00  
Concession £5.00  
Institution £15.00  
Ordinary £10.00

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## CURRENT SEABIRD GROUP COMMITTEE

Current retirement dates (at AGM) are shown in bold after the name of each member. Nominations (which should be submitted to the Secretary) from members for replacements on the committee are always welcome.

### Chairman

Norman Ratcliffe (**2011**)  
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### Other Members:

Simon Foster (**2010**)  
Ilka Winn (**2012**)

## EDITORIAL

The Seabird Group committee were truly delighted with the high turn out of people at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Seabird Conference. We were also pleased with the numbers of new members, particularly from outside the UK and hope that they continue to be involved with the group for many years. We would also like to point out the importance of taking part in the AGM (see minutes of the 43<sup>rd</sup> meeting on page 22). Your views really do count so we would encourage our members to attend these meetings wherever possible.

Submissions for the newsletter must be in electronic format, preferably in word and should be no more than 1500 words wherever possible. If you would like to see any new themes, please get in touch with your ideas (Email: [seabird@bto.org](mailto:seabird@bto.org)).

Every effort is made to check the content of the material that we publish. It is not, however, always possible to check comprehensively every piece of information back to its original source, as well as keeping news timely. Please will readers make further checks at their own discretion, if they have concerns about any of the information or contacts provided, and contact me to allow feedback to other readers if necessary.

We also try to provide a forum for readers' views, so that those provided in the *Newsletter* are not necessarily those of the editor or the Seabird Group.