



**ROYAL  
AIR FORCE**  
ornithological  
society

**Newsletter 108 - Autumn 2019**



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## Introduction

This edition of the Newsletter is rather slim, but not uninteresting for all that.

Unfortunately, it starts with obituaries for two former members: Jon Orme and Frank Smith. Jon was a very active member until illness forced him to give up, and Frank was also active for many years, some time ago. Our sympathy goes to both their families. We also learned of the sad death of Mrs Jo Hamley, wife of our former Chairman, Darell.

Martin Routledge talks of the fashion for renaming species - personally I have never got over the change from Fan-tailed Warbler to Zitting Cisticola.

Then we have a moving article from David Morgan, a former Fleet Air Arm Harrier pilot concerning a return to the Falklands. The picture of a Gentoo Penguin on the front cover is his.

John Wells explains a pollinator monitoring survey that he is involved with. Sounds like hard work!

John Le Gassick has provided an interesting review of *The Seabirds Cry* by Adam Nicolson. He also tells of his latest trip up the Gulf.

There is a report of the RNBWS AGM at Cranwell, an event on our patch!

Finally, Jayne Lindley has written an entertaining article concerning SIMMER DIM 19. The picture of her being strafed by a Bonxie is quite something.

On the back cover are a few dates for your diary, including that of the RAFOS AGM.

Best wishes,

*Bill Francis*

Newsletter Editor

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# Jonathan Patrick Orme 'Jon'

March 1938 – February 2019

By Pete Evans

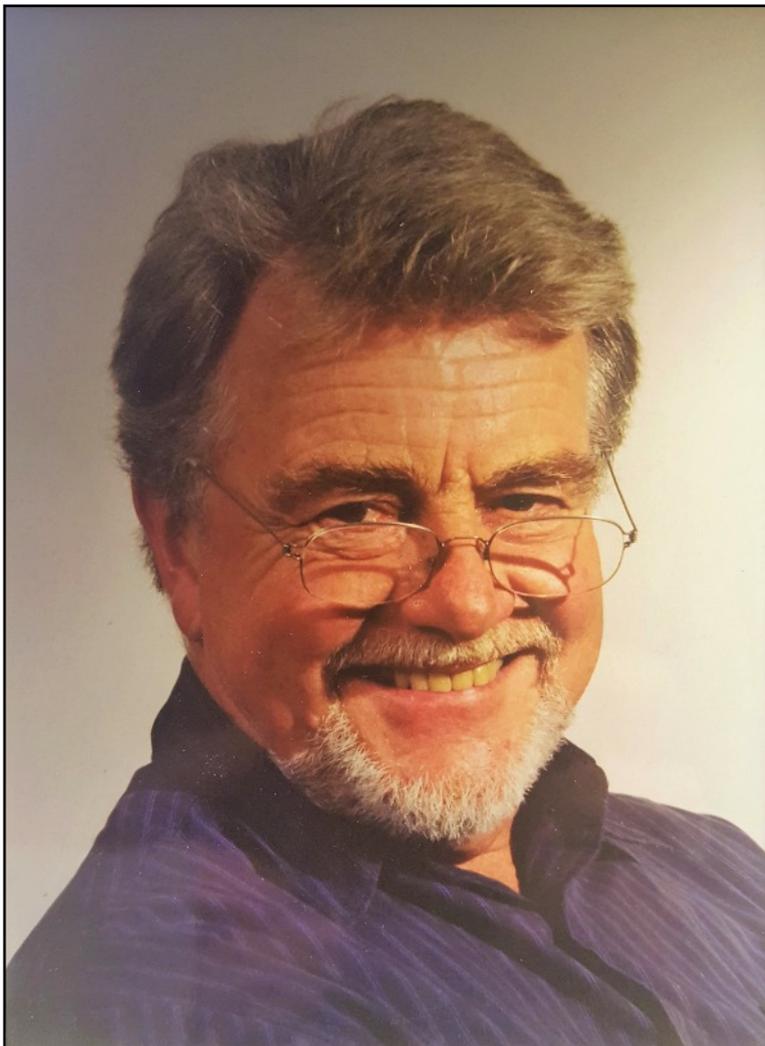
Jon was born in March 1938 in North London but, sadly, he only had dim memories of his mother, as she died quite suddenly when he was six years old. In those days there was no such thing as social security and his father had no option but to continue working, so Jon was fostered by a family in Potters Bar, North London.

His uncle and aunt, who lived in Cheam, Surrey, treated him as one of the family and he spent many happy weekends and holidays with them, travelling the complete length of the Northern Line from north to south - quite an adventure for a twelve-year-old.

Jon was already developing a passion for wildlife and it was during one of his stays that he found an enormous spider which he named Methuselah. He wanted to take it home, so his uncle found a large jam jar into which some leaves and the spider were deposited. All the way back to his home he sat on the train with the jar on his knees and no one would sit anywhere near him! Shades of the young Gerald Durrell as depicted in a recent TV series.

When he left school in 1955, Jon took up an apprenticeship with De Havilland and went on to work on the Comet 4 aircraft that were destined for BOAC. Several events during his time with the company were to shape Jon's future.

First, he met Margaret who he described to his friends as "a fine young lady". The low wage that apprentices earned meant that he and Margaret could not afford to get married until he qualified as an aircraft engineer and moved on to a man's wage.



While he was employed in the assembly hangar, one of the designers spotted a potential talent and he was offered a position in the design drawing office. He accepted the post, which then gave him the opportunity to qualify as an Associate Member of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (AMIMEchE).

In 1968 Jon moved to the Isle of Wight where he joined Britten Norman as a senior designer, working on the Islander.

In 1971 Jon joined the RAF, learning the basics at Henlow and then moving on to Cranwell where he graduated as an Engineering Officer. He was involved with the Hercules at RAF Lyneham, then survival equipment at RAF Brawdy and then the aircraft repair section at Abingdon. In 1989 Jon left the RAF and was fortunate to be offered a position in the section's design office. This suited him as it meant that he did not have to look for another job with the prospect of yet another move for the family.

When Abingdon closed in 1992, the repair section moved to St Athan, which did not

suit Jon, but he managed to get a transfer to the design drawing office at the Joint Air Transport Establishment (JATE) at Brize Norton.

It was here that I first met Jon through our mutual interest in birds and it was he who persuaded me to join RAFOS. Over the years we travelled far and wide on various expeditions, some close to home: the Scottish islands of Islay and Sanda, Norfolk and Portland Bill. Then there were those much further afield; Austria, East Germany, Hungary, Cyprus the Czech Republic and Ascension Island.

Most of these trips were undertaken on a self-catering basis and over the years Jon built up quite a reputation for burning toast, or as he would put it, 'Testing the smoke alarm' but it has to be said that not all of his many mishaps were self-inflicted. Jon was one of those people who seemed to be victim of circumstances. In Cyprus the switch on a new kettle came apart in his hands, the door handle to his room broke and in the local kebab shop he was cutting a piece of lamb and his knife broke in half. Even while enjoying a quiet coffee on the balcony he got doused with water from a solar heater on the roof above. Jon dealt with them all in his wonderful, unflappable way.

It would almost certainly be true to say that on all the various events both at home and abroad, Jon never lost his composure. He just dealt with it and moved on. Underneath that gentle persona, however, Jon was very much a man of principle, especially where family and profession were concerned. He knew what was required and would ensure that it was achieved.

In retirement, Jon's skill in design and mechanical things still led him to new challenges. He constructed his kit car – the Marlin. It took 3 years to build and he loved to drive it. When the floods came to Abingdon in 2008 and threatened the house, it was the Marlin that got the special treatment of being jacked up out of danger's way.

To all those who knew him, Jon will be remembered as a kindly gentle man, a keen birder and RAFOS Member, and a good friend.

Mrs Jo Hamley

I am sad to report that Jo Hamley died at 91 on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019. Jo was the wife of Wg Cdr Darrell Hamley who joined RAFOS in the 1970s and was our Chairman in 1976/7.

The couple were able to attend AGMs until about four years ago when ageing prevented them from coming. Our sympathy goes to her family.

*Editor*

## Francis Graham (Frank) Smith 30th January 1935 - 9th April 2019

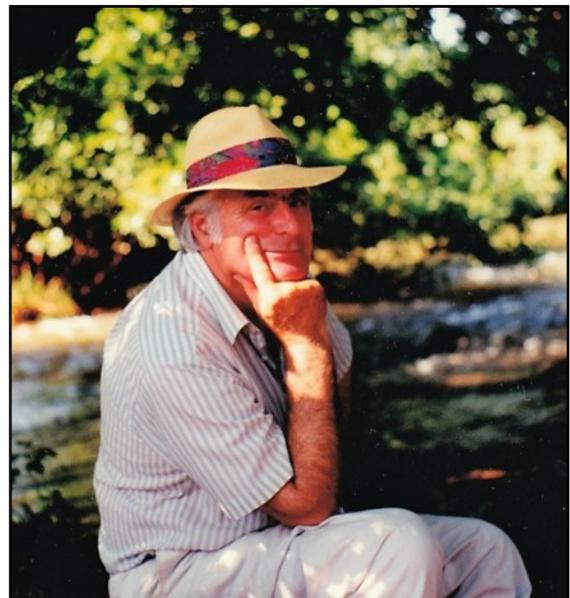
*By Dave Bodley*

Frank's childhood was spent in Lower Washfield, a tiny hamlet on the River Exe, just north of Tiverton in Devon. His father was a true countryman, forester by trade but well versed in most country crafts. Frank attended Heathcott School in Tiverton up to the age of 15, taking the years of the war and a billeted evacuee in his stride. His spare time and holidays were mostly spent roaming the countryside with his brothers and friends, building dens and tree houses, collecting birds' eggs etc. – all the things the freedom of youth allowed in those days. One slightly unusual hobby was developed while he was recovering from an infection: his mother gave him a painting set and he found he had an aptitude for painting, especially flowers and plants.

On leaving school Frank started working with his father, cutting down trees for commercial timber. His father was keen on rough shooting and Frank quickly became adept with a .410 shotgun in what was to prove an introduction to his eventual RAF career. He also started his future interest in sport when he became a founder member of the Tiverton Boxing Club where he achieved considerable success.

At the tender age of 16 Frank joined the RAF as a boy entrant and spent two years at RAF Cosford learning to be an airman. He selected the trade of Armourer and started the long climb up the career ladder with a first posting to RAF Chivenor, where he was soon promoted to Corporal. In 1954 Frank married Joyce, a girl he had first known at school in Tiverton. Postings and promotions proceeded in the usual way, often causing periods of separation. Frank became Corporal Technician in 1956, Senior Technician (remember them?) in 1963, Sergeant in 1964, Chief Technician in 1965, Flight Sergeant in 1973 and Warrant Officer in 1976. His postings were many and varied and included stations in Germany, the Gulf, Gibraltar, Malta and the Falklands. His final posting before retirement was again Chivenor.

During his RAF career, Frank developed several other interests. One was sport in general and besides boxing, he played rugby, hockey and football. In Malta his interest in the natural world was re-awakened, partly by the visible bird migration and by the flowering plants. He started bird-watching in earnest, then took up bird ringing and gained the BTO ringing licence. He also painted pictures of plants and became an extremely accomplished illustrator, so good in fact that over two hundred of his pictures were accepted by the Malta Natural History Museum. Frank joined RAFOS and went on some of the early expeditions – Masirah 2, Berlin, Gibraltar and Herm, and he led two expeditions to Bardsey.

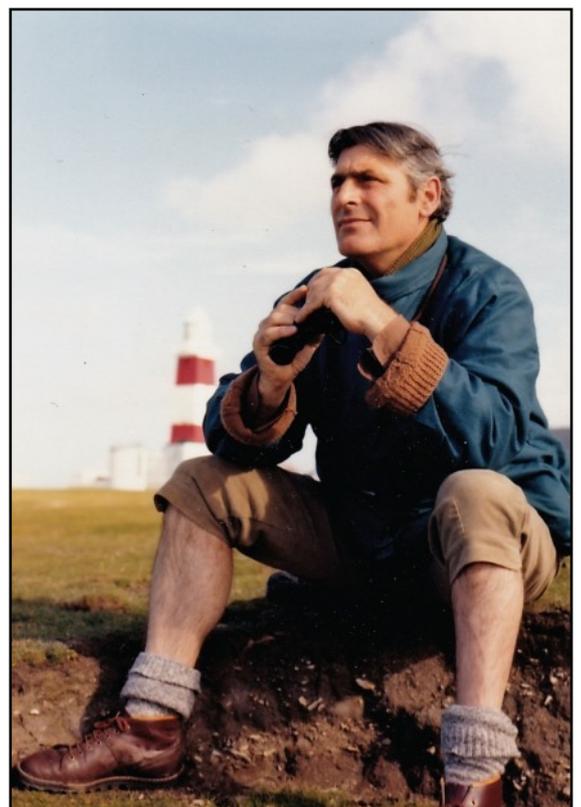
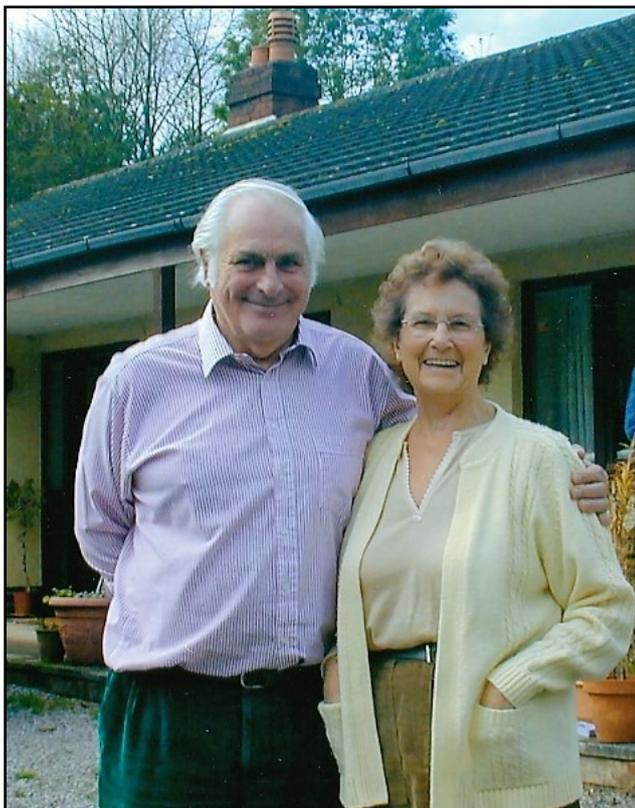


Anticipating his retirement, Frank had planned to build a house on a plot of family land in Lower Washfield. He had great difficulty getting the necessary planning approval and it wasn't until six months before the due date that it was at last agreed and building could begin. Here the clan rallied around and together they built a lovely bungalow on the hillside above the river. It was habitable by 5<sup>th</sup> March 1990 – just in time!

Of course, there was still a lot of work to do on the house, and Frank proceeded to complete all the outstanding jobs. Next came the garden – then a hay meadow, now transformed into a well-ordered leisure garden. Then there was the small matter of a job in Civvy Street – after all, he was only 55 and needed the challenge of another project to provide interest (and income), so he took a job as a Crafts Technician at Tiverton High School, dealing with provisioning and preparing the woodwork and metalwork departments and incidentally keeping up with life back in the real world among the younger generation.

Leisure activities became very important in later life. He had always had an interest in model making, and soon progressed from assembling kits to designing and building from scratch with raw materials - mostly wood. He produced a model sailing boat using timber from an old piano and some others using only matchsticks. His paintings were quite prolific, many enhancing the walls of his bungalow. He continued as a bird ringer and qualified as a trainer, passing on his skills to the younger generation. He attended RAFOS field meetings at Portland and Chew and extended his interest in the natural world by joining the Mid-Devon Natural History Society, a group of amateur naturalists who made annual excursions to the Mediterranean region to enjoy the different wildlife there. They went to Spain, Portugal, Majorca, Crete and Rhodes, usually ten or twelve people sharing hired cars and using low-cost accommodation. These trips almost always inspired more paintings!

Frank's later years were dogged by ill-health – he had started with heart problems while still serving in the RAF, and they only got worse as he grew older. Nevertheless, he branched out further with his interests by becoming a Church Warden at Washfield church and eventually progressed to be a Lay Preacher there. So, in the final order of things, Frank was buried in the churchyard in Washfield on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019. He will be fondly remembered by his wife Joy and their children Graham, Amanda and Harvey, and by his wider family and friends



## What's in a Name?

By Martin Routledge

An ancient Chinese proverb says 'The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names'. Now I don't know why we should put so much faith in the ancient Chinese; after all chop sticks aren't that clever and perhaps Shakespeare had it right when he wrote 'What's in a name? That which we call a rose ..... by any other name would smell as sweet'.

OK that's enough profound thoughtfulness for one day. Now imagine the scene – I've arrived in Africa with the Current Mrs R for one of our much-loved adventures in the bush. We're bouncing along in an open topped safari vehicle and I'm admiring a soaring raptor. Bateleur, I say with confidence as I admire this bird which seemingly has no tail and wobbles a bit like the French tight-rope walker it is named after. Well yes, says Patrick our guide, but now we have to call them Short-tailed Eagles. We round a bend and stop to admire the wildlife at a small waterhole. Among the many birds I call a Blacksmith's Plover – except I'm told to call it a Blacksmith's Lapwing and then I hear the unmistakable sound of the Flat Battery Bird (OK that isn't a proper name but is resonant of the noise it makes which is likened to a car that won't start *ti-ti-ti-tee-tee-toooo slowing and dropping in pitch*); Dikkop I say, proud to show off my Afrikaans and knowledge of local birds; ah but now we call them Water Thick-knees says the ever knowledgeable Patrick. And so it goes on, many Francolins are now Spurfowls and they've even changed the scientific names from *Francolinus* to *Pternistis*.

You'll be getting the picture – is this really necessary or is it just a ploy for men in suits to gather for meetings in Geneva on expenses and then produce second and third editions of popular field guides to get us all to spend more on the latest version? Surely this birding malarkey is hard enough without someone, somewhere changing the names of everything. My Boys Book of African Birds shows a surprising number of changes in their lists but we're not immune to such avian lexicographic pedantry. Apart from the more historical evolution of Hedge Sparrow in to Dunnock or even Nettle Warbler into Whitethroat we now have to contend with Knot becoming Red Knot, Divers becoming Loons and a whole host of birds having Eurasian put in front of a perfectly good English name (Eurasian Bittern, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Jay, Eurasian Magpie ..... the list goes on). To add to the confusion, we should now call Bearded Tits by the International English name of Bearded Reedlings and the Fan-tailed Warbler has become the Zitting Cisticola.

The trend in renaming seems to be widespread on the international scene. The Current Mrs R and I have just returned from a very pleasant trip to Costa Rica. Caribbean coast, Pacific coast and a bit of volcano in the middle all produced some great wildlife and of course Toucans amongst the many splendid birds. Now the book I bagged on E-bay before this trip (a bargain if



Dikkop or Water Thick-knee



Blacksmith's Plover or Lapwing

15 years old) referred to Swainson's Toucan but noted it was now more commonly known as the Chestnut-mandibled Toucan. Fair enough, but on arrival I heard the guide referring to a Yellow-throated Toucan and yes, you've guessed it – it's the same bird.

To keep grumpy old men (such as me) in our boxes the British Ornithologists' Union have at least accepted that our more familiar names (referred to as the British (English) vernacular name in the jargon) may still be used. Good job too, but what about the broader vernacular such as Tystie (Black Guillemot), Mallimack (Fulmar) or Bonxie (Great Skua) as we all used on SIMMER DIM? Now I get that we can't be using umpteen different names for the same bird all over the place and nobody wants to use scientific names in routine conversation but surely there is a middle ground (a third way to quote a now very ex-prime minister). I was taken by the South African Bird Club's approach which was to take the proposed new International name (courtesy of Gill et al) and then consider whether they wanted to adopt it or stick with their current name. So perhaps in Britain we won't get the pedants raising an eyebrow at Jay, Knot or even Swallow before tutting into their beers in that corner of the local hostelry reserved for such pompous pedants.

I suspect I'm pushing the proverbial uphill in trying to get a bit of common sense applied in this space but I don't think I'll ever call a Diver a Loon (unless by some chance I'm actually in North America where it would seem only polite to conform). On top of all this, there is the vexed issue of Scientific or Taxonomic Order – you know the order in which birds are listed on checklists and appear in those oft updated field guides. I can remember being berated for getting things in the wrong sequence one year on Winter Duck only to find the following year that the order had changed. Some groups of birds had changed places and some individual species in a group had also swapped place. I get it – science is moving forward and we have to keep these things as accurate as possible but all this threw out my carefully prepared, pre-printed forms and so now I print these things in alphabetical order which hasn't changed for over 300 years (did you know Z used to come before H but was later moved to the end?) – it takes more than a few men in suits to change the alphabet!

So, are you with the proverbial Chinese or with Shakespeare?



Swainson's or Chestnut-mandibled Toucan or Yellow-throated Toucan

## Crash Sites and Caracaras

*by David Morgan DSC*

In March last year I was asked whether I would be able to travel to the Falkland Islands; an unusual request made even more interesting by the fact that the request came from a retired Fuerza Aérea Argentina pilot. Hector Sanchez and I first encountered each other on a very dark evening 37 years ago at extremely low level, near Lively Island, some 60 miles southwest of Stanley. His formation of four A4 Skyhawks was attacking one of HMS Fearless' landing craft when my wingman and I appeared on the scene. Hector was the only Argentine to get home.

The plan was for my wife and me to fly down on the Airbridge from RAF Brize Norton (not a trip for the fainthearted!) and meet Hector in Stanley. His party included Luis Cervera (another A4 pilot) and Pablo Bolzán whose father had been killed on 8th June 82 by my wingman's Sidewinder after I had emptied my guns at him. We planned to visit the crash site and erect a small memorial, as well as trying to find the wreckage of a Dagger on Lively Island that had been flown by Hector's best friend, José Ardiles.

There had been little time to appreciate the wildlife of the islands during my first visit in 1982. Indeed, the only contact I had with the local avian population was trying to avoid hitting Albatrosses and watching the Sheathbills perching unconcernedly on the lip of HMS Hermes' ski-jump whilst a formation of Sea Harriers waited impatiently (and noisily!) to get airborne. This time however, I resolved to make more of an effort to explore East Falkland and its indigenous fauna.

On our first day in Stanley, we met up with Hector and Luis and walked out to Stanley airfield. This has changed little since the war and the control tower still bears scars from my cluster bombs. It is also possible to see the mostly now-filled craters of Black Buck 1's 1000 lb bombs, as they march from the edge of the runway up over Canopus Hill. From the tower we could see elegant Black-browed Albatross patrolling the shoreline and the inner harbour.



Luis Cervera, David Morgan, Hector Sanchez and Pablo Bolzan in Stanley

The following day was very special; Caro and I were driven to the Volunteer Point reserve to visit the penguin colonies. The journey was a ninety-minute drive over stone tracks, followed by another two hours of extreme off-road excursion. We travelled in convoy across a vast landscape of bog and tussock grass under wonderful blue skies until, cresting a hill, we saw the rookeries. They are on a spit of land between a beautiful white-sand beach and a lagoon and contain thousands of chattering (and very smelly) birds which seemed completely oblivious to our presence. The three common types of local penguin were all in evidence; the beautiful and aloof King penguins, slightly smaller Gentoos and finally the burrowing Magellanic.

Many of the Kings were brooding eggs on their upturned feet (no low flying allowed!) and a number of chicks had already hatched. In addition, there were many extremely tame Upland Geese. These totally wild birds have no fear of humans at all and will happily peck your shoelaces in search of a treat.

Surprisingly on this particular day, the wind had dropped below the usual 20 knots and we were able to enjoy a picnic in the dunes overlooking the perfect white sand and azure-blue sea. Were it not for the penguins waddling past and the odd Two-banded Plover skittering through the sea cabbage, it could have been the Caribbean (on a cool day!).

The following day, I abandoned Caro to the fleshpots of Port Stanley and joined Hector and his compatriots on another eight-hour boggy safari to visit the wreckage of Danilo Bolzán's Skyhawk on Hammond Point. His son was accompanied by a dozen of his friends and together we built a small cairn and placed a simple memorial. It was quite an emotional few hours, but I was able to explain to both Hector and Pablo the exact details of our fight and show them the evidence of a Sidewinder warhead on the tail plane and fuselage. There was no doubt that the aircraft had been hit at very low level and exploded in mid-air.

As we were working around the largest piece of wreckage, I realised that there was a pair of Tussock Birds using it for shelter, which somehow seemed very appropriate. They were very happy hopping amongst us and feasting on the massive crop of diddle-dee berries.

Day three saw us driving around the north of East Falkland, past Teal Inlet to Port San Carlos. This is where the Harrier Forward Operating Base was established in May '82 and my first reaction when I saw it again was "Bloody hell, that's small!" And small it was – only 650 meters in length; enough to get airborne with a full weapon load and internal fuel. HMS Sheathbill (or Sid's Strip if you were RAF) made a huge difference to our available CAP time, increasing it from 5 minutes per transit from the ship to more than an hour.

It was here that we had problems with the local wildlife in '82, as the Upland Geese discovered that the tin strip was lovely and warm and a good place to sit. The judicious use of size 10 boots didn't offer a lasting remedy, so a number were "liberated" and became the Goose Galtieri main course at the Wardroom Victory Dinner.

Our next destination was the British Cemetery in San Carlos. This is a beautifully peaceful and well-kept site, not at all mournful. Having found a few friends on the list of those who have no grave, I spied a stunning Long-tailed Meadowlark, but it refused to be photographed! I did, however, capture a good shot of a Dark-faced Ground-tyrant perching on the cemetery wall before we headed for Goose Green to pay our respects to Lt Nick Taylor, who was shot down on 4th May.

Our penultimate day in the islands was spent exploring the battlefields to the west of Stanley and gaining an appreciation of just what an amazing feat of arms the battles for Mount Longdon, Tumledown and Wireless Ridge were. There is little left of the detritus of war; just the odd rusting gun and cluster bomb casing and most of the minefields have now been cleared. This has,

apparently reduced the pickings for the Striated Caracaras that scavenge ceaselessly in the mountains and uplands.

And then came the long and slightly melancholic journey home. The wild – but amazingly tame beauty of the islands has left a lasting impression on both of us and I feel that I can now close the door on that part of my life. It was wonderful to be able to appreciate at last, the wildlife and to realise that those of us who went south in '82 have enabled the islands to flourish and grow in a way that probably would not have happened without the Task Force.



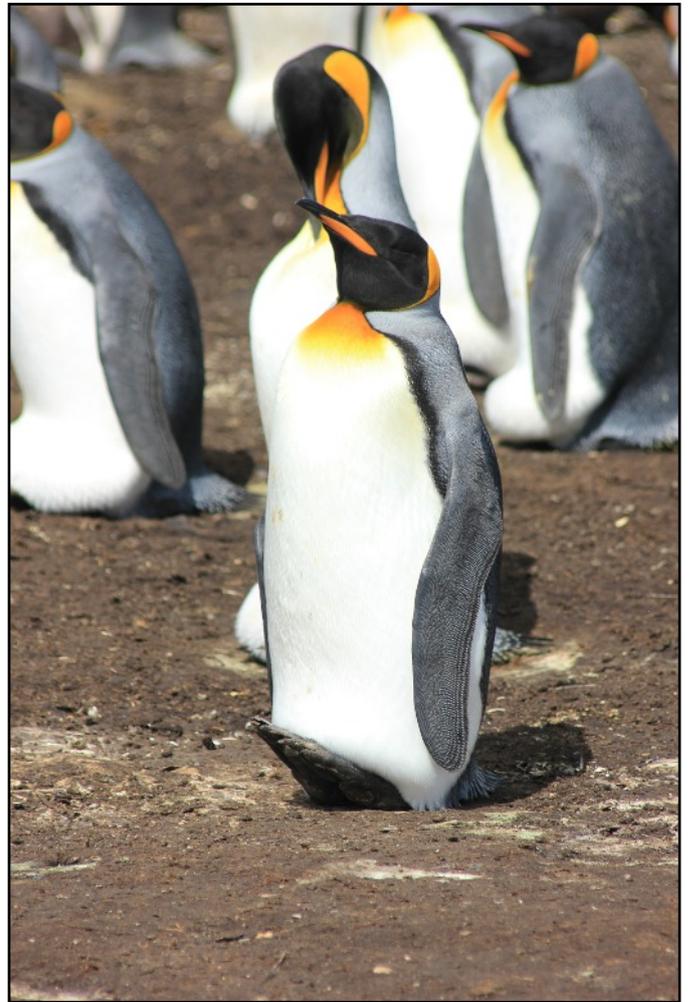
Female Upland Goose



Dark-faced Ground Tyrant, British Cemetery



Magellanic Penguin



King Penguin



Tussac Bird and Skyhawk

## More Falklands Pictures



Two-banded Plover



Skyhawk flown by Danilo Bolzan



## Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (PoMS) and its link to RAFOS explained

by JN Wells PIEMA, MSM

### Background and Details

*Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (PoMS) for the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) also; PoMS whilst on RAFOS Expedition; 'Simmer Dim (Orkney) 2018' and Monad Ser 25; Conington, Near Cambridge*

*PoMS is an insect pollination study helping to understand how our insects; Bees, Butterflies, Sawflies, Hover-flies, Wasps, Beetles and other pollinating insects are fairing in the countryside and how they are surviving in what is becoming an increasing hostile and barren place for them. Habitat loss is a potential factor but causes of those habitat changes are not being directly investigated.*

*The focus of PoMS is to gather data on trends in pollinating insect numbers. PoMS will not directly research the causes of any perceived or actual losses of pollinators. The study will, CEH and its partnership hope, in time, provide data that will support others who are researching the causes.*

**NOTE:** *The assumptions written here are my understanding only and must be taken as that and are therefore with a Caveat: it is **NOT an official view** of the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme, its partners and officials therein.*

*Pollinators are essential to the food chain for crops, flowers, fruit trees, fruit plants and bushes in our food cycle. Furthermore, pollinators directly affect our birdlife and food availability for birds and their young in the long-term. Hence the article for RAFOS members and Newsletter readers.*

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### Full time study supported by Volunteers.

My volunteer work commenced in Spring 2018 following a 'tweet' from Dawn Balmer at the BTO asking me if I would be interested, in an un-paid volunteer role, in supporting work for the CEH. The CEH is based in offices in Wallingford, near Oxford. The links we (RAFOS), have formed with the BTO no doubt helped Dawn call me as someone suitable with an interest in the countryside. The BTO is a project partner to CEH (and many others - see links at the foot of the article), in this collaborative project and helping to Establish a UK Pollinator Monitoring and Research Partnership (PMRP).

The UK PoMS is the only scheme in the world generating systematic data on the abundance of bees, hover-flies and other flower-visiting insects at a national scale (currently across England, Wales and Scotland).

Together with long-term occurrence records collated by the *Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society* and *Hover-fly Recording Scheme*, these data will provide an invaluable resource from which to measure trends in pollinator populations and to target conservation efforts by interested

national organisations working with CEH. The project will focus on bees and hover-flies (based on evidence that they provide a high proportion of the pollination service to crops and wildflowers), although the methods used will sample or survey a wide range of other flower-visiting insects. Protocols and materials will be made widely accessible to allow their use beyond core survey sites and to measure the impacts of specific activities.

## **RAFOS - Permission to copy data**

My article provides a personal input and update on PoMS activities to date and those experiences on Eday, Orkney during *Expedition 'Simmer Dim' 2018*. Factual copyright has been given by CEH for me to inform you of the study, most of which is taken from the Newsletter provided by Dr Claire Cavell and Dr Helen Roy at CEH or available public data on the Website of CEH - PoMS. Reports are Referenced below.

## **PoMS Surveys 2017.**

The UK Pollinator Monitoring and Research Partnership (PMRP) aims to combine improved analyses of long-term records with new systematic survey activity to establish how insect pollinator populations are changing across Great Britain. 2017 saw the establishment of the PMRP and launch of PoMS, following 2 years of design and testing of survey methods. The scientists and their teams at CEH Wallingford undertook this initial work, with only a few non-specialists. In 2018 they cast the net wider for volunteers to help undertake the fieldwork.

To enable the study to become operational, 2 years of planning and access rights needed to be granted to ensure landowners granted permission for field workers to set out and retrieve the Pan-traps, with people transiting each transect twice in a day - once to set out, and once to collect the insects and retrieve equipment. Materials also needed to be designed and manufactured for each of the squares, and kits made containing the necessary equipment hardware and any tools or containers for liquids used in the survey. These were then issued out to staff and volunteers. Volunteers [identified to fill gaps in fieldwork], were then trained on their first visit by CEH staff. I was one of the first set of volunteers working alongside a permanent staff member, Nadine Mitschunas. Nadine was already committed to three other Monad squares and needed to handover Square Ser 25, Conington, West of Cambridge. I had offered to help on this square following Dawn's initial contact.

Following initial mapping and survey, the volunteer surveyor undertakes training, with subsequent visits alone or working in pairs with other trained local volunteers. Having two trained allows for holidays or sickness etc. My co-partner in PoMS was Mr Dion Garret from Cambridge, a who is an undergraduate in a similar study. He specialises in greenfly and their tolerances to crop sprays and their breeding cycles.

More volunteers may be required now there is further funding in 2019, that will hopefully fill gaps in squares where needed or there are gaps with no permanent staff able to complete the square or a gap of volunteers on the ground. This article is therefore a 'taster' for our members to see if anyone wants to become involved in their region, not necessarily in PoMS but also the less arduous Flower Insect Timed (FIT) counts which can be done by anyone without any special training. FIT counts are undertaken twice on every PoMS visit by volunteers' or staff, but in the main can be undertaken by any keen member of the public casually in gardens, parks, flowering hedgerows or rough ground areas, anywhere with wild flowers, herbs or flowering plants, even thistles and or Ivy as these to are great plants for insects. We (RAFOS) undertook PoMS on Eday, Orkney as a side survey to the main *Simmer Dim 2018* work and had planned to undertake FIT counts on the separate Island of Stronsay, but they never came to fruition due to other constraints.

FIT Counts are a sample of insects visiting a square metre using a quadrat positioned over flowers in bloom over a ten-minute count period. The FIT counts can be taken from April to end of September. After identifying the flower, you count the total of insects visiting the flower species open blooms or food source within the 10-minute count period. More details from Eday, later. I'll explain PoMS in detail first.

## Main POMS Survey Methodology

The PoMS survey covers 75 National mapped Monads (1km Squares). The 75 squares; which are stratified random samples, are located throughout all 3 countris of the UK. Each has a count Identifier (mine is Ser 25) And each 2km area of the countryside is mapped and sampled. Posts are set out at a pre-arranged grid references and spacing. Each plot or Monad has 5 wooden stakes set out with each stake holding 3 differently coloured (Hi-Viz), Blue, White and Yellow 'Pan-traps' [Picture 1] that are attached with sprung-wired holders. These wire clips are foldable onto the stake for transit via butterfly nuts on screw headed bolts-finger tight. The holders are in twin holes at various heights on the stakes, this allows for crop, vegetation or grassland height. Depending on crop height the traps are set to give the surveyor opportunity to gauge the height to crop/hedgerow or height of adjacent vegetation, thus attracting passing insects. The stake or post is then driven into the ground. The 5 traps and stakes are left out for a minimum of 6 hours to attract insects and thus gauge the insects using the square, or visiting and or pollinating the crops or plants (such as fruit trees, flower beds, oil seed rape or other crops etc) whichever random sampled square was chosen.

Each trap location is satellite map-referenced and focused with a minimum 8 Figure Grid Reference. Locations of each Pan-trap must be adhered to as closely as possible. There is a mobile phone application, available to download for this from the Apple® I Store. The positions are already determined in the prior years work and set by CEH. These traps are placed in exact location each month and each subsequent month and year as the survey progresses. That way as crops change and or be visited by insects, each crop will possibly be different depending on flowers, grain, seed heads, wild plants or grasses etc but sampling will be at the same spot. The 5 sample locations are normally equidistant on a straight transect route. This was pre-set for me by CEH and the paperwork and instruction pack provided by my trainer. On our first visit she showed me how to set each location, fill each of the traps with water mix in a little washing-up liquid to enable the pollinators to be caught. The insects do die during this work but gathering the insects allows microscopic identification by a specialist in the laboratory. The liquid containing insects needs to be frozen and kept fresh in screw-thread pots prior to posting to CEH by First Class post. I trained Dion on his first visit, both of us collecting and assisting the paperwork.

In detail my PoMS Square is as follows:

**Square Ref:** 25 [the CEH ident]

**Square Grid:** TL 3266

**Square Name:** Conington



**Start Point & End Point:** As identified for field workers [withheld from this article because of proprietary landowners' permissions]

Here is a photo of Pan Trap 4 [Photo1], in its wheat crop location. Behind is a sheep field that is walked through to position Pan Trap 5 in its location. That is just beyond the grass field shown, but away from any live animals to avoid disturbance.

All 5 Pan-traps are set out and collected after 6 hours to enable visiting insects to locate the 3 coloured Pan-trap bowls. Insects are kept in alcohol-bbased

solution for freezing overnight and later by post for laboratory identification and collation by species type and quantity for each Report.

### **Oil Seed Rape - 5-metre Crop Study.**

During the initial training visit, (May 18), Nadine was additionally tasked by her organisation to undertake a crop survey outside of the PoMS survey square. In an adjacent field using similar randomly stratified technique but containing Oil Seed Rape - the target crop. This was a one-off and not part of the Main PoMS Scheme counts, but CEH-specific. Separate permissions had been requested and granted for this work.



The study entailed a count of all insects visiting and feeding on open flower heads in oil-seed rape, over a 50m distance within a 5m square and a walk/count along the chosen crop 'tram-line' to count visiting insects at the 5 m distance from the crop tram line. I helped by holding the tape measure!! Well I did do a little more - I attempted counting the open flower heads and productive stems of the Oil Seed Rape in the sample plot; start and end points within the 5sq metre of each end of the tape measure (under supervision), thus letting Nadine do the main count as that

was an experienced worker task and she wanted it done asap without any recalculation which was understandable. I did have a little dry-run count [Photo 2.] once she felt I was proficient!

This task aimed to investigate the potential of data on abundance and diversity of pollinators collected, using the PoMS 1km survey protocol to act as a proxy for important crop visitors. To test this, additional survey of crop visitors on a selected focal crop (flowering oil seed rape) were conducted at a subset of squares nationally. The data-set on these counts will be compared as part of the 1km square protocol and CEH will investigate the possibility of using additional data-sets on oil seed rape visitation held by University of Reading and CEH to identify likely key pollinators across different regions. A manuscript has also been submitted from the design and testing phase project (WC1101) that includes assessment of the feasibility of different sampling methods for assessing crop pollinators as part of a larger monitoring scheme (O'Connor et al., in review).

### **Flower Insect Timed (FIT) Counts.**

FIT counts are undertaken both alongside and separately to the 1km Pan-trap setting out days. Many wild and cultivated plants depend on insects to pollinate their flowers, with successful pollination leading to successful seed or fruit production. There are concerns that numbers of pollinating insects may be declining, but more data is needed to be able to track changes in abundance across the country. The FIT Count is designed to collect new data on numbers of flower-visiting insects, as part of a wider set of surveys under the PoMS. This involves counting all the insects that visit a patch of target flowers in a 10-minute period, identifying the insects to broad

group level. Counts can be made at any location where there are flowers, and whenever the weather is suitable from April to September.

FIT counts can be undertaken by anyone in the UK as a volunteer and using limited materials and key ID Skills is all you need. The instructions are on-line and the equipment you need are simple as follows

- a. Piece of rope or hand made quadrat, (see PoMS link <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/sites/default/files/FITCount> - or quadrat [purchased type]. Size;1 Square meter.
- b. Notebook or Clipboard
- c. Downloaded pre-printed FIT form with instructions
- d. It is advisable to read the ID guides on insect types likely to visit your quadrat. This document contains all the information you need to carry out a FIT Count.

You also need to become familiar with the insect 'types' at species level. The Count is not difficult to do, but CEH, need to collect data as carefully as possible so that it can be analysed to provide information on potential changes in insect numbers. Please do follow this guidance as closely as you can. The web-link FIT count instructions are available at the end of my article. Choose a nice flowery spot on a dry sunny or dry cloudy day, pick an area with lots of open flowers and lay the quadrat down. Start the clock and using the pre-printed form mark-off each individual visitor to a flower that is open inside the chosen area There is a list of selectable flowers but you can choose one of your own if needs be.

FIT counts were undertaken as a pre-requisite on PoMS Field visits as I said earlier but in addition volunteers can undertake FIT counts on any suitable patch of flowers in any number of habitats and types of vegetation such as; gardens, churchyards, rough ground, playing fields, agricultural open spaces, Sports pitches, National Nature or Local Nature reserves, basically anywhere with flowers.

### **FIT Counts on Simmer Dim 2018**

FIT Counts were undertaken, by the RAFOS Team on Orkney in the main by me on Eday, late



afternoon-early evening as the sun was still well up. The FIT counts were usually before the Seabird Survey call-over with the Eday team: Keith Cowieson, Jim Bryden, Maggie Sheddan and Brian Lyon being interested in how it went. The team watched and let me know what insects were close by or likely to come into the quadrat. They also covered me as they prepared meals or got the day's paper work ready for 'call-over' so I popped out into the lovely gardens of Pirate Gows and set out my quadrat square of orange plastic rope to achieve the FIT count.

The survey species were in the main flowering shrubs of Mahonia (see left) in the cottage gardens, but the bees and insects were visiting also visiting fuchsia and a

lovely flowering purple Hebe. But as late afternoon and evening was generally bright, I needed the flower in full sun and the hebe and fuchsia were in a colder shady spot with precious few pollinators late evening albeit conditions light-wise were fine.

Conditions temperature and wind wise were less so and on 3-4 days my FIT counts were curtailed as it was either too cold or too windy to meet the survey criteria set by CEH. I did achieve some success later in the week as the temperatures increased and the rain subsided at Pirate Gows.



The FIT results on Eday, were in the main on the low side of visiting pollinators but one species of bumble bee was very special. I had hoped to try and locate The Great-yellow Bumble Bee (*Bombus distinguendus*) [see left] whilst we were on Orkney and in the main the FIT count was successful as 15-20 sightings of this species were seen during my 4 FIT counts. These were not always within the quadrat, however. Luckily 4 or 5 did visit inside my quadrat so I was able to report them as being 'countable' in the criteria successfully.

I have also taken a photo from the PoMS Newsletter - January 2019 for all PoMS Scheme volunteers which fabulously shows our work on Eday with 2/3 sample

'blue spots' which is smack bang on Eday!! So RAFOS' work has gone some way to adding science ationally in other ways as well as our prime ornithological Seabird census study.

### PoMS 1Km Monad - 'Highlights in Numbers' - (2017 & 2018).

Back on to the main study RESULTS: PoMS. The 2017 visits allowed the surveyors of the 72 of 75 squares to confirm access permissions and map sampling locations. They also conducted at least one, and in most cases two surveys on each square between June and September, with a total of 127 visits for 2017. A sum of 631 pan trap samples were collected and, on each survey, at least 2 Flower Insect Timed Counts (FIT) were conducted, giving a total of 336 FIT Counts. The PMRP and PoMS have been presented by CEH and Partners and communicated through various channels since the Jan 2018 progress report, including online or in print articles, social media, public events, volunteer training days hosted by PoMS partners and stakeholders' groups. Together, these 170+ engagements activities have reached an estimated audience of 550,000 people or more.

2018 Work. I completed all of our Square 26; Qty 4 monthly surveys and successfully posted back all collected samples without any undue spillages or mishaps. The Progress Report from CEH October 2018, (Ref 3), has been published. Some statistics taken from the Jan 2019 PoMS Newsletter are published below.



CEH Report - Map of FIT Counts

During 2017 and 2018, PoMS has been generating new data from PoMS survey and with FIT counts by volunteers here are some (not all) statistics:

NB: The database; [iRecord\\*](https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/) <https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/> is a national database for all manner of scientific and voluntary surveys. It's worth becoming familiar with if you do moths, butterflies and or any wildlife data gathering really

**PoMS Data both 2017 and 2018: Taken from (Newsletter Ref; 3)**

<b>1,307</b> FIT Counts [see <b>Picture 4</b> ]	<b>631</b> Pan trap samples collected in 2017
Submitted to iRecord by <b>168</b> Recorders Across England, Scotland Wales	<b>731</b> Pan trap samples collected in 2018
Survey in <b>3</b> countries in UK	<b>71%</b> 'Other Flies' - highest visitors to pan traps
<b>14.347</b> insect visits to flowers recorded on FIT counts over both years	<b>177</b> bee and hoverfly species identified from pan traps
<b>45</b> Volunteers for PoMS 1Km squares	Bringing new records for many 1Km squares
Completing <b>107</b> survey visits in 2018	<b>3</b> Short 'how to' videos are available. Along with survey guides and forms for FIT Count
Funding available: PoMS and FIT sampling <b>Surveys continues in 2019</b>	#25 PoMS Conington...[to be continued] 2019
<b>RAFOS</b> assistance to CEH & BTO; PoMS; Qty 5 FIT's on Eday Orkney; 2018 <b>2 Expeditions; 2018 and 2019*</b>	*How many F.I.T's can we achieve: on Shetland Exped; ' <b>Simmer Dim 2019</b> '

**CEH References and Twitter Link**

1. PoMS is available on Twitter at the handle: @PoMSScheme
2. FIT instructions: are available all records of activities and progress reports can be found at <http://www.ceh.ac.uk/pollinator-monitoring> Establishing a Pollinator Monitoring and Research Partnership

**Gratitude & Thanks.**

Thanks go to CEH Staff: Mr Martin Harvey, Dr Claire Cavell of CEH Wallingford for allowing me to use their CEH data in References 1-3 below, for this article, with special thanks to my trainer;

Nadine Mitschunas [Photo's 1 & 6] who assisted me by photocopying all the PMRP Preliminary Reports and PoMS Results/Newsletter and background data to allow me to extrapolate and copy some of the key background science material on the survey. To Nadine as well, for her support in training. Without Martin's administration and Nadine's practical help, I would not be anywhere near as proficient in the field doing the work, but also in handling, storing, label identifying and locating the positioning and setting-out the Pan-traps and data capture with safe transfer and nil spillage techniques into the sample pots. Notwithstanding all the essential on-line data input to iRecord, the hard copy paperwork compilation and maintaining the survey equipment between Wallingford and deployed volunteers. They do a terrific job and it's a pleasure working with them. We are very lucky to have professionals like CEH and The BTO to work with.

#### References:

1. PMRP Preliminary Results 2017 UK Pollinator Monitoring Progress Report **January 2018**  
Author: Claire Cavell and PMRP partners (January 2018). A collaborative project funded by Defra, JNCC, the Welsh and Scottish Governments and project partners  
[www.ceh.ac.uk/pollinator-monitoring](http://www.ceh.ac.uk/pollinator-monitoring) <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/pollinator-monitoring>
2. UK Pollinator Monitoring Progress Report **October 2018** [as above]
3. PoMS Newsletter - Jan 2019. Issued by CEH Wallingford.



Nadine on 50m square PoMS Count

## The Seabirds Cry by Adam Nicolson

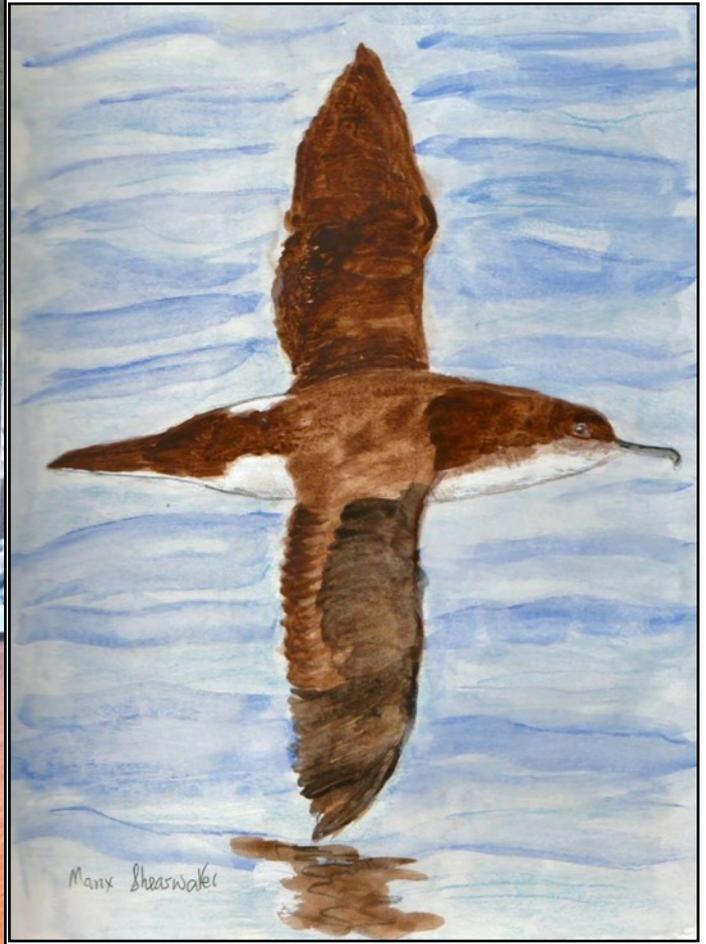
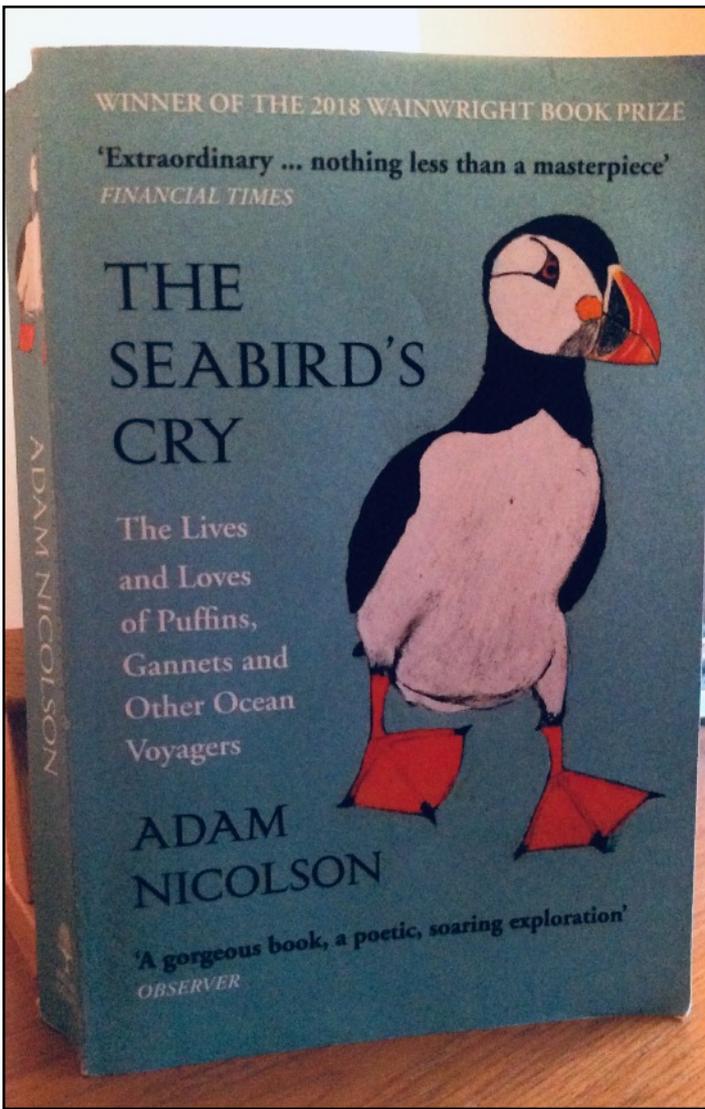
Review by John Le Gassick

This book was the winner of the 2018 Wainwright Book Prize. I received it as a Christmas present and immediately recognised the Author's name from the BBC 4 television programme "The Last Seabird Summer", a two-part series based for the most part on the Shiant Islands. This is a privately-owned group of islands in the Outer Hebrides (once owned by Compton MacKenzie and bought by Nigel Nicolson in 1937 and remain in the family today). A simple bothy is the only habitable structure on these islands that hold a large population of breeding seabirds and previously, a population of Black Rats *Rattus rattus*. Fortunately, after the efforts of the owner and several national organisations, the islands were declared "rat free" in March 2018. In reviewing this interesting book, I thought that the best that I can do is skim through its chapters, selecting one or two snippets that to me were interesting! The book starts with a variety of maps followed by a 23-page Introduction and eleven chapters, ten of which cover a species of seabird, and a final chapter which summarises the many threats to their well being in present times.

**1. Fulmar.** I imagine that we have all sat on a cliff top and marvelled at the buoyant stiff-winged flight of the Fulmar. Their weight to wing is ratio 25 ounces on a wingspan of three and a half feet. I had not realised that they are so dependent on the wind to fly any great distance. A geo-locator and a GPS were fitted to a bird nesting on the Orkneys. When relieved by his mate, he departed for two weeks before returning to the nest. He travelled 3,900 miles, but as the data revealed the wind direction was used to travel and navigate. During a period of calm, he rested on the sea for two days before continuing his journey to the feeding grounds. There are also facts about the Fulmar as one of the mainstays of the historic economy of St Kilda. The inhabitants of St Kilda killed 12,000 a year, for the mostly plump chicks taken during August, that yielded 600 gallons of oil a year. Throughout the late 19th and 20th Century there was a significant increase of population when they colonised most of the North Atlantic. This was attributed to the arrival of industrialised fishing fleets and the whaling fleets discarding waste fish products and blubber into the sea.

**2. Puffin.** A Puffin's egg weighs twenty percent of their body weight, this is the same as an eleven stone woman giving birth to a 30-pound baby. In Iceland, Puffin hunters paint the rocks orange and place orange flags in the turf beside them. The orange colour attracts Puffins. If a bird has a very orange bill rosette, feet and legs it shows its mate that it has caught a lot of carotenoid rich fish, indicating a healthier and therefore a better breeder than the less colourful birds. Recent fitting of Geo-locators to Puffins show that on leaving their breeding grounds they go as individuals to different winter locations, using the identical tracks year after year. For example, of two neighbours on Skomer one went south of Greenland, then east to Iceland and then wintered off the west coast of Ireland before returning to Skomer. The other bird went into the Atlantic south of Iceland and then wintered in the central Mediterranean. Previous theories on migration have assumed that birds are genetically programmed or are taught by their parents. Young Puffins leave without their parents so cannot learn from them. Most Winter sightings in the ocean are of single birds. Amazingly in Spring they all stream back together to their nesting sites in their thousands.

**3. Kittiwake.** This is the most populous seabird, with 18 million Kittiwakes spread across the northern hemisphere. In the 19th Century they suffered persecution by being shot in large numbers by men in boats. A naval officer in the Coastguard reported that along an eighteen-mile strip of coast near Flamborough Head, 107,250 were destroyed by pleasure parties in four months, 12,000 for their feathers and 79,500 young birds who died of starvation in the emptied nests. Today all is not well; from the 1970s when large scale monitoring of seabird populations began, the population increased. This was caused by most civilized countries introducing laws against their slaughter for hats. The problem now is the unavailability of food close to their breeding sites. The Kittiwake lays two eggs but in times when food is in short supply and the parents are a long time away from the nest the larger, first hatched chick, will kill its sibling by simply forcing it out of the nest to fall to its death on the rocks below. In Greenland 10,000 a year are still shot but apparently this does not affect the overall population.



Art-work by John Le Gassick



**4. Gull.** Gull is probably a little non-specific for the Society's Larophiles, but it covers a multitude of sins. This chapter starts with the birth of the Island of Surtsey in the ocean south of Iceland in November 1963 and how only two weeks after this eruption, gulls were seen touching down on the steaming island. In 1974 a pair of Great Black-backed Gulls bred there. Many other species also started to breed, including Kittiwake, Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull, but it was the gulls with their omnivorous diet defecations and regurgitations that fertilized the island so that it slowly greened up. By 1984, when it had grown into a large colony, Surtsey was green. Gulls are not regarded as clever birds like crows or parrots, but I think the following story may lead you to think otherwise. On a Summer's afternoon in Paris a Herring Gull alighted on a pond and immediately grabbed a piece of bread from a group of feeding Mallards. It then swam to the centre of the pond and proceeded to break it into tiny pieces which it spread onto the calm surface. The gull then sat motionless and picked off the goldfish as they came up to eat the crumbs! The chapter closes with a series of studies of cannibalism in Herring Gull colonies, which certainly opened my eyes.

**5. Guillemot.** Nothing in the seabird world is more cramped than life on the Guillemot shelf, a patch of cliff seven inches square. Every year the same birds return to the same spot. To feed they normally fly ten miles from the nest but on occasions can go up to 40 miles. They dive to a couple of hundred feet, but sometimes go down to 600 feet, staying submerged for more than four and half minutes. They are long-lived, the oldest yet recorded living to forty-three. They lay a single egg and even in the crowded colony can recognize their returning mate when it is still a small black blob out at sea

**6. Cormorant and Shag.** These birds are the least evolved of the seabirds, nearest in body form and perhaps lifestyle to the first fossil seabirds that emerged about 100 million years ago. They stay close to the shore, diving down to the seabed to catch the bottom-lurking fish. Unlike the auks, fulmars or petrels, they lay several eggs, usually three. They do not have brood patches but place the eggs on the layer of skin between their toes. In China, fishermen use Cormorants to fish and because female Cormorants are not attentive, the eggs are brooded by hens and after hatching, they are transferred to cotton-lined baskets and kept in a warm room. The young birds 'imprint' on their nurturers and do not even need to be tethered. Shags, of which there are about 250,000, have stayed on the coast and are probably in slow decline. Great Cormorants which are bigger and stronger, fare better and there are now about 2 million of them. They often winter inland on lakes and marshes as much as they do on the coast and may still be increasing.

**7. Shearwater.** Shearwaters get their name from the way that they fly over the sea, touching the surface with their wing tips. Shearwaters are relatives of the Fulmar, Albatross and the Petrel, all members of a super family called tubenoses. They all have a pair of exterior nostrils moulded to the side of their bills. They are Procellariiformes (try saying that with a mouthful of spaghetti), a 19th Century German word meaning "Order of the Storm Birds" the emperors of the wind. They make enormous annual migrations; the Sooty Shearwater covers 40,000 miles from Australia to Alaska and back every year. Many experiments have been carried out over recent years. In one a bird taken to Venice in an aeroplane and released, arrived back in her burrow on Skokholm, plump and glossy. The introduction of miniature geo-locators produced a record of a male from Skomer covering more than 4,800 miles in six and a half days. The journey was moulded to the wind patterns, but how do these birds know the shape of the vast ocean gyres that circulate around each ocean basin, clockwise in the northern hemisphere and anti-clockwise in the south? Smell is of exceptional importance to Procellariiformes with their brains containing an exceptionally large olfactory bulb which enables them to even detect krill by smell!

**8. Gannet.** Sir Thomas Browne, the great Seventeenth Century doctor-scientist, named the Gannet *Larus maior ferox leucophaeopterus* (fortunately I have finished the spaghetti) the Great White-winged Savage Gull. Bass Rock, off the east coast of Scotland, has about 150,000 Gannets breeding on it, the biggest Gannet colony in the world. The rock is now so full that for the past couple of years young birds have had to build their nests in the inter-tidal zone. Gannets regularly fly on fishing trips of 350 miles or more away from their nest site. Perhaps a great colony of Gannets offers better protection than a few solitary nests. Though very few birds can prey on Gannets, in Shetland Great Skua occasionally kill an adult and in Norway, Sea Eagles will take

them. Colonies in Norway have declined and have even been wiped out through disturbance and killing by the Sea Eagles.

**9. Great Auk and its cousin Razorbill.** Out of every hundred Razorbill chicks only twelve or thirteen will survive to become breeding adults. When the chick is three weeks old, in late afternoon early evening, the male calls to the chick to leave wherever it is hiding and join him in the sea. He then stays in company with the chick for several weeks. This strategy not only reduces the energy used in flights to and from the nest but also reduces the risk of predation from the other occupants of the island. The slaughter and extermination of the Great Auk is an awful story. Its size and inability to fly, along with its great size and the sheer quantity of feathers, meat and oil made it the hunters' favourite prey. Today the Great Auk stands for all endings, and all memories, the poster bird for all the species that we have destroyed. To quote from the book, it does appear that we have not learnt from our previous follies "We are the holocaust, the destroyers of what we have come to live with, and not only because we hunt them. We bring with us the other three Horsemen of the Apocalypse: habitat destruction, diseases which the indigenous species have no defence against, and the introduction of other predators. Snails, rats and cats which eat their way into the lives of animals that do not know what they represent. The Great Auk remains the King of the Lost. It was the first penguin, a name the French still use for the Razorbill. Penguin was only later transferred to the flightless birds of the Southern Hemisphere when early European sailors were reminded of the auks that they knew at home.

**10. Albatross.** The Wandering Albatross, the biggest of all the albatrosses, has a wingspan of eleven feet or more. Males start their lives pied and spotted, growing paler with every passing decade until at seventy or eighty years old, they are a pure unearthly white. By that time, they will have fathered forty or fifty offspring and flown millions of miles across the Southern Ocean. Captain Cook on his three great voyages to the South Seas between 1768 and 1780, mentions many albatrosses about the ship that were caught by hook and line and eaten. The Wandering Albatross was known as a Cape Sheep among sailors heading around South Africa, its feathered skin was useful as a type of fleece. The long line Spanish and Japanese fishing boats going after Tuna have been the cause of millions of albatross deaths. They use enormously long lines, each stretching over 60 miles or more with tens of thousands of squid-baited hooks. The fishing fleet based on Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean sets 26 million hooks a year. The death rate of albatrosses ballooned in the early 1990s when drift nets were banned to protect dolphins and sea turtles. The long lines are a death trap for the albatross, which when trying to take the squid before the lines sink get caught on the hooks and are carried down to their deaths. Mitigation devices such as streamers to frighten the birds, only setting the lines at night and heavily weighting the lines so that they sink at once have helped. Nevertheless, damage continues, and long line fisheries are still the greatest cause of albatross deaths.

**11. The Seabird's Cry.** This chapter discusses the fact that over the last 60 years the world population of seabirds has dropped by over two thirds. Of the ten birds that appear in the book, seven are in decline in at least part of their range. The albatrosses and petrels of the Southern Ocean are of the most concern. Highly effective mitigation measures around South Georgia have decreased albatross deaths by ninety-nine percent in ten years. Albatross chicks on Gough Island are being eaten by giant mice, which are threatening them with extinction. The author visited the Westman Islands near Iceland in the Summer of 2015, where large colonies of Puffins have been wiped out. The cause is the parents' inability to find enough food for their chicks. On the Island of Papey 130,000 dead chicks were counted. The picture is complex, but the Sand Eels that the Puffin depends on have departed because the tiny planktonic shrimp that they eat has been replaced by a similar one, but this variety does not hibernate so does not have the high fat content of its predecessor that the Sand Eels need. This, of course, has been caused by the rise in sea temperature. The book has not given the answer to all the questions hanging over the seabird world. I recommend it as an interesting and worthwhile read. I have learnt a lot but then I am not a Larophile but I do have an interest in auks. I hope this doesn't make me an awkward \*\*\*\*\*!

## WINTER SUN 3

*by John Le Gassick (not another one!)*

Well yes, I am afraid so, after the rapturous welcome of my first two offerings I felt that it would be unfair to disappoint my readers, however much they were looking forward to being disappointed. I sat in the courtyard of the house where we were staying in Seeb on the first evening and they were all there: Graceful Prinia, a pair of Bulbuls (White-spectacled), the raucous Common Myna, Laughing Dove and the vociferous Purple Sunbird. All of them singing to attract a mate or to defend a territory, Spring had sprung. Two glasses of the Red stuff, bought at Duty Free at Heathrow, and “wallop” did my creative juices begin to flow! I must point out that owing to some serious camera trouble during our stay the amount of slightly out-of-focus photographs will be down on previous years.

By lucky chance the dates chosen for this year’s visit, February 18th to March 2nd, coincided with the Bank of Oman Open Golf Tournament, allowing access to the Al Mouj Golf Course which normally is verboten to all apart from golfers. It certainly is a birding oasis with at this time of year plenty of ponds and shrubbery. Normally it is possible for someone more interested in the avifauna than hitting the small white ball to survey the pond close to the clubhouse which certainly has a variety of interesting birds. Any attempt to venture any nearer the hallowed turf and one’s collar is well and truly felt (pers obs). However, entry to the Golf Tournament was free and a lovely day was had, only spoilt by a total camera failure. Marsh Harrier, Isabelline Shrike, Black-eared Wheatear, Citrine Wagtail and Lesser Short-toed Lark were recorded. The second day when I returned, with my now serviceable camera, a sandstorm which I am told are a very very rare occurrence in Muscat caused the Golf Tournament to be cancelled. This golf course is certainly worth a visit during migration. It was the only location where I saw visible signs of migrating birds, with streams of mixed hirundine feeding over the largest lake.

Seeb sea-front was visited in the evenings, as on my previous visits, the tidal pools yielding good numbers of waders and a variety of herons. Great Egret was present at most suitable places, a species not recorded on my earlier visits and on March 1st there was a flock of 60 Ruddy Turnstone. Al Qurum beach had large gatherings of gulls, a feast for the larophiles, and waders such as Curlew Sandpiper, Whimbrel and sand plovers of both persuasions. Work was in progress on the inland side of the road at the Qurum Nature Reserve (a Ramsar Convention Site), to make it more accessible for the general public. A Common Kingfisher was seen here.



Great White Egret, Seeb



Sama Heights Resort

The highlight on this visit was undoubtedly an overnight visit to the Jebel Shams Mountains where we had comfortable accommodation at the Sama Heights Resort. These mountains are the highest in the Oman and the third highest in the Arabian Peninsula and where the North Summit rises to a height of 9,872 feet. While we waited for the sun to set over mountains from our high vantage point, we saw Egyptian, Griffon and Lappet-faced Vulture in the air at the same time. The chalet we were allotted had a patio that overlooked the scrub dotted desert and from here on the next morning we had good views of a nice male Common Redstart, Arabian Babbler, Orphean Warbler, Hume's and Pied Wheatear. Other birds recorded in the mountains were Pale Crag Martin, Common Swift and Desert Lark. This was a lovely once in a lifetime trip but the ascent was nail bitingly awful requiring at the least a four wheel drive vehicle, especially when the asphalt stopped, and a sufficiency of warm (Winter) clothing.

In conclusion I would like to thank Mike Blair for the very attractive Pocket Checklist of Birds of OSME Region. This comprehensive and attractively illustrated booklet enabled me to compile the following statistics:

2017 03.02.17 to 13.02.17. - 48 species recorded

2018 21.03.18 to 29.03.18. - 68 species recorded

2019 20.02.19 to 01.03.19 - 75 species recorded

A total of 107 different species were recorded during these three visits.



Red-wattled Lapwing



Jebel Shams



Slender-billed Gulls, Shatti-al-Quarum

The Author (with  
dodgy camera)



## RNBWS AGM RAF COLLEGE CRANWELL 15-17 Mar 19

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society (RNBWS) held its AGM at RAF Cranwell on the weekend of the 15-17 Mar 19. Cranwell is home to RAF Officer training, with the Lincolnshire venue providing a refreshing change to the south coast. The event was organised by Lt Philip Boak, who is currently working at RAF Cranwell as a Leadership Instructor.



Members of the society pose in front of the impressive College Hall Officers' Mess (CHOM) at RAF Cranwell.

**Fri 15 Mar 19.** Eleven attendees made the journey up to Lincolnshire for the weekend, with the first major event being the Executive Committee meeting held on the Friday evening. The meeting was extremely valuable and saw the opportunity to discuss the core business of the society, ensuring it remains relevant and at the forefront of conservation. The meeting gave the opportunity to plan research efforts on the Shetland Isles where a joint RN/RAF team will be gathering data to assess changes in UK breeding seabird populations. The last counts were made in 1999 and this latest effort will inform future actions for conservation. Another team will deploy to the mountains in Madeira to monitor a small nesting population of the rare Zino's Petrel. The birds fly in from the sea to nest sites at 2,000m after midnight. Trapping with mist nets enables birds to be marked with numbered rings, weighed and measured to monitor health and nesting progress. Another group will deploy to south-east Australia to gather data on offshore petrels, shearwaters and albatrosses.

**Sat 16 Mar 19.** Most of the day was spent in the field, visiting two RSPB nature reserves on The Wash; Freiston Shore and Frampton Marsh. The small reserve of Freiston Shore was visited first, with numerous wildfowl and waders being sighted. The reserve was also home to numerous sites of historical interest, ranging from when the area was a seaside resort, to WW2 gun emplacements.



Historical remains of Freiston Shore, from left to right: The remains of a hotel, once supporting the thriving seaside resort prior to saltmarsh reclamation. WW2 graffiti within the crew shelter of a WW2 6inch gun battery. The tracks from the Freiston Shore light railway.



Three of the bird species seen at RSPB Frampton Marsh. From left to right: Teal (male and female). Canada goose. Wigeon.



Keeping watch at Frampton Marsh (left), with flight of avocets (right).

The last event of the Saturday was the AGM, held at the all ranks and rates Holloway Club of RAF Cranwell. The meeting included a summary of the pertinent points discussed during the EXCOM meeting, before an excellent presentation on New Zealand by Stephen Chapman. This presentation not only discussed the birds seen during a recent excursion to New Zealand but placed them in a wider historical and social context, whilst discussing the issues of conservation. A final short presentation was given on the history of Cranwell by Phil Boak.



Historical sites and photos of Cranwell. From left to right: Braucewell Horse Gin. Cranwell Railway Station. NS11 dirigible at the former Naval Air Station at Cranwell.

**Sun 17 Mar 19.** The weekend sadly ended on the Sunday morning, as the attendees made their way back south. Never failing to spot an opportunity, some made a detour to the nearby birding hotspot of Rutland Water.

**Attendees at the RAF Cranwell Weekend 15-17 May 19**

**Present:** Martin Alabaster, David Dobson, Stephen Chapman, Tony Tindale, Mark Cutts, Philip Boak and Steve Copsey. **Also present:** Julia Springett Robin Springett and Lee Lappin

<b>Bird species seen 16 Mar 19</b>		
Avocet	Great Tit	Pintail
Barnacle Goose	Green Woodpecker	Pochard
Blackbird	Greenfinch	Redshank
Black-headed Gull	Greylag	Reed Bunting
Black-tailed Godwit	Herring Gull	Ringed Plover
Brent Goose	House Sparrow	Robin
Canada Goose	Jackdaw	Rook
Carrion Crow	Lapwing	Ruff
Chaffinch	Linnet	Shelduck
Common Gull	Little Egret	Shoveler
Coot	Magpie	Skylark
Cormorant	Mallard	Snipe
Curlew	Marsh Harrier	Sparrowhawk
Duncock	Moorhen	Starling
Gadwall	Mute Swan	Teal
Goldeneye	Oystercatcher	Tufted Duck
Goldfinch	Peregrine	Wood Pigeon
		Wren

## Planes, trains, automobiles... and North Sea Ferries ahoy for Simmer Dim 2019

*By Jayne Lindley*

This was to be a who-dunnit not in the Shetland police drama style - but RAFOS' own avian investigators who flocked together at Aberdeen North Sea Ferry terminal after migrating from up to 2000+ miles away, with Tony Marter looking surprisingly fresh after his epic flight from Texas!

Lucky for the expedition leader Keith 'Bear Grylls' Cowieson, 13 of RAFOS and RNBWS birders arrived ready for action. The mission (whether we chose to accept it or not) was to scout the North and West of the Shetland Isles in support of the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) partnership's 'Seabirds Count' coordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. This vital field survey work is undertaken every 15 years and builds on previous census work, most recently charting widespread declines in Arctic Skua, Black-legged Kittiwake and Tern populations.



Team and NorthLink Ferry

*Picture by John Wells*

The team had surpassed themselves in pre-deployment prep and, unlike Simmer Dim (SD) 18 no curtains had to be misappropriated into bed-sheets due to forgetting a sleeping bag! In addition to field kit and all-weather gear we took an armful of Lessons Identified from the previous Orcadian SD 18 – the most notable being that an ability to make mashed potato for 6 with a fork translated into being chief food shopper for the Northern Team. Fledgling RAFOS member was to be Mother Hen!

As with all the RAFOS expeditions, SD 19 drew on military skills of map reading, resilience and team-work with the first challenge being the 'Big Shopping' serial on Day 1 of the expedition. For the North, fast-jet Keith delegated, engineer Mike consulted a detailed electronic list, and Loggie Jayne referred to her carefully thought out list (and doubled the quantity 'just in case') while 'all-rounder' John tried to sneak puddings into the trolley when the engineer and loggie were distracted with lists.

Giving this key role to a logistics officer was perhaps a flawed plan. Loggies, by their nature, like to hoard 'just in case' of local supplies running out or a Viking invasion. Despite having my trusty list, the plan did not survive first, second or even third contact and I found myself in the shops daily (FF – carrying food) to ensure I met the diverse culinary needs of my chicks. The over-provisioning has certainly got Winter Duck 20 off to a flying start!

The 5 strong North team tackled peat hags, Shetland weather, blanket bogs and dive-bombing Great Skuas - or Bonxies to use the local parlance. Even experienced yompers of the Northern team were caught hopping with John Wells nearly disappearing whilst Maggie Sheddan wished

she had not rolled down her wellies as she followed his line. My tactic of 'observe the experts then act' worked a treat. It was the same technique I used with Mike Hayes. In the enlightened days of Diversity & Inclusion always insisted he breach the wire fences first, especially in the rain; that way I got an early warning when it was a live electric fence!



*John Wells 'Helping' Maggie Sheddan Over a Peat Hag (Photo:Mike Hayes)*

The Famous 5 carried their sandwiches and lashings of ginger beer a total of around 135 miles during the expedition, surveying 158 x km grid squares of beautiful windswept landscape fringed by azure sea in the process. The West team did similar covering an area of around 86 Km<sup>2</sup> under the watchful leadership of Jim 'The Kipper' Bryden who also had the benefit of 3 ornithologists from the RNBWS in his team – it was a sea bird survey after all; and knowing of Jim Bryden's penchant for shopping, some of the West team's mileage will inevitably have been clocked up in supermarkets!

Whilst Arctic Terns and Skuas (Great and Arctic) were of key interest to the survey (in addition to gulls) the West team were thrilled with the sighting of Otters in addition to a female Red-necked Phalarope in breeding habitat, Common Cranes and Red-throated Divers with chicks (all Red-Listed species). This was matched by the Northern team's sightings of several Mountain Hare, a loose colony of breeding Whimbrel and suspected wild (but possibly feral) breeding Barnacle Geese. The jury is still out... this will be aired in the autumn series of Shetland.



Great Skua Defending Territory (*by Jayne Lindley*)



Great Skua Dive-bombing Jayne (*by Keith Cowieson*)



Great Skua Chick (*by Jayne Lindley*)



Dark Phase Arctic Skua  
(*by Keith Cowieson*)

Arctic Tern Chicks  
(*by Keith Cowieson*)



Key points from SD 19... turns out Simmer Dim is named after a beer and not the long days of sunlight experienced in the far flung north. The local Shetland folk are very friendly and very positive about birds, even naming a local hamlet 'Nesting' in honour.

On a serious note the survey work was both challenging and rewarding with long days in the field and even longer nights foraging for food and writing up survey findings into the wee small hours. The data will be used to complement the scientifically important work of the conservation organisations who work together to better understand the challenges facing our native and migrant birds and their place in the wider ecosystems. Rising sea temperatures have caused a decline in suitable fish stocks, placing strain on kittiwakes and puffins and forced them to extend their foraging journeys range in search for food.

And finally...a special thanks to NorthLink Ferries for their generous support and sponsorship with the 14-hour crossings to and from the Shetlands. It would have been a long swim without their support!



Poster on NorthLink Ferry (by Keith Cowieson)



Wheatear (*By Stephen Chapman*)

Oystercatcher  
(*by Jayne Lindley*)



Curlew Chicks  
(*by Jayne Lindley*)

## Dates for Your Diary:

RAFOS AGM, RAF High Wycombe: 16 November 2019

RAFOS Visit to WWT Slimbridge: 5 January 2020

Closing Date for Newsletter 109: 14 February 2020