

**For immediate use**

## Europe's oldest Puffin is alive and well in Scotland

**BTO bird ringers on an expedition to a remote island off the west coast of Scotland have found the two oldest Puffins in Britain. One of these OAPs (Old Age Puffins), at 34 years of age, is also the oldest currently known in Europe.**

The expedition, to the Shiant Isles, broke the British longevity record for Puffin on 5 July 2009 when they caught EX08155, which was originally ringed on the island on 27 June 1977. EX08155 was originally ringed by Ian Buxton, also a member of this year's team, so he was reunited with the same bird 32 years later!

But this record was topped just five days later on 10 July, when Ian recaptured EB73152, originally ringed on 28 June 1975, making it over 34 years old (older than three of this year's expedition members). This is now the oldest recorded Puffin in Europe, beating an Icelandic bird at 33 years old. Amazingly, it not only still had its original metal ring, but also its colour ring, allowing it to be identified as a Shiant's bird 'in the field'.

**David Steventon, founder of the Shiant's Auk Ringing Group**, and a member of the original expeditions in the 1970s commented: *"These longevity records were almost inevitable, as ringing data shows that adult survival rates are about 92%. Therefore we would expect that about 25 of the 441 birds ringed in 1975 will still be alive and could be recaptured in 2009. There could even be a handful remaining alive from those ringed back to 1970, so there is the potential to break the record again in the next few years. Compared to recent years, the Puffins are having a good breeding season this year, bringing in good sized sand eels for their young."*

**Mark Grantham, Research Ecologist in the BTO Ringing Scheme**, commented: *"These two record-breakers show that, to understand these birds, you can't just pop in and out of colonies. We need to study them over many decades to know what's going on."*

He continued: *"Ringing birds is the only way to find out how long they live. The same applies to all birds, so anyone can help by keeping an eye out for birds with rings and reporting them back to the BTO via the web ([www.ring.ac](http://www.ring.ac))."*

The Shiant Isles are a small group of islands between the Outer Hebrides and the Scottish mainland, and both these OAPs were caught in the Puffin colony on the north slope of Rough Island (Garbh Eilean).



Ian Buxton and the 34 year old bird



Expedition member Kate Thompson (24) with the Puffin (34)

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## Notes for editors

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Photographs should be acknowledged as **Alex Borawska**

**The Puffin is a member of the Auk family**, along with Guillemot, Black Guillemot and Razorbill. These are the only species of auk to breed in the UK. Being seabirds whose diet consists mainly of small fish, they breed on seacliffs on the coast and islands around the UK.

**BTO volunteers ring over 800,000 birds every year**. Part of the BTO Ringing Scheme is funded by a partnership of the BTO and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales, and also on behalf of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency). The scheme also receives support from National Parks and Wildlife (Ireland). The volunteer ringers give freely of their time and expertise and also provide a substantial part of the Scheme's funding.

**Ringing, as a practical science**, can only be learnt by working in the 'field' with a qualified trainer, of which there are over 400 in the country. The BTO runs the Ringing Scheme and issues ringing permits under license from the Government agencies. After undergoing a period of training, usually of one to two years, a successful trainee is awarded a permit allowing them to ring alone, but still on behalf of their trainer. See: [www.bto.org/ringing/ringinfo/become-a-ringer.htm](http://www.bto.org/ringing/ringinfo/become-a-ringer.htm)

**The BTO is the UK's leading bird research organisation**. Over thirty thousand birdwatchers contribute to the BTO's surveys. They collect information that forms the basis of conservation action in the UK. The BTO maintains a staff of 80 at its offices in Norfolk and Stirling, who analyse and publicise the results of project work. The BTO's investigations are funded by government, industry and conservation organisations.

**Reports of ringed** or colour-ringed birds can be reported via the web at [www.ring.ac](http://www.ring.ac)

## Contact information

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### **The BTO has an ISDN line available for radio interviews**

**Please contact us to book an interview**

**Office: 01842 750050**