



## **BIRD REPORT FOR THE SHIANT ISLANDS 30th JUNE – 11th JULY 2009**

The following report was compiled during a visit by the Shiant's Auk Ringing Group from 30 June to 11 July 2009. The group was formed in 1972 as a way of formalising the arrangements started by the first major visit in 1970 for Operation Seafarer. It continued with almost annual visits until 1989 and was then dormant for a number of years. It was re-launched following a short visit by one of the new members in 2006. This is the second visit in the current series by the group, the first in this new series being in 2008. The work was supported by a grant from the Seabird Group. As always, the group is grateful to Adam Nicolson for permission to visit the islands, to use the bothy and to carry out the sea bird work.

The expedition members were A. Borawska, I. Buxton, A.J. Clunas, J.J. Lennon, (J.J.L), D. McWalter, E.S. Scragg, D.J. Steventon (D.J.S), J. Street and C. E. Thompson.

A total of 33 species were seen during the visit and 2,192 birds of 14 species were ringed and 107 birds retrapped/recovered. Appendix 1 shows the total numbers of birds ringed during the visit.

The codes for the ringing recoveries are listed in Appendix 2.

The following abbreviations are used in the text:

**AOT** - Apparently Occupied Territories

Code letters used as follows for each species to denote the records being used for the text:-

**A** = A species for which all records are given

**B** = A species for which a summary of the records is given

**C** = A species for which selected records are given, e.g. migration, weather movements, unusual dates etc.

**D** = A species recorded about which there is nothing to report

**A Greylag Goose***Anser anser*

Two on sea west of Eilean an Taighe on 3 July.

**B Common Eider***Somateria mollissima*

Eilean an Taighe: up to three females were seen any one time representing at least four broods seen during the period (four, four, two and one ducklings). Eilean Mhuire: four females were seen with a single duckling on 1 July.

**A Red-throated Diver***Gavia stellata*

One heard calling in mist off the west side of Eilean an Taighe on 2 July.

**C Fulmar***Fulmaris glacialis*

Seen daily. Offshore max 100 + north on 6 July with northerly movement also noted from Eilean an Taighe on 7 and 8 July.

**A Storm Petrel***Hydrobates pelagicus*

Three seen to the south of Eilean an Taighe Island on 30 June from the boat on our approach to the islands. A total of 300 birds were ringed with 3 re-trapped and 12 controlled during four night catches using tape lure on Eilean an Taighe.

One of the controls in 2009 was a Portuguese ringed bird, details are awaited.

Details are given below of 22 controls, ranging from Priest Island, Highland Region (50 kilometres) to Point Lynas, Anglesey (503 kilometres). The control from Northumberland shows there is interchange between birds frequenting the Hebrides and the North Sea.

2359564	4 R	27.08.08 03.07.09 310 days	Low Hauxley, Northumberland Shiant Isles, Western Isles	409 km	315
2359942	4 R	13.07.08 03.09.08 52 days	Shiant Isles Faraid Head, Highland Region	122 km	50°
2359983	4 R	17.07.08 15.06.09 333 days	Shiant Isles Priest Island, Highland Region	50 km	82°
2359988	4 R	17.07.08 13.06.09 331 days	Shiant Isles Priest Island, Highland Region	50 km	82°
2540125	4 R	02.09.08 09.07.09 310 days	Faraid Head, Highland Region Shiant Isles	122 km	230°
2540357	4 R	02.09.08 09.07.09 310 days	Faraid Head, Highland Region Shiant Isles	122 km	230°
2581997	4 R	26.07.08 09.07.09 348 days	St Kilda, Western Isles Shiant Isles	133 km	86°

2582675	4 R	21.07.08 04.07.09 348 days	Point Lynas, Anglesey Shiant Isles	513 km	346°
2590323	4 R	29.07.06 03.07.09 1070 days	Souter Point, Whitburn, Tyne & Wear Shiant Isles	448 km	317°
2620418	4 R	05.08.08 01.07.09 & 03.07.09 330 days	Twinyess, North Ronaldsay, Orkney Shiant Isles	279 km	235°
2628251	4 R	17.08.07 19.07.08 337 days	Isle of Muck, Highland Region Shiant Isles	117 km	357°
2628511	4 R	20.07.07 19.07.08 365 days	Eilean nan Ron, Highland Region Shiant Isles	140 km	238°
2629842	4 R	30.07.08 01.07.09 336 days	Eilean nan Ron, Highland Region Shiant Isles	140 km	238°
2630084	4 R	06.07.09 09.07.09 3 days	North Ronaldsay, Orkney Shiant Isles	279 km	235°
2637791	4 R	15.08.08 01.07.09 320 days	Craig Stirling, Grampian Region Shiant Isles	269 km	291°
2640005	4 R	19.07.08 17.07.09 363 days	Shiant Isles Eilean nan Ron, Highland Region	140 km	58°
2640024	4 R	19.07.08 27.07.08 8 days	Shiant Isles St Kilda, Western Isles	133 km	266°
2640061	4 R	19.07.08 12.08.08 24 days	Shiant Isles Fair Isle, Scotland	329 km	57°
2649135	4 R	03.07.09 22.07.09 19 days	Shiant Isles Isle of May, Fife Region	297 km	130°
2649167	4 R	03.07.09 04.08.09 32 days	Shiant Isles Souter Lighthouse, Tyne & Wear	448 km	137°
2649179	4 R	03.07.09 16.07.09 13 days	Shiant Isles Priest Island, Highland Region	50 km	82°

2649200	4	03.07.09	Shiant Isles		
	R	07.08.09	Noss Head, Wick, Highland	203 km	72°
		35 days	Region		

**C Gannet**

*Morus bassanus*

Noted as absent from the ledges at Stocanais on Garbh Eilean, where an individual was seen in 1975, 1976 and 1985 (DJS). Otherwise, singles seen offshore on most days with a northerly movement on 6 July (c. 80 per hour) and 7 July.

**B Shag**

*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

137 pulli were ringed from 67 broods. Eilean an Taighe: 13 broods from a total of 25 pairs; Garbh Eilean: 54 broods. Not as many nests were noted in the boulder scree at Carnach Mhor on Garbh Eilean as in the 1970s and 1980s (DJS).

One recovery of a 2009 bird found dead locally in the same year.

1260682	1	06.07.09	Shiant Isles		
	X	20.10.09	Ludag, South Uist, Western Isles	106 km	213°
		106 days			

**A White-tailed Eagle**

*Haliaeetus albicilla*

One adult seen over the south end of Garbh Eilean on 1 July.

**B Peregrine**

*Falco peregrinus*

Two seen on ledge on the east cliffs of Eilean an Taighe, 4 and 6 July at a suitable nest site. It is assumed that the pair was unsuccessful as no young were seen.

**B Oystercatcher**

*Haematopus ostralegus*

A pair, one of which was ringed, with three chicks was seen on stony beach south of the house on Eilean an Taighe. Not all the ring could be read by telescope - ??569?3, most likely candidate being FS56963, a pullus ringed on Eilean an Taighe on 2 July 1982. 21 adults were seen on Eilean Mhuire on 1 July. Four adults plus two dead chicks were seen at north end of Garbh Eilean on 2 July. Pair with two chicks at Annat, Garbh Eilean on 8 July.

**A Golden Plover**

*Pluvialis apricaria*

Six flushed from the highest point of Garbh Eilean, with three, probably from the same group, seen flying west out towards the Galtachan on 8 July.

**B Snipe**

*Gallinago gallinago*

Seen almost daily with a maximum of seven birds flushed from the marshy area on Eilean an Taighe on 30 June. Drumming birds were heard on four occasions on Eilean an Taighe. Maximum of three birds, including two flushed from the boggy area at the top of Garbh Eilean on 8 July.

**A Curlew**

*Numenius arquata*

Singles seen on Eilean an Taighe on 30 June, 2, 4 and 8 July.

**A Common Sandpiper***Actitis hypoleucos*

One at the bottom of the Garbh Eilean north Puffin colony slope, 2 July. One heard on causeway between Eilean an Taighe and Garbh Eilean on 6 July and one heard from the bothy on Eilean an Taighe, 7 July.

**B Arctic Skua***Stercorarius parasiticus*

Singles seen daily usually over the causeway between Garbh Eilean and Eilean an Taighe with two on 4 July and four on 6 July.

**B Great Skua***Stercorarius skua*

15 pulli ringed from an estimated population of 25 AOT on 2 July on Garbh Eilean. Maximum of six birds over Eilean an Taighe on 8 July, with at least one pair south of the bothy. At least two pairs on Eilean Mhuire, one with a single chick.

**C Kittiwake***Rissa tridactyla*

No young on nests or any fledged young seen during the visit with the birds appearing to have had a poor breeding season.

**B Common Gull***Larus canus*

Maximum of two seen on the shore at the bothy, Eilean an Taighe. Three seen Eilean Mhuire on 1 July. There were 16 adults making alarm calls at the small gullery at Annat, Garbh Eilean on 8 July, but no young found. Absent from the area over the natural arch on Garbh Eilean, where found regularly in previous years. (DJS)

**B Lesser Black-backed Gull***Larus fuscus*

Five pulli ringed in the colony at the top of Eilean an Taighe with an estimate of 13 AOT there.

**D Herring Gull***Larus argentatus*

Recorded breeding on Garbh Eilean and Eilean an Taighe (2 AOT). A total of seven pulli were ringed.

**B Great Black-backed Gull***Larus marinus*

Only six pulli ringed from an estimated 25 AOTs on the one visit to Eilean Mhuire on 1 July, where it appeared to be a poor breeding season as most egg cups were empty and most broods were of a single chick. Garbh Eilean: 21 AOTs on western extremity and 2 AOTs below north end below Puffin colony on 5 July. Eilean an Tighe: four single chicks ringed on 30 June.

**C Guillemot***Uria aalge*

A total of 57 adults and 19 pulli ringed on Garbh Eilean. Adults finding plenty of fish and many chicks were too small to ring: a great improvement on the 2008 breeding season. The colonies in the boulder scree on the east of Garbh Eilean now cover a larger area than in the 1970s and 1980s (DJS).

T58219	1	02.07.90	Isle of Canna, Highland Region		
	6	16.06.94	Isle of May, Fife Region	297 km	130°
		1444 days			
r/r	6	04.07.09	Shiant Isles	96 km	7°
R96552		6942 days			

T80851	1 XF	13.07.08 26.01.09 197 days	Shiant Isles Bangor, Morbihan, <b>France</b>	1197 km	170°
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Guillemots are philopatric but will visit other colonies in their 3rd/4th year, which is exemplified by T58219.

### **C Razorbill**

*Alca torda*

A large departure of pulli was apparent from the Garbh Eilean east boulder scree overnight 9/10 and 10/11 July with far more noise from calling birds than on other evenings. 374 pulli were ringed in the main boulder colony at Carnach Mhor on Garbh Eilean. Single adults were retrapped from 1985 and 1989. A total of 202 adults and 414 pulli were ringed.

K17025	6 XF	03.07.06 13.07.08 741 days	Shiant Isles Shiant Isles	0 km	0°
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### **C Black Guillemot**

*Cephus grylle*

One or two seen daily off Eilean an Taighe and Garbh Eilean. One seen in the rock fall in the Eilean an Taighe sample colony 12 on 4 July.

### **C Puffin**

*Fratercula arctica*

A total of 967 adults and 15 pulli were ringed during the visit, mostly from the north slope of Garbh Eilean at Airighean a Bhaig. One 32 year-old and one 34 year-old bird retrapped in the Garbh Eilean north Puffin colony slope, beating the previous UK longevity record. Other veteran puffins retrapped included 10 birds from the 1980s and four from the 1990s.

ER29858	4 X	06.07.89 17.06.08 6921 days	Shiant Isles Shiant Isles	0 km	0°
EW80256	6 X	17.07.08 18.06.09 336 days	Shiant Isles Shiant Isles	0 km	0°

### **A Collared Dove**

*Streptopelia decaocto*

One heard on the cliff behind the house on Eilean an Taighe, 9 July.

### **B Skylark**

*Alauda arvensis*

Small numbers seen on all three main islands. One singing on Garbh Eilean on 2 July. Maximum of five seen on Eilean an Taighe on 1 July.

### **B Meadow Pipit**

*Anthus pratensis*

Small numbers seen on all three main islands. Two nests were found with young on Eilean an Taighe and two nests on Garbh Eilean - one with two eggs and two chicks on 5 July and one with four eggs on 8 July.

**B Rock Pipit***Anthus petrosus*

Small numbers seen on all three main islands. Maximum of seven seen on the causeway between Eilean an Taighe and Garbh Eilean.

**B Wren***Troglodytes troglodytes*

Singing birds: two east side Eilean an Taighe (4 July) and one singing north slope of Garbh Eilean (5 July). Three seen Garbh Eilean on 2 July. One juvenile seen near the bothy on Eilean an Taighe on 8 July.

**A Wheatear***Oenanthe oenanthe*

Two seen at south end of Garbh Eilean on 2 July, with three juveniles there on 8 July.

**B Hooded Crow***Corvus cornix*

Maximum counts: one on Eilean Mhuire on 1 July, two on the Galtachan on 3 July and three north end Garbh Eilean on 5 July

**B Raven***Corvus corax*

Up to five seen regularly over Garbh Eilean and Eilean an Taighe. A single bird was seen on Eilean Mhuire on 1 July

## Appendix 1 Ringing Total for 2009

	<b>Full grown</b>	<b>Pulli</b>	<b>Retraps/ Recoveries</b>	<b>Total</b>
Fulmar	5	0	0	5
Storm Petrel	300	0	16	316
Shag	32	137	4	173
Eider	1	0	0	1
Oystercatcher	0	3	0	3
Great Skua	0	15	1	16
Lesser Black-backed Gull	0	5	0	5
Herring Gull	0	7	0	7
Great Black-backed Gull	0	12	0	12
Guillemot	57	19	3	79
Razorbill	202	414	13	629
Puffin	967	15	71	1053
Meadow Pipit	0	1	0	1
Rock Pipit	1	0	0	1
Totals:	1565	627	107	2299

## Appendix 2 Codes for Ringing Recoveries given in tables in the text

### Age/sex codes:

1 = pullus (nestling/chick)

4 = hatched prior to calendar year of ringing, exact year unknown

6 = hatched prior to previous calendar year of ringing, exact year unknown

### Condition at recovery:

X = found dead

XF = found freshly dead or dying

R = caught and released by a ringer