



## **BIRD REPORT FOR THE SHIANT ISLANDS 26th JUNE – 10th JULY 2011**

This report was compiled following a visit by the Shiant's Auk Ringing Group from 26 June to 10 July 2011. The Fladaigh Chuain were visited on 3 and 10 July; David Steventon has written a separate report of these visits.

Our thanks go to Adam Nicholson for permission to use the Bothy during our stay on the Shiant's. We are also grateful for the financial support of the Seabird Group to purchase health and safety equipment, and to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee for providing free auk rings through the British Trust for Ornithology.

The expedition members were Kate Atwell, Aleksandra Borawska, Ian Buxton, Alistair Clunas, Philip Hanmer, Duncan Hooton, Jim Lennon, Charlie Main, Bob Medland, Ali Quinney, Derek Robertson, Anne Roels, David Steventon, Ruth Walker and Hannah Ward. We were also joined by Kenny Graham and Alastair Young of the Highland Ringing Group for a few days in the first week.

On the Shiant's, a total of 39 species were seen, 3,555 birds of 11 species were ringed, and 418 birds were retrapped/recovered. Appendix 1 shows the total numbers of each species ringed on the Shiant's during the visit.

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

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

**C Fulmar***Fulmaris glacialis*

Seen daily. No significant movements recorded offshore. Three adults ringed.

**B Storm Petrel***Hydrobates pelagicus*

A total of 112 were ringed with seven controlled during four night catches using tape lure on Eilean an Taighe. Details for six of the controls are given below (details of one still awaited) and one quick recovery from this year's ringing. The recoveries are probably 'pre-breeding wanderers' that are attracted by tape lures in July and August. Their breeding is unproven on the Shiant Islands and retraps would be expected if they were. However, 2359988 is notable for being re-captured three years in a row on Priest Island, where there is a large breeding colony of Storm Petrels, and this bird is probably breeding there.

Ring No.	Age	Ring date	Ring location		
		Control/ recovery date, duration	Control/recovery location	Distance	Direction
2359988	4	17-07-08	Shiant Isles		
	R	13-06-09 331 d	Priest Island, Highland Region	50km	82°
	R	20-06-10 703 d	Priest Island, Highland Region		
	R	18-06-11 1,066 d	Priest Island, Highland Region		
2558462	4	30-06-10	Faraid Head, Highland Region		
	R	03-07-11 368 d	Shiant Isles	122 km	230°
2581930	4	19-07-08	St Kilda, Western Isles		
	R	03-07-11 1,079 d	Shiant Isles	133 km	86°
2600745	4	08-08-10	Sanday, Orkney		
	R	08-07-11 334 d	Shiant Isles	268 km	237°
2621254	4	06-08-09	Sanday, Orkney		
	R	03-07-11 696 d	Shiant Isles	268 km	237°
2639285	4	08-08-10	Annagh Head, Mayo, Ireland		
	R	03-07-11 329 d	Shiant Isles	468 km	30°
2643811	4	01-07-09	Sanda Island, Kintyre, Argyll & Bute		
	R	02-07-11 731 d	Shiant Isles	295km	351°
2649358	4	05-07-11	Shiant Isles		
	R	29-07-11 24 d	Gwennap Head, Porthgwarra, Cornwall	874 km	178°

**C Gannet***Morus bassanus*

Single figures seen offshore on most days with larger numbers on 26 June (20+ moving south) and 27 June (hundreds moving north).

**B Shag***Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

A total of 37 adults and 179 pulli were ringed with 32 retraps. Eilean an Taighe: colony on the south west coast with 51 pulli ringed from 23 broods from a total of 28 nests (many pairs had eggs or pulli were too small to ring); Garbh Eilean: 128 pulli ringed from 64 broods. The colour ringing project was continued in order to study nest and site fidelity as well as adult and juvenile survival, with 34 adults and 86 pulli ringed on the left leg with a red colour ring, each colour ring having a unique combination of four white letters. One colour ringed bird was seen flying over the causeway on 26 June, and several adults were re-sighted on Carnach Mhor. The twenty-three nests individually marked in 2010 at a discrete colony on the south west coast of Eilean an Taighe were revisited in order to monitor nest fidelity, occupancy and success of this colony. There was one Shag controlled, a 23 year old adult that had been ringed as a pullus off the Co Wexford coast in 1988. This is notable for both its age, the oldest ringed Shag in Britain & Ireland was nearly 30 years old (also from Great Saltee), and its dispersal distance of 645 km. Nearly all young Shags recruit as breeders within 12 km of their natal colony and even exchanges between colonies are less than 100 km.

1251548	1R	01-05-88	Great Saltee, Wexford, Ireland		
	R	02-07-11 8,462 d	Shiant Isles	645 km	2°

**A Greylag Goose***Anser anser*

One adult seen on 1 July near Stocanais in the north-west of Garbh Eilean, where there were lots of droppings. One or more heard from the bothy on Eilean an Taighe on 2 July. Three seen to the west of Eilean an Taighe were flying north to Garbh Eilean on 5 July.

**B Common Eider***Somateria mollissima*

Two females seen regularly between the causeway and the beach by the bothy with broods of four and three. Two additional females by the bothy on 5 July. Female with brood of four off the north beach of Carnach Mhor on 8 July. None seen around Eilean Mhuire on the visit on 30 June.

**A White-tailed Eagle***Haliaeetus albicilla*

One over the Puffin colony on the north slope of Garbh Eilean (mobbed by Peregrine) on 29 June: this was a second calendar year bird with no marks (such as wing tags).

**A Buzzard***Buteo buteo*

One flew north over the bothy of Eilean an Taighe and then seen perching high up over Carnach Mhor on Garbh Eilean on 2 July. One seen over Carnach Mhor on 6 July.

**A Golden Eagle***Aquila chrysaetos*

One at Stocanais on Garbh Eilean on 7 July, mobbed by Peregrine and Ravens and flew off north towards Lewis.

**A Eagle sp**

Two unidentified eagles over Carnach Mhor on 6 July.

**B Peregrine**

*Falco peregrinus*

One over the Puffin colony on the north slope of Garbh Eilean (mobbing the White-tailed Eagle) on 29 June. One over the causeway on 30 June. One at Stocanais on Garbh Eilean (mobbing the Golden Eagle) on 7 July. Not seen this year at the usual site on the east cliffs of Eilean an Taighe.

**B Oystercatcher**

*Haematopus ostralegus*

Pair with two fledged young on the beach by the bothy on Eilean an Taighe and up to the causeway. Pair with two fledged young at the bottom of the Puffin slope on the north of Garbh Eilean. Two adults on Eilean Mhuire on 30 June. Four adults on 1 July and five adults on 7 July at Annat. Three apparently territorial pairs in the west of Garbh Eilean on 1 July. Three chicks at the southern end of Eilean an Taighe on 7 July. Adults heard calling from the top of the boulder scree at Carnach Mhor on 9 July. One chick was ringed below Airighean a Bhaigh on Garbh Eilean.

**A Golden Plover**

*Pluvialis apricaria*

Five on Eilean Mhuire on 30 June flew off westwards. Separate groups of three and nine on Garbh Eilean on 1 July.

**B Snipe**

*Gallinago gallinago*

Two flushed on 27 June and one heard drumming in the early hours of 5 and 8 July on Eilean an Taighe. An adult and pullus on 1 July, one flushed on 4 July and three flushed on 7 July on Garbh Eilean.

**A Curlew**

*Numenius arquata*

One on Eilean Mhuire on 30 June and one near the bothy on Eilean an Taighe on 2 July

**A Common Sandpiper**

*Actitis hypoleucos*

One heard near the bothy on Eilean an Taighe on 26 June and 1 July. One on the causeway on 3 July. One heard near the Shag study colony area on Eilean an Taighe on 6 July.

**A Arctic Skua**

*Stercorarius parasiticus*

One in the bay between Garbh Eilean and Eilean Mhuire on 30 June and a dark phase bird also in the bay on 6 July.

**B Great Skua**

*Stercorarius skua*

Eight or more AOTs on Garbh Eilean with seven nest sites found (one with two eggs, one with one egg) and four pulli ringed from three broods. Three AOTs on Eilean Mhuire. Two AOTs on Eilean an Taighe.

**B Common Gull**

*Larus canus*

One near the bothy on Eilean an Taighe on 26 and 28 June. One over Carnach Mhor on Garbh Eilean on 28 June. Two over the natural arch on Garbh Eilean and two at the Puffin slope on the north of Garbh Eilean on 29 June and two at the Puffin slope

again on 1 July. Eight on the causeway at high tide on 3 July. Seven nests found at Annat on Garbh Eilean where eight pulli ringed (seven with large feathers and the eighth still in pin) with a ninth too small to ring on 1 July. Seven fledged young seen at Annat on 7 July with the last occupied nest with three eggs just hatching.

**B Lesser Black-backed Gull**

*Larus fuscus*

Seven or eight AOTs in the colony at the top of Eilean an Taighe where nine small young found from seven nests, but not certain that they were Lesser Black-backs rather than Herring Gull chicks, and a count of 20 adults at this colony on 9 July. Two adults seen at Annat on Garbh Eilean but no evidence of breeding.

**B Herring Gull**

*Larus argentatus*

Six AOTs on the east side of Eilean an Taighe with three pulli found in the Shag study colony area and four adults with the Lesser Black-backs in the colony at the top of Eilean an Taighe. Counts of 20 on 2 July and 41 on 3 July feeding at the causeway around the mid-morning high tides.

**B Great Black-backed Gull**

*Larus marinus*

Eilean an Taighe: four nest sites found (three empty and one with two eggs hatching) with a possible total of six AOTs at the south end. Garbh Eilean: pair on the beach below Airighean a' Bhaigh, pair above the boulder scree at Carnach Mhor, and at least two pairs in the west (where three pulli ringed from two broods). Eilean Mhuire: 20 nest sites found and four pulli ringed from two broods; total of 66 adults counted.

**C Kittiwake**

*Rissa tridactyla*

Twenty AONs at Eilean an Taighe sample colony 12, eight having chicks of which three held three chicks.

**C Guillemot**

*Uria aalge*

Many more birds ringed than in any other year: total of 292 adults, 276 pulli and 18 adult retraps including a 26 year old bird and one control. The latter was ringed as an adult on the Treshnish Isles 15 years ago. Also, a recovery of Guillemot pullus that had washed up on Shetland. This bird would have swum most of the way alongside its moulting, flightless, male parent. Previous highest total for the Shiant was 74 adults and 414 pulli in 1985. Lots of young in the boulders at Carnach Mhor, mostly medium feathered with a few large feathered on 8 July.

Sample colony counts were: Garbh Eilean section 6, 1853 compared with 1743 in 2010 and typically 1800 in the 1970s and 2400 in the 1980s; Eilean an Taighe section 12, 67 compared with 33 in 2010 and typically 40 to 60 in the 1970s and 1980s; Eilean Mhuire section 36, 133 compared with 116 in 2010 and typically 100 to 150 in the 1970s and 1980s; Eilean Mhuire section 37, 763 (but there may be an error with respect to the boundaries used) compared with 653 in 2010 typically 600 to 800 in the 1970s and 1980s.

R97210	1	09-07-11	Shiant Isles		
	XF	25-09-11 78 d	Sandwick, Shetland	375 km	52°
X63453	6	27-06-96	Treshnish Isles, Argyll & Bute		
	R	01-07-11 5,482 d	Shiant Isles	158 km	2°

**C Razorbill***Alca torda*

Many more birds ringed than in any other year: total of 968 adults, 878 pulli and 77 adult retraps including a 33 year old bird. Also, a control of a 15 year old bird ringed as a pullus on Canna in 1996; a typical movement. One pulli had dispersed to Cornwall (841 km) and was probably headed further south for its first winter. This total is the same as for the whole of Britain & Ireland ringing for 2010. Previous highest total for the Shiant Islands was 313 adults and 907 pulli in 1979. Some young leaving the Carnach Mhor colony on 5 July with many leaving on 8 July.

Sample colony counts were: Garbh Eilean section 6, 132 compared with 76 in 2010 and typically 150 to 250 in the 1970s and 1980s; Eilean an Taighe section 12, 20 compared with 19 in 2010 and typically 20 to 25 in the 1970s and 1980s; Eilean Mhuire section 36, 36 compared with 41 in 2010 and typically 20 in the 1970s and 1980s; Eilean Mhuire section 37, 37 (but there may be an error with respect to the boundaries used) compared with 80 in 2010 and typically 50 to 110 in the 1970s and 1980s.

K23516	1	30-06-11	Shiant Isles		
	XF	25-10-11 117 d	Perranporth, Cornwall	841 km	175°
M66913	1R	30-06-96	Isle of Canna, Highland		
	R	30-06-11 5,478 d	Shiant Isles	96 km	7°

**C Black Guillemot***Cepphus grille*

Four off the south end of Eilean an Taighe and up to three east of the causeway off the north end of Eilean an Taighe.

**C Puffin***Fratercula arctica*

A total of 755 adults and 32 pullus were ringed, with 272 retraps in total. On the Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) monitoring site at Airighean a' Bhaigh on Garbh Eilean site a total of 537 adults were ringed and 236 retraps made during the monitoring visits on 29 June and 4 July. An encouraging retrap rate of 30%. Details of fish loads brought in by Puffins in the RAS site are given in Appendix 4.

Oldest birds retrapped were both nearly 32 years old. One being a juvenile ringed in 1979 on Sule Skerry, Orkneys. The majority of the Puffins were retrapped from 2008 onwards. However, birds retrapped from earlier years are: 2006 (3), 2003 (5), 1995 (3), 1992 (1), 1991 (1), 1990 (2), 1989 (3), 1985 (2) and 1979 (1). Also, a Shiant adult Puffin was recovered off the Spanish coast in the Bay of Biscay where it was wintering. There have been about 70 recoveries on the Spanish coast of British & Irish birds.

EJ23483	4	01-07-80	Shiant Isles		
	R	29-06-11 11,320 d	Shiant Isles	0 km	0°
EJ29309	3	25-07-79	Sule Skerry, Orkney		
	R	04-07-11 11,667 d	Shiant Isles	175 km	221°
EW81339	6	02-07-09	Shiant Isles		
	XF	12-03-11 618 d	At Sea, Bay of Biscay	1,596 km	179°

**A Rock Dove** *Columba livia*  
Two near the bothy on Eilean an Taighe on 26 June and one there on 27 June.

**A Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*  
One on Eilean an Taighe on 1 July flew off north west. Two on the bothy roof on Eilean an Taighe on 5 July and one heard near the bothy on 8 July.

**A Common Swift** *Apus apus*  
Two screaming over the Puffin slope at Airighean a' Bhaigh on 4 July.

**B Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*  
Singing birds on all three main islands.

**A Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*  
One flying north-east at the causeway on 27 June and one at the bothy on Eilean an Taighe on 6 July.

**C Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*  
Fledged young on Garbh Eilean and Eilean an Taighe and nest and eggs on Eilean Mhuire.

**B Rock Pipit** *Anthus petrosus*  
Up to three on the beach to the south of the bothy on Eilean an Taighe and up to four around the causeway. One seen on Eilean Mhuire on the only visit. One agitated bird at the bottom of the Puffin slope on the north of Garbh Eilean.

**A White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba*  
One seen on 27, 28, 30 June and 4 and 5 July variously at the beach south of the bothy on Eilean an Taighe and at the causeway.

**B Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*  
Singing birds on Garbh Eilean indicate: three territories in Carnach Mhor; one each at the top of Puffin colony, bottom of Puffin colony and over the natural arch at Airighean a' Bhaigh; one at Stocanais; and one at Annat. Two juveniles seen on Garbh Eilean. Singing birds on Eilean an Taighe indicate: one territory on the east side; one close to the causeway; and one in the Shag RAS colony area in the south west.

**A Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*  
One on 4 July and four, two of which were juveniles, on 7 July on Garbh Eilean. One adult and one juvenile on Eilean an Taighe on 6 July.

**B Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix*  
Maxima were four on Eilean an Taighe, four on Garbh Eilean, one on Eilean Mhuire and one on the Galtachean.

**B Raven** *Corvus corax*  
Maxima were four on Eilean an Taighe, four on Garbh Eilean, and three on Eilean Mhuire.

**A Twite**

*Carduelis flavirostris*

Two above the Puffin colony at Airighean a' Bhaigh on Garbh Eilean on 29 June.  
Heard at Carnach Mhor on Garbh Eilean on 30 June. One on Garbh Eilean on 1 July.  
None seen around the bothy on Eilean an Taighe this year.

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## Appendix 1. Ringing Totals for 2011

	<b>Full grown</b>	<b>Pulli</b>	<b>Retraps/ Recoveries</b>	<b>Total</b>
Fulmar	3	0	0	3
Storm Petrel	112	0	8	120
Shag	37	179	32	248
Oystercatcher	0	1	0	1
Great Skua	0	4	0	4
Common Gull	0	8	0	8
Great Black-backed Gull	0	7	0	7
Guillemot	292	276	18	586
Razorbill	968	878	88	1934
Puffin	755	32	272	1059
Meadow Pipit	0	1	0	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2167</b>	<b>1386</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>3971</b>

Additionally, the following were ringed on the Fladaigh Chuain

	<b>Full grown</b>	<b>Pulli</b>	<b>Retraps/ Recoveries</b>	<b>Total</b>
Arctic Tern	0	250	31*	281

\*From first visit.

## 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

8 = hatched at least two years prior to 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

RR = sight record by a ringer

Appendix 3 – BTO Bird Atlas (2007-11)



BTO Breeding Bird Atlas, evidence codes in 2011

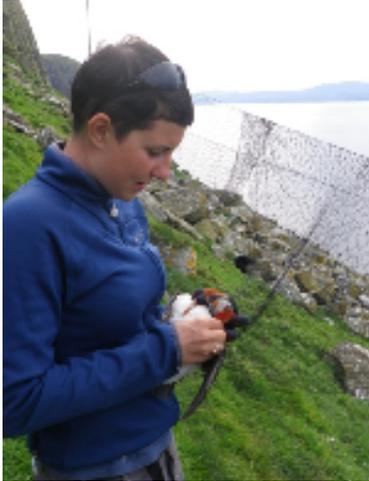
	NG39Z	NG49E	NG49J	NG49D	NG49I
Common Eider				FL	
Fulmar		NE			
Shag		NY			NY
Oystercatcher		FL		FL	FL
Snipe		NY			
Great Skua		NY	A	A	
Common Gull		NY			
Lesser Black-backed Gull					NY
Herring Gull					NY
Great Black-backed Gull			NY		NY
Kittiwake		ON	NY		NY
Guillemot		NY	ON		NY
Razorbill		NY	ON		NY
Puffin		NY	ON		NY
Skylark		S	S		
Meadow Pipit		FL	NE		FL
Rock Pipit		A			
Wren		FL	S	S	S

### Breeding Status Codes

<b>Non-breeding</b>	
<b>F</b>	Flying over
<b>M</b>	Species observed but suspected to be still on <b>M</b> igration
<b>U</b>	Species observed but suspected to be s <b>U</b> mmering non-breeder
<b>Possible breeder</b>	
<b>H</b>	Species observed in breeding season in suitable nesting <b>H</b> abitat
<b>S</b>	Singing male present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season in suitable breeding habitat
<b>Probable breeding</b>	
<b>P</b>	<b>P</b> air observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season
<b>T</b>	<b>T</b> errestrial Territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song etc.) on at least two different days a week or more apart at the same place or many individuals on one day
<b>D</b>	<b>D</b> courtship and <b>D</b> isplay (judged to be in or near potential breeding habitat; be cautious with wildfowl)
<b>N</b>	<b>N</b> visiting probable Nest site
<b>A</b>	<b>A</b> gitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults, suggesting probable presence of nest or young
<b>I</b>	<b>I</b> brood patch of an adult examined in the hand, suggesting <b>I</b> ncubation
<b>B</b>	<b>B</b> nest <b>B</b> uilding or excavating nest-hole
<b>Confirmed breeding</b>	
<b>DD</b>	<b>D</b> istracted <b>D</b> isplay or injury feigning
<b>UN</b>	<b>U</b> sed <b>N</b> est or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey)
<b>FL</b>	<b>F</b> ledged young (nidicolous species) or downy young (nidifugous species). Careful consideration should be given to likely provenance of any fledged juvenile capable of significant geographical movement. Evidence of dependency on adults (e.g. feeding) is helpful. Be cautious, even if the record comes from suitable habitat
<b>ON</b>	<b>O</b> ccupied <b>N</b> est (including high nests or nest holes, the contents of which can not be seen) or adults seen incubating
<b>FF</b>	<b>A</b> dult carrying <b>F</b> aecal sac or <b>F</b> ood for young
<b>NE</b>	<b>N</b> est containing <b>E</b> ggs
<b>NY</b>	<b>N</b> est with <b>Y</b> oung seen or heard

#### Appendix 4. Recording Puffin (*Fratercula Arctica*) Food Loads, 4 July 2011

In continuation with the 2010 Puffin project, food loads were collected from individual Puffins as they release their catch when coming into contact with the mist nets. Food loads were collected at the Puffin RAS site Airighean a' Bhaigh on Garbh Eilean (Rough Island) and then taken back to camp to identify species/order and weigh each individual load.



This ongoing project on the Shiantis investigates the specific food type of the Atlantic Puffin, providing information about feeding and diving behaviour. Further research can explore variations in availability of fish stocks over time as changes in sea surfaces temperatures occur and investigate changes in feeding habits at different stages of incubation and following egg hatch. Comparisons over the years can also be made from repeating the study every visit.

#### Methodology

As the Puffins fly back to their nests from the sea, some come into contact with the mist net. As this happens, some let go of the catch they have collected to bring back to their nest to an awaiting partner or chick. Care was taken to collect as much of the abandoned catch as possible and keep individual loads separate from others. The fish were kept in separate pots and labelled. Back at camp each load was weighed separately and then each fish order was identified using rough templates. Each fish was then photographed against a ruler in order for measurements to be recorded and analysed in detail at a later date.

#### Results

Percoid; Order Perciformes; Family Ammodytidae. Includes Lesser sand eels *Ammodytes marinus*

Clupeid; Order Clupeiformes; Family Clupeida. Includes herrings, sardines and sprats

Gadoid; Order Gadiformes; Family Gadidae. Includes Cod.

The average weight of the 22 fish loads collected was 6.45g (range 1.70g to 19.30g) with each Puffin carrying an average of 5.2 fish (range 1 to 13) of any species. Some loads only carried one species and others were mixed.

Table 1. Percentage of the 22 loads carrying each species

Species	Percentage of loads with the species
Sand Eel	90.9%
Gadoid	22.7%
Clupeid	9.09%

Table 2. Lengths of each species (whole fish only)

Species	Number	Minimum (mm)	Mean (mm)	Maximum (mm)
Sand Eel	98	48.9	70.6	97.7
Gadoid	15	44.5	64.3	88.6
Clupeid	7	44.7	49.9	62.3

### Discussion

These results suggest that sand eels are the most popular choice. This may be related to the abundance and availability of these fish, their position within the water column related to Puffin dive depth (up to 60m) or the energy value of sand eels.

The small scale of the project (small amount of data collected during one day) makes it suitable mainly as an indicator of the basic feeding habits of the Puffins. Over time, it may also become a useful tool for comparing the feeding behaviour of the Puffins each year. Biological and environmental factors should be taken into consideration when comparing the years, including weather patterns. Suggestions for improvement include collecting more data by repeating the RAS study over a longer time period and having more pairs of hands and eyes as well as an individual specifically collecting fish loads throughout the day. More data will increase the reliability of the dataset and enable more thorough analyses. Other suggestions include detailed identification sources for fish and recording the time that each load was collected. This could potentially be repeated for Guillemots or/and Razorbills during the Razorbill RAS project; however, most of the birds coming back with fish fly over the nets because the nets can only be set relatively far below the main nesting area at the site. The majority of auks caught during this project are the individuals on their way out to sea, flying low after taking off.

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