

FORTH ISLAND SEABIRD COUNTS 1973

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Shags continue their increase on the East Lothian islands and the Fidra colony seems to be well established. A pair were reported with a nest on Carr Craig near Inchcolm and they probably bred. There is no previous record of breeding in Inner Forth although we found a bird on an empty nest several years ago on Inchkeith. The number of Guillemots breeding on Lamb has shot up from 200 pairs to about 340 pairs since 1971 - an increase of 70% in two years - and they, too, are consolidating their position on Fidra.

More Puffins than ever before were seen on and around Craigleith and Inchkeith. Many of these will be non-breeding birds but they are indicative of the healthy state of the species in Forth. A slightly alarming side-effect of this increase became apparent during an August visit to Inchkeith. In June numbers of birds were sitting around burrows on the steep slopes of the north-west side of the Island. These 60° slopes were covered with vegetation and apparently completely stable. By early August two sections of slope had slipped and were now 45° scree of small granulated particles apparently of a basaltic origin. Fortunately there is a storm beach at the foot of the scree so that there is little danger of heavy seas washing the cliffs away completely. This erosion may have been started by the burrowing of the Puffin. The situation will have to be carefully watched and it will be interesting to note how soon the scree will become stabilised by a covering of vegetation.

During the summer a further cull of big gulls was made by the RSPB and Nature Conservancy. In May the Conservancy killed some 10,000 gulls and have now cleared most of the island of gulls with the exception of some birds on the cliffs and those breeding in the two study areas. About 100 Herring Gulls were disposed of on Inchmickery and there was a very satisfactory number of terns breeding. The figure of 50 pairs for Roseates is hopeful but this is only one-tenth of their breeding strength on this island a few years ago. On Fidra, in spite of a cull of all the gulls on the central grassy part, no terns bred successfully. The increase of Herring and Lesser Black-back Gulls elsewhere on the island presents more problems for the future if this magnificent island is not to be ruined botanically.

On Inchkeith in 1972 we found a single first-year specimen of Tree Mallow. This year the same plant, though somewhat battered, was flowering well and Tree Mallow may well be able to establish itself on this island as it has done, in recent years, on Craigleith. The seed would probably have been carried in by a gull and it may be that the tremendous increase in gulls, with the incidental heavy manuring and trampling of vegetation, has created conditions suited to this very local and apparently specialized plant.

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	Craigleith	Lamb	Fidra	Inchkeith	Inch- mickery
Fulmar	60	3	38	400	
Cormorant	12	228			
Shag	164	244	17		
Shelduck			1		
Oystercatcher			5	5	1
Great Black Back Gull	2				
Lesser Black Back Gull	350	2	10	X	
Herring Gull	5000	400	250	X	1
Kittiwake	326	116	218	407	
Common Tern					750
Arctic Tern			NIL		
Roseate Tern					50
Sandwich Tern					328
Razorbill	34	8		7	
Guillemot	560 bds on cliff	340	5		
Puffin	1400 bds on land/sea			450 bds on land/sea	

In the above table the figures for Fulmar represent occupied sites - not necessarily breeding.
 Guillemots on Craigleith and all Puffins are individual birds.
 All other figures are counts of breeding pairs or nests.
 X means present but not counted.

Please note that the numbers in this table may not agree with those in the main Forth Seabird Group tables. In some years some islands were counted more than once. When this happened the Forth Seabird Group figures reflect the main count.