

FORTH ISLAND SEABIRD COUNTS 1986

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The East Lothian trips were made in good conditions but a gale postponed the Inchkeith count until July when Allan Brown got out with the seabird ringers. With the later count date he probably lost some birds but generally speaking his visit was very satisfactory.

Although the spectacular increases in breeding numbers - and the occasional hiccups of past years seem, hopefully, to be behind us, there are still all the indications of flourishing seabird communities in Forth. There is evidence of a slow increase of Guillemot on all the islands and, especially in Inner Forth, of Kittiwake and Shag, although without more accurate counts on the Bass we cannot be sure that birds are not moving from there because of continuing pressure from the ever spreading Gannets. Fulmar continue their long-term build-up and only the future of the big gulls and terns is uncertain under present conditions .

In spite of annual outbreaks of botulism which have decimated some Herring Gull populations in Britain, there is no appreciable decrease in Forth at present. Perhaps if the general population increase of 17% per annum has been checked by this disease some stabilisation may occur. Terns are struggling to hold their own so it is a relief that the rarest one, the Roseate Tern, has had a better year with more reported at their British breeding colonies and a doubling of numbers to 18 pairs at Inchmickery.

Although the seabirds are doing well under 'present conditions' it is salutary to recollect that, given present day technology and the driving philosophy of the 'quick buck' these conditions can change radically in a very few years. In other parts of the North Sea, seabirds are suffering from food shortage due to over-fishing of once overlooked resources such as sand-eels. Even after the Forth seabird populations attain a balance with their present environment we must continue to monitor them to warn of the next disaster!

The Inchkeith keepers reported two Greylag nests this year and there was a pair with two big young in July. A more intriguing report was of two dead Leach's Petrels seen by another bird-watcher on our visit to Craigleith. Unfortunately the news came on our way back to North Berwick so confirmation was not possible. A colony of Greylags on Inchkeith is one thing but a colony of Leach's Petrels on Craigleith ...!

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	Craigleith	Lamb	Fidra	Inchkeith	Inchmickery
Fulmar	140	2	160	656	9
Cormorant	94	104			
Shag	378	301	67	20	24
Eider	30+	1	150+	x	82
Gt Bl-back	3	?1			
Lesser Bl-back	c380	c3	x	x	x
Herring Gull	x	c150	x	x	x
Kittiwake	c725	167	532	369	
Common Tern			26		202
Arctic Tern			5		
Sandwich Tern					416
Roseate Tern					18
Razorbill	40	21	48	23	
Guillemot	1900 bds	2750 bds	176 bds	33 bds	
Puffin	1350 bds	2+bds	190 bds	1450 bds	

All figures are sites or pairs except where indicated. x means present but not counted. Once again I am grateful to the RSPB for providing the Inchmickery data.

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.