

# **Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group**

## **Report for 1998**

**Expedition dates: 27<sup>th</sup> June - 4<sup>th</sup> July 1998**

**Expedition members in 1998:**

**Simon Walker (Leader), Dennis Cooper, John Hodson,  
Damian Offer, Steve Willis, Steve Worwood & Robin Ward**

**Ringing Secretary: Mike Smith**

**Correspondence:**

**Simon Walker, Snipe Cottage, Hamsterley, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham,  
DL13 3NX.**

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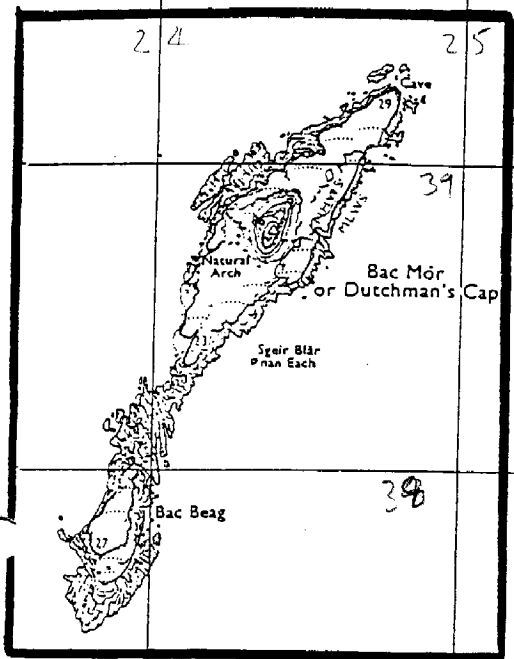
## INTRODUCTION

Since 1971, the Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group (TIARG) has undertaken to monitor through ringing and census work, the breeding seabird populations of the Treshnish Isles, Argyll (Walker & Cooper 1996). This report summarises the results of the Group's 19th expedition to the Treshnish Isles on 27th June - 4th July 1998.

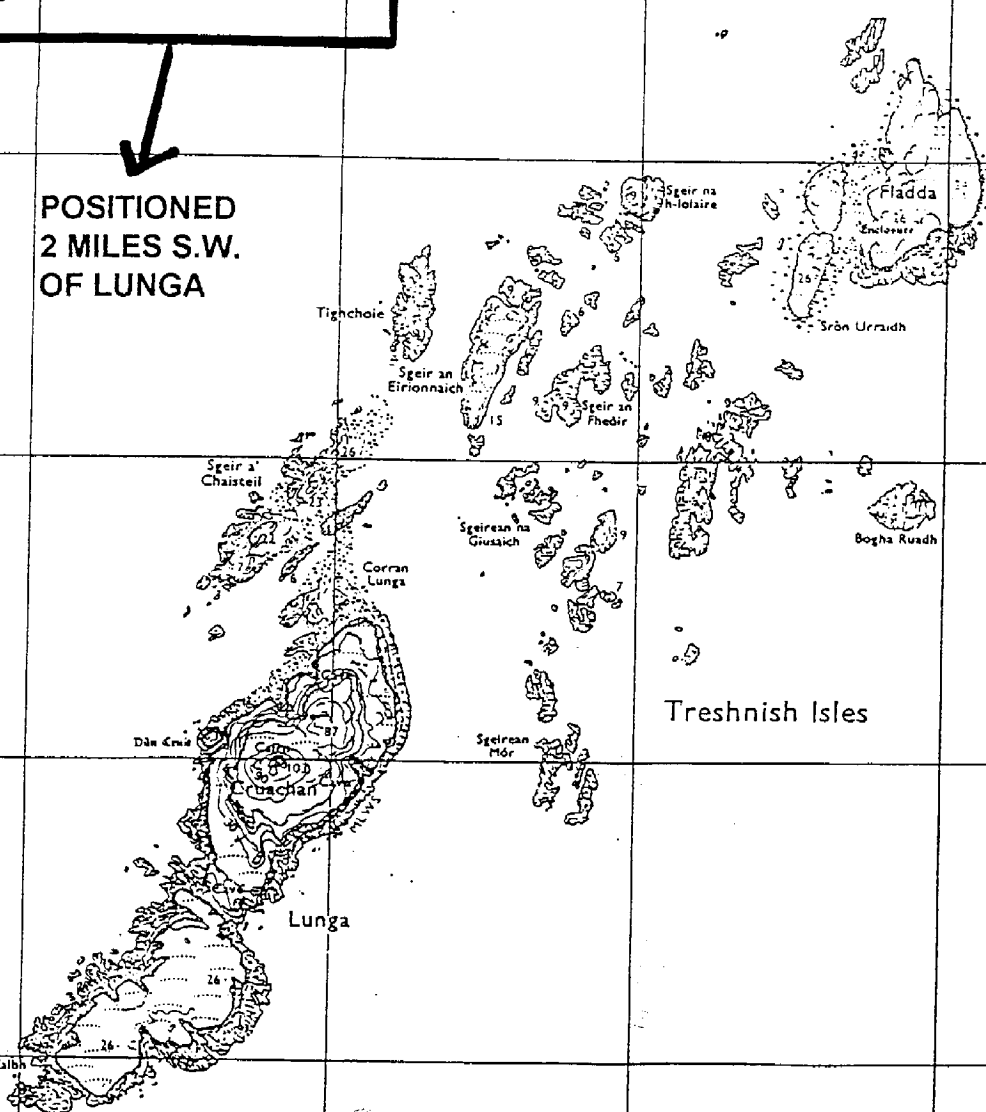
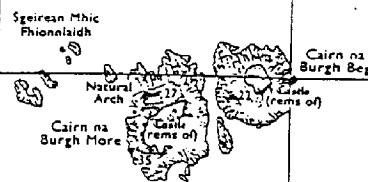
As in previous years, the expedition's base was set up around the ruined village site at the northern end of Lunga. The majority of the week's fieldwork was centred upon Lunga & Sgeir a Chaisteil where a now annual full seabird census and the systematic ringing of specific seabird colonies was undertaken. With much logistical help from Iain Morrison and his family, expedition members were in addition able to census the seabird colonies on Fladda, Sgeir an Eirionnaich, Sgeirean na Giusaich (south & north) and Sgeir an Fheoir in 1998.

All TIARG census and ringing data are fed into two national monitoring programmes, the Seabird Colony Register (J.N.C.C.) and National Ringing Database (British Trust for Ornithology), respectively. The data supplied are of great conservation value as they are the sole means by which the seabird colonies of the Treshnish Isles are currently monitored. The conservation importance of these islands is recognised by their designation as a Special Protection Area by the UK Government for the breeding colonies of seabirds they support. Financial support for the monitoring work TIARG undertook in 1998 was given by Scottish Ornithologists Club in the form of a £200 grant towards the cost of rings and transport.

# THE TRESHNISH ISLES



POSITIONED  
2 MILES S.W.  
OF LUNGA



NM

## SYSTEMATIC BIRD LIST FOR 1998

The following systematic list is a brief account of those bird species seen whilst the Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group were in attendance on the Treshnish Isles, 27<sup>th</sup> June - 4<sup>th</sup> July. Unless specified, no records are available for the Cairn na Burghs and the Dutchmans. The status comments refer to the species' occurrence during the breeding season based upon the records of expeditions in previous years.

**Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis*

A common breeding species

Breeding was confirmed on Lunga, Fladda and Sgeir a Chaisteil

**Manx Shearwater** *Puffinus puffinus*

A regular breeding species

Presumed breeding birds were seen at night on Lunga, with one bird found in a burrow.

**Storm Petrel** *Hydrobates pelagicus*

A common breeding species

Birds were heard churring from burrows on Lunga and Fladda. One dusk-dawn mist netting session at a Fladda colony on the southeast coast (colony 16 of Gilbert *et al.* 1996) using three 18m nets, without tape lure, resulted in the capture of 571 birds amongst which were 33 retraps/controls. Of the latter, none had been ringed on Lunga and three from the previous year's visit to Fladda (colony 2 of Gilbert *et al.* 1996). In 1997, of the 37 retraps of 836 birds mist netted in one night at colony 2 again with no tape lure used, only 4 were from Lunga. The total number of birds ringed on Lunga from 1990 - 1997 was 2625, the vast majority at or around the boulder beach. The ringing data would therefore appear not to support the hypothesis inferred by Gilbert *et al.* (1998) that many of the birds mist netted on Lunga's boulder beach originate from Fladda's south coast colonies.

From a sample of 97 birds mist netted, only one bird did not have a brood patch whilst six birds were noted to be carrying an egg. Recording the proportion of birds with partial or no brood patches i.e. potential non-breeders, is seen as a priority next year to assist in interpreting ringing data for colony size assessment.

**Gannet** *Sula bassana*

Regularly seen offshore

Small numbers of birds of all ages were seen offshore, some individuals fishing particularly off the west coast of Lunga.

**Shag** *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

A common breeding species

Breeding was confirmed on Lunga, Fladda, Sgeir an Eirionnaich and Sgeir a Chaisteil

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser*

Regularly represented by a small number of breeding pairs and a late summer moult flock

The moult flock held at least 25 birds, typically residing around the islands of Sgeir an Eirionnaich, Fladda and Sgeir an Fheoir. An area heavily grazed by geese was located on Sgeir an Eirionnaich adjacent to a freshwater (ephemeral) pool. No evidence of the recent presence of the species was found on Lunga.

**Eider** *Somateria mollissimam*

Regularly breeds in small numbers

Only one brood of 1 located on Lunga and attended by 2 females. A further 6 females were located around Lunga's shores.

**Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator*

A rare visitor

One female was flushed from offshore at Sgeir an Eirionnaich on 29<sup>th</sup> June.

**Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

One pair breeds in most years

One pair bred at a cliff nest site. One of the two young fledged prematurely, landing in the sea whereupon it became waterlogged and was presumed to have died.

**Peregrine** *Falco peregrinus*

At least one bird regularly present with breeding known to occur on adjacent coasts

Lone adult birds seen daily on Lunga, with a pair noted over the village on 4<sup>th</sup> July. A single adult bird was also seen on Fladda on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. Breeding was confirmed on the Dutchmans with an active nest being located (I.Morrison pers comm.).

**Corncrake** *Crex crex*

Probably a regular breeder in small numbers

One bird heard every night within the vicinity of the village, Lunga. This is the second year a calling bird has been at this locality, the previous occasion being 1996. No birds were located elsewhere on Lunga or during the brief visit to Fladda. A Scottish Natural Heritage botanical team in spring 1998, located an additional bird on Lunga and one at Fladda.

**Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

Regularly breeds in small numbers

7 breeding pairs held territories on Lunga's beaches (3 pairs in area 8 and single pairs at boulder beach, Shag Alley and areas 9 & 6A), with only one brood observed. Elsewhere territorial pairs were located at Sgeirean na Giusaich south (1 pair) and Sgeir an Fheoir (1 pair).

**Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*

One or two pairs breed

One bird was heard alarming as the boat approached Lunga's boulder beach on the 27<sup>th</sup> June. The only other record was of two birds on Sgeir a Chaistell on 30<sup>th</sup> June.

**Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

Regularly breeds in small numbers

At least four drumming males were located along the north-east coast of Lunga; one above Shag Alley, one above Shearwater Gully and two within the vicinity of the village. Up to three individuals were flushed from the south end (count area 7) on a given day where a nest with 4 eggs was located. Elsewhere a brood of four young were located on Fladda where at least one drumming male was to be noted. Whilst surveying the east side of Fladda up to 7 birds were flushed by the expedition. A single bird was also on flushed on Sgeir an Eirionnaich.

**Redshank** *Tringa totanus*

Rare visitor

One bird was recorded on Sgeir a Chaistell on 28<sup>th</sup> June.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

One pair occasionally breeds

Breeding was confirmed for one pair on Fladda's south-east coast; a juvenile was later ringed. Elsewhere alarming birds included singles on Sgeir an Fheoir and the south end of Lunga (west coast).

**Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Small numbers seen daily presumably from the breeding colony on Coll

Up to 2+ seen daily kleptoparasitising auks and Kittiwakes at Harp Rock. Both dark and light phase birds were observed.

**Great Skua** *Stercorarius skua*

An increasingly regular species, with one pair holding territory since 1996.

The first ever breeding record for the Treshnish Isles was confirmed when a single chick was located on Fladda. The breeding pair's territory was that occupied in the previous two years when breeding was suspected. An additional two adult birds were seen on Fladda but with no evidence of a second territory being held. Adult birds from Fladda regularly visited Lunga, in particular Harp Rock, with up to 3 birds noted.

**Common Gull** *Larus canus*

Irregular breeding species in small numbers

Breeding was confirmed for two pairs on Fladda (broods of 1 and 3) with another 4 pairs on apparently occupied territories. Breeding was also considered to have occurred on Sgeir an Fheoir (1 pair) and Sgeirean na Giusaich north (3 pairs)

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

Regularly breeding species in small numbers

Breeding was suspected on Lunga (south end) and Sgeir a Chaisteil with 2 & 1 pairs respectively on territory.

**Herring Gull** *Larus argentatus*

A common breeding species

Breeding was confirmed on all islands visited except Sgeirean na Giusaich (N & S).

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

Regular breeding species that has declined in recent years

Breeding was confirmed on Fladda, Lunga, Sgeirean na Giusaich south (1 pair), Sgeirean na Giusaich north (1 pair), Sgeir an Eirionnaich and Sgeir an Fheoir. The colony at the south end of Lunga was found at the time of visit to have produced unusually low numbers of chicks.

**Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla*

A localised breeding species

Breeding was confirmed on Lunga, Fladda and Sgeir a Chaisteil. An attempt to colonise a new area was noted, a single bird nest building on the side of gully in Area 1.

**Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea*

Irregular breeding species

One pair on Sgeir an Eirionnaich which from their behaviour were possibly breeding. No other birds were seen, the traditional mixed Common/Arctic Tern colony on Sgeirean na Giusaich being vacant with no apparent signs of having been occupied earlier in the year.

**Guillemot** *Uria aalge*

Common breeding species

Breeding was confirmed on Lunga, Fladda and Sgeir a Chaisteil.

**Razorbill** *Alca torda*

Common breeding species

Breeding was confirmed on Lunga, Fladda and Sgeir a Chaisteil.

**Black Guillemot** *Cephus grylle*

Regular breeding species in small numbers

Adult birds were seen around Fladda (35+), Sgeirean na Giusaich (1), Sgeir an Eirionnaich (7) and Lunga's south end (1). Breeding was confirmed only on Fladda where adults were seen carrying fish into nesting sites amongst boulder scree.

**Puffin** *Fratercula arctica*

Common breeding species

Breeding was confirmed on Lunga, Fladda and Sgeir a Chaisteil.

**Rock Dove** *Columba livia*

Regular breeding species in very small numbers

One pair were noted in a cave on Lunga.

**Swift** *Apus apus*

Irregular visitor

Several individuals were seen above the Village, Lunga, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July.

**Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*

Regular breeding species in small numbers

A minimum of 5 singing birds were considered to be holding territory on Lunga; a single at Tarbet, two between the Village and Shearwater Gully, and two between Shearwater Gully and Shag Alley.

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*

Regular breeding species in small numbers

Widespread breeding species on Lunga and Fladda. The species may have been overlooked on the other islands visited.

**Rock Pipit** *Anthus petrosus*

Regular breeding species in small numbers

Common along the coast of Lunga with birds also noted on Fladda and Sgeir a Chaistell. Breeding though not confirmed was considered to have occurred on these islands given the presence of recently fledged juveniles. The species is likely to have been overlooked on the other islands visited, given the limited duration of visits.

**Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla alba yarrelli*

Irregular breeding species

One male was regularly seen foraging on Lunga opposite Harp Rock and around the deserted Village area.

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Regular breeding species, quite common where habitat suitable.

Singing birds noted on Fladda and the northern half of Lunga.

**Dunnock** *Prunella modularis*

Irregular breeding species

No birds were recorded by the expedition.

**Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Regular breeding species in small numbers

During 1998, there were numerous pairs of Wheatears breeding on the main island of Lunga with almost every suitable location occupied by a pair. Accurate estimates of the population are difficult as family parties appeared very mobile and adult birds did not appear to be holding territories (only one female was trapped with a brood patch). This was made clear from captures around the cottages this year; offspring and adults from the locality were caught early in the week (including two retrapped adults) but new birds were caught when hard weather forced them from higher slopes and more wind-swept areas into the vicinity of the cottages. As a rough estimate, birds were trapped in locations approximating to 8/9 territories on the main body of Lunga (Area 14). It is likely that there were at least another 3 territories in this area where trapping was not attempted giving a total of 12 pairs. Other birds were also observed on the south end of Lunga (Areas 6 & 7) but the number of pairs was not recorded.

Following the success in catching 25 birds during our week in 1997, greater effort was focussed on trapping a larger proportion of the breeding population and to spread the trapping effort around the island. Thus 41 birds were trapped (incl. 3 retraps) using seven spring traps baited with meal-worms at various locations, working methodically around the main body of Lunga (one bird was trapped on Fladda).

	Juvenile	Adult		TOTAL
		Male	Female	
New birds	25	7	6	38
Retraps	-	2	1	3
TOTAL	25	9	7	41

	Location														
	Cottages			Harp Rock			N Beach			Shag Alley Shearwater Gulley			Tarbet		
	Juv.		Ad.	Juv.		Ad.	Juv.		Ad.	Juv.		Ad.	Juv.		Ad.
		M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F		M	F
New Birds	12	4	2	3		1	5	1	1	3		1	1	2	1
Retraps		1	1		1										

Three birds were re-trapped from the previous year:

E196501	3J	01/07/97	Shearwater Gulley
	4M	29/06/98	Harp Rock
C331895	4M	01/07/97	Deserted Village
	4M	01/07/98	Deserted Village
	This bird had no left foot.		
C331896	4F	02/07/97	Deserted Village
	4F	01/07/98	Deserted Village

Out of a sample of 25 birds, 3 re-traps was very encouraging. Hopefully, we will get a higher number in 1999 and, with refinement of the trapping effort, it may be possible to think about making estimates for survival rates.

#### **Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Rare visitor

One bird regularly singing from the reedbed at south-east end of Lunga. A singing bird was also present there in 1997.

#### **Hooded Crow** *Corvus corone*

Regular breeding species in small numbers

One family party on Lunga with 2 fledged juveniles were noted at the top of Shearwater Gully and at the south end. The presence of a dead youngster at the south end with all primaries bearing sheaths is indicative of local breeding. Caches of corvid-predated gull eggs were to be found on the south end of Lunga, including one of 12.

#### **Raven** *Corvus corax*

At least one pair breeds in most years

At least 4 birds were present on Lunga, including a family group of 2 adults and 2 juveniles. A recently fledged juvenile was flushed from a freshly killed Great Black-backed Gull on Lunga. No further confirmation of breeding was obtained.

#### **Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

Regular breeding species in small numbers

No evidence of breeding found. Birds were heard in the vicinity of the village, Lunga on 2<sup>nd</sup> July.

#### **Twite** *Carduelis flavirostris*

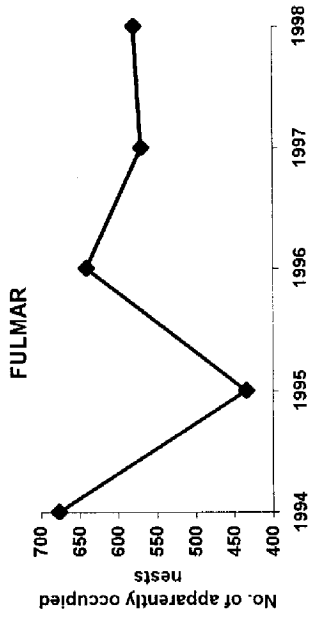
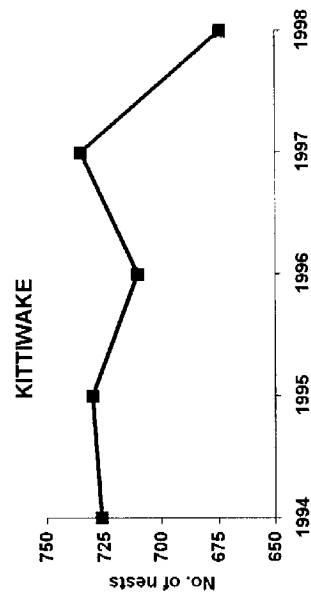
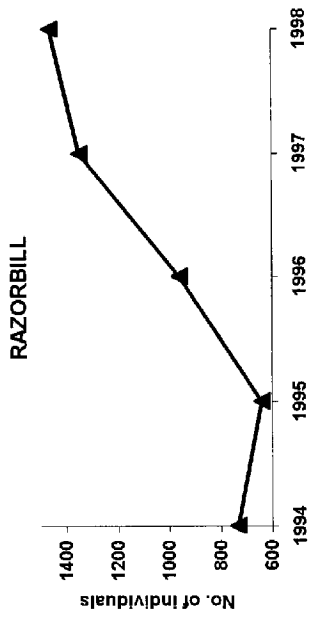
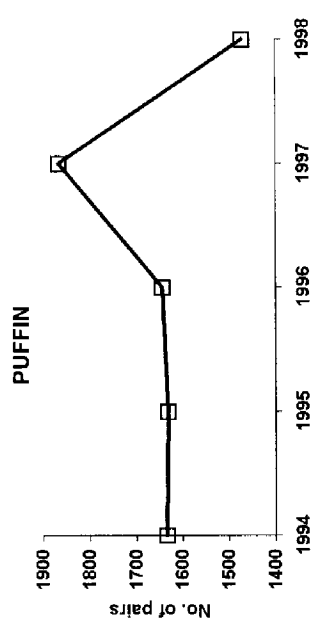
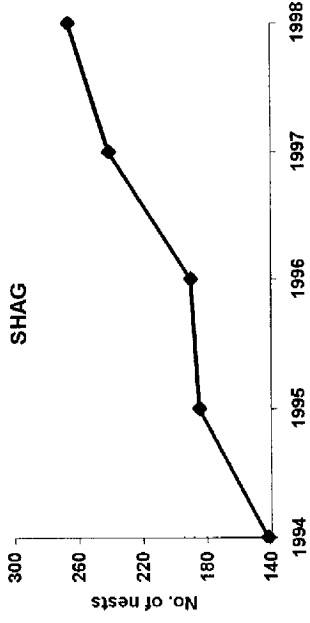
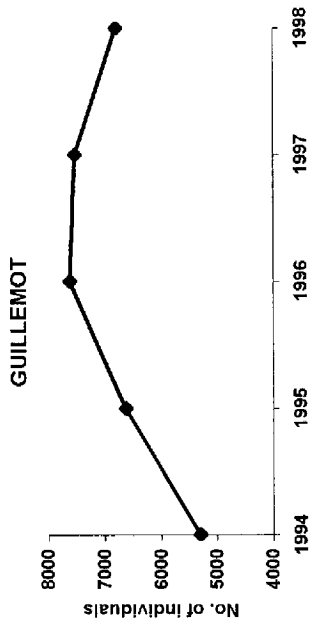
Regular breeding species in small numbers

All birds on Lunga were recorded along the north-east coast; count sectors 1, 2 and 3. Observations indicated a minimum of 2 pairs resident on Lunga with no more than 2 juveniles identified on any one occasion. The largest flock was of nine birds seen over the village but could not unfortunately be aged.

On Fladda at least 14 birds, including 3 juveniles, were located along the south-east coast on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. Two birds were also seen on the boulder beach on Sgeir a Chaisteil.



Population changes in a selection of breeding seabird species on Lunga 1994 - 98



## TRESHNISH RINGING TOTALS FOR 1998

SPECIES	NEW BIRDS RINGED			TOTAL RINGED	RETRAPS/CONTROLS
	ADULT	JUVENILE	PULLI		
Fulmar	24			24	
Manx Shearwater	1			1	
Storm Petrel	741			741	99
Shag	8		142	150	
Common Sandpiper	1			1	
Great Skua			1	1	
Common Gull			4	4	
Herring Gull			73	73	
Great Black-b. Gull			19	19	
Kittiwake	41			41	13
Guillemot	503			503	42
Razorbill	107	5		112	20
Puffin	398			398	29
Rock Pipit	4			4	
Wheatear	14	23		37	3
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1842</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>2109</b>	<b>203</b>

Note: Rings used in 1998 were registered under *Treshnish Auk Ringing Group, Hardman, Juckes & Cooper, Deans & Smith, J.R.Hodson and S.W.Walker.*

## 1998 Breeding seabird census data for the Treshnish Isles

Sector	Count unit	Count Sectors on Lunga and Chaisteil													Lunga & Chaisteil Totals		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	6a	7	8	9	10	11	12		12a	13
Fulmar	AON		72	12	19	50		59		41	49	19	46	75	28	109	579
Shag	N		31	47	16	63				26	8	20	12	9	34	266	
Great Skua	N																0
Common Gull	AON																0
Lesser B-b Gull	AON	1							2								3
Herring Gull	AON	13	1			3		4	1	33	3					12	70
Great B-b Gull	AON		1	2	1				15				1			4	53
Kitiwake	N	1								1				60			674
Common Tern	IND											3	609				0
Arctic Tern	PRS																0
Razorbill	IND		59	28	1	44				5	5	43	1,152	90	16	9	1,463
Guillemot	IND					17						147	6,350	120	25	132	6,791
Black Guillemot	IND					1											1
Puffin	PRS		40	125		20						2	340	440	404	1	1,472

Sector	Count unit	Count sectors					Grand Total
		Eirion	Fheior	Gius	Fladda		
Fulmar	AON				20		599
Shag	N	5			156		427
Great Skua	N				1		1
Common Gull	AON			3	6		10
Lesser B-b Gull	AON		1		2		5
Herring Gull	AON	4	28		79		181
Great B-b Gull	AON	48	3	2	30		136
Kitiwake	N						674
Common Tern	IND		1				1
Arctic Tern	PRS	1					1
Razorbill	IND				126		1,589
Guillemot	IND						6,791
Black Guillemot	IND	7		1	35		44
Puffin	PRS				190		1,662

**Key to count unit codes:**

- AOT = Apparently occupied territories
- AON = Apparently occupied nest
- N = Nest
- PRS = pairs
- IND = individuals

### TRESHNISH RINGING TOTALS 1971 - 1998

SPECIES	1971	1974	1976	1977	1978	1980	1982	1984	1986	1989	1991	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	TOTAL
Fulmar	17	6	4	8	21	14	18	7	21	15	4	27	38	7	24	231		
Manx Shearwater		2	13	4	4	1	8				9	1		2	1	45		
Storm Petrel		254	22	1	283		203	800	411	975	75	440	331	1104	741	6176		
Shag	150	7	10	10	24	80	50	160	40	10	59	96	99	150	955			
Buzzard					1	2										3		
Oystercatcher	1				1	4	2										8	
Common Sandpiper																1	1	
Great Skua																1	1	
Common Gull																4	4	
Lesser Black-backed Gull																		
Herring Gull	6	1		14	46	35	56	4	4	3	5	24	19	52	73	342		
Great Black-backed Gull	3	6	3	7	22	14	35		22	15	6	25	16	48	19	247		
Kittiwake					1	1	1	2	2	4	6	10	1	50	41	119		
Guillemot	32	20	14	66	502	137	364	180	250	306	109	498	349	472	503	3802		
Razorbill	65	72	90	115	266	218	236	151	103	64	81	101	105	98	112	1877		
Black Guillemot														1		1		
Puffin	70	198	271	203	200	208	182	174	160	114	358	236	301	267	398	3340		
Meadow Pipit												4		1		5		
Rock Pipit								5	1			2	4	2		14		
Pied Wagtail											1					6		
Wren												3	2			3		
Wheatear			12				1	3					5	24	37	82		
Willow Warbler																1		
Twite														2		2		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>1427</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>1266</b>	<b>1326</b>	<b>1014</b>	<b>1506</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>1029</b>	<b>1530</b>	<b>1230</b>	<b>2130</b>	<b>2109</b>	<b>17267</b>

NOTES: Data for 1971 - 1995 extracted from Walker & Cooper (1996). Ringing data for a three day visit in 1972 was not available.

## RECENT RINGING RECOVERIES

### Storm Petrel

TIARG have in the past year received details of 46 recoveries of birds ringed within Britain and Ireland in the months July - August and controlled by TIARG on Fladda or Lunga in June - July 1997. These recoveries are summarised in the table below; all birds were ringed as adults (Euring code 4). In total 48 Storm Petrels of 1278 handled by TIARG in 1997 were controls for which details of 2 foreign birds are still awaited (2 Norwegian).

Ringing Site	No. of controls at:		Time interval (days)		Distance km	Direction (degrees)
	Fladda	Lunga	Minimum	Maximum		
Sanda Island, Kintyre, Strathclyde	10	6	342	6519	145	339
Ailsa Craig, Strathclyde	1	0	1418	1418	160	330
Corsewall Point, Dumfries & Galloway	1	0	1077	1077	184	335
Copeland, Down, Northern Ireland	5	0	322	5792	209	345
Sheepand Hbr., Ardglass, Down, Northern Ireland	1	0	2902	2902	254	348
Faraidh Head, Highland Region	0	1	698	698	255	202
Skerry, Bettyhill, Highland Region	1	0	1098	1098	258	209
Eilean nan Ron, Highland Region	0	1	347	347	261	208
Calf of Man, Isle of Man	2	4	337	2513	290	340
Sule Skerry, Orkney	0	1	364	364	313	202
Twinyess, North Ronaldsay, Orkney	1	3	338	1806	395	216
Isle of May, Lothian	0	2	324	2157	239	278
Tynemouth, Tyne & Wear	3	1	1428	2166	352	298
Portland Bill, Dorset	1	0	1462	1462	714	339
Beginish, Blasket Island, Kerry, Eire	1	0	1464	1464	557	29

## OTHER SPECIES RECOVERIES:

### Abbreviations

Age                    1 - Pullus  
                          6 - Hatched before previous calendar year, exact year unknown

### Manner of recovery

R - Caught and released by a ringer  
XF - Found freshly dead or dying  
XL - Found long dead

### Guillemot

X64546                6    28/06/97   Lunga, Treshnish Isles  
                          XF  16/11/97   Sjaelland, DENMARK  
    141 days      1127 km      94 degs  
                          Found dead in fishing nets

### Razorbill

M85541                6    29/07/94   Lunga, Treshnish Isles  
                          R    10/02/97   Bognor Regis, West Sussex  
    927 days      738 km      149 degs  
                          Oil victim released 18/02/97 Berry Head

### Razorbill

M72568                6    24/06/96   Lunga, Treshnish Isles  
                          XF  13/08/97   Loch Tuath, nr. Kilninian, Mull, Strathclyde  
    415 days      12 km      72 degs  
                          Eaten by predator

### Shag

1170693               1    26/06/96   Lunga, Treshnish Isles  
                          XL  01/08/97   Coales, Isle of Tiree, Strathclyde  
    401 days      18 km      301 degs

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly we would like to express our appreciation to Sir Alick Rankin for permission to allow our continuing studies to be made on these beautiful islands.

We thank Iain Morrison and his family, for providing our transportation in the 1980's and 1990's and are grateful for his continuing advice, co-operation and help.

Once again thanks to Jan Densham for organising the expedition's food and provisions (a thankless task!).

We are grateful for the first of three research grants of £200 from Scottish Ornithologists Club. Thanks is also due to TIARG members who donated Storm Petrel and Shag rings free of charge.