

# News

## CONSTITUTION OF THE AFRICAN SEABIRD GROUP

1. The name of the society shall be the African Seabird Group, alternatively the Studiegroep : Seevoëls van Afrika.
2. The society exists to further the study and knowledge of seabirds in Africa and adjacent areas in any way that seems good to the society's committee or general meeting. Seabirds are any birds that make use of the sea.
3. The society shall be managed by a committee of not less than five members elected at an annual general meeting amongst whom shall be the Chairman, the Secretary and the Treasurer.
4. The committee shall have the power to undertake any act on behalf of the society whether specifically authorized there-to by this constitution or by a general meeting of the society or not. Without derogating from the generality of the foregoing the committee shall have the power to determine membership dues and charges for goods and services provided by the society; to appoint office holders and co-opt members to the committee; to transact business in movable and immovable property; to manage the affairs of the society; to operate with a quorum of three members.
5. The society shall hold a general meeting once a year at which the quorum shall be one-tenth of the paid up membership. Each office holder shall report upon the activities of his function to the meeting. Subject to the provisions of the constitution, there shall be no limits on the right of an annual general meeting to do anything on which a majority of members have resolved.
6. A special general meeting shall be convened by the Chairman upon the requisition of one-twentieth of the paid up membership, but such a meeting may only deal with the matter or matters contained in the notice of requisition of the meeting.
7. A general meeting may wind up the society and its affairs in any manner that seems best to it.

The above constitution was put to an appreciative (though captive) audience at the Symposium on Birds of the Sea and Shore at the University of Cape Town in November 1979. It was carried with acclaim and a committee was then elected. At a subsequent (and the very first) committee meeting of the group, the following office-bearers were approved :

J. Cooper, Chairman and Editor, *The Cormorant*  
P.D. Morant, Secretary  
R.K. Brooke, Treasurer  
G. Avery, Beach Patrol Organizer  
A.J. Williams, Member

Special thanks are due to Richard Brooke for producing a most excellent and concise constitution which allows the committee (who do all the work anyway) to do most anything.

J.C.

## BIRDS OF THE SEA AND SHORE

The first symposium to be devoted to birds of the sea and shore held in the southern hemisphere took place at the University of Cape Town on 19 - 23 November 1979. It was organised by the Southern African Seabird Group (now the African Seabird Group), the Western Cape Wader Study Group and the Cape Bird Club in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the University of Cape Town and the 50th anniversary of the Southern African Ornithological Society, and was attended by some 95 local people, seven from Britain, four from the USA, two from Holland and one from New Zealand. They considered 26 contributions on seabirds and 11 on shorebirds (three of them read in the absence of the authors), and made excursions out to sea from Hout Bay at the start and to the seabird colony on Malgas Island and Langebaan Lagoon at the end. The meeting was generally felt to be highly successful, not least because of the work put into its organisation by members of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University led by John Cooper.

The proceedings showed the wide spectrum of content and style of delivery characteristic of ornithological meetings involving a mixture of professional and enthusiastic amateur contributors. Each of the three days of formal papers ended with a general discussion, devoted successively to feeding ecology, distribution of birds at sea and breeding biology, which rambled enthusiastically far and wide. After a number of years of productive unregulated existence the Southern African Seabird Group also got round to holding an inaugural meeting to elect officers and to adopt a constitution, while terminally a resolution was passed calling for more conservation, monitoring and research for the declining Jackass Penguin. The conference should go far to help place the rapidly developing work in this field on a more formal basis.

The talks devoted to seabirds were opened by a lucid exposition by Dr Robert Furness of Glasgow University of the possible relationship between birds, seals and men as competitors fishing for marine animals which perhaps gained in clarity from the omission of much discussion of some of the more uncertain factors such as the feeding range, precise diet of different species, and extent to which they feed on wastes from the fishing industry. This is clearly a subject about which we shall hear much more as man progressively takes up a growing proportion of the biological production of the sea, depriving other species of food, and considers whether to treat them as prey or competitors. It is perhaps worth stressing that this is not such a simple issue, and the truth may not be arrived at so easily.

The complexity of the problem encountered in assessing the impact of seabirds on marine ecology was demonstrated by the interesting contributions from Mike Imber (of New Zealand) and Aldo Berruti (South Africa) revealing the extent to which the *Procellariiformes* eat cephalopods and the upheaval with these findings have caused among studies of this group (still of only limited importance for human fisheries). It is still particularly

difficult to arrive at any quantitative estimates of the magnitude of this bird activity, though a number of other seabird studies were described likely to play a more measurable part in the assessment of the biomass of the Southern Ocean preparatory to the development of krill fisheries. There were a similar number of reports on South African coastal birds, ranging from an interesting pioneer account by G. Avery of fluctuations in the abundance of different species in the Pleistocene archaeological record to an important report by Messrs P.D. Morant, J. Cooper and R. Randall on the growing number of penguins which are becoming oiled and the success now being achieved in rehabilitating a majority of those which are rescued.

The contributions on shorebirds were led by an able and considerably less controversial review by the organiser of the British "Birds of estuaries" enquiry, Tony Prater, of the way in which they fit their moult into their intercontinental migrations, sometimes suspending it for a while when they are due to move on. W.J.A. Dick also described the route by which Siberian Knot may reach winter quarters in South Africa via Europe and west Africa, and the length of the flights that they make and the places where they stop to rest when returning north. There were a number of accounts of shorebird communities in Europe and South Africa, and their feeding behaviour in South Africa, where local workers are now clearly also beginning to make progress of international importance (as with seabirds) though there is still much to be done.

Among the more general contributions, Dr Joanna Burger provided a notable demolition of the long accepted belief that seabirds commonly desert their growing young before they fledge, while Dr Sheila Mahoney, also from the USA, revealed in the course of a comparison of the heat-conservation capacity of cormorants and darters that the latter have an unnoticed simultaneous moult of the flight-feathers when they look like plucked chickens. It is to be hoped that such revelations may cause people to look around them and examine accepted beliefs more critically in future. The general feeling among outside observers was that it was a most useful conference which combined the interest and excitement of breaking new ground with a high level of organisation and achievement. It provided promise of much interesting development in the future.

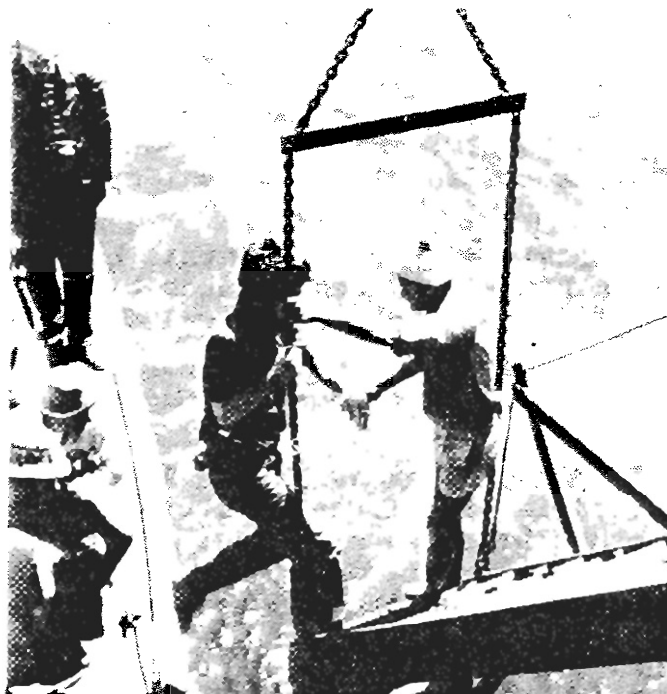
W.R.P. Bourne, Scotland

During the Symposium on Birds of the Sea and Shore, there was a four-hour cruise out of Hout Bay, Cape Peninsula, into the Atlantic Ocean on the converted 'crashboat' *Circe* on 19 November 1979. I counted all the seabirds I identified; listed here as a 'souvenir' for the northern hemisphere visitors to the symposium :

Blackbrowed Albatross <i>Diomedea melanophris</i>	4
Shy Albatross <i>D. cauta</i>	1
Yellownosed Albatross <i>D. chlororhynchos</i>	1
Whitechinned Petrel <i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>	1
Sooty Shearwater <i>Puffinus griseus</i>	427
Cape Gannet <i>Sula capensis</i>	218

Whitebreasted Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	11
Cape Cormorant <i>P. capensis</i>	54
Arctic Skua <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	1
Pomatorhine Skua <i>S. pomarinus</i>	5
Subantarctic Skua <i>Catharacta antarctica</i>	1
Kelp Gull <i>Larus dominicanus</i>	41
Sabine's Gull <i>L. sabini</i>	1
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	21
Arctic Tern <i>S. paradisaea</i>	1
Sandwich Tern <i>S. sandvicensis</i>	10

*G. De Roos, The Netherlands*



The 1979 Symposium : excursion to Malgas Island.  
Bob Furness steps ashore while Bill Bourne awaits his turn.



The 1979 Symposium : excursion on the *Circe* out  
of Hout Bay after albatrosses.

## RESOLUTION

The Symposium on Birds of the Sea and Shore held at the University of Cape Town, 19 - 23 November and organised by the Southern African Seabird Group, the Cape Bird Club and the Western Cape Wader Study Group, taking note :

- (1) That the Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus*, a species endemic to southern Africa, has decreased and is continuing to decrease in numbers, especially on the west coast of southern Africa.
- (2) That the Jackass Penguin is listed with the category "vulnerable" in the new edition of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red Data Book, is listed in the South African Red Data Book, and is listed in the Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) (Appendix 2), to which South Africa is a signatory.
- (3) That several Zoological Gardens maintain breeding populations of Jackass Penguins which produce birds potentially available for trade to other Zoological Gardens.
- (4) That oiling of Jackass Penguins continues to occur and two oiling incidents have occurred at St Croix and Dassen islands in 1979.
- (5) That illegal landings on at least one island have occurred and have resulted in significant disturbances to Jackass Penguins and other breeding seabirds, and that on several occasions it is known that Jackass Penguin eggs and adult birds have been collected and removed from the island.

Therefore recommends and resolves :

- (1) That all further trade, international or national, in wild-caught Jackass Penguins to Zoological Gardens and Aquariums for public display be halted until such time as the species is no longer included in the IUCN Red Data Book.
- (2) That the existing laws relating to oiling in southern African waters be strictly enforced.
- (3) That the breeding islands of Jackass Penguins and other seabirds be continued to be patrolled and that the existing laws controlling access to the islands be strictly enforced.
- (4) That monitoring of Jackass Penguin numbers be continued.

The Symposium further resolved that the above resolution be sent to the International Council for Bird Preservation (South African Section) with a request that it be forwarded to the relevant authorities and the ICBP (SA Section) is requested to report to the organising bodies of the Symposium on any replies it may receive from the relevant authorities.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION : COLOUR RINGED CAPE GANNETS  
AND CAPE CORMORANTS

Cape Gannets *Sula capensis* and Cape Cormorants *Phalacrocorax capensis* chicks have been ringed on South African and South West African islands during the 1979/80 summer breeding season. A numbered metal ring was placed on the left leg and a combination of up to three coloured plastic rings on the right leg.

These birds were ringed in order to gather important information on their movements and life history as part of a study being conducted by the Sea Fisheries Institute. Anyone sighting ringed birds either at sea or on land can assist by sending (i) date of sighting, (ii) place of sighting, (iii) species, and (iv) ring colour combination (e.g. top = blue, middle = red, bottom = blue) to :

P.A. Shelton  
Sea Fisheries Institute  
Pvt Bag  
Sea Point 8060, South Africa.

If a dead bird is found the metal ring number should also be recorded and the information sent to :

The South African Bird Ringing Unit  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.

No postage need be applied in either case, if the envelope is marked OFFICIAL.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION : COLOUR RINGED SWIFT TERNS

Swift Terns *Sterna bergii* chicks have been ringed on the islands in Saldanha Bay, southwestern Cape, for the fourth successive year in 1980. Members of the African Seabird Group colour ringed 1 740 chicks with a yellow ring on the left leg and a numbered metal ring on the right leg on the weekend 19 - 20 April on Jutten and Malgas islands. This figure is more than twice the number ringed on Marcus Island in 1979, when the colour used was red. Sightings of yellow and red ringed Swift Terns are requested with details of the locality and date, the total number of adult and juvenile (heavily barred) Swift Terns present, and the number colour ringed. Observations of juveniles begging for food or being fed by adults are of especial interest.

Please send all observations to :

J. Cooper  
FitzPatrick Institute  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION : COLOUR RINGED BLACK OYSTERCATCHERS

Over 150 Black Oystercatchers *Haematopus moquini* have been colour ringed on islands in Saldanha Bay, southwestern Cape, using red, yellow, blue, green, white and black plastic rings. The following sets of combinations have been used : (1) Right leg metal, left leg three colours; (2) Green over metal right, left leg three colours; (3) Blue over metal right; (4) Blue over metal right, white left; (5) Red over metal right; and (6) Black over metal right.

Reports of any of these birds and the following additional information would be much appreciated : number of oystercatchers present (particularly in the case of flocks), including the number of first year birds; first year birds can be identified by the dull brownish tip to the bill, very small dull eye ring and dull legs. I am also keen to receive records of flocks of sub-adult Oystercatchers. Second-year birds resemble adults, but have small, dull eye rings. All records will be acknowledged, and details of colour ringed birds supplied.

Details of sightings with date and location should be sent to :

P.A.R. Hockey  
FitzPatrick Institute  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.

NOTES ON RARE SEABIRDS

Previous issues of *The Cormorant* as well as other journals have included reviews of the records of several species of rare seabirds in southern African waters. The Editor intends to produce an annual article starting in Vol. 8(2) listing new records, corrections or other pertinent observations of the species already reviewed. The article will bear the heading "New data on rarely recorded seabirds in southern Africa" and each record will be written up in a standard manner under the name(s) of the observer(s).

Records are requested of all species in southern African waters which have been reviewed or which have a review in preparation\* :

Rockhopper Penguin	<i>Eudyptes chrysocome</i>
Macaroni Penguin	<i>E. chrysolophus</i>
Southern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i> (white phase only)
Antarctic Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialisoides</i>
*Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>
*Little Shearwater	<i>P. assimilis</i>
Wedgetailed Shearwater	<i>P. pacificus</i>
Blue Petrel	<i>Halobaena caerulea</i>
Redtailed Tropicbird	<i>Phaethon rubricauda</i>
Whitetailed Tropicbird	<i>P. lepturus</i>
*Franklin's Gull	<i>Larus pipixcan</i>

## THE SEABIRD GROUP

The Seabird Group was founded in 1966 in Great Britain to circulate news of work in progress on seabirds and to promote co-operative research on them. It is run by an Executive Committee composed of nine elected members three of whom represent the British national ornithological societies, the British Ornithologists' Union, the British Trust for Ornithology, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Its activities may be classified under the following headings :

### *Work at the breeding stations*

This started with a national census of breeding seabirds, Operation Seafarer, in 1969, the results of which were published in the book "The Seabirds of Britain and Ireland" by Stanley Cramp, W.R.P. Bourne and David Saunders, in 1974 (London: Collins). The group is now co-operating with the R.S.P.B. and the Nature Conservancy Council in organising sample censuses of birds at representative sites, more detailed surveys of particular groups of birds such as the auks, terns and skuas, and of areas which require more study such as the Shetlands, Orkneys, Hebrides, and S.W. Irish Islands. A census subcommittee is also presently producing a seabird counting manual to cover all colonial species.

### *Investigations into the distribution of birds at sea*

These include observations of passing birds from the shore ("seawatching"), and of birds at sea from ferries, other boats, and fixed stations such as oil rig platforms. At present a standardised record card is being developed which hopes to be comprehensive, easy to use and yet readily computerised for subsequent analysis.

### *Surveys of evidence of bird mortality on beaches*

Since bird bodies float and are comparatively durable and conspicuous, their appearance on beaches provides good evidence on the character of hazards affecting birds at sea. The Group has co-operated with the R.S.P.B. in the development of systematic surveys to record oil pollution and bird mortality along the shores of Britain and Ireland simultaneously with other investigations along the coast of Europe. These surveys provided the main evidence for the nature of bird mortality during the *Torrey Canyon* oil pollution disaster in 1967, the Irish Sea birdkill which revealed the extent to which seabirds are now affected by toxic chemical pollution in 1969, the outbreak of botulism around the British coast in 1975, and numerous more recent oiling incidents, notably the *Amoco Cadiz*, *Eleni V* and *Christos Bitas* disasters in 1978. A scheme has now also been set up to make better use of bird corpses by rapid collection and deep freeze storage at a central location. Data on measurements, age, sex, state of moult, body condition, and so on will now be collected in a systematic manner.

These enterprises provide a regular measure of the numbers, status, productivity, mortality and its causes of British sea-



birds together with further information on their biology and ecology.

The work of the group in the past has been reported in cyclo-styled Bulletins (of which there were seven), and subsequently printed reports (of which there have been four so far), whilst newsletters are sent to members at intervals (three times a year from now on). The Annual General Meeting is normally held at the British Trust for Ornithology's Ringing and Migration Conference in January, and is preceded by talks by members. Membership is open, and the subscription is currently £1 per annum, fulltime students half price. The Secretary, Tim Birkhead, will always be interested to hear of problems affecting seabirds and pleased to answer queries :

*Dr T.R. Birkhead,  
Zoology Department,  
The University,  
Sheffield S10 2TN, England.*

There are a few copies of the last three Bulletins and the four printed reports available, price 50 p each. A publication by the Natural Environment Research Council summarising recent ecological studies of seabirds is also available on request.

Chairman : *Chris Mead, c/o British Trust for Ornithology,  
Beech Grove, Tring, Hertfordshire HP23 5NR, England.*

Treasurer : *Ted Ponting, c/o BTO.*

#### THE PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP

The Pacific Seabird Group (PSG) is an organisation of persons interested in the study and conservation of Pacific seabirds. The Group acts to increase the flow of information among seabird researchers and to inform its membership and the public of conservation issues relating to seabirds and the marine environment. The Group is an international organisation, though most of the current members are from North America.

Current activities include involvement in seabird sanctuaries, human disturbances, coastal surveys, seabird/fisheries interactions, and legislation. The *PSG Bulletin* has been issued biannually starting in 1974 and contains information on current seabird work in the Pacific, PSG policy statements on conservation issues of critical importance, and articles and news about Pacific seabirds. The annual meeting is held in December or January and features a variety of papers on all aspects of Pacific seabird biology, ecology, and management.

Membership dues are \$5-00. Back issues of the *Bulletin* (starting with spring 1974) are available at \$1-00 per issue. Please send payment for dues or back issues to : *Ms Betty Anne Schreiber,  
Treasurer, Pacific Seabird Group, c/o Los Angeles County Museum,  
900 Exposition Blvd, Los Angeles, California 90007, U.S.A.*