

Clyde Marine Region Topic Sheet Series

Seabirds and Waterbirds



CONCERNS
SOME CONCERNS



TREND
DETERIORATING

Background

The Clyde Marine Planning Partnership (CMPP) has developed this set of Topic Sheets to help communicate the findings of the Clyde Marine Region Assessment which is available on our website www.clydemarineplan.scot. The Assessment is used to inform and prioritise the development of policies for the Clyde Marine Plan. If you would like to be kept up-to-date about the development of the marine plan please visit the website and sign up to receive our e-newsletter.

About Birds in the Clyde

The Clyde Marine Region (CMR) is home to many important species and populations of sea and waterbirds. The area has a great variety of habitats, from the indented coastline with multiple islands, to saltmarshes and intertidal sand and mud habitats so there are lots of opportunities for birds to feed, nest and breed.



TWENTY-ONE OF THE TWENTY-FOUR SPECIES OF SEABIRD FOUND IN SCOTLAND HAVE BRED OR BREED IN THE CLYDE MARINE REGION. PHOTOS © SARAH BROWN

We know quite a lot about the bird life of the Clyde due to long term monitoring programmes. This is useful, not only to see how their populations and distribution might be changing, but also because they are considered good indicators of the health of the marine environment; so if bird populations are doing well we know the general health of the area is good.

A wide variety of waterbirds live all around the CMR, but the Inner Clyde estuary is their favourite area and it supports large numbers of redshanks, oystercatcher and eider, so much so that it has led to it being safeguarded by several protected area designations.

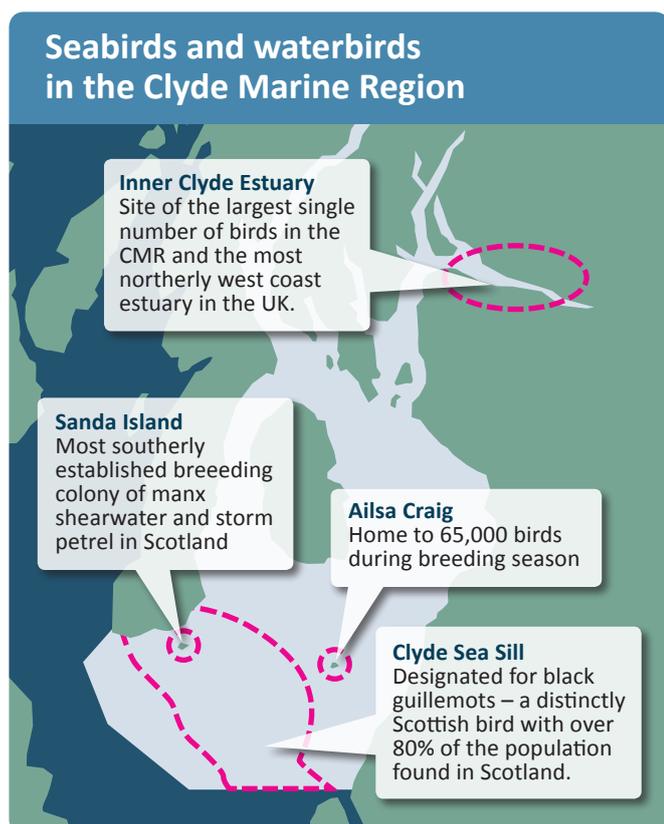
Seabirds and waterbirds – what’s the difference?

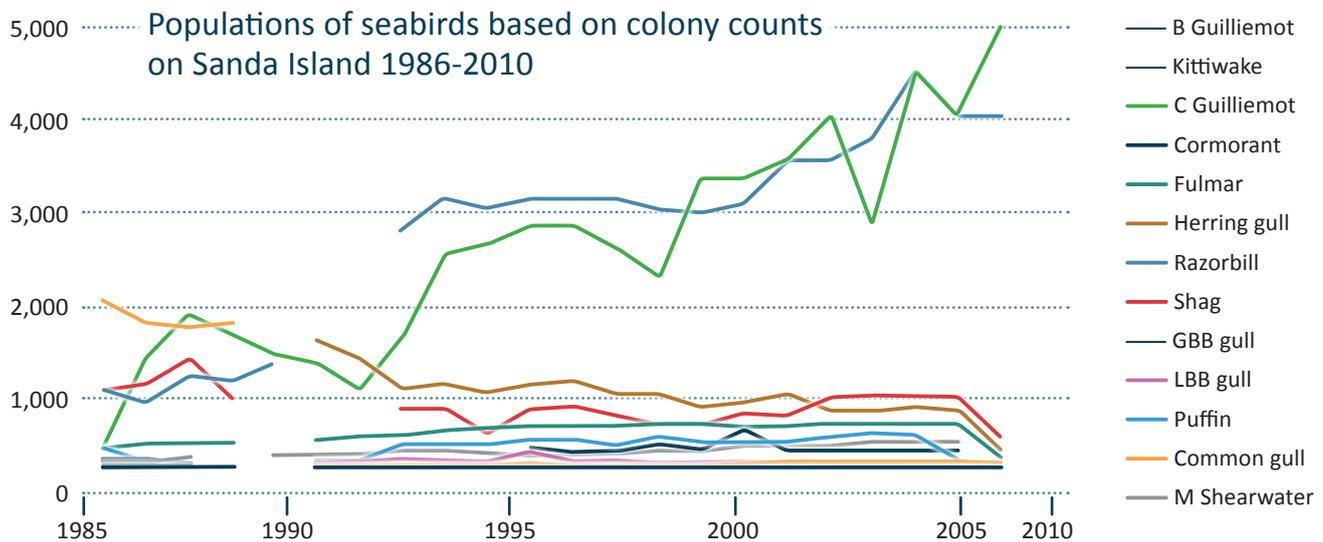
Seabirds forage at sea but breed on land. Some feed on the surface, such as terns and kittiwakes and some dive to catch their food, such as puffins, guillemots and gannets. Waterbirds are those that live on or around water, whether fresh or sea water, such as geese, swans, ducks and wading birds.

Why are we concerned about them?

Within Scotland, nine of the commonest seabirds have shown sustained declines over the past 20 years. Across the whole of the UK seabird abundances have been declining since the early 1990s, with the lowest level recorded in 2004.

Despite gannets thriving on Ailsa Craig since the eradication of rats there in 1991, kittiwakes, fulmars, razorbills, herring gull and lesser black backed gull numbers are still declining. Sanda Island has also seen declines in fulmar, herring gull and razorbills, shags and puffins.





The Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) waterbird biodiversity indicator for Scotland highlights an overall declining trend for wintering waterbirds and this is reflected in the CMR, particularly for eider, pochard, and golden eye. In the Inner Clyde estuary there have been declines in numbers of redshanks, cormorant, Slavonian grebe and oystercatcher. The CMR used to be home to the largest population of eiders in the UK, with 20,000 being recorded in 1997. Unfortunately, populations began to decline in 2000 and, although recent surveys suggest their numbers may be stabilising, they are still much lower than before.

Why are seabirds and waterbirds declining in the Clyde?

Across the UK, including the Clyde, birds are generally struggling. The reasons are complex, sometimes difficult to identify, and vary according to species. Problems can be national or local in scale and include a lack of food and suitable habitat for breeding, disturbance by people, predation by native and invasive species and pollution, including marine litter. The impacts of climate change on food webs, associated sea level rise, which may destroy important habitats such as saltmarsh, and the impact of extreme weather events are also not well understood.

What is being done to help?

The Clyde Assessment scores seabirds and waterbirds at 'some concerns' level and deteriorating. The next step for the Clyde Marine Planning Partnership is to work with partners to develop policies which will support action being taken at a national level and where possible help reduce localised pressures.

There are many practical Clyde based initiatives – bird counts, surveys and monitoring efforts are often carried out by a host of volunteers. SNH lead on assessing and monitoring the condition of protected areas (such as the Inner Clyde estuary, Ailsa Craig and Sanda Island) and certain species; they also manage habitats to control vegetation and improve food availability. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has been active in the Clyde, including managing Ailsa Craig and Horse Island off Ardrossan which is now home to an increasing population of breeding cormorants and lesser black-backed gulls.



GANNET © SARAH BROWN

Other charities, such as the Scottish Wildlife Trust manage a number of reserves for birds in and around the CMR.

What can I do about it?

There are many things we can do to help – there are lots of voluntary groups you could join who do invaluable work counting and ringing birds. You can also play your part in limiting disturbance, particularly during the breeding season when you are at the coast or on the water. We've listed some contacts below which will help get you started.

Where can I find out more?

We have published the 'Assessment of the Condition of the Clyde Marine Region'. This contains a lot of detailed information about a range of topics including birds. You can download it from www.clydemarineplan.scot or contact us via the details below.

If you would like to get involved with practical projects try the Argyll Bird Club (www.argyllbirdclub.org), the Scottish Ornithology Club (www.the-soc.org.uk), the British Trust for Ornithology (www.bto.org) or the Arran Natural History Society which produces the Arran bird atlas (www.arranwildlife.co.uk/index.php/anhs/publications.html) or the RSPB (www.rspb.org.uk) who have a number of local members' groups around the Clyde.