

# Puffins face 'grim' outlook despite breeding success

ADRIAN WINTER



Warmer winters that affect availability of food for the seabirds are blamed for population crash a decade ago

Julia Horton

Puffins at one of Scotland's globally important seabird colonies have had their best breeding season in nearly 30 years. However, conservationists warn that nationwide, the birds' future still looks "grim".

Results from the latest survey on the Isle of May found that 87% of breeding puffins successfully reared a chick this summer.

Their rising survival rate is the highest recorded by experts since 1989 – long before the population crashed in the early 2000s, wiping out about half the colony as numbers plummeted from nearly 80,000 to about 40,000.

The improvement coincided with the first observation of a pair of puffins nesting in an artificial burrow on the island in the Firth of Forth since the early 2000s, which scientists believe is a further sign that the birds are recovering.

Mark Newell, Isle of May field manager for the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, said: "We have had a run now of above average breeding success and we'd like to be hopeful and positive that for the next few years numbers will continue going up."

"The fact that a pair of immature puffins was nesting in one of the concrete burrows means the birds are using a new site, which also suggests that things are improving [because they are expanding their nesting area]."

But he warned that, while the observations brought optimism that the colony could slowly increase from the current level of about 40,000 back towards pre-crash numbers, threats including climate change remained, and puffins were suffering at other Scottish sites.

Newell said: "One possible cause of the population crash in 2007 was a series of much warmer seas in winter, which affects the distribution of the sand eels that puffins feed on. If we were to get another series of warmer winters it would not be good for puffins. At other colonies in Scotland, such as St Kilda, Orkney and Shetland, puffins are doing poorly. The statistics make grim reading."

Young puffins have been observed nesting at artificial burrows on the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth

RSPB Scotland, which is fighting a lengthy legal battle against wind farms in the Forth over fears that they threaten the survival of seabirds including puffins, welcomed the Isle of May findings. But it said breeding numbers among a dozen key seabird species had halved between 1986 and 2015 and forthcoming counts across Britain were expected to produce more "sobering news".

Alex Kinninmonth, its head of marine policy, said: "The effect of warming seas on food supply means that our seabirds face an uncertain future so it's critically important that we do all we can now to make sure additional pressure from non-native mammals, offshore development



At other colonies such as St Kilda, Orkney and Shetland puffins are doing poorly

and fisheries doesn't make an already bad situation worse."

Newell is taking part in an event later this month entitled UnEarthed in Edinburgh later this month where the public can meet Natural Environment Research Council scientists to discuss puffin research.

Meanwhile, the centre is considering installing new artificial burrows on the island to see if more breeding puffins will choose to nest in them. The burrows, a mix of old wooden fishing boxes and purpose-built concrete bunkers, were first installed several decades ago to help researchers monitor fledglings more easily.

# 'Sherlock' sniffs out poachers to rescue pangolin

Tony Allen-Mills

Professor Sam Wasser, an American biologist who has been called the Sherlock Holmes of the illegal wildlife trade, is surveying a huge pile of smuggled ivory seized by customs agents.

Asked how many animals must have died for such a haul, he blinks back tears. A thousand elephants," said Wasser, 64, director of Washington University's Centre for Conservation Biology, based in Seattle.

It is one of many shocking moments in The Last Animals, a new documentary about rhino and elephant poaching and the battle to expose the criminal cartels behind the mass slaughter of the world's largest land mammals. Yet rhinos and elephants are not the only mammals on Wasser's mind as he begins a year-long stint as a visiting professor at Cambridge University's department of zoology.

It was while inspecting ivory seizures that he began to find increasing evidence that poachers were setting their sights on a very different animal – a small, reclusive, scale-covered anteater known as the pangolin.

"The pangolin has become the most poached mammal – if not animal – in the world," Wasser said last week. "They used to be traded for their meat, which was a delicacy in much of Asia. Then poachers started promoting their scales

as the cure for everything from acne and arthritis to cancer. We estimate that over 1m pangolins have been poached in the past decade."

Wasser and a graduate student colleague, Hyeon Jeong Kim, are now playing key roles in an extraordinary battle to prevent the extinction of eight pangolin species, four each in Africa and Asia. They are assisted by Wasser's pack of 21 faeces-sniffing dogs. These remarkable animals, all rescued from animal shelters and trained like narcotics dogs to sniff out specific scents, were originally used to hunt down samples of rhino and elephant dung for DNA-matching with confiscated horns and tusks. Now the dogs hunt in the wild for pangolin poo as well – no easy task given that pangolins are insectivores, so their faeces disintegrate quickly.

The faeces enable Wasser and Kim to build up a global DNA map of the eight species, which they can then match to seizures of smuggled pangolins to identify areas where they were poached.

The pangolin is a shy and obscure animal but has long featured in traditional African and Chinese medicine. One recipe recommends boiling its scales in a boy's urine as a cure for "excessive nervousness and hysterical crying in children". Other uses include cooking the scales to help "women possessed by devils and ogres".



Sam Wasser estimates that more than 1m pangolins have been poached in the past 10 years

## Family's tribute after body of woman found

Catriona Webster

The family of a young woman whose body was found in an Aberdeen flat have paid tribute to "a beautiful daughter and sister".

Chloe Miazek, 20, from Kemnay near Inverurie, was discovered after police were called to a property in the Rosemount Viaduct area on Friday morning.

A 32-year-old man has been arrested and charged in connection with her death. He is expected to appear at Aberdeen Sheriff Court tomorrow.

Her family said they were "absolutely devastated".

In a statement released by the police they said: "She was in the prime of her life and had so much to look forward



'Sorely missed': Chloe Miazek

to, and it is difficult for us to comprehend that she is not here with us today.

"Chloe was a loving daughter to Bob and Theresa, sister to Nathan and friend to many, including at her work at Tesco in Inverurie.

"She will be sorely missed and we ask for privacy as we try to come to terms with her untimely death."

## 'Honour' violence victims fear Brexit deportations

Iram Ramzan

Women and children who fled from "honour" violence in Europe fear they may be at risk again after Brexit.

The Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO), which helps Middle Eastern women and girls living in the UK, believes some are at risk in the country where they hold EU citizenship. This is because they are not permanent UK residents – a status gained after five years – and may have to return to abuse.

"Honour" violence is carried out to defend a family or community in the belief that a person has caused shame. IKWRO wants a guarantee that women who are at risk will be allowed to

stay in the UK. It works with 800 complex cases a year, and 3% of those may be forced to return.

One client, "Zara", sought refuge in Scandinavia in the 1990s after her political activities put her life at risk. Once there, Zara and her children were subjected to violence from her husband, who threatened to kill her.

She left him, taking their children with her. He was always able to find her, however, until she and her children were given new identities in the UK. Now they fear being returned to danger.

"The whole situation of Brexit is very saddening," Zara said, adding that her daughter would prefer to kill herself than go back to a life of violence.

## Praise be: Roman temple of Mithras reopens in City

Richard Brooks  
Arts Editor

Few Roman gods can owe their survival to a newspaper, but the ancient bull-slaying deity Mithras returns to public prominence this month thanks largely to an article published 63 years ago in The Sunday Times.

A reconstructed temple honouring the pagan god will open in London next week in the improbable surrounds of the new £1bn Norman Foster-designed headquarters of the Bloomberg media company.

This striking alliance of religion and commerce springs from the uproar sparked by a front-page story in The Sunday Times in September 1954.

We reported that the newly discovered site of a former Roman temple near Cannon Street in the City of London was about to be "buried



The Sunday Times reports on the recovery of a stone head of Mithras from the site of a former Roman temple in 1954

beneath a block of modern offices". A pair of images showed a stone head of Mithras recovered from the site. Readers were horrified; some even came to the newspaper's London offices to protest against the proposed destruction.

The next day The Times agreed with them. "There is something grievously wrong with our planning if an important antiquity of this sort can be destroyed almost before it has been seen," it thundered.

The stories were read by

the prime minister, Winston Churchill, who dispatched his minister of works, David Eccles, to delay construction of the office block to allow for more excavation.

"It was then, rather remarkably, discussed twice in cabinet," said Sophie Jackson, of the Museum of London Archaeology. In the days following, the public swarmed over the ruins. "It was Mithras fever," she said.

As a result, rather than being buried, the ruins were dismantled and relocated nearby, then dismantled again during construction of Bloomberg's headquarters.

Now rebuilt within the new building, the London Mithraeum will be open to the public from November 14, featuring 600 items from the site. Entry will be free for visitors, who may want to reflect that newspapers can sometimes be godly, too.

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