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Shiant Isles Seabird Recovery Project

Newsletter, Spring 2017

Charlie Main

Here in the **new hub** of the Shiant's project at the stunning new community centre on West Harris, already there is much to share that's coming up for 2017.



Talla na Mara Community Centre above the beach at Niseaboist, where the Shiant's project office is now based.



Monitoring The rat eradication part of the project was undertaken during winter 2015-16 but according to international best practice we cannot declare the islands rat free until March 2018 at the earliest. Until then, we are monitoring for rats using a set of 44 permanent monitoring stations (example pictured left) located across the three main islands. Following an intensive check of all islands in October 2016, we managed to get back out to Eilean an Tighe and Garbh Eilean on 16th January, followed up by Eilean Mhuire on 2nd March and the two main islands again on 10th April. No rat sign has been seen at any of the monitoring stations over the winter, and we remain quietly positive about the potential success of this part of the project.

Photo (left) of monitoring station – John Tayton

We are looking forward to the start of the 2017 **summer field season**, when we will welcome back Johnny Tayton, Molly Heal and Jack Ibbotsen to form our monitoring team at the islands. The three were all involved in the eradication and have strong personal connections with the place as would anyone who had spent a winter at the Shiant's. Over the summer, seabird productivity in the main colonies will be estimated for puffins, razorbills, guillemots, shags and kittiwakes. Presence of land birds is recorded in transects running across Eilean an Tighe and Garbh Eilean. Also, vegetation quadrats will be recorded and samples of crawling invertebrates collected using pitfall traps (see photo). Monitoring for rats continues at least every month during the summer. A control site is also

monitored for changes in invertebrates and vegetation at a site on Harris. This is done to try and account for large, between-year variations in the flora and invertebrate communities that may be driven by weather conditions at the Western Isles.



A pitfall trap with rain cover pictured in place in the field (left) and a sample collected at the Harris control site (right).
Photos Charlie Main

Petrel attraction Active attraction for petrels at the islands will continue this year, with the building of more solar powered speaker systems to install at the islands near to carefully hidden nest boxes (pictured right). The new systems will employ the use of multiple small speakers to create a colony effect. The larger speaker systems that were in use during 2016 will again be deployed for maximum audible coverage out to sea.



Biosecurity We are gearing up for the first of a series of biosecurity training courses, which are aimed at island owners, managers and inhabitants. Our first workshop will be delivered by Laura Bambini and Karen Varnham at the Western Isles in June. Participants will learn how to use a range of monitoring tools to detect rats, and about what to do if rat sign is found at an island where an eradication has taken place. Successful biosecurity is essential to ensure the long term success of island restoration projects.

Thanks to Joe and Charles Engebretsen for continued boating support on rib Per Mare II and to all of our supporters

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Charlie – Shiants Project Manager

