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Shiant Isles Seabird Recovery Project

Newsletter, Winter 2017

Charlie Main

Since our last newsletter we have been busy monitoring at the Shiant Isles: looking for any rat sign and studying the bird populations that rat removal will benefit. Monitoring work during the summer focuses on seabird productivity studies of the Shiant species protected under UK and EU law (puffins, razorbills, shags, guillemots, kittiwakes and others). But we also monitor land birds, vegetation coverage and crawling invertebrate communities. We also had a busy summer continuing our petrel attraction work and had the great pleasure of meeting the Greenpeace ship Beluga II at the islands when she visited as part of her marine plastics research and campaign tour.



Stunning photos above shot by Will Rose – Greenpeace while visiting the Shiant Isles with ship Beluga II.

Storm petrels at the Shiants

We had some great news this year with the first known record of European storm petrels either prospecting or breeding on Garbh Eilean. Adult calls were recorded through June to August, heard from within boulder scree at one of our active attraction sites (see photo).



Adult storm petrels responded to calls played outside the possible nesting site both by day and at night. Following our press release several media outlets ran the story including the BBC. You can catch up with it here if you missed it in September:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-41347336>

Solar powered speaker system with motion activated camera (Photo John Tayton).

Rats final check

The main rat eradication campaign was undertaken successfully during winter 2015-16 but according to international best practice we cannot declare the islands rat free until we have done a final period of intensive monitoring, which we are planning for February 2018. Our colleagues from Wildlife Management International Limited will be coming back to lead the final check.

We will have the valued help of three volunteers, Alister, Alex and Ian – who have all visited the islands many times. Alister and Alex both volunteered during the eradication itself and are coming back for more. Look out for more news bulletins as we progress through the month of February.



The future

We are working on ensuring the islands remain rat free beyond the end of this LIFE project. One of our innovations trialled this year has been cast concrete rat motels (see photo). These will last long into the future and can be made to blend in with surrounding rocks and vegetation.



Photos: Designs for rodent motels used for the early detection of rats include the tried and tested wooden version (left) and newly innovated cast concrete design (right). The concrete motels were trialled this year.

Biosecurity We have now delivered three of our four planned biosecurity training workshops, which are aimed at island owners, managers and inhabitants. Our first workshop was held at the Western Isles in June, followed by two more, in Shetland and in Lundy. We are putting together a new Shiants leaflet to help get the biosecurity message out.

Thanks for the continuing interest and good will of all of our supporters, and best wishes for 2018.

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