

# Making Waves

## The Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative

NEWSLETTER 5: APRIL 2007

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For centuries Fair Islanders have looked after their resources - not for any altruistic reason, but because they had no other option. Greater mobility and changes in marine legislation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century meant that others now had access to a resource which had previously been largely for local use. The new user groups were free from the constraints of safeguarding stock for future use, because for them Fair Isle waters were only part of a wider resource. The islanders could no longer compete and the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a wholesale and difficult shift from a subsistence economy with fishing at its heart, to a more mixed economy. What has not changed, however, is that the new economy still relies strongly on our ties with the sea. From traditional Shetland *yoal* boat-building to the tourist trade, the key element for those earning a living on the isle remains a healthy marine environment and maintenance of the marine resource.

The Fair Isle community is very concerned that we are effectively excluded from having a say in the control and management of our marine resource – a resource which has sustained us for centuries and which remains at the heart of our economic and social life. The Fair Isle community recognises the imperative need to safeguard our resources, terrestrial and marine, for future generations. Our concerns are social and economic as much as environmental. A healthy, pristine environment is an essential ingredient for our future well-being.

Photograph on front cover

**The Holms and base of Malcolm's Head - nesting sites for some of Fair Isle's many breeding seabird species and the important seas around the island which provide their food.**

FIMETI logo by Fiona Mitchell.

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### Progress... perhaps?

In the last newsletter I expressed renewed optimism that things were at last moving on the issue of coastal zone management and on addressing the island's long-held aspiration of sustainable management for our marine resource. Well, there have certainly been plenty of developments, but have they brought us any nearer our goal?

Two opportunities appeared to have presented themselves in the last couple of years. The search for Scotland's first **Coastal and Marine National Park (CMNP)** and the Shetland pilot study for the **Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative (SSMEI)**. At the same time, a number of other initiatives have been launched which should have a bearing on future management of our seas.

#### Coastal and Marine National Park

In June 2005, the Scottish Executive announced its intention to proceed towards the establishment of Scotland's first Coastal and Marine National Park. Scottish Natural Heritage was given the task of assessing suitable sites and the form such a CMNP should take. SNH reported to the SE at the end of March 2006. A period of consultation followed, in which organizations and individuals were invited to respond to a series of questions and options related to the CMNP. This consultation period ended on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2007. The Shetland Islands Council Planning Service also opened a short consultation process on Shetland as a CMNP, announced on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006 with all responses to be in by 5<sup>th</sup> January 2007. There were Fair Isle responses to both consultations, an example of which is given in Appendix 1.

#### SSMEI

There has been Fair Isle representation at all SSMEI Shetland working group meetings apart from one when the weather intervened. The most recent meeting, on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2007 was held on Fair Isle, with the Edinburgh based Scottish Executive coordinator of SSMEI, David Mallon, in attendance. The island turned out in force in the evening to hear presentations by Mr Mallon and Shetland pilot study leader, Lorraine Gray, about the national and Shetland elements of this initiative. An energetic discussion session after the presentations gave the islanders the opportunity to pose questions and express the long-held views and aspirations of the island community.

### Coastal Partnerships Working Group

For some time, FIMETI was one of very few initiatives for the sustainable management of the maritime resource. In recent years, however, a plethora of coastal fora and partnerships have sprung up throughout the UK. In late 2006, a Coastal Partnerships working group was established in order to give a more cohesive approach to sustainable marine management. It is being led by the English and Welsh coastal groups, but FIMETI remains in contact and supportive of the initiative.

### Scottish Marine Enquiry

On 10<sup>th</sup> November 2006, Sarah Boyack MSP announced that a Marine Enquiry would be held in January 2007 by the Scottish Parliament's Environment and Rural Development Committee Executive. The press release for the enquiry recognized a lack of "overall co-ordination" for managing the marine environment; and indicated that the enquiry was seeking ideas on the "best way to create an overarching framework for effective management of the marine environment in Scotland". The results of the enquiry was published in March 2007 at <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/environment/reports-07/rar07-04-00.htm>.

### Minister's Advisory Group on Marine & Coastal Strategy (AGMACS)

This group, comprising representatives from a range of marine stakeholder organisations, reported to the Scottish Executive in March 2007. Their recommendations were commendably mature and, if accepted, could form the framework for truly sustainable management of Scotland's seas. Recommendations relevant to Fair Isle's situation include:

- There should be a statutory marine spatial planning system to provide comprehensive management of the marine environment;
- Ministers should create a new Scottish marine management organization to carry out marine spatial planning, marine nature conservation and fisheries functions;
- consideration should be given to a Scottish marine management organization having responsibilities to 200 nautical miles;
- a system of integrated zone management – a process to better co-ordinate both land and sea based coastal activities – should be considered in the context of marine spatial planning;
- Ministers should explore improvements to our system of marine nature conservation for protecting Scotland's biodiversity.

The AGMACS website is

[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Water/16440/AGMACS](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Water/16440/AGMACS)

## UK Marine Bill White Paper

In 1988, the UK had one marine nature reserve and two others were in negotiation. In 1996 there were three. And ten years later... still only three. Less than 0.002% of our inshore area is currently afforded the total protection of a reserve. A UK Marine Bill could put this right. A UK Marine Bill White Paper was launched by David Miliband, Secretary of State for the Environment, on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007. The proposed bill is long and complex but essentially sets out to “provide a new planning framework” for UK seas through “an integrated approach to managing ecosystems”, “more regulation” and “delivering sustainable development and a better environment”. The white paper can be found at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/marinebill-whitepaper07/marinebill-whitepaper.pdf>.

## Integrated Coastal Zone Management – EU Evaluation

A report *Evaluation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) in Europe* was published at <http://www.rupprecht-consult.eu/iczm/> in February 2007. There is much to be drawn from over 200 pages of text plus another 140 of tables and figures, but key elements include the need for a balance between ecological, social, economic and cultural interests – exactly what our Fair Isle initiative is trying to achieve. The evaluation does state that the EU recommendation on ICZM has initiated a non-reversible process towards integrated coastal management.



Fair Isle yoal at Kirki Geo, Fair Isle.  
Photograph © Elizabeth Riddiford 2007.

## **Outcomes for Fair Isle**

So, there are plenty of developments but what does it all mean for Fair Isle?

### Coastal and Marine National Park

Apparently we are not out of the running for such a designation, but the signs have not been good. Size and accessibility are given as factors counting against us. However, we were not aided by some dubious reporting based on a blatant lack of knowledge and information gathering in Scottish Natural Heritage’s Advice to Ministers. We tried our best to communicate Fair Isle’s values and suitability, engaging in all the consultations and by any other means we could think. We were

hoping to get our message across in person to the SNH officer with responsibility for assessing potential CMNP sites but, despite promises to the contrary, he never made it to the isle. This failure was reflected in the *Scottish Natural Heritage advice on coastal and marine National Parks: Advice to Ministers* published in May 2006. The several positive references in the text of the document were severely undermined by an evaluation Table which scored seven out of eight Fair Isle's values (including natural and cultural heritage) as low and the other (how dependent is the community on natural resources and heritage) as medium. The isle community felt it was a gross misrepresentation of the island's qualities and needs and a letter was sent to SNH by N Riddiford, Chairman of the Fair Isle Committee and Community Association, both objecting to the table and re-evaluating it from an island perspective. This correspondence and the re-evaluation are given in Appendix 2 of this newsletter.

The text of the *Advice to Ministers* did include some positive comments, including that "Fair Isle... [and other] such places could merit further consideration as a new form of locally led management initiative". This is the first time that Fair Isle's aspirations for sustainable marine management have been acknowledged in any official document other than in the succession of Council of Europe Diploma renewal reports.

## SSMEI

What would a locally led management initiative entail, and how does it come about? Engagement in the SSMEI Shetland pilot study seems the best current way forward. FIMETI has been represented on the advisory working group from the start. Leading the study is Dr Lorraine Gray, based at the North Atlantic Fisheries College, Scalloway. Initial work concentrated on pulling together as much maritime information as possible. Any fears that the study would just be a data gathering exercise has been dispelled and the study is already moving towards the development of a draft Shetland Marine Spatial Plan. This is quite a step forward for Scotland because, for the first time, it will give local communities and other previously marginalised stakeholders a voice in the management of the marine resource. Fair Isle would be an ideal place to initiate a sustainable management programme, which takes into account local aspirations.

## The Other initiatives

I read in a magazine recently that environmentalists recognise a "full circle" phenomenon - still talking and writing about the same conservation struggles now as 25 and more years ago. The island community has been asking for sustainable management of our marine resource for 18 years and remains patient as more and more initiatives are launched which examine, consult, discuss and ruminate – but with no obvious practical outcome. The jury is out about whether the plethora of initiatives will lead to implementation of sensible management measures for maritime Fair Isle or the seas generally in Scotland and beyond. However, there does seem to be a one way flow towards this goal at the Shetland, Scotland, UK and international level.

So, is their progress? For Fair Isle the current situation appears to be that we do not fulfil all the criteria for CMNP status, but it is still not entirely ruled out. The community's enthusiastic support for and commitment to CMNPs may yet work in

our favour, particularly as there appears to be strong opposition to such a designation within the current “First List” of sites. Written acknowledgement of the isle’s case for some sort of marine designation should also assure that the issue rises much higher on the agenda; and the argument can only be enhanced by the number of initiatives and recommendations for future wise use of the marine environment. So we have to conclude that there is progress, but it remains painfully slow.



The Holms, Fair Isle.  
Photograph © Elizabeth Riddiford 2007.

## NEWS

### *Fair Isle Wildlife Club*

Fair Isle now has a Wildlife Club. This new venture was prompted partly because Fair Isle is engaging in the preparation of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan and partly through popular interest and demand on the isle. The initiative was taken by Nick Riddiford and was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2006. Only one person attended the first excursion but since then over a quarter of the local community has taken part. The club is aimed primarily at islanders, but is open to all-comers – and incorporated members of the Shetland Field Club on one occasion. Children and adults are equally welcome. Excursions in the first year have included investigation of seaweeds at low tide, the marine life of the rock pools at South Light, North Haven ecology at low tide, the special plants and animals of dry maritime heath (a European Union priority habitat for conservation) and, of course, other terrestrial subjects. Feedback from the isle has been enthusiastically favourable. Reports of the visits are posted on the Fair Isle website [www.fairisle.org.uk](http://www.fairisle.org.uk).



Seaweeds at Sompal, Fair Isle.  
Photograph © Elizabeth Riddiford 2007.

### *MCS Scottish Projects Officer*

The Marine Conservation Society appointed a Scottish Projects Officer at the end of 2006. The Scottish Projects Officer takes charge of a new Scottish initiative called “Cool Seas” which develops educational, interpretative and web-based resources and promotes marine conservation and the work and activities of the Marine Conservation Society to members of the public, schools, industry and government in Scotland. The position also involves support and co-ordination for individual and community involvement in existing MCS projects in Scotland including marine life surveys such as Basking Shark & Turtle Watch, and the Adopt-a-Beach project. FIMETI has established close links with the Marine Conservation Society and is kept informed of MCS activities as it gradually expands its operations in Scotland.

### *Climate Change*

Following reports in the last newsletter of rising sea temperatures and falling salinity, the seas are now confronted with another, largely unheralded threat. In an article in *Nature*, Dr Tundi Agardy stated: “As carbon emissions accelerate global warming, the carbon dioxide contained in those emissions is able to silently yet dramatically reduce the alkalinity of the oceans. And as the pH drops, marine organisms that produce shells and carbonate skeletons grow weak and die off. The discovery that carbon dioxide emissions can lower global ocean pH is very recent, even though chemists and biologists have for long known that when carbon dioxide dissolves in water, carbonic acid results. However, the sheer volume of water in the oceans has always been assumed to be so vast as to be safe from changes in chemical balance brought about by small scale inputs. In effect, it is just plain hard to imagine that atmospheric inputs of any kind could significantly alter the chemical composition and nature of over 1.3 trillion cubic kilometers of ocean water. Thus when intrepid oceanographers and marine ecologists set out to address the question of how changing atmospheric conditions that lead to changes in pH could affect marine life, they raised alarms about the possibilities of very large scale impacts.”

### *Basking Sharks*

The basking shark has been listed on the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species, strengthening protective measures in international waters. This is a welcome move. Basking sharks are beginning to reappear in Fair Isle waters after a long absence. Hopefully, with better protection, Britain’s largest fish will become as common a sight in Fair Isle waters as our whales and dolphins – another bonus for the visitors to our isle.

## Wildlife

### *Seabirds*

Editor's note: the following article by Deryk Shaw, outlining the results of seabird monitoring by Fair Isle Bird Observatory in 2006, first appeared in a recent *Seabird Group* Newsletter.

**Overview:** A much better season than of late with record numbers of some species and lots of chicks produced. There does still seem to be a shortage of 1-group Sandeels at the correct time, however this was partly compensated for by an apparent abundance of Gadoids. Things were not all rosy however as a large number of Snake Pipefish were collected in colonies and from regurgitates of all bird species. These are particularly hard for chicks to swallow and digest and are also low in nutrition. Many are just discarded by chicks.

**Northern Fulmar:** Numbers of AOS on the plots increased by 18.0% from 2005 (and by 95% since 2004) but are still nearly 40% less than 20 years ago. Breeding success was high with a mean productivity of 0.49 (at the five monitoring plots) being the highest since 1995.

**Northern Gannet:** A large increase was noted at the newest colony, on Sheep Rock, from 23 AON to 44 AON. The remaining colonies however were not counted accurately. Similarly, breeding success was not followed efficiently and I have little confidence in the data presented to me. Gannets are therefore unfortunately excluded from this year's analysis.



Northern Gannet on nest, Fair Isle.  
Photograph © Deryk Shaw 2007.  
Courtesy of Fair Isle Bird Observatory.

**European Shag:** Overall numbers of nests at the population plots were the highest since 2001 and a massive 41.2% up on the 2005 figure. Productivity was 1.60, the highest since 2002 and over twice as productive as 2004 & 2005. The few food samples collected consisted predominantly of Sandeel.



European Shag on nest, Fair Isle.  
Photograph © Deryk Shaw 2007.  
Courtesy of Fair Isle bird Observatory.

**Gulls:** Ten pairs of Common Gulls raised eight chicks to fledging – the highest number on record -whilst Herring Gulls and the few pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gulls also fledged the majority of chicks. Gulls seemed to be feeding predominantly on Snake Pipefish with large numbers regurgitated by chicks during handling.

**Skuas:** Surprisingly (following several years of extremely low productivity), both Arctic and Great Skua had a very successful breeding season. A record number (189) of Bonxie pairs set up territories (previous highest was 152 in 1997) and around 180 chicks fledged – a productivity of 0.95. Similarly, 105 Arctic Skua AOT (the highest since the early 1990s) produced 86 chicks to fledging – a productivity of 0.82.



Arctic Skua chick & adult, Fair Isle.  
Photographs © Deryk Shaw 2007.  
Courtesy of Fair Isle Bird  
Observatory.

**Black-legged Kittiwake:** The least successful of all species. Numbers of AON fell by 10.3% compared to 2005 (although still 27% higher than in 2004). Fledging success, whilst better than the complete failures of 2003 & 2004, was quite low. A mean productivity of 0.26 is below the 0.37 recorded in 2005. Productivity during the previous ten years has ranged from 0 – 1.31 (mean 0.54). Many chicks and adults regurgitated Snake Pipefish and these were also evident as discards in nests indicating a lack of availability of favoured food. Butter Fish and Gadoids were also collected but no Sandeels.



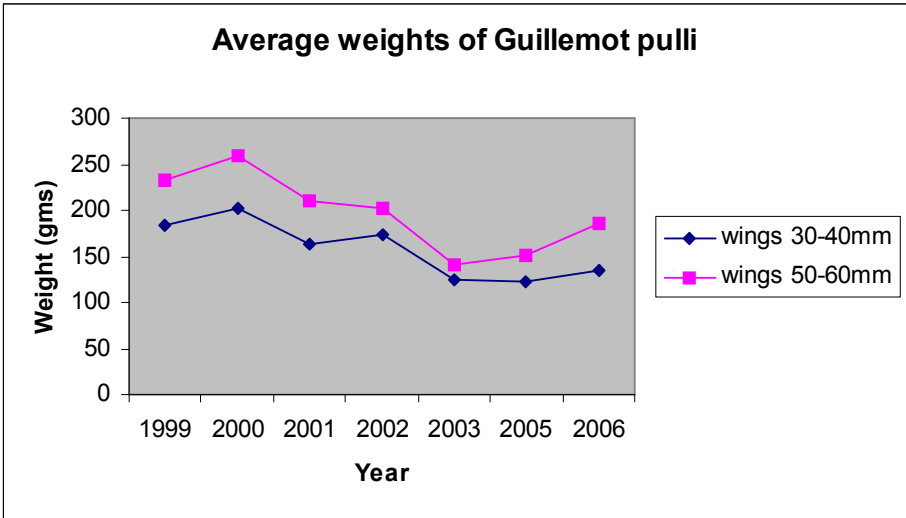
Black-legged Kittiwakes on nests, Fair Isle.  
Photograph © Deryk Shaw 2007.  
Courtesy of Fair Isle Bird Observatory.

**Arctic Tern:** ‘Tirricks’ were the great success story this year. After five consecutive years of failure to fledge any chicks and with numbers of nesting birds dwindling each year, it was a surprise to record over 800 AIA this year and even more surprise that over 300 chicks fledged – a productivity of 0.39. Whilst Sandeels were evident during the courtship period, by the time chicks had hatched adult birds were mainly seen carrying small individuals of other fish species. Samples collected during ringing trips into colonies were almost exclusively 3-spined Stickleback. – but this may have been the species that was discarded by chicks whilst other species were eaten.

**Common Guillemot:** Numbers of attendant adults were similar to the previous year (+4.2%) but numbers apparently laying eggs on the productivity plots were low. Fledging success was 0.57 – the highest since 2002 but well below the previous ten-year (1992 – 2001) average (0.74). Fledging chicks were particularly underweight, which will no doubt affect their future survival chances (see graph below). Feeding watches and collected samples showed that a variety of fish were being fed to chicks. During the 24hr feeding watch in early July, 40% were Sandeels, 26% were Gadoids and 5% Pipefish. Food samples obtained during ringing trips were varied; Lesser sandeel, Pipefish and Gadoids – several individuals of Poor Cod were identified.



Common Guillemots, Fair Isle.  
 Photograph © Deryk Shaw 2007.  
 Courtesy of Fair Isle Bird Observatory.



**Razorbill:** The number of eggs in the breeding-monitoring plot was again (as last year) a new record but fledging success was low. A productivity figure of 0.23 is less than half that of the previous year (0.44) and only the complete failure in 2004 was worse. The ten years prior to these (1994-2003) saw a mean productivity of 0.60. As in recent years, chicks were also very underweight this year with some even losing weight between visits to the colony. The majority of food items collected were Lesser Sandeels (mean length 66.9mm).

**Atlantic Puffin:** Breeding success was particularly low – a productivity of 0.47 is the second worst on record (0.31 in 2001) and some way below the 1990 – 2005 average (0.68). During the 24hr feeding watch 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> July, 43% of feeds were 0-group Sandeels and a further 26% 1-group Sandeels. A significant proportion (21%) were Pipefish, the majority of which would have been discarded by the chicks near the entrance to the burrow. Feeding rates were 4.46 feeds/burrow/day – a below average figure. Food samples collected from adults returning to colonies in July were; 41% Snake Pipefish, 40% Gadoid and just 7.4% Lesser Sandeel (mean length 63mm). During one colony visit a total of 85 discarded Snake Pipefish were retrieved from a *single* burrow!

**Note:** AON = Apparently Occupied Nest. AOS = Apparently Occupied Site



Atlantic Puffin with sandeels, Fair Isle.  
Photograph © Deryk Shaw 2007.  
Courtesy of Fair Isle Bird Observatory.

## *Fish*

Stewart Thomson of Quoy continues to monitor fish abundance. He reported a better abundance of whitefish in 2006 than in other recent years. Though plentiful, most were small in size, at or below legal commercial limits. Stewart put back 50% of whiting *Merlangius merlangus* and 30% of haddock *Melanogrammus aeglefinus* captures for that reason. Commercial boats still sweep through Fair Isle waters from time to time. Stewart estimates that a substantial proportion of their catches would have been dumped as under-sized, a terrible waste of the resource.

*Other fish:* There were few Ling *Lota lota* in 2006. The reasons for this are unknown. Piltocks *Pollachius virens* were abundant and in very good condition, indicating good food availability for them. Snake pipe-fish *Entelurus aequorius* were extremely abundant. Two basking sharks *Cetorhinus maximus* were seen in July. This species was formerly regular in Fair Isle waters then disappeared. In the last few years it has been making a comeback in UK waters. Further monitoring will establish whether the same is the case for Fair Isle.

Only a few years ago, the snake pipe-fish was unknown around this island. How things have changed. Shoals are appearing offshore, and in 2006 it was the commonest food item brought to some seabird chicks. This phenomenon is not confined to Fair Isle. Reports are coming in from throughout western and northern Scotland and the species is now being viewed as a major indicator of the ecological change going on in Scottish waters. The species may have replaced the sandeel – which remains scarce – but it is hardly a replacement for the hard-working seabirds. The pipe-fish is of low calorific value and too tough any way to digest, judging by the numbers rejected by chicks at the nest site.

Snake pipe-fish are set to become even more abundant in 2007. The October 2006 Marine Biological Association Newsletter reports record numbers of juveniles in the north-eastern Atlantic plankton, as measured by the Continuous Plankton Recorder scheme. “A warmer North Atlantic due to global climate change may be the cause of this pipefish baby boom. In pipefish it is males that incubate the eggs on a special part of their abdomen but brooding males cannot mate with females. Therefore, female pipefish compete among each other for access to mates so in pipefish the traditional roles are reversed. At warmer temperatures egg incubation time is shortened so males can brood more clutches in a season, which affects female-female competition and the number of pipefish that are born” (Richard Kirby, MBA News No. 36).

One unusual event in 2006 occurred when two yachtsmen who had tied up in North Haven took an inflatable craft round the nearby cliffs. A sudden severe jolt to their craft was followed by the deflation of one of the craft's panels. They limped back to North Haven where islanders were able to confirm from teeth marks on the craft that they had been attacked by a shark, possibly a porbeagle *Lamna nasus*. Presumably the shark mistook the boat for one of the plentiful seals in the vicinity!

### *Shellfish*

Iain Stout of Setter, Fair Isle, continued to monitor Fair Isle shellfish stocks. He reported that lobsters *Homarus gammarus* were the scarcest ever recorded for the isle and on most occasions sets of creels produced single or nil captures. This was despite no large commercial boat visiting during the year. The reason for the general absence was unknown. However, there were some sea temperature anomalies during the year. In January-February and again from July through to the end of the year, monthly temperatures were 1°C or more above the long-term average. March-June were very close to long-term averages, though considerably cooler than the trend in recent years. These trends will inevitably have impacts on food chains and the ecosystem both in the sea and on land, though understanding these impacts will require a run of data for a considerable period of years.

## Sea Mammals

Both Atlantic grey seals *Halichoerus grypus* and common seals *Phoca vitulina* continue to be abundant and, to the delight of visitors, easy to observe and photograph. Cetacean observations during 2006 included sperm whale *Physeter catodon*, minke whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* and killer whales *Orcinus orca*.



Common seals, Fair Isle.  
Photograph © Elizabeth Riddiford 2007.



Orcas (Killer Whales), Fair Isle.  
Photograph © Deryk Shaw 2007.  
Courtesy of Fair Isle Bird Observatory.

### *The Oysterplant Mertensia maritima colony*

The oysterplant colony on the shingle shore of Muckle Uri Geo continues to thrive thanks to the protective measures undertaken by Fair Isle Bird Observatory. In 2006, the density of plants within the two fenced enclosures erected by FIBO staff was the greatest it has ever been. Plants are now so crowded that it is getting increasingly difficult to make an accurate census of individual plants. Basing the annual census on “rosettes” of emerging stalks, N Riddiford arrived at a minimum of 138 mature plants, all of which were at least 30 cm and a number over a metre across. There was good recruitment too, new plants in 2006 totalling 58, including 8 outside the enclosures. So the total for 2006 was 196 – a conservative estimate.

The fencing also provided shelter for a single Scots Lovage *Ligusticum scoticum*, a species previously only recorded from cliff sites inaccessible to sheep.

## Acknowledgements

FIMETI gratefully acknowledges the support, including financial, derived from the Scottish Natural Heritage-National Trust for Scotland concordat. Shetland MSP Tavish Scott and Green MSP for the Highlands and Islands Eleanor Scott continued to champion our cause in the Scottish Parliament and with the Scottish Executive. Our thanks to them, all the contributors to this newsletter and our many supporters both on and off the isle. Thanks, too, to Deryk Shaw, Fair Isle Bird Observatory, the JNCC and the Seabird Group for the summary of seabird breeding in 2006.

## Appendix 1 Response to Shetland Islands Council Planning Service consultation on Shetland as a CMNP

*Editor's note:* the following text, by Stewart Thomson, Quoy, is a good example of the efforts being made by members of the Fair Isle community to draw attention to the need for sustainable management of our marine resource

Fair Isle's population has, for the last fifteen years, been trying to promote regulation of fishing around the island, and I know and appreciate that this does not sit well with some of the fishermen's federations, but I shall try to respond to the questions, which ask for our views.

I think a Marine Park could certainly help Shetland to develop in a more sustainable way. We have an extremely diverse coastline with opportunities for diving, boat tours and bird watching, all of which are very important on a national and global scale. To keep this healthy we do need regulation and proper management. Shetland's environment does need protection. I know that Shetland Islands Council is aware of our ecological heritage, but I also appreciate the need to keep employment levels high. A balance needs to be found, and the input of local community members experienced in the logistics of petitioning for National Park status would surely be beneficial. I was Fair Isle delegate at a conference in Finland which took us around the Archipelago Biosphere Reserve, off the south west coast. I was particularly impressed at a presentation by the fishery college in Turku, which is setting up training courses throughout the Ostrobothnians region. The courses are based on traditional fishing methods, and the emphasis is on sustainability. Only half of the Reserve is a National Park with a 'no take' zone.

I have also had discussions with fishermen in New Zealand during a visit there. Having read an official report by the Department of Conservation prior to arriving, I was keen to hear the views of those at grass roots level. Initially doubtful of the validity of closing down large areas of fishing ground and concerned this would lead to the collapse of the industry, the local fishermen are seeing the benefits as both quantity and quality of catches have increased dramatically. I do believe that if similar schemes were to be ventured round Shetland, the benefits to our coastline would be substantial.

Marketing is obviously important, and surely any environmental protection initiative taken by Shetland would promote positive publicity. I also think that the development of a Marine Park would benefit present service industries and encourage the expansion of tourism by widening the provision of boat and bird tours, catering, accommodation and transport, thus also benefiting local infrastructure and population.

The ideal in inaugurating such a scheme is obviously one in which each decision is taken only after discussion in each area with those most involved. There are many diverse traditions and aspirations throughout Shetland and a blanket decision will not suit everyone, but I still take the view that to preserve Shetland's ecology for our own benefit and the benefit of the world as a whole, a National Park or Biosphere Reserve could be a good place to begin.

**Appendix 2 Re-evaluation of *Scottish Natural Heritage advice on coastal and marine National Parks: Advice to Ministers*, Table 5 - from a Fair Isle viewpoint**

The following text, prompted by perceived inaccuracies in Table 5 of the report *Scottish Natural Heritage advice on coastal and marine National Parks: Advice to Ministers* (SNH, 2006), was drawn up by Nick Riddiford (FIMETI) and sent to the SNH Director of Strategy and Operations (East), Andrew Bachell, in October 2006.

Based on 18 years of working with the Fair Isle community on this hugely important part of our environmental and cultural heritage, I offer a re-evaluation from the island perspective, as follows:

Issue	SNH Stage 3 scoring	Fair Isle re-evaluation
1) Is the natural and cultural heritage under threat?	<b>LOW</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
2) What is the scale/significance of recreational visitor pressures?	<b>LOW</b>	<b>LOW</b>
3) What is the scale/significance of development and land-sea use pressures?	<b>LOW</b>	<b>HIGH (sea use pressures)</b>
4) What is the potential to enhance the natural and cultural heritage?	<b>LOW</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
5) What is the potential to enhance enjoyment & recreation?	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>
6) How significant are the conflicts and interactions between development and land-sea uses?	<b>LOW</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
7) To what extent would the more integrated approach of a Park provide for better management?	<b>LOW</b>	<b>POTENTIALLY HIGH</b>
8) How dependent is the economy on the use of the natural resources and heritage of the area?	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH</b>

You will see that there is a large discrepancy between the two evaluations. One reason for this is, despite **repeated requests from the isle and repeated promises from the SNH evaluator, the isle received no visit** or other opportunity for detailed face to face consultation at the community level (other than an SNH Shetland officers' visit, and they stressed that we had to make all the running!).

In support of the re-evaluation, I have drawn up a point by point commentary (see below). Please note that this is only a brief summary of the most important issues. The many other Fair Isle maritime qualities that contribute to the natural and cultural environment of Scotland, and the environmental, social and economic values which are integral to the long-term viability of this island, are set out in the document *Safeguarding Our Heritage – the Fair Isle marine resource: a community proposal for its sustainable management* (Riddiford, 1998. Fair Isle Community Association, Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, & The National Trust for Scotland, Fair Isle & Inverness). This document not only describes Fair Isle's maritime values but puts

forward a blueprint proposal for sustainable management. It has been widely distributed, including to yourself. The matters pertaining in 1998 still pertain now. I will happily make more copies of this document available to anyone who requests it (write to [nick.riddiford@lineone.net](mailto:nick.riddiford@lineone.net)).

### Reasoning behind the Fair Isle re-evaluation

- 1) Is the natural and cultural heritage under threat? *SNH assessment LOW; Fair Isle re-assessment HIGH*

Fair Isle has internationally important seabird populations, yet the Special Protection Area for Birds intended to maintain and enhance their populations is restricted to the cliffs and moorland where they breed. Virtually all the seabird populations have suffered a long succession of poor to disastrous breeding seasons and population levels are beginning to fall. The sea, where the birds feed and from which they provision their chicks, is not protected. By excluding this essential habitat for local breeders, the SPA is not achieving its conservation objectives, and thus is failing in its obligations as laid down in the European Directive.

Fair Isle is a maritime community with a long and well researched cultural history, skilfully interpreted at the island's George Waterston Memorial Centre & Museum. It has a history of important coastal and submarine archaeological sites. The important terrestrial ones are designated and thus protected, but as with the birds, there is no provision for protection of offshore sites.

Fair Isle's natural history interest is not restricted to birds. Riddiford (1998) lists a whole series of other notable wildlife features of national and international significance.

The people of Fair Isle are part of the natural and cultural heritage, and feel under threat at a longer time scale, if nothing is done to address the issue of sustainable resource management for the marine resource.

Fair Isle has held the Diploma of the Council of Europe since 1985. In consecutive renewals, the Council of Europe has reiterated the natural and cultural importance of Fair Isle and the urgent need to safeguard its marine environment through a series of measures. The Council of Ministers, in signing the renewal documents, clearly recognises that Fair Isle's maritime natural and cultural heritage is under threat. The Fair Isle community has the right to ask why Scotland/UK, as an integral member of the Council of Europe has not acted upon this.

- 2) What is the scale/significance of recreational visitor pressures? *SNH assessment LOW; Fair Isle re-assessment LOW*

A high proportion of visits to the isle or by folk using its waters would be described as recreational. However, it is the experience of the island that these folk are generally both respectful to and appreciative of our high quality cultural and natural environment. Hence I have no argument with the SNH assessment of *low*.

### 3) What is the scale/significance of development and land-sea use pressures?

Development is not currently an issue for the isle, but “sea use” is...and has been for more than a century. The booklet *Fishing Traditions of Fair Isle* (Perring, 2003. Fair Isle Marine Environment & Tourism Initiative, Fair Isle) owes its existence to a series of diaries kept by Fair Islanders which gives clear evidence of the unsustainable plundering of fish stocks from Fair Isle waters throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a tale of stock after stock disappearing and boats shifting their attention to the next most commercially valuable stock thereafter. Advances in technology meant that bigger, faster commercial boats could steam to Fair Isle waters and return their catch fresh to market. Stocks which previously had sustained a subsistence fishing community on the isle were swept away (illegally!); and without the intervention of George Waterston and The National Trust for Scotland, and the determination of the community to “re-invent” itself economically, Fair Isle could have gone the way of St Kilda. The final straw for the island’s fish stocks came with the repeal of the Herring Fisheries (Scotland) act in 1984 which for the previous 101 years had made trawling in inshore waters illegal. They came, they took and it is now a rare sight to see trawlers around the isle. The isle still has large fish stocks, massive shoals of commercial fish. Unfortunately, these are predominantly juveniles and the islanders get angry as they see masses of pre-commercial sized fish hoovered up and then returned as by-catch...with the huge wasteful mortality that entails.

### 4) What is the potential to enhance the natural and cultural heritage?

There is immense potential for enhancing both. Fair Isle Bird Observatory is a field station of world-wide fame and acclaim. It has both field staff and a ranger. It not only draws together vital information on the natural heritage (including being the most important station, in range of species and suites of data, of the UK government’s Seabird Monitoring Scheme, which acts as a litmus for the health of our seas), but it also integrates visitors to the island and residents alike into its activities.

The isle community also offers high quality knowledge on a range of natural and cultural subjects; and indeed, this has been tapped through the organisation, by FIBO, of “island insights” weeks and other communal events open to all - in which islanders are engaged to lead or perform.

There is also a high level of artisanal skills and products on the isle, many of them reflecting Fair Isle’s maritime traditions.

### 5) What is the potential to enhance enjoyment & recreation?

Apart from the activities described in point 4 above, one can cite music, art and literature. The isle has always had a strong tradition in those areas, and is currently enjoying a real boom with music CDs, poetry books, musical events and collaborations with other artists, musicians and writers happening on a very frequent basis.

There is also a lot of potential for a range of outdoor activities.

I do however acknowledge that size and characteristics inevitably place limitations on maritime recreational possibilities, so I have selected an evaluation of *Medium*.

6) How significant are the conflicts and interactions between development and land-sea uses?

The gradual erosion of fish stocks has been mentioned in point 3 above. The community has attempted to address this through engagement with all stakeholders and users of the local marine resource. This was done through the setting up of the Fair Isle Marine Partnership. FIMP was established specifically to promote discussion and seek agreement on management measures for Fair Isle waters. Meetings took place on a six-monthly basis from the late 1990s at the SNH office in Lerwick. The meetings were chaired by Anthony Bryant (NTS). Representatives attended from SNH (Lerwick), Shetland Islands Council, The Shetland Fishermen's Association, North Atlantic Fisheries College, FIBOT and the RSPB. Fiona Mitchell (then chair of the Fair Isle Community Association) and myself (representing FIMETI) attended from the isle. We came each time with proposals which initially were greeted with enthusiasm and apparent general support. However, each meeting appeared to follow the same pattern: two hours of positive discussion, but culminating with the SFA representative stating that the proposal was interesting but he could not see his members signing up to it.

As our visits to Shetland were costing myself and Fiona both time and money we saw no point in continuing such a barren process and there has not been a FIMP meeting for over 3 years. The message that we had to put back to the isle was that, despite our best endeavours, the community continued to have no say whatsoever in the management of its waters.

Another similar conflict has occurred over lobster fishing. In 2000-01 FIMETI undertook a study to ascertain a sustainable level of lobster fishing for the isle, and the sole island lobster fisherman keeps rigidly to the protocol derived from that study. Lobster fishing in Shetland is governed by the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation which issues licences to those who can demonstrate a track record of shell-fishing in Shetland Waters. The isle fisherman holds this licence, but so too does an Orkney boat which in a single visit exhausts the stock, leaving it a long time to recover. To fish unsustainably is not, in the eyes of the islanders, acceptable "management"!

We are now engaged in the Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative as part of the SSMEI Shetland pilot study working-group. Conflict resolution is one of the themes of the Shetland study. Time has moved on and we may yet have the opportunity to make some progress in conflict resolution. However, the fact remains that this is still only a discussion topic and we need some sort of designation supported by a sustainable management system if we are to make any real progress in this area.

7) To what extent would the more integrated approach of a Park provide for better management?

I have entered *Potentially High* for this point because there is no doubt that a CMNP would *have the potential* to bring with it a sustainable management programme which would safeguard the very resources the community recognises as in urgent need of protection. However, a designation unaccompanied by the requisite management measures and the means to apply and enforce them would leave us (and our marine environment) no better off; not least because further pleas for sustainable management might risk being countered by “you have got your CMNP, why are you still complaining”!

8) How dependent is the economy on the use of the natural resources and heritage of the area?

Our community was declining alarmingly until George Waterston made the wise choice, in 1948, to establish a bird observatory on the isle. The community’s well-being was further secured in 1954 when The National Trust for Scotland took responsibility for the isle, in recognition of its cultural as well as its natural values. The bird observatory continues to play a vital role in the economic as well as the social life of the isle. Without it, the island shop and transport links to the isle would be at serious risk; and visitors to the isle fuel the island economy (and social life) in many other ways too – of which purchase of the famous knitwear and other Fair Isle artisanal products are just one immediately recognisable example.

The comments which support my re-evaluation are relatively extensive, but could be much longer. They do, however, add detail to my assertions and ask serious questions about the value of Table 5 as it currently stands in the document. I hope that the table does not do us irreparable damage and that we will at long last see our aspirations and needs given the urgent priority they deserve.

*Nick Riddiford, Fair Isle*