



Alderney Bird Observatory RAMSAR ringing return for 2021

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The seabird ringing program on Alderney and its offshore islets began in the 1940's, historically undertaken by the Channel Islands Bird Ringing Scheme, almost exclusively by bird ringers travelling from Guernsey to complete this important research work. Since 2016 through the ABO, Alderney has had its own resident bird ringers qualified to manage the seabird ringing program, with each passing year the ABO has strived to develop and improve the methodology and best practice in obtaining this important data. At the same time as introducing these changes, minimising disturbance to our seabird colonies. Increasing numbers of UK based ringers now travel to Alderney annually to assist with this work offering skills and experience, combined with the wealth of local expertise and knowledge contributed by ringers from across the Channel Islands, the ABO led research teams continue to achieve high standards of scientific data collection. Heading into 2021 each of the scheduled trips were fully-booked with licenced bird ringers, mostly by those unable to visit from the UK last year due to the pandemic, an exciting rich mix of experience and enthusiasm set to gather the latest data researching and understanding our seabird colonies. Sadly, UK based ringers once again faced frustration as they did in 2020. With the possibility of travel to Alderney from the UK looking highly unlikely at best, it was prudent to arrange for local bird ringers from the Channel Islands Bird Ringing Scheme (CIBRS) to make up the research teams required.

The ringing of Gannet chicks on Les Etacs has been carried out by representatives of the Channel Islands ringing scheme almost annually since 1945, in 2018 the local seabird ringers who have completed the task many times in recent decades expressed concerns that the density of the colony and size of the nests has reached a stage where it is no longer safe for bird ringers to climb this rock. A review of how the ringing of the chicks on Les Etacs has been suggested by the ABO and the CIBRS to look at options addressing ways to improve the safety of the ringers so that future landing on Les Etacs can resume. Ortac rock, facilitating the slightly smaller Gannet colony to the north west of Les Etacs is altogether a much easier proposition, though landing can be tricky, moving around the rock is significantly easier.

The following information concerns the bird ringing effort towards Seabirds and Shorebirds situated within the designated official Alderney RAMSAR site (see Fig 1).

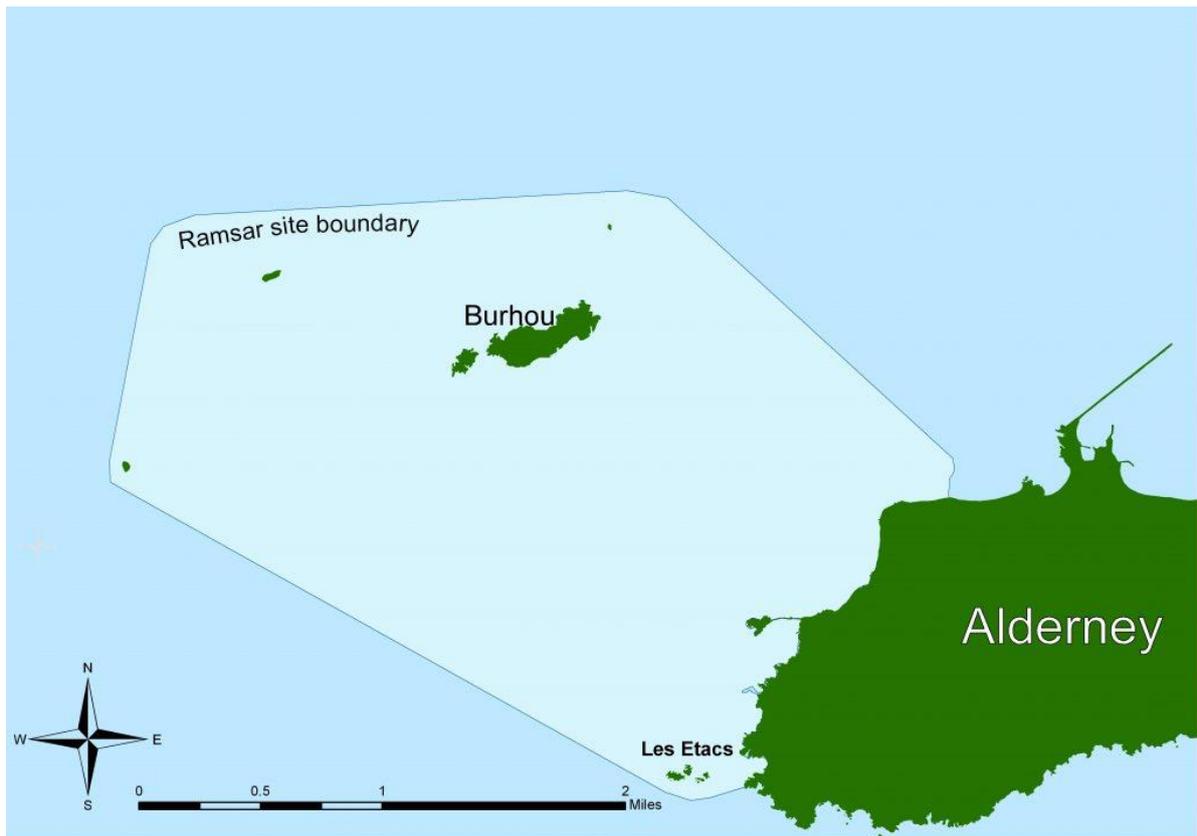


Fig 1. Alderney RAMSAR area

This season began very positively with a landing on Little Burhou in April targeting the Cormorant colony. The recent Euring conference chaired by the BTO identified 'ring reads of colour rings in the field' as largely responsible for a huge increase data submitted in recent years so we were delighted to re-establish the colour ringing of the Cormorant chicks this year. Visiting Ortac and the small auk colony on Coq Lihou also went ahead this year ahead of the ringing the Storm Petrel and Lesser black backed Gull colonies on the Island of Burhou. A short visit to Coque Lihou in June was very productive indeed, 30 Shag pulli were ringed and this year there were 12 active Lesser black backed Gull nests, some with chicks old enough ring. Ortac was not such a positive venture, the numbers of chicks were significantly down on previous years.

In an effort to reduce disturbance during the birds breeding season on Burhou we combined the ringing of the Petrel and Gull colonies into one single visit. The workload involved in this task is such that the trip was made three nights instead of two, apart from the obvious benefits of reducing disturbance by only visiting the island once, this move also significantly cut costs and presented the research team with an extra night which greatly enhances the chance of fulfilling the two-night standardised Petrel ringing program. The moon phase is of course a critical factor in deciding the forward dates for Petrel ringing, when possible the remarkable success achieve this year should be repeated where the lunar cycle overlaps that of the optimal time to ring the Gull chicks. This year we were truly fortunate with the weather and our team managed to process 657 Storm Petrels, this total including 191 local re-traps and 9 foreign controls (see Fig 2.) The latter mostly made up from UK ringed birds along with one French ringed individual. In previous recent years records of French ringed birds have been prominent (amongst controls), one wonders if the drop in French ringed birds is related to the pandemic which may have temporarily curtailed the French operations.

Location	Method	Capture type	Species	Ring number	Scheme	Date	Time	Age	Sex	Mlt	Wing	Weight	Fat	Pec	Initial
Burhou	Mist net	Control	Storm Petrel	2761208	UK	15.07.21	23	4		O	128	30			PV
Burhou	Mist net	Control	Storm Petrel	2699064	UK	15.07.21	23	4		O	127	25.8			MS
Burhou	Mist net	Control	Storm Petrel	2673323	UK	16.07.21	0	4		O	122	28.3			MS
Burhou	Mist net	Control	Storm Petrel	2699099	UK	17.07.21	23	4		O	121	30.8			PV
Burhou	Mist net	Control	Storm Petrel	2699175	UK	17.07.21	23	4		O	124	25.6			PV
Burhou	Mist net	Control	Storm Petrel	SE36806	PARIS	17.07.21	23	4		O	125	28.3			PV
Burhou	Mist net	Control	Storm Petrel	2714416	UK	17.07.21	23	4		O	127	33.4			PV
Burhou	Mist net	Control	Storm Petrel	2699145	UK	18.07.21	0	4		O	126	28.2			PV
Burhou	Mist net	Control	Storm Petrel	2607381	UK	18.07.21	0	6	M	O	126	30			JH

Fig 2. Foreign Control Storm Petrels processed on Burhou Island 2021

Of The ‘controlled’ birds the French individual was originally ringed as pulli on 27/07/20 at Le Conquet (France, Finistère,) a location at which we have now seen movement between the two colonies annually since 2016. The UK ringed birds consisted of four from Portland Bill Dorset – first ringed in 2017/18/19 & 21’ respectively. The other four records were all from Cornwall, three first ringed at The Lizard in 2012/16 & 19’ and one from Gwennap Head ringed in 2019. The birds we encounter ringed outside of the Channel Islands are beginning to build an intriguing picture in terms of the dispersal of this species indicating the distances the birds may be travelling to feed.

Subsequent to our visit to Burhou in July one Petrel ringed by the ABO team on Burhou on the 17/07/21 later processed by the Irish ringing scheme just 5 days later moving 405km to Little Saltee Island, Wexford, Ireland. (See fig 2) An fascinating movement for this individual, especially given the timing, these birds being on the verge of nesting.

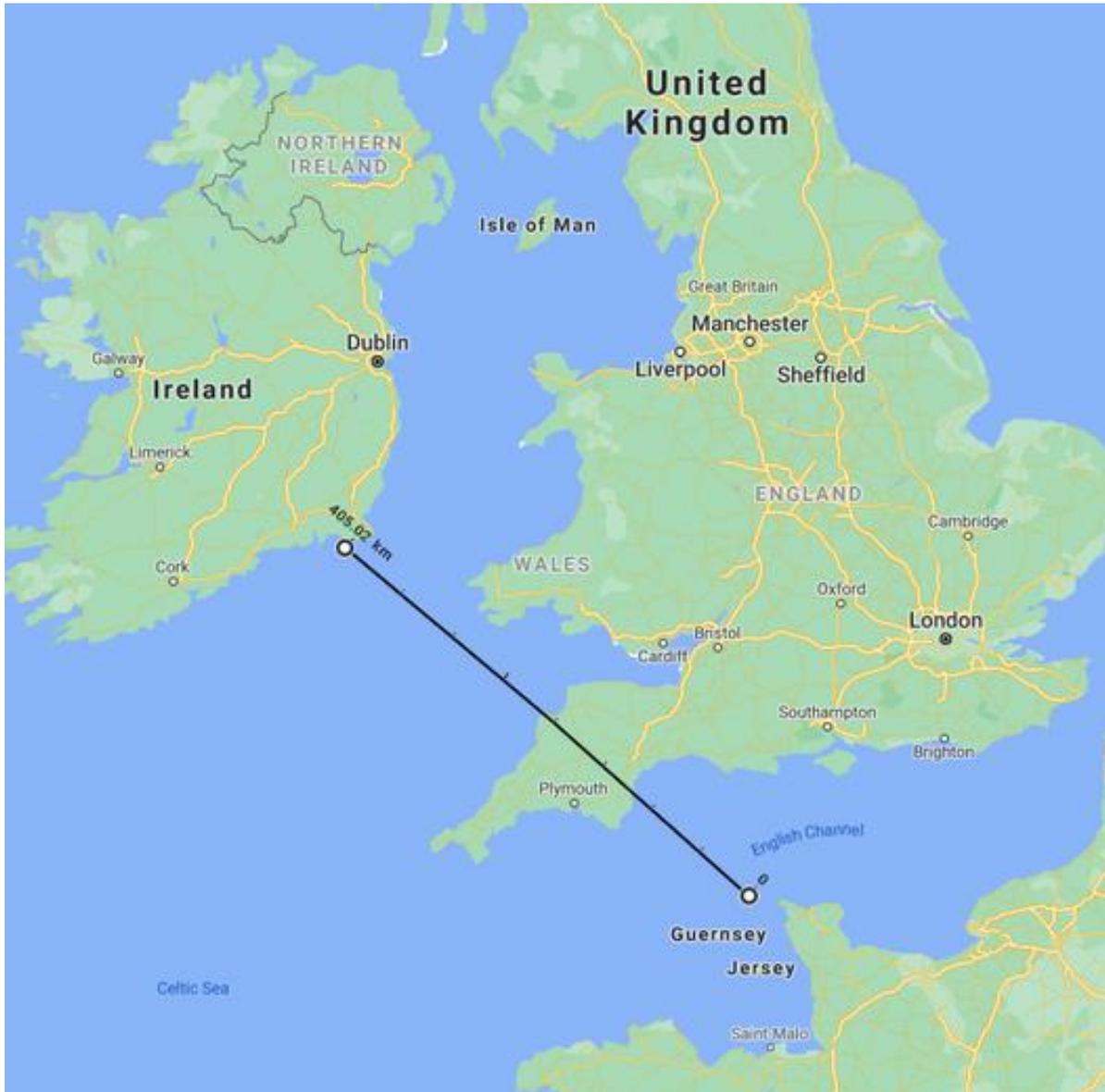


Fig 3. Google maps showing movement of Alderney ringed Storm Petrel travelling 405km in 5 days

For continuity of annual records and standardised data return, the ringing of the Storm Petrels (when conditions allow) begins at the north-east end of the island at a dedicated mapped location. This is a large colony, and two or three nets are quite sufficient to keep a team of experienced ringers employed non-stop until 4am. Constant monitoring is required to ensure that the number of birds do not exceed the capability of the ringing team. The sites are exposed to the elements and equally close attention must be given to the weather conditions ensuring that the welfare of the birds is both paramount and maintained at all times until closing the mist nets about an hour ahead of dawn. Our second standardised Petrel ringing location is at the opposite end of the island.



Fig 4 Members of the 2021 seabird research team processing Storm Petrels. (Photo John Horton)

Once again, the large numbers of Rock Pipits present were noted, this species is invariably the first bird of the evening to be ringed (and was again this year). Rock Pipit does exceptionally well as a breeding bird on Burhou and each year there are well in excess of fifty individuals present come July. It is a species that through lack of study on an international scale has received precious little research attention resulting in minimal baseline data, one scientific authority referring to Rock Pipit as 'The Grey man' of British birds. Undoubtedly there is local dispersal of these birds across the Channel Islands aside of the more significant migration movements of this species. Though not a rare bird or in significant decline, it is arguably just as important to understand why a species is doing well as it is to learn why a species may be in decline. For example, there is annually significant research and resources put into researching Alderneys Gannet colony, a species steadily increasing in numbers. The ABO will be submitting a request to the new independent RAMSAR panel of experts (once appointed) and hope to be granted the opportunity to obtain more data on these 'forgotten' birds.

Exciting news received by the Channel Islands ringing scheme concerned one re-trapped Storm Petrel from this year that was first ringed by Channel Islands Bird Ringing Scheme ringer J. Hooper 16/07/2000, processed by ABO Asst warden M. Scragg 16/07/2021 the bird exactly 21yrs old to the day! Current Euring longevity records show this is the second oldest ever recorded.

This was the ABO's 6th year recording the productivity of the Lesser black backed Gull colony. Our timing was good, and the team managed to colour ring over two hundred individuals, the best return to date. Several of these birds have already been reported hundreds of miles south in Spain and Portugal as the head to favoured wintering grounds. Incidental pulli ringing accrued 5 Herring Gull chicks, 6 Shags, 1 Oystercatcher and 2 White Wagtails.

Other seabirds ringed on Alderney outside of the designated RAMSAR area this year were:

Storm Petrel; 61 ringed between 8th June and 4th August. Oystercatcher 1, Dunlin 4, Ringed plover 5, Herring Gull 13 and Lesser black-backed 2. Our Petrel ringing on mainland Alderney in recent years has extended the first arrival and latest departure dates of Alderneys Storm Petrels and 2021 saw Lesser black backed Gull nesting on mainland Alderney for the third consecutive year (this species not recorded as breeding on mainland Alderney pre-2019).

Ring reads in the field again heavily featured locally colour ringed Gulls, the ABO team returned over two hundred separate sightings this year, the pick of these perhaps a 'white on blue' colour-ring on an adult Lesser black backed Gull that I came across on Crabby Bay 30th September. It transpired that the bird was ringed at a rehab centre in Portugal. It is especially important to be able to show the successes of rehab centres and to demonstrate one of the many benefits that colour ringing brings to research and conservation. The ring fitted to the bird was **BLUE M:326**, a metal ring GC09084 (British metal ring – ringed at Lady Isle, South Ayrshire, Great Britain, on the 12 of June of 2005), the color ring added in the rehabilitation center ECOMARE, in Ílhavo, Portugal, and released at 31 of December of 2019. And here he is below clearly doing very well !



Lesser-black backed Gull – *Larus fuscus* 30/09/21 Crabby Bay Alderney (photo John Horton)

Amongst the most interesting colour ringed birds spotted this year was an individual seen during the observatory daily census; a Ringed Plover on Alderney 12th April had an interesting combination of colour rings, Communications with our European ringing scheme counterparts brought us the news that this bird is part of a research program targeting productivity of this species in Iceland (see fig 6) The bird was found and photographed by ABO spring migration assistant Chris Bale.



Fig 5 Image of Ring Plover – *Charadrius haiticula* Photo Chris Bale

Plovers

species:

Common Ringed Plover

scientific name:

Charadrius hiaticula

notes:

Combination of 4 c-rings, 1 on each tarsus, 1 on each tibia.

note 1 : this scheme in use since 2006.

note 2 : c-ring on left tibia is either green, white, red or yellow.

note 3 : c-ring on right tibia or either tarsus is white, green, lime, black, red or yellow.

note 4 : metal ring can be on either tibia.

email sighting submit:

icelandwader@gmail.com

colour-ring type:

Legrings : combination of uncoded.

countries where ringed:

Iceland.

Fig 6 Data return for Ringed Plover from Iceland

Overall, 2021 was one of the best seabird and shorebird ringing returns on record contributing valuable data to the States of Alderney RAMSAR program. The Burhou Island visits went particularly well and for these were delighted to include the experience of long standing CIBRS ringer and RAMSAR committee member Paul Veron. The 2022 season will hopefully allow us to facilitate some of the backlog of UK based bird ringers hoping to volunteer their time helping the ABO with the 2022 annual RAMSAR seabird & shorebird ringing return.

Thankyou to all of the CIBRS ringers and helpers for volunteering on the various research teams that enabled this year's comprehensive seabird/shorebirds ringing return.

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Species: Storm Petrel – *Hydrobates pelagicus*

- Date: 15th-18th July
- Location: Burhou Island
- Number of people involved in ringing: 6 (5 licenced ringers & 1 helper/scribe)
- Time on island 2.30pm 15th to mid-day 18th.
- Time spent ringing (i.e., start time when each net was opened and end time when each net was closed) Session 1 (10pm 15th – 1am 16th), Session 2 (10pm 16th – 3am 17th) & Session 3 10pm 17th – 3am 18th.
- Capture method – Mist netting
- Number of nets: Session 1 (2), Session 2 (3), Session 3 (3).
- Length of nets (if used) Session 2 (36m), Session 2 (57m), Session 3 (57m).
- Net locations (coordinates, if used) Session 1 (Grid ref 49.731241, -2.252612), Session 2 (Grid ref 49.73155, -2.24818) Session 3 (Grid ref 49.73061, -2.25572).
- Number of birds caught/ringed: 457
- Number of controls (if applicable): 9
- Number of retraps (if applicable): 191
- Number of casualties/injured bird: 0
- Any additional information e.g., observations, any additional things recorded such as biometrics etc.

Prevailing Wind : Session 1 (N 7mph trough to NE 11mph) Session 2 (N 2mph through to NE 3mph). Session 3 (NE 8mph through to NE 15mph).

Sunset: Session 1 (21:11), Session 2 (21:10) Session 3 (21:09)

Relative Humidity (requested by AWT) 15th (84%), 16th (82-84%), 17th (85-89%).

Temperature (at time ringing commenced) 15th (17C), 16th (16C) 17th(16C)

- Species: Gannet – *Morus bassanus*
- Date: 15th July
- Location: Ortac
- Number of people involved in ringing: 4 licenced ringers
- Time on island: 0705 hrs- 0820

- Time spent ringing (i.e., start time when each net was opened and end time when each net was closed) N/A 1hr 15mins
- Capture method: By hand
- Number of nets (if used) N/A
- Length of nets (if used) N/A
- Net locations (coordinates, if used) N/A
- Number of birds caught/ringed: 182
- Number of controls (if applicable)N/A
- Number of retraps (if applicable)N/A
- Number of casualties/injured bird: 9 birds were cut free from fishing line and or plastic, 11 moribund/perished chicks were noted.
- Any additional information e.g., observations, any additional things recorded such as biometrics etc...: Whilst some chicks were recently hatched the majority of the birds were mobile, whilst 'ideal' visit times are hard to pin down as they vary from year to year, it may be prudent to visit Ortac a few days earlier next year. The number of chicks present was significantly down on last year, we thought by as much as 40%.

Species: Lesser-black backed Gull - *Larus fuscus*

- Date: 15th-18th July
- Location: Burhou
- Number of people involved in ringing: 6 (5 licenced ringers 1 helper/scribe)
- Time on island: 2.30pm 15th to mid-day 18th.
- Time spent ringing (i.e., start time when each net was opened and end time when each net was closed): Approx. 15th-1700hrs-1900hrs. 16th 0700hrs-1100hrs, 17th 1100hrs-1200hrs & 1700hrs-1900hrs.
- Capture method: By hand
- Number of nets (if used)N/A
- Length of nets (if used)N/A
- Net locations (coordinates, if used)N/A
- Number of birds caught/ringed: 203
- Number of controls (if applicable): N/A
- Number of retraps (if applicable) – All ring 'reads in the field' data were placed on the Guernsey Gulls website managed by Paul Veron.

- Number of casualties/injured bird. Zero injuries as a result of ringing. 14 dead emaciated chicks discovered amongst the colony, most appeared to have been predated.
- Any additional information e.g., observations, any additional things recorded such as biometrics etc...: Only 5 eggs from 3 nests, all likely addled and unattended given the advanced stage of growth of the chicks ringed that this year only saw 2 birds considered too small to ring. This would indicate that this year the chosen visit date again good timing in terms of the growth stage of the chicks ringed.

- Species: Lesser-black backed Gull - *Larus fuscus*

Date: 15/06/21

- Location: Coque-Lihou
- Number of people involved in ringing: 2 licenced ringers
- Time on island: 0815hrs- 0945hrs
- Time spent ringing (i.e., start time when each net was opened and end time when each net was closed): 5mins
- Capture method: By hand
- Number of nets (if used)N/A
- Length of nets (if used)N/A
- Net locations (coordinates, if used)N/A
- Number of birds caught/ringed: 5 (from 3 nests)
- Number of controls (if applicable):0
- Number of retraps (if applicable)N/A
- Number of casualties/injured bird. 0
- Any additional information e.g., observations, any additional things recorded such as biometrics etc...: 9 further nests all contained unhatched eggs, one chick too small to ring.

- Species: Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Date: 29/04/2021

- Location: Little Burhou Island
- Number of people involved in ringing: 8 (5 licensed ringers & 3 helpers)
- Time on island 12.55hrs – 1630hrs
- Time spent ringing (i.e., start time when each net was opened and end time when each net was closed) 12 minutes.

- Capture method: By hand
- Number of nets:2
- Length of nets: 18m x2
- Net locations: N/A
- Number of birds caught/ringed:11
- Number of controls (if applicable) N/A
- Number of retraps (if applicable): N/A
- Number of casualties/injured bird: N/A
- Any additional information e.g., observations, any additional things recorded such as biometrics etc. There were 9 nests in total and 3 birds too small to ring. The colony had moved position against previous years facilitating a rise in the number of nests. The new location (that has apparently been used historically by the Cormorants) is easier to access for the research team allowing us to quickly corral the birds minimising disturbance to the colony. The size of the team was just about perfect.
- Species: Razorbill - *Alca torda*
- Date: 15/05/21
- Location: Coque-Lihou
- Number of people involved in ringing: 2 licenced ringers
- Time on island: 0815hrs- 0945hrs
- Time spent ringing (i.e., start time when each net was opened and end time when each net was closed) : 5 mins
- Capture method: By hand
- Number of nets (if used) N/A
- Length of nets (if used) N/A
- Net locations (coordinates, if used) N/A
- Number of birds caught/ringed: 3 (1 adult 2 chicks)
- Number of controls (if applicable):N/A
- Number of retraps (if applicable):N/A
- Number of casualties/injured bird. Zero
- Any additional information e.g., observations, any additional things recorded such as biometrics etc. Whilst there were nesting auks present few were of size/age suitable for ringing. Along with many other species the nesting of Alderneys auk colonies has been later

than a typical year. Historic dates suggested we may be visiting too late for ringing auks, in the event we were too early!

Shag - *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

30 Shag pulli were ringed on Coque Lihou 15th June Historically this is the 2nd highest total ever on this rock. Whilst the pulli from 12 nests were ringed a further 4 nests containing 9 well grown chicks were visible but not accessible.

6 Shag pulli were ringed 'opportunistically' on Burhou (4 on 16th & 2 on 16th).

- Herring Gull - *Larus argentatus*

3 pulli were ringed 'opportunistically' on Burhou (3 on 16th, 1 on 17th).

- White Wagtail - *Motacilla alba*

2 pulli were ringed 'opportunistically' on Burhou 16th July 1730hrs.

- Rock Pipit – *Anthus petrosus*

2 pulli were ringed 'opportunistically' on Burhou 15th July at 2200hrs.

- Oystercatcher – *Haematopus ostralegus*

1 chick was ringed 'opportunistically' on Burhou 15th July 1800hrs.

- Gannets on Les Etacs

Under the advice of long-standing experienced seabird ringers from Guernsey CIBRS, the ABO took advice that the developing situation of the density of the nests of this Gannet colony on Les Etacs has reached a stage whereby health and safety of the ringers must take precedence. A health and safety review is necessary in order to determine the potential of any future ringing on this rock.