

BREEDING BIRDS ON THE FARNE ISLANDS 2018

Table: Total counts of breeding birds in 2018. (Pairs, except Guillemots which are given as individuals)

	2018	2017	Change	% change
Canada goose	1	0	-	+100
Mallard	12	17	-5	-29
Eider	477	337	140	+29
Red-breasted Merganser	1	1	0	0
Fulmar	248	180	68	+27
Cormorant	83	92	-9	-10
Shag	476	710	-234	-33
Oystercatcher	23	13	10	+43
Ringed plover	3	4	-1	-25
Black-headed gull	483	487	-4	-1
Lesser black-backed gull	576	593	-17	-3
Herring gull	743	847	-104	-12
Great black-backed gull	18	15	3	+17
Kittiwake	3158	4753	-1595	-34
Sandwich tern	424	556	-132	-24
Common tern	67	75	-8	-11
Arctic tern	1735	1883	-148	-8
Guillemot	49,972	48,234	1738	+3
Razorbill	440	459	-19	-4
Puffin	43,955	39,962*	3993	+9
Carrion crow	1	0	1	+100
Barn swallow	6	5	1	+17
Pied wagtail	7	4	3	+43
Rock pipit	9	11	-2	-18

*Number taken from most recent Puffin census, carried out in 2013.

A total of 24 species nested on the Farne Islands in 2018, in what proved to be a challenging season for many birds. In a year characterized by extreme weather, **Shags** were conspicuous by their absence when the Rangers arrived on the islands in March. The Beast from the East had taken its toll on the Farnes' resident seabird, resulting in the worst year for them since 1979. **Kittiwakes** were the other big losers this season. Storm Hector wreaked havoc in June, washing nests from the cliffs, some of which were even found by the Inner Farne picnic benches. This was the worst year for them since 1973. Despite such losses, productivity remained stable for both species, no doubt assisted by the dry, warm weather that followed.

2018 was **Puffin** census year. It was a milestone count in that, not only was a population survey carried out for the first time in 5 years, but a new, streamlined methodology was used to complete it. 43,955 pairs of Puffins were present across the islands, an increase of 9% on 2013, indicating a stable population with no evidence of decline. It was also a good breeding year for puffins with low rainfall and calm conditions in mid-June to July resulting in high productivity. It was an improved year for **Eider**, with a substantial increase on the abysmal numbers in 2017 (the lowest in over 50 years). Though far removed from the triple figures seen in the 1990s, the 477 pairs this year, along with above average productivity, is certainly

call for optimism. **Fulmars** also had a good year, with a respite from 3 consecutive years of decline.

Success also extended to **Guillemots** which enjoyed a 3% boost, in contrast to **Razorbill** which dropped by 7%. The **Sandwich** and **Common tern** colonies dwindled further in 2018, with the lowest counts in decades. As for **Arctic terns**, the cocktail of extreme wind followed by scorching sun (Max temp: 19.9 degrees in July) contributed to low productivity. Though numbers were down by 8% from last year, they were still higher than those logged in 2015 and 2016. There was also a decline in large gulls, with combined **Herring** and **Lesser black-backs** down by 15%. **Black-headed** and **Great-black-backed gulls**, on the contrary, remained stable. It is a defining year when a new species is added to the Farnes breeding bird list, so the discovery of a **Canada goose** nest caused quite a stir among the Rangers. Beside this exciting find, other rare island breeders included **Red-breasted Merganser** and the first **Carrion crow** nest since 2015.