

WORK ON NESTING SEA-BIRDS

(1) THE SOUTH-WEST SAMPLE AREA CENSUS

This census was taken in the same way as in 1952. The auk figures are the maxima of several counts of adults, and occupied nests were counted in the other cases. The total of nests was doubled to obtain the population figures in the table.

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS PRESENT

	1953	1952	1951	1950	1949	1948	1942	1939
Shag	100	108	26	30	50	32	43	72
Oystercatcher	2	4	2	2	4	2	2	4
Great Black-backed	16	18	13	27	27	20	16	26
Lesser Black-backed	8	6	12	12	21	14	1	2
Herring Gull	446	490	478	332	348	171	464	1000
Kittiwake	98	84	54	32	0	0	84	80
Razorbill	128	228	211	408	415	290	364	1390
Guillemot	51	83	72	68	137	116	265	1010
Puffin	1	1	0	0	5	0	0	0

(2) THE CENSUS OF SHAGS

Seventy-two nests were counted this year, fourteen fewer than in 1952. The decrease was most noticeable at the small colonies on the east coast, the population there falling from twenty-one to only nine pairs

Twenty-five of the 1952 sites were abandoned, and nine new ones occupied. Some of the latter had been used in earlier years.

(3) THE CENSUS OF KITTIWAKES

A complete count of occupied nests was made in early June by Michael Huxtable and the Warden. There were 1,858 such nests, compared with 2,026 at the last completed census in 1951, and an estimated total of over 2,500 in 1952.

General discussion.—The 1953 season was a poor one for the Lundy sea-bird colonies. The Kittiwakes and auks in particular suffered a severe set-back, though the decline of the Razorbill and Guillemot populations was certainly not as steep as the sample-area figures suggest. The decrease appears to have been expressed, rather, in a tendency to desert the smaller outlying colonies such as those within the sample area, whilst the larger and presumably more successful colonies from Jenny's Cove northwards remained relatively stable.

It is of interest to note that the isolated Kittiwake colony in the South-West, re-established only four years ago, has continued to increase in a season of general decline.

There was no significant change in the numbers of the large gulls. No counts of Puffins were attempted, but the impression given by casual observations was one of a further small decrease in numbers.

The breeding-season was early for most species in 1953, and weather conditions were generally good until early July. At this

time, with the chicks at a vulnerable age, the fine weather was succeeded by a fortnight of high winds and low temperatures, which played havoc in the colonies. Another factor contributing to the poor success in breeding was the mysterious disappearance of a considerable number of Razorbill eggs from the north and north-west coasts. As far as is known, no chicks at all were reared by Razorbills, in accessible sites on the north coast. Whether rats or men played the major part in this disaster was not established.

Oiling, particularly of auks and Gannets, is a steadily increasing menace in the Bristol Channel. More oiled birds were seen in August than in the whole of the previous two years, including nearly fifty Guillemots in a single week. In my opinion, this is by far the greatest single threat to our colonies. This view is supported by our census results, for the auks have decreased far more steeply than the surface-feeding and scavenging birds, which are less likely to come into contact with the floating sludge.

It is depressing to realize, that if Perry's 1939 census figures and the Field Society's estimates are even approximately accurate, the auk population of Lundy has declined by over seventy per cent in fifteen seasons. The Puffin, greatly troubled by rats as well as by oil, has perhaps decreased by over eighty-five per cent.

The population of gulls, on the other hand, is at roughly sixty per cent of the pre-war figures, and may depend to a considerable extent on the number of eggs and young of the auks available as food.

There is at last some prospect of legislation to reduce pollution of the sea. When this comes about, our census work on Lundy should provide a valuable check on its effects and its efficacy.

(4) In addition to the census taking, some preliminary work was done towards a study of the life-history of the Shag. This is a long term project, and no useful purpose can be served by reporting on it at present.

