



Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA Seabird Monitoring Programme

2025 Report



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Front cover image: Morgan Cartlidge

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Summary

The 2025 seabird monitoring programme was carried out by a Seabird Research Officer, a Seabird Research residential volunteer, and 23 additional dedicated volunteers and staff members from the Bempton Cliffs reserve team. The team monitored 44 productivity plots, resulting in 1857 nests/sites monitored across seven species. In addition, 18 population study-plots were also monitored across three species. Combined, a total of 778 hours was spent monitoring by the team this season.

For the second year, Grandstand viewpoint remained closed and thus 10 productivity plots, spanning four species, and three population study-plots, across three species, were not monitored. The loss of monitoring plots has reduced the number of Guillemot and Razorbill nests available for monitoring. Since 2024, one less plot has been monitored for both species on the reserve, which should be considered when interpreting and comparing data to pre-2023 results. As in 2024, additional effort was made to reach the minimum sample size of 250 nests per species within the remaining plots. However, the sample fell just short with 243 Guillemot and 244 Razorbill nests monitored.

The season began with the first Gannet egg being seen on 4th April 2025. Throughout April, there was dry and mild weather, and some auks began to settle by the middle of the month. The first auk eggs were seen on 28th April for both Guillemot and Razorbill, but a large number of birds still appeared unsettled by this point in the season. The auk monitoring began proper on 1st May, and the auks settled as the month progressed. A dry April led into a dry May, which resulted in the hottest spring on record and driest in 50 years (Met Office, 2025). This dry weather resulted in an apparent delay of nest building in the Kittiwakes. At Flamborough, a wet 'flash' usually used by large numbers of birds dried up, and the Kittiwakes were nest building well into mid and late June. The first Kittiwake chick was seen on 28th May on a monitoring plot but, as with the auks, large numbers remained unsettled, and the majority of eggs were laid in late May and early June. The dry and hot weather persisted into June and July and a hose pipe ban was introduced in early July across Yorkshire. Coinciding with this, in the first two weeks of July, many dead Kittiwake chicks were seen in nests on plots across the colony, suggesting widespread losses. August finally brought some rain as well as strong winds, especially the tail end of Storm Floris.

The overall productivity trend for the 2025 seabird breeding season is generally one of decline (Fig. 1). Fulmar is the only species to have experienced an increase from the 2024 season, which is promising after low productivity last year, and Gannet remained stable. Guillemot and Razorbill both had their poorest breeding season on record and Kittiwake also experienced a marked decline from previous success to the third lowest productivity on record. The productivity of Herring Gull was below that of 2024 but remains comparatively high, however, the number of nests within the monitoring plots was well below that expected.

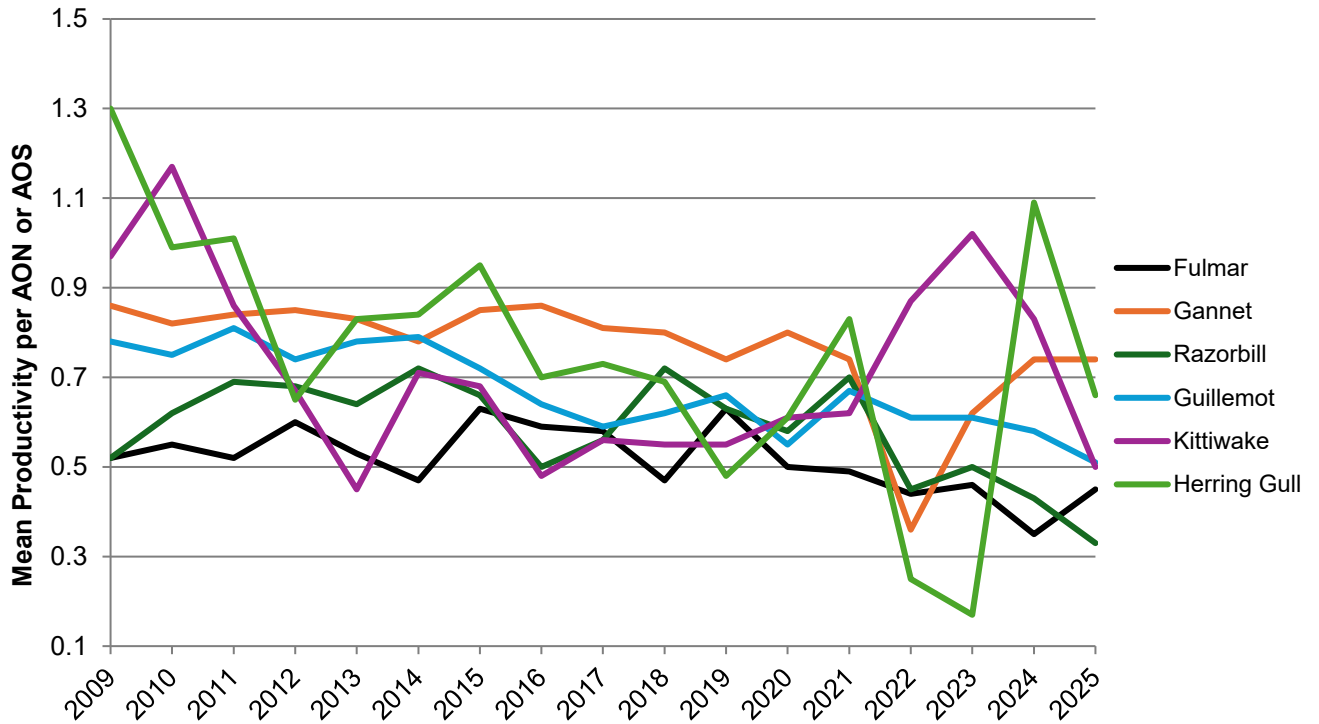


Figure 1: Summary of the productivity trends of the six seabird species monitored from 2009-2025.

N.B.1: In 2020, productivity monitoring followed a reduced programme with a late start, a reduced number of monitoring plots and an altered method of analysis for some species.

N.B.2: From 2024 the closure of Grandstand viewpoint resulted in fewer plots, and therefore a smaller sample size, for the following species: Gannet, Kittiwake, Guillemot and Razorbill.

The results from the 2025 breeding season are as follows:

Northern Fulmar:

A total of 55 chicks fledged from 115 Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS), resulting in a mean productivity of 0.48 chicks fledged per pair. This is the highest productivity since 2021, although the overall trend appears to be one of gradual decline.

Northern Gannet:

A total of 332 Apparently Occupied Nests (AON) were monitored across six plots on the Bempton Cliffs reserve. These AON fledged 246 chicks, resulting in a mean productivity of 0.74 chicks fledged per pair. This is the same productivity as 2024 and is an encouraging sign of continued recovery after the outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in the colony in 2022.

Black-legged Kittiwake:

A total of 860 AON were monitored in 16 plots across Bempton, Flamborough and Filey and from those, 435 chicks fledged. This resulted in a mean productivity of 0.50 chicks per pair. This is a large decrease from 2024 productivity and a departure from the overall trend of increasing productivity since 2019. Alongside chick mortality there were high numbers of young chicks being left unattended in nests, which may point to a problem with their sandeel prey availability this year.

European Herring Gull:

A total of 40 chicks fledged from 58 AON across four plots. The mean productivity was 0.71 chicks per pair. This is a decrease from the productivity of 2024 but remains higher than the lows of 2022 and 2023. In 2025, the number of AON monitored declined from 82 in 2024 to 58; this is the second lowest number of AON since monitoring began, the lowest being 52 in 2009, and is below both the 10-year average of 92 AON and 5-year average of 84 AON.

Common Guillemot:

A total of 243 AOS fledged 128 chicks which resulted in a mean productivity of 0.53 chicks per pair. As with 2024, there was only a single plot monitored on the Bempton Cliffs reserve due to the closure of Grandstand viewpoint. This year's mean productivity is the lowest on record and another year of relatively low productivity compared to 2009-14.

Razorbill:

A total of 88 chicks fledged from 244 AOS across four plots. As with 2024, the closure of Grandstand viewpoint resulted in only one plot being monitored on the Bempton Cliffs reserve. The mean productivity was 0.32 chicks fledged per nest. This is a large decrease from the 2024 mean productivity, which was the previous lowest on record. There is heavy predation on at least two of the plots which may be a factor in the low productivity in this small sample.

Early season Atlantic Puffin survey:

In 2025, as with the previous few years, there was no obvious large-scale arrival of Puffins and thus the early season pre-breeding count was not undertaken. The count made of approximately 3080 individuals in 2022 therefore remains the most recent reference for this species. ***It is important to stress that this survey is not designed to provide an accurate census of the breeding population of Atlantic Puffin at this colony, however, it provides an index where large scale year-to-year fluctuations can be monitored.***

Study-plot counts:

Grandstand viewpoint remained closed in 2025, so six plots were counted for each species instead of seven. As with 2024, the values are adjusted to exclude the Grandstand plots when comparing with previous years. Counts for all three species show a decline from 2024. Kittiwake showed the smallest change at 6.5%, the same decline as last year. Current population counts suggest stability, but future counts are needed to confirm this trend. Both auk species showed larger declines, Guillemot by 11.8% and Razorbill by 16.2%. For both species the numbers remain relatively high when compared with historical counts, but analysis this winter of drone images taken this season will confirm if this population decline is real.

Chick provisioning of Common Guillemot and Razorbill:

A study into Guillemot and Razorbill chick diet was conducted at Flamborough Head in 2025, marking the fifth consecutive year. Guillemot diet was made up of 64% clupieds and 22% sandeels, this is a decrease in the number of sandeels from 2024 but still a significant part of their diet. There was a switch in the mid-season period with more sandeels being brought in than the initial or end of the season. This differs from 2024 when predominantly sandeels were recorded in the initial and mid-season period, only switching to clupieds in the end part. In

2025, as with previous years sandeels formed the majority of the Razorbill chick diet at 94% and the same significant switch was not observed.

Black-legged Kittiwake Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) project:

In 2025, 76 colour ringed individuals were resighted throughout April and July. This is the same number of resighted individuals as in 2024. An additional five adult birds were also added to the project. We hope to present survival rates in the next report, following analysis of seven years of resighting data this winter.

Northern Gannet whole colony count:

The Gannet whole colony count was completed this season using drone imagery. In previous years, both the boat and drone counts produced very similar results so the 2025 count should be comparable with previous years. The processing of images and the counting of pictures will be carried out over the 2025 winter season so there will not be any results presented in this report. As of writing this report the 2024 count remains the most recent.

Winter auk attendance:

In winter 2024-25, two different winter auk survey methods were conducted. The first saw daily morning counts from Bartlett Nab viewpoint, on the Bempton Cliffs reserve by volunteers, and the second looked at analysing timelapse camera images, also taken on the reserve. The daily counts showed regular periods of attendance of around 5 days from mid-November onwards. This was echoed by the timelapse camera images that revealed the return of auks on 13/11/2024 and birds returning irregularly thereafter.

Nest litter survey:

A team from Natural England undertook an analysis on the amount of litter, defined as hard or soft plastic, rope, fishing line or other, in Gannet nests across the Bempton Cliffs reserve. A total of 1133 nests were monitored in the survey and from that 21% of nests contained at least one item of litter.

Recreational disturbance:

Since 2013, data collected by RSPB staff, volunteers, and partners has monitored recreational disturbance around the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA which is collated by the Yorkshire Marine Nature Partnership. In 2025, only 15 disturbance incidents were reported, mainly from Jet Skis, continuing the post-Covid decline in reported incidents. The Yorkshire Marine Nature Partnership believes actual disturbance is likely higher and is exploring improved monitoring to better protect the breeding seabird colony.

Impact of HPAI at Bempton Cliffs and the wider SPA:

In 2025, there were no confirmed cases of HPAI in the colony. Following the major impact of HPAI on Gannets in 2022, daily monitoring along 2 km of the SPA at Bempton Cliffs has been carried out since 2023. There was no significant increase in mortality at any point in the season. One Kittiwake with suspected HPAI symptoms was sent for testing under the avian influenza wild bird surveillance (AIWBS) scheme. There was no HPAI detected and instead examination found that the cause of death was blunt force trauma.

Introduction

Background

Seabird population data has been collected within the Special Protection Area (SPA) since at least 1969. In 1969, all species but Shag and Puffin were counted as part of the 'Operation Seafarer' national seabird census. In 1987, all species were counted during the 'Seabird Colony Register' census. All species were counted in 2000 for the 'Seabird 2000' census, again in 2008, in 2017 as part of the 'Seabirds Count' national seabird census, and again most recently in 2022. Additional colony counts of Gannet were also completed in 1970-77, 1985-94, 1996-99, 2002, 2004-05, 2008-09, 2012, 2015 and 2017. Since 2022, the Gannet colony has been counted annually. In addition, colony counts for Herring Gull were completed in 2010 and 2014 and for Shag in 2014.

Before the commencement of the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs seabird monitoring programme in 2009, breeding success data for Flamborough/Bempton was collected for Gannet during 1973-79, 1986-94, 1996-98, and 2006. Kittiwake breeding success has been monitored continuously since 1986. Guillemot productivity was monitored during 1991-98 and 2005-06 and Razorbill productivity was monitored in 2005-06. Fulmar and Herring Gull breeding success were monitored for the first time in 2009 and continues to this day. Unfortunately, it is not possible to monitor breeding success for Puffin at this vertical cliff-nesting colony and only limited monitoring of Shag and Cormorant nests is possible depending on nest site selection.

At Filey, a whole colony count was carried out in 1986 (Williams 1996). In 2002 the 'Seabird 2000' census team identified a significant colony of cliff-nesting seabirds on the cliffs to the north of Filey Bay (Mitchell et al. 2004). The significance of this colony came to light in 2008 in response to large numbers of Guillemot and Razorbill being caught and killed in gillnets set by fishermen in Filey Bay. It was recognised that birds caught in the nets could have originated from either the Flamborough/Bempton or Filey colonies. Unfortunately, at that time there was little current data about the state of the colony at Filey.

The Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA Seabird Monitoring Programme

Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA supports the largest mainland seabird colony in the UK, the only mainland Gannetry in England and one of the largest mainland Kittiwake colonies in the UK. The landward boundary of the SPA generally follows the coast at Flamborough Head from South Landing in the south, to Speeton in the north, with an additional section from the forefront of Filey Brigg headland to Cunstone Nab. The seaward boundary extends approximately 2 km parallel to the coast from the landward boundaries before moving seawards and extends approximately 2 km into the marine environment (see maps in Appendix 1).

Flamborough Head is a highly protected site both for its wildlife and unique chalk habitats. The site is designated as a European Marine Site (EMS), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a Special Protection Area (SPA), a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Heritage Coast site which includes three Local Nature Reserves (LNR), as well as RSPB Bempton Cliffs Nature Reserve and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Flamborough Cliffs Nature Reserve.

At the northern end of the SPA the Filey Brigg SSSI falls within the SPA and the Gristhorpe Bay and Red Cliff SSSI is just to the north of the SPA.

The Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA qualifies under Article 4.2 of the EU Birds Directive for the following reasons:

- It supports over 1% of the biogeographical population of four regularly occurring migratory species: Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*); Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*); Common Guillemot (*Uria aalge*); and Razorbill (*Alca torda*).
- It supports a breeding seabird assemblage of European importance; during the breeding season the area regularly supports up to 300,000 breeding seabirds.

Due to the importance of the seabird colony and level of site protection, in 2008 Natural England and the RSPB proposed a project to enable a baseline count, population monitoring and further research to collect data on the health of the colony and the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs SPA and underpinning SSSIs. This proposal led to the establishment of the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs seabird monitoring programme, which began with the 2009 seabird breeding season.

In 2009 there was also evidence to suggest that the cliffs 5 km northwest of Bempton supported a sizeable colony that might also meet the EU Birds Directive criteria. A boat-based whole colony count of the breeding seabird assemblage nesting on the cliffs between Filey Brigg and Cayton Bay was carried out by the RSPB. The results suggested that the total number of breeding seabirds in this colony exceeded 20,000 birds, and therefore this site also met SPA qualifying criteria. In response to this evidence the RSPB, with support from Natural England, completed five consecutive years of boat-base whole colony counts to verify these findings. This data supported the proposed extension of the existing Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs SPA to include Filey Cliffs to create the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA, which was formally designated in November 2018.

The data collected by the now enlarged Flamborough and Filey Coast seabird monitoring programme will inform the condition and management of the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA and underpinning SSSIs. In addition, the results will also inform current and new planning enquiries and environmental assessments e.g., the Hornsea and Dogger Bank offshore wind arrays that could impact the features of the designated site. It is also hoped that seabird tracking data collected from the colony will inform potential new offshore Marine Protected Areas.

Data collected will also be used to inform the national Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) coordinated by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), the RSPBs Annual Reserves Monitoring programme, the RSPB Bempton Cliffs reserve management plan and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's reserve management.

The key aims of the seabird monitoring programme, and how they are currently implemented, are as follows:

- **Understanding variation and trends in seabird productivity**

Northern Fulmar, Northern Gannet, Black-legged Kittiwake, European Herring Gull, Common Guillemot and Razorbill plots have been monitored for breeding productivity annually since 2009.

- **Understanding population numbers and trends**

Black-legged Kittiwake, Common Guillemot and Razorbill study-plot counts have been carried out annually since 2009. A whole colony census was carried out in 2008 and repeated in 2017 and 2022. It is intended that a whole colony count be completed every five years within the reserve's management plan cycle.

- **Understanding the relationship between the colony and the larger marine environment**

As the relevant technologies improve, we hope to better understand foraging behaviours of birds breeding in the colony and to identify preferred foraging areas and trends in provisioning such as determining key feeding areas for key species, and the factors that influence their location. This includes ongoing seabird tracking, currently focused on Black-legged Kittiwake, and monitoring of Common Guillemot and Razorbill diet composition. In the future this could extend to range finders, remote tracking, and increased use of fish population modelling data and benthic mapping.

- **Understanding how RSPB Bempton Cliffs relates to wider SPA and potential impacts on disturbance by developing research proposals to address the following management issues**

What are the types of human activities that could disturb the colony and what are their effects? Currently recreational disturbance is monitored and recorded by Bempton Cliffs and others on an ad-hoc basis. For those activities that are of particular concern, we hope to develop specific research proposals which assess level of impact.

The annual programme of monitoring is coordinated by the RSPB Bempton Cliffs seabird team led by the reserve Warden, a Seabird Research Officer and a team of dedicated volunteer seabird researchers including members of Flamborough Bird Observatory (FBO) and Filey Bird Observatory & Group (FBOG).

The results of the 2025 Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA Seabird Monitoring Programme are detailed in this report. Access to the monitoring data is available to researchers and conservation organisations by agreement with RSPB.

Productivity Monitoring

Detailed productivity monitoring was completed for the seventeenth consecutive year for six of the nine breeding seabird species found in the colony: Fulmar, Gannet, Kittiwake, Herring Gull, Guillemot and Razorbill. In addition, one visible Shag nest at Flamborough was monitored, as well as a small number of Cormorant nests at Filey. It is not possible to monitor Puffin productivity at this colony.

The Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA seabird monitoring programme follows the methods and guidelines set out in the '*Seabird monitoring handbook for Britain and Ireland*' (Walsh et al. 1995), "the Handbook" hereafter, which summarises census and productivity monitoring techniques for seabirds at colonies in Britain and Ireland. All productivity monitoring is based on marking Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS) or Apparently Occupied Nests (AON) on a laminated photograph of the relevant plot. Please refer to the Handbook for more details on methodologies for each species and survey undertaken.

In general, productivity monitoring plots were identified when the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs seabird monitoring programme was established in 2009. Plots were selected with a view to providing, where possible, a sample size in the region of 50 AOS or AON per plot and a minimum sample of 250 AOS/AON for each species, while providing safe vantage points for the observer with little or no disturbance to breeding seabirds. In 2011, five additional monitoring plots for Kittiwake were established at Filey Cliffs in conjunction with the census work there which led to the extension of the Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs SPA to include Filey Cliffs; in 2014 one of the original plots was dropped as it was too difficult to observe and an additional monitoring plot added on Filey Brigg. In 2017, two additional Fulmar plots were added at Cunstone Nab at the north end of Filey Cliffs in an effort to extend the monitoring of other species to Filey. A further Fulmar plot was added from Thornwick in 2021, as it provided a reasonable number of AOS that were easily monitored. In 2023, two additional productivity plots for Gannet were added at Bartlett Nab and Grandstand viewpoints at Bempton Cliffs. This was as a response to the impact of HPAI on Gannet productivity in 2022 and increases sample size across a wider area of the colony. Indicative maps of the productivity plot locations are included in Appendix 2.

As recommended by the Handbook, we present productivity calculated as the mean of the individual plot results for each species as well as presenting species productivity data by aggregating the results of each plot (total chicks fledged / total nests (or sites) monitored). It is important to note that for auk species, the productivity calculation includes AOS that are regularly occupied (on a minimum of five out of any seven consecutive visits), even if no egg or chick is seen.

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Eight productivity plots were monitored this year. Plots were photographed in early May and AOS marked on laminated photographs over three visits over the late May/early June period. A final visit was made in early to mid-August (with the option of a second visit if any chicks had not yet reached large size) and large chicks present at that time are assumed to have

fledged. The Cunstone Nab plots were again photographed at a larger scale this season to aid in accurate recording of AOS on parts of these distant plots.

The mean productivity for Fulmar was 0.48 (SE ± 0.3456) chicks per AOS. A total of 115 AOS were monitored across all eight plots, from which 55 chicks successfully fledged (Table 1, Fig. 2). This is an increase from 2024 and is the highest productivity since 2021. There was a large decrease in the number of AOS at 115 down from 133 in 2024. This is below the mean number of AOS of 117 AOS, from 2017 (when the number of plots was increased) to 2024).

Table 1: Northern Fulmar productivity 2025. Plots added in 2017 are marked* and in 2021 marked**.

Plot	AOS	Chicks fledged	Productivity ch/pr
New Roll-up	6	1	0.17
Old Dor	14	8	0.57
Newcombe	3	1	0.33
Breil Nook	4	4	1.00
Swineshaw Hole	10	2	0.20
Thornwick**	14	9	0.64
Cunstone Nab A*	38	21	0.55
Cunstone Nab B*	26	9	0.55
Total	115	55	
Mean of plot results ± SE			0.48 ± 0.0970
Aggregate productivity			0.48

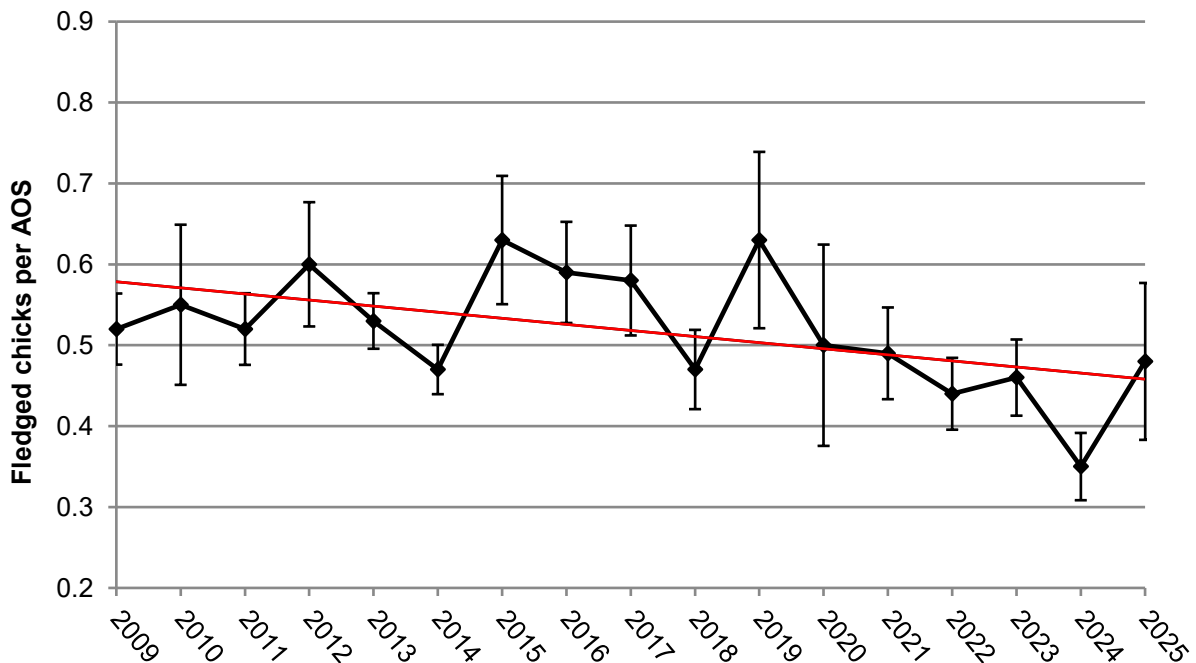


Figure 2: Northern Fulmar productivity 2009-2025, mean of plot productivity results plus/minus standard error (SE).

Huge variation existed in productivity values across the SPA, with values ranging from 0.17 at New Roll-up to 1.00 at Breil Nook. The Bempton plots saw the lowest productivity with a mean of 0.37 (brought down largely by New Roll-up's 0.17), followed by the Filey plots at 0.49 and Flamborough had the highest productivity of 0.52. The productivity at Bempton remains like previous years but, both Filey and Flamborough overall experienced a welcome increase on 2024 figures.

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

As in 2024, with the continued closure of Grandstand viewpoint six out of the potential seven plots were monitored this year. Plots were photographed in mid-April and up to 59 AON were marked on laminated photographs. The plots were then visited every 7-10 days until all chicks fledged in October. Average visit time early in the season was 2 to 2.5 hours per plot but reduced dramatically once chicks got larger and were more visible. Presence of an egg or chick is then recorded (if seen) each visit.

The mean productivity for Gannet this season was 0.74 (SE \pm 0.0335) chicks per AON. A total of 332 AON were monitored across the six plots, from which 246 chicks successfully fledged (Table 2, Fig. 3).

Table 2: Northern Gannet productivity 2025. Plots added in 2023 are marked * and remaining plots are classed as 'original'.

Plot	AON	Chicks fledged	Productivity ch/pr
Jubilee Corner	55	43	0.78
Nettletrip	59	43	0.73
Bartlett Nab *	53	32	0.60
Staple Newk 1	55	47	0.85
Staple Newk 2	55	40	0.73
Staple Newk 3	55	41	0.75
Total	332	246	
Mean of plot results \pm SE			0.74 \pm 0.0335
Aggregate productivity			0.74
Mean of original plots \pm SE			0.74 \pm 0.0239

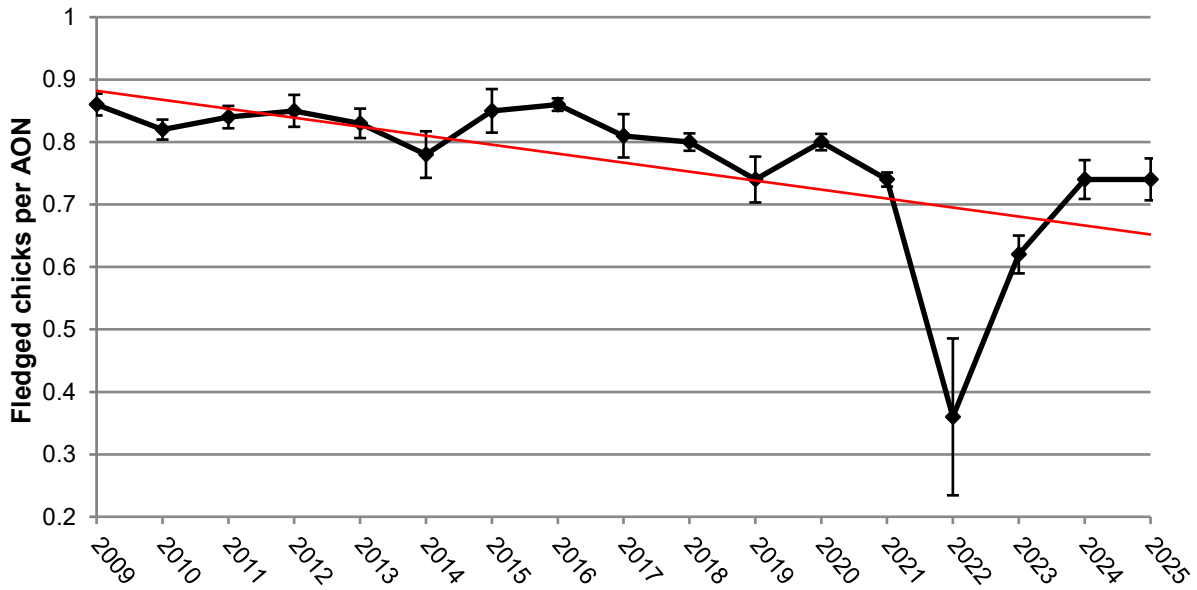


Figure 3: Northern Gannet productivity 2009-2025, mean of plot results plus/minus SE.
N.B.: Two plots added in 2023 at Bartlett Nab and Grandstand. In 2024 and 2025 Grandstand viewpoint was closed so no data from that plot is included.

The productivity in 2025 is the same as last year, and this productivity value is remarkably similar to the 10-year mean of 0.73 chicks per AON. There was variation in the changes seen across the plots, with Jubilee and Staple 2 showing increases since 2024 and both plots exhibiting the highest productivity in 5 years for Jubilee and 8 years for Staple 2 (Fig. 4). The other two Staple plots' productivity declined slightly from 2024, after initial promising increases on both since 2022 (Staple 1: 0.60 down from 0.75 in 2024, Staple 3: 0.73 down from 0.85 in 2024). The plots at Staple that were worst impacted by HPAI in 2022, are showing signs of recovery.

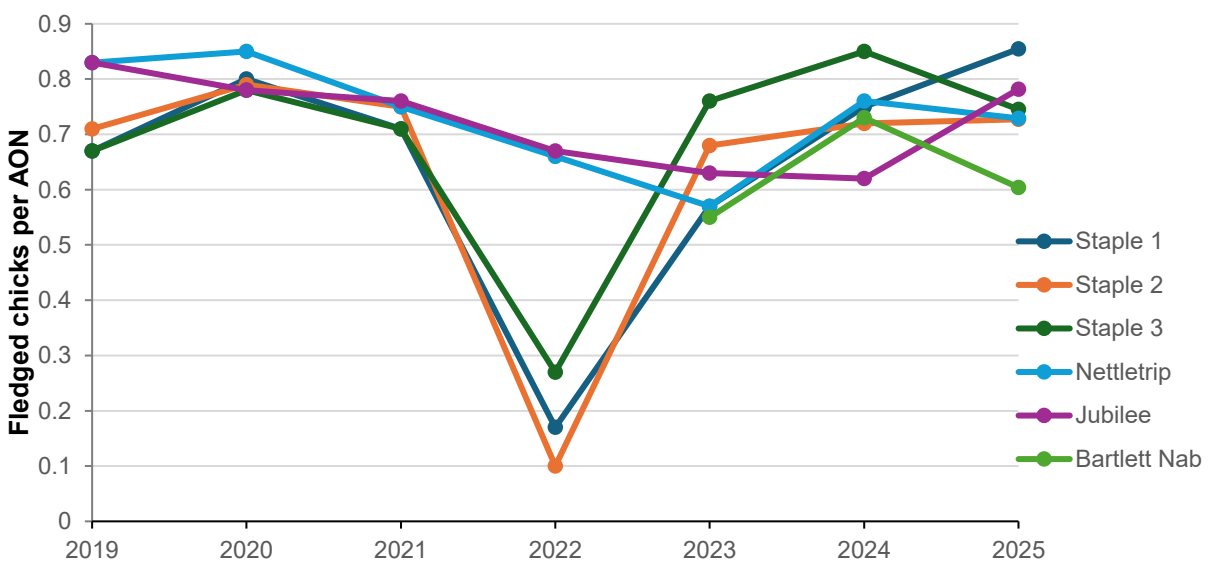


Figure 4: Northern Gannet productivity in six monitoring plots 2019-2025. Bartlett Nab is included from 2023 onwards and excluding the Grandstand Plot.

European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Only one Shag nest was visible and monitored this year, located within the Queen Rock at Breil Nook, the same single AON as 2024. This nest successfully fledged two chicks, giving a productivity of 2.0 chicks per AON.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

The new viewpoints established in 2024 were used again this season, however, only Filey North had visible nests. There were no Cormorant nests visible from Filey South and only four nested at Filey North resulting in a much smaller number of AON than previous years. This is 12.5% of the breeding population of 32 AON recorded in 2022. Additional plots or viewing areas will hopefully be established to increase the AON in future monitoring.

Four AON were visible from the Filey North viewpoint from which eight chicks fledged resulting in a productivity of 2.0 chicks/pair. This is a welcome increase from the 2024 productivity of 1.55 chicks/pair, but remains lower than the 2022 productivity of 2.27, and 2021 productivity of 3.0. This winter, analysis of drone images taken this season will confirm if there has been a genuine decline in the number of breeding Cormorant at Filey, or whether the colony has just moved to areas that cannot be viewed safely from the land.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

Sixteen productivity plots were monitored across the SPA between May and August 2025: 10 plots at Flamborough, four plots at Bempton and two plots at Filey. Following the successful redesignation of the SPA in 2018, the Filey plots have been integrated into the productivity calculations with Flamborough and Bempton from 2012 onwards.

Again this season, the closure of Grandstand viewpoint reduced the sample size at Bempton, with the loss of five monitoring plots. At Flamborough, one plot at Newcombe was not monitored and at Filey, plot 7 was also not monitored as the viewpoint remains unsafe.

Plots were photographed in early to mid-May and between 50 and 66 AON were marked on laminated photographs. Plots were then visited every week, ideally on the same day so visits are seven days apart. Presence and number of eggs or chicks at each AON were recorded (if seen) each visit. Volunteers were asked to record chick size using standard codes. Average visit times varied according to the volunteer and stage of the season, but 1 to 1.5 hours per visit was typical.

The mean productivity for Kittiwake across the SPA this season was 0.50 (SE \pm 0.0709) chicks per AON. A total of 860 AON were monitored, from which 435 chicks fledged successfully (Table 3, Fig. 5).

Table 3: Black-legged Kittiwake productivity 2025.

Plot	AON	Chicks fledged	Productivity ch/pr
Jubilee Far	57	32	0.56
Bartlett Nab Near	52	31	0.60
Bartlett Nab Far	55	21	0.38
Old Dor	52	38	0.73
Back of Newcombe	55	39	0.71
Carter Lane 1	52	17	0.33
Carter Lane 2	50	9	0.18
Saddle Nook 1	56	26	0.46
Saddle Nook 2	50	31	0.62
Saddle from Breil	50	17	0.34
Breil Nook North	53	21	0.40
Breil Nook South	56	21	0.38
Back of Breil Nook	66	35	0.53
Lighthouse	55	71	1.29
Filey plot 1	48	4	0.08
Filey plot 8	53	22	0.42
Total	860	435	
Mean of plot results ± SE			0.50 ± 0.0709
Aggregate productivity			0.51

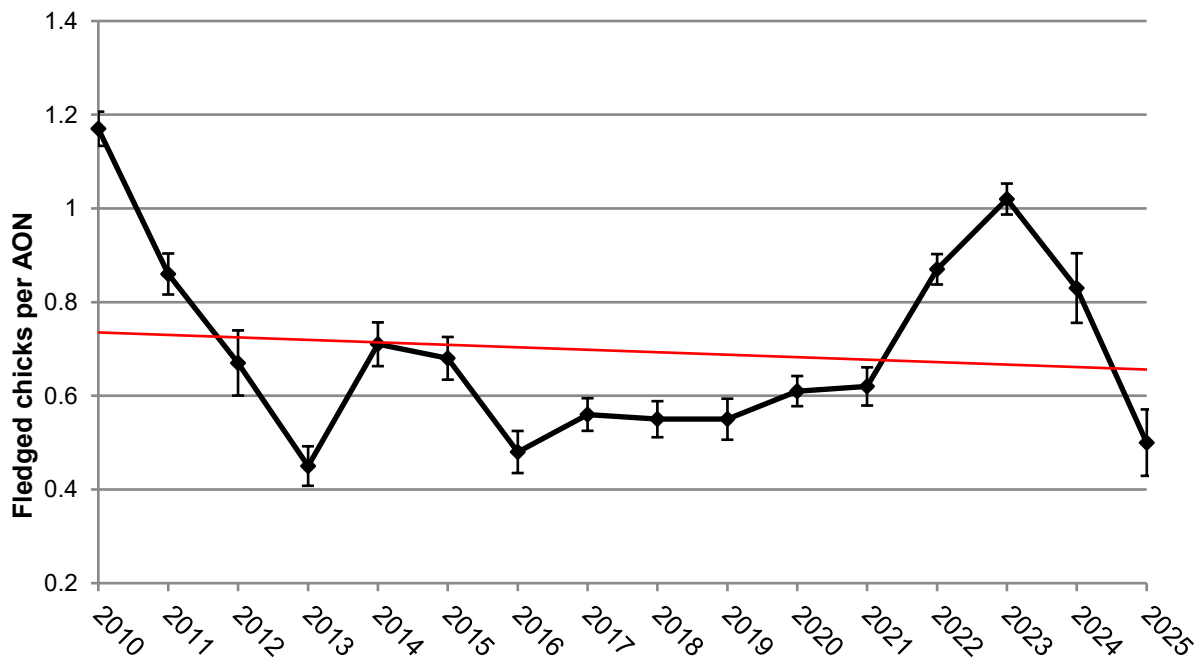


Figure 5: Black-legged Kittiwake productivity 2009-2025. Mean of plot results, plus/minus SE.

The productivity of Kittiwake in 2025 shows a step decline from 2024 and is a deviation from a previous trend of recovery from 2019 onwards. This season's productivity of 0.50 was well

below the previous 5-year mean of 0.73, and below the previous 10-year mean of 0.68. This shows a departure from the previous trend of recovery and a significant decline since 2023.

There were declines in productivity across all three sites from last year (Fig. 6). Filey Cliffs has the lowest productivity at 0.25 when compared with Bempton Cliffs 0.57, and Flamborough 0.52, as is generally the case. Bempton being the site with the highest mean productivity is a deviation from the general trend of Flamborough being the most productive site. Flamborough experienced the largest decline in productivity from 2024, from 0.93 to 0.52.

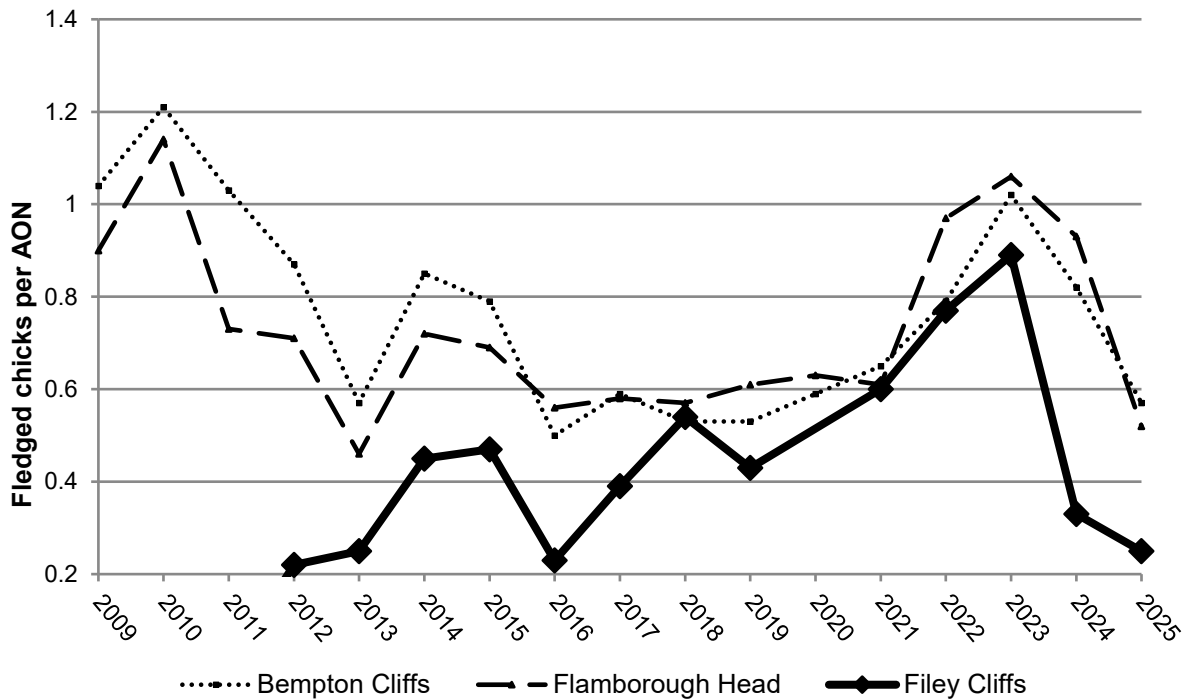


Figure 6: Black-legged Kittiwake productivity 2009-2025 comparing plots between Bempton Cliffs (dotted line), Flamborough Head (dashed line) and Filey Cliffs (solid line).

Looking at the productivity of individual plots there was a large range of values. The poorest performing plot was Filey plot 1 at 0.08, fledging just 4 chicks from 48 AOS, and the highest was the Flamborough Lighthouse plot, with a productivity of 1.29.

A total of 14 out of 16 plots experienced declines in productivity this year. Several factors could have contributed to this. The unseasonably dry and hot spring meant finding nesting material was difficult, with many established water sources drying up. In addition to this, it has been suggested by colleagues from our Conservation Science Team that there was food availability or accessibility (Kittiwakes not being able to reach food sitting lower in the water column) issues in the North Sea as other colonies experienced similar, and in certain cases more severe, declines this season. Across almost all plots, chicks were left unattended at an earlier age, for longer periods and more often than previously seen in the colony, supporting the idea that there was low food availability.

This season there were no reports of dead or dying adult kittiwakes showing symptoms of HPAI. There was large mortality of chicks seen in the nests, but there was no evidence that this was linked to HPAI.

European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Four Herring Gull productivity plots were monitored between May and August. Two of these plots are linear and include all safely observable nests found on a defined stretch of cliff, one at Bempton Cliffs and one at Flamborough Head. As of the 2024 season one plot, Newcombe North, has been integrated into the Flamborough Head linear plot.

Plots were photographed in late-May and AON marked on laminated photographs over two visits. Additional AON were added over the course of the season. Plots were then visited once a week, ideally on the same day so visits were seven days apart. Presence and number of eggs or chicks for each AON are recorded (if seen) each visit. Chicks were aged using standard codes to aid in assessment of fledging more accurately.

The mean productivity for Herring Gull was 0.71 (SE \pm 0.1042) chicks per AON. A total of 58 AON were monitored across 4 plots, from which 40 chicks successfully fledged (Table 4, Fig. 7). The number of nests monitored declined dramatically from 82 in 2024 to 58 (Fig. 8). This is the second lowest number of AON since monitoring began, the lowest being 52 in 2009, and is well below both the 10-year average of 92 AON and 5-year average of 84 AON. These decreases were seen in three of the four plots, with the exception of Breil Nook Stack, which had the exact same number of AON as 2024. The remaining two Flamborough plots had the largest decline with the linear plot having 10 less AON and the Saddle Rock 9 less AON. There appeared to be birds paired and defending territories but then not progressing to nest building and egg laying.

Table 4: European Herring Gull productivity 2025 (Newcombe North was integrated into the Newcombe to Breil plot in 2024 due to declining AON).

Plot	AON	Chicks fledged	Productivity ch/pr
Jubilee to Old Dor	16	9	0.56
The Saddle Rock	16	8	0.50
Breil Nook Stack	12	11	0.92
Newcombe to Breil	14	12	0.86
Total	58	40	
Mean of plot results \pm SE			0.71 \pm 0.1042
Aggregate productivity			0.69

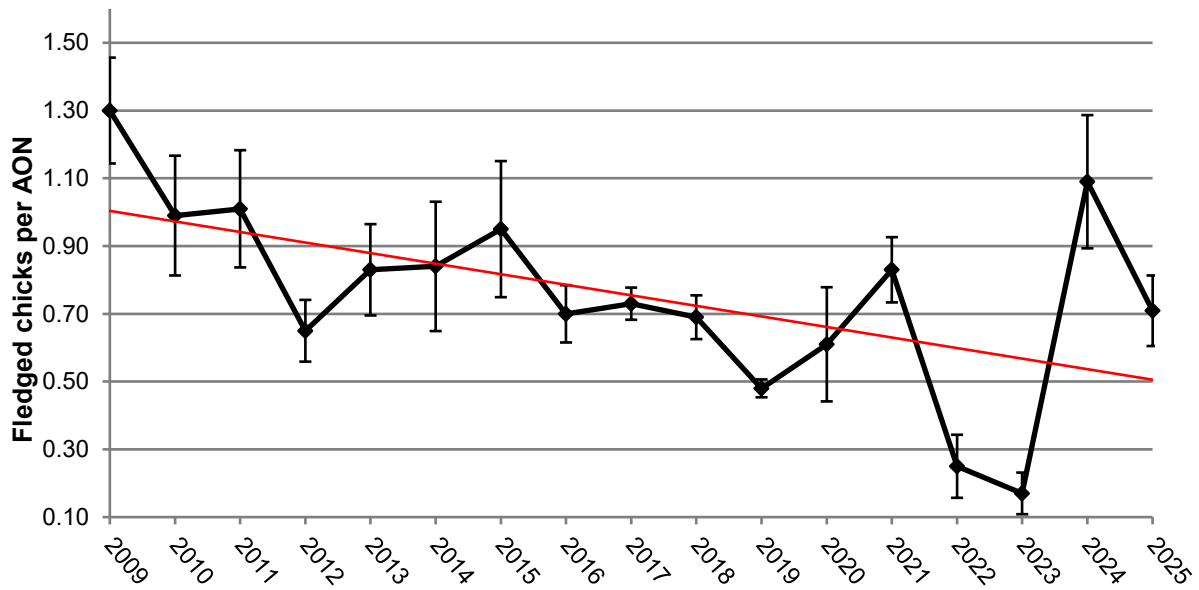


Figure 7: European Herring Gull productivity 2009-2025, mean of plot results plus/minus SE.

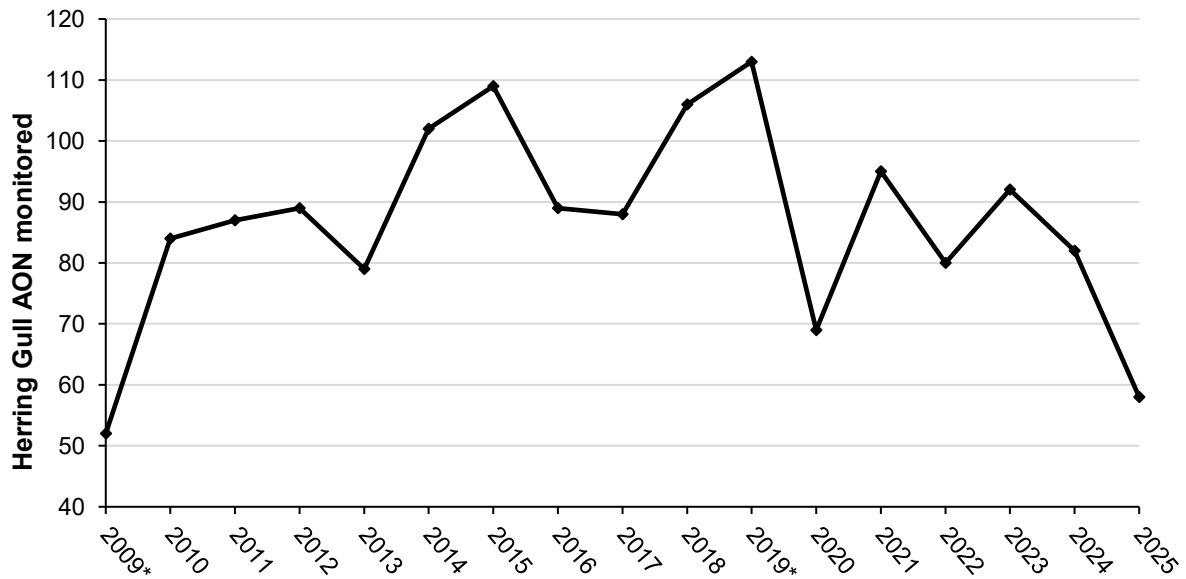


Figure 8: Number of European Herring Gull AON monitored 2009-2025.
N.B.: In 2009, only three plots were monitored and in 2019, six plots were monitored.

The productivity of 0.71 chicks per AON is a more familiar figure following the high of 1.09 seen in 2024 and is still encouraging after the record lows observed in both 2022 and 2023. There was variation in productivity across the plots with the lowest performing plot at Saddle Rock with 0.50 chicks per pair, closely followed by the Bempton Cliffs linear plot of 0.56. The most productive monitoring site was the Flamborough linear plot at 0.86 which was the only plot to see an increase in productivity from 0.79 in 2024.

Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*

Four productivity plots were monitored between early May and the end of July. Plots were photographed in early May and up to 75 AOS were marked on laminated photographs over two visits, and then visits were made every third day thereafter. Presence of an egg or chick was recorded (if seen) each visit. Average visit time early in the season was 2 to 2.5 hours but reduced once chicks got larger and were more visible.

As with 2024, the closure of Grandstand viewpoint meant that one less plot was monitored than usual, with just a single plot at Bempton and three plots at Flamborough. Therefore, a concerted effort was made to increase the number of AOS monitored within the four remaining plots.

The mean productivity for Guillemot was 0.53 (SE ± 0.0990) chicks per AOS. A total of 243 AOS were monitored across four plots, from which 128 chicks successfully fledged (Table 5, Fig. 9). This season, productivity declined again for a second year, and falls below both the previous 5-year average of 0.60 and previous 10-year average of 0.63.

Table 5: Common Guillemot productivity 2025.

Plot	AOS	Chicks fledged	Productivity ch/pr
Nettletrip	60	14	0.23
Carter Lane 1	59	39	0.66
Carter Lane 2	56	35	0.63
Breil Nook	68	40	0.59
Total	243	128	
Mean of plot results ± SE			0.53 ± 0.0990
Aggregate productivity			0.53

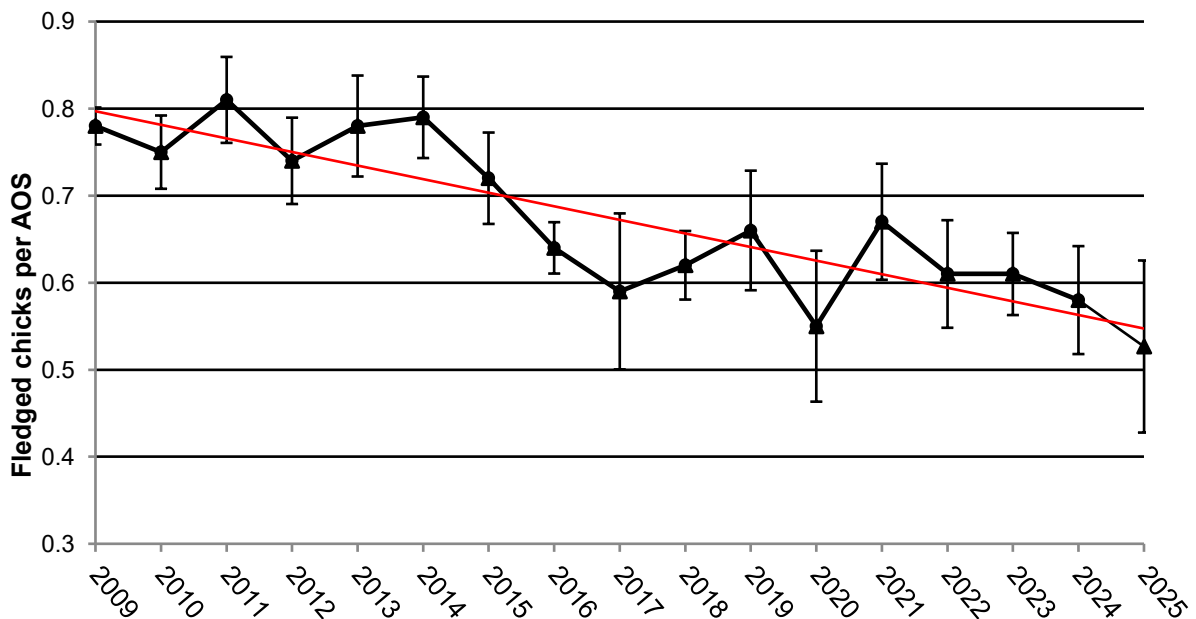


Figure 9: Common Guillemot productivity 2009-2025, mean of plot results plus/minus SE.

Declines were seen in productivity at both Bempton and Flamborough, but with varying degrees (Fig. 10). At Flamborough the overall mean was 0.62, which is a small decline from 2024 and 2023 means of 0.64 and 0.67 respectively. The sharp decline in productivity at Bempton is likely down to the loss of the Grandstand plot, which historically tends to be more productive than the plot at Nettletrip. In addition, the Nettletrip plot is impacted by prospecting Gannets which displace nesting Guillemot sites; this year, at least three AOS were observed to fail due to Gannets taking over Guillemot breeding ledges.

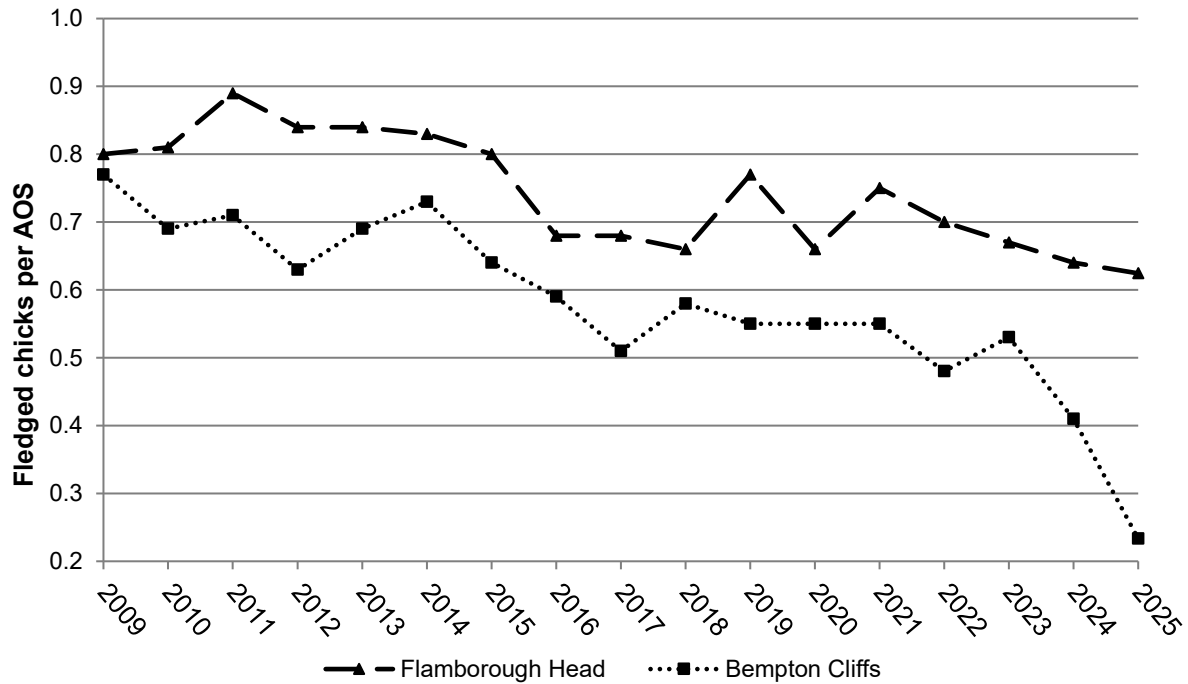


Figure 10: Comparing Common Guillemot productivity plots separated by sites; Flamborough Head (dashed line) and Bempton Cliffs (dotted line) between 2009-2025. Results for each year are the mean of the results of plots monitored that year.

Razorbill *Alca torda*

Four productivity plots were monitored between early May and the end of July. Plots were photographed in early May and up to 90 AOS were marked on laminated photographs over two visits and then visited every third day thereafter. Presence of an egg or chick was recorded (if seen) each visit. Average visit time early in the season was 2 to 2.5 hours but reduced once chicks got larger and were more visible.

The closure of Grandstand viewpoint meant that one less plot was monitored than usual, with one plot at Bempton and three plots at Flamborough. Therefore, a concerted effort was made to increase the number of AOS monitored within the four remaining plots.

The mean productivity for Razorbill in 2025 was 0.32 (SE ± 0.0833) chicks per AOS. The aggregate productivity was slightly higher at 0.36 chicks per AOS. A total of 88 chicks fledged from 244 AOS monitored across the four plots (Table 6, Fig. 11).

Table 6: Razorbill productivity 2025.

Plot	AOS	Chicks fledged	Productivity ch/pr
Grandstand Gully	36	3	0.08
Newcombe	53	19	0.36
Breil Nook	79	37	0.47
Swineshaw Hole	76	29	0.38
Total	244	88	
Mean of plot results ± SE			0.32 ± 0.0833
Aggregate productivity			0.36

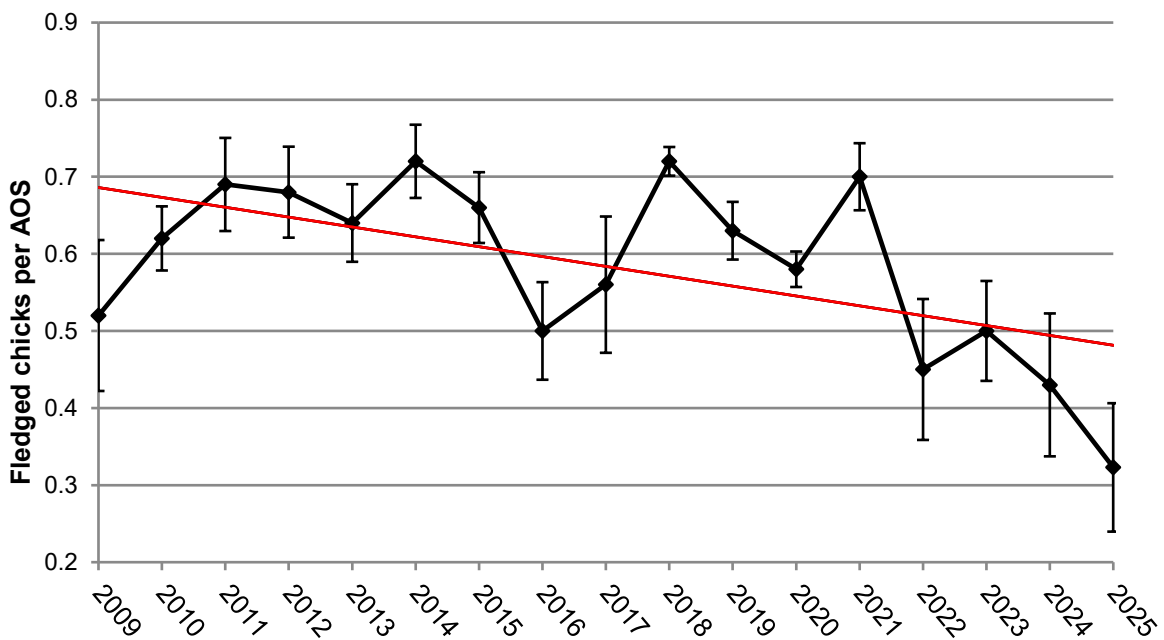


Figure 11: Razorbill productivity 2009-2025, mean of plot results plus/minus SE.

Following the lowest productivity on record in 2024, productivity declined once again this year. There were declines at both the sites, however the declines at Bempton were much more significant (Fig. 12). Without the main Grandstand plot, the only other remaining plot at Bempton, Grandstand Gully, experienced its poorest productivity on record at 0.08 chicks per AOS. This is a large decline from 2024’s 0.41 chicks per AOS. The three Flamborough plots appear more stable, with a minor decrease from 0.43 in 2024 to 0.40 in 2025.

The difference between the two sites suggests that the one remaining plot at Bempton, Grandstand Gully, which is often affected by higher levels to predation than elsewhere, is not representative of the productivity of the wider colony.

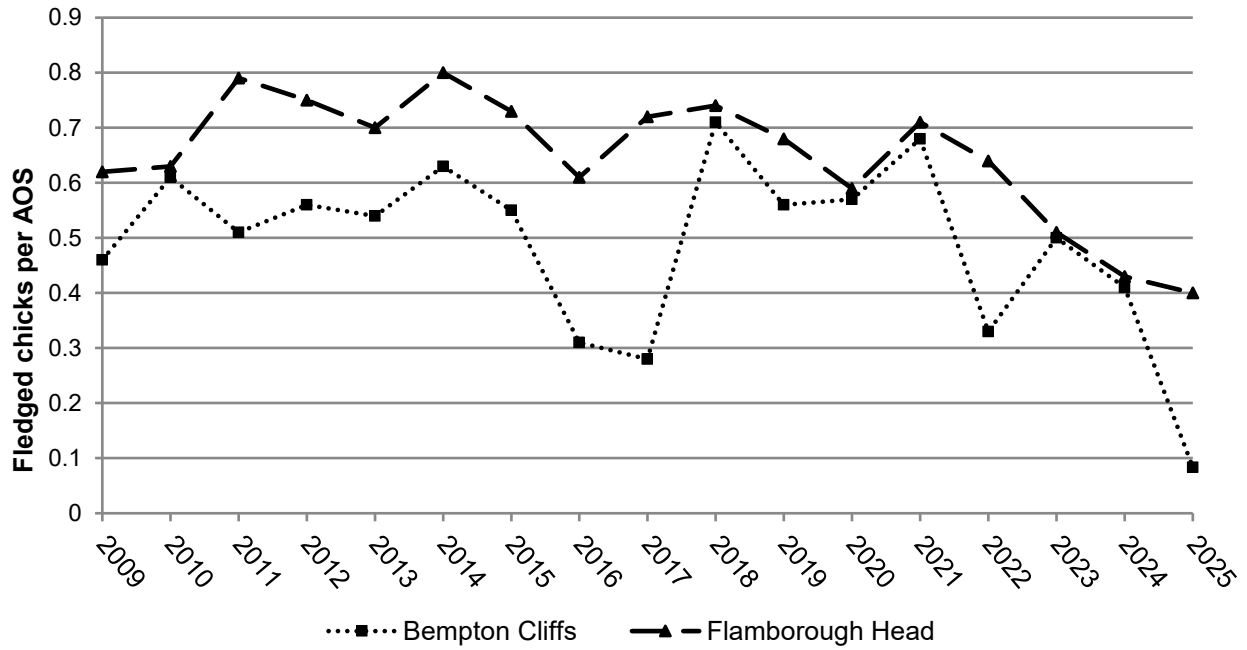


Figure 12: Comparing Razorbill productivity plots against Bempton Cliffs (dotted line) and Flamborough Head (dashed line) between 2009-2025. Results for each year is the mean of the relevant plot results.

Study-plot Counts

The size and nature of the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA colony means that it is not feasible to conduct annual boat-based whole colony population monitoring. Accordingly, study-plots for population monitoring of Kittiwake, Guillemot and Razorbill were established in 2009. Plots were selected throughout the colony as randomly as possible, whilst also providing a safe vantage point and minimising disturbance to the colony. For each species the same plots are used each year as required by the Handbook; plot boundaries are marked on laminated photographs of the relevant area of cliff. Indicative maps of the study-plot locations at Flamborough and Bempton are included in Appendix 3.

The Handbook suggests that study-plot counts are not recommended for general use when counting Kittiwake, however as the SPA holds one of the largest mainland populations in the UK, it is important that trends are monitored.

In 2025, all species experienced a slight decline, however values remain stable relative to historic figures (Fig. 13). Kittiwake decreased by 6.2%, however the population remains fairly stable with some year-to-year fluctuations. Both auk species declined slightly with Guillemot by 10.7% and Razorbill by 16.2%, although when comparing historic results the study-plot counts remain high for both species.

The closure of Grandstand viewpoint meant that in 2024 and 2025 six plots were counted for each species, instead of the usual seven. **To allow for accurate comparison with the 2024 and 2025 data, in this report historical mean values from 2009 – 2023 have been adjusted to exclude the Grandstand plots.**

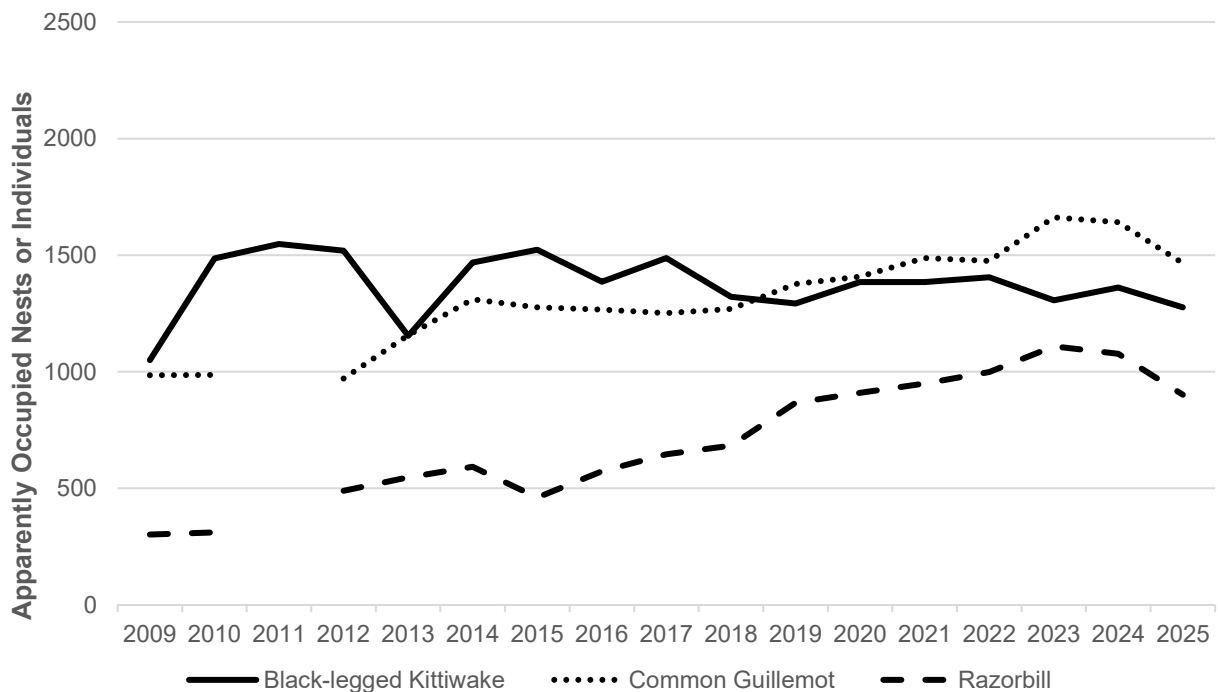


Figure 13: Study-plot count results for Black-legged Kittiwake, Common Guillemot and Razorbill from 2009-2025 at Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs excluding Grandstand viewpoint.
N.B.: Black-legged Kittiwake counted as AON, Common Guillemot and Razorbill counted as individuals (IND).

Black-legged Kittiwake study-plot counts

Six study-plots were counted between 0800 and 1600 on two occasions between 01/06/2025 and 14/06/2025. The mean of the two counts was 1276, but the two counts were very similar to each other (Table 7). There has been a 6.2% decrease from the 2024 mean of 1361, despite this the population appears stable when comparing with the historical means (Fig. 14).

Table 7: Black-legged Kittiwake study-plot count results for the last 5 years, excluding Grandstand viewpoint. Green indicates the highest count for each year.

Visit	2021 AON total	2022 AON total	2023 AON total	2024 AON total	2025 AON total
1	1801	1849	1769	1349	1277
2	1837	1893	1738	1373	1275
Mean	1385	1406	1306	1361	1276

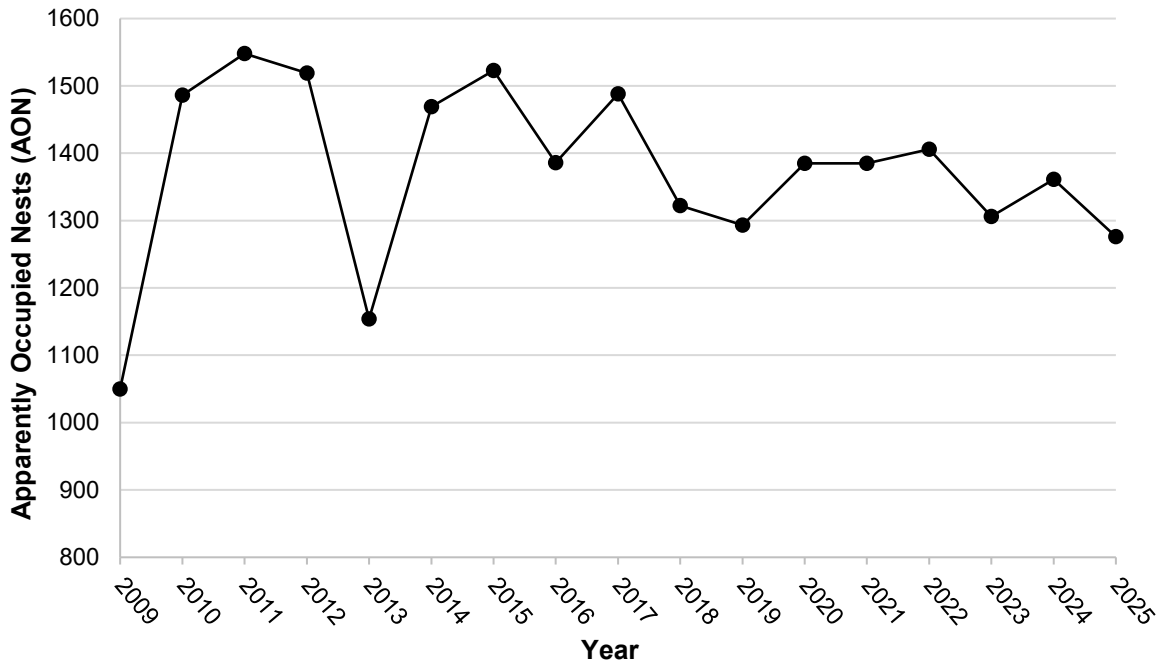


Figure 14: Total number of Black-legged Kittiwake AON from 2009-2025 across six study-plot areas, excluding Grandstand viewpoint.

Common Guillemot study-plot counts

Six study-plots were counted between 0800 and 1600 on five occasions between 01/06/2025 and 17/07/2025 (Table 8). The mean of the study plot counts in 2025 was 1466 individuals, which is a decrease of 10.7% from 1641 individuals in 2024 (Fig. 15). This is the lowest mean since 2020 at 1406 but overall remains high when compared to historical results and is similar to that of 2022 and 2021. Analysis of drone colony count images this winter will confirm whether this drop in numbers is mirrored across the colony, or just fluctuations within the study-plots.

Table 8: Common Guillemot study-plot count results for the last 5 years, excluding Grandstand viewpoint. Green indicates the highest count for each year.

Count	2021 IND total	2022 IND total	2023 IND total	2024 IND total	2025 IND total
1	1574	1710	1784	1719	1535
2	1694	1594	1841	1617	1492
3	1526	1560	1819	1726	1445
4	1580	1440	1740	1494	1420
5	1540	1498	1660	1649	1437
Mean	1488	1475	1662	1641	1466

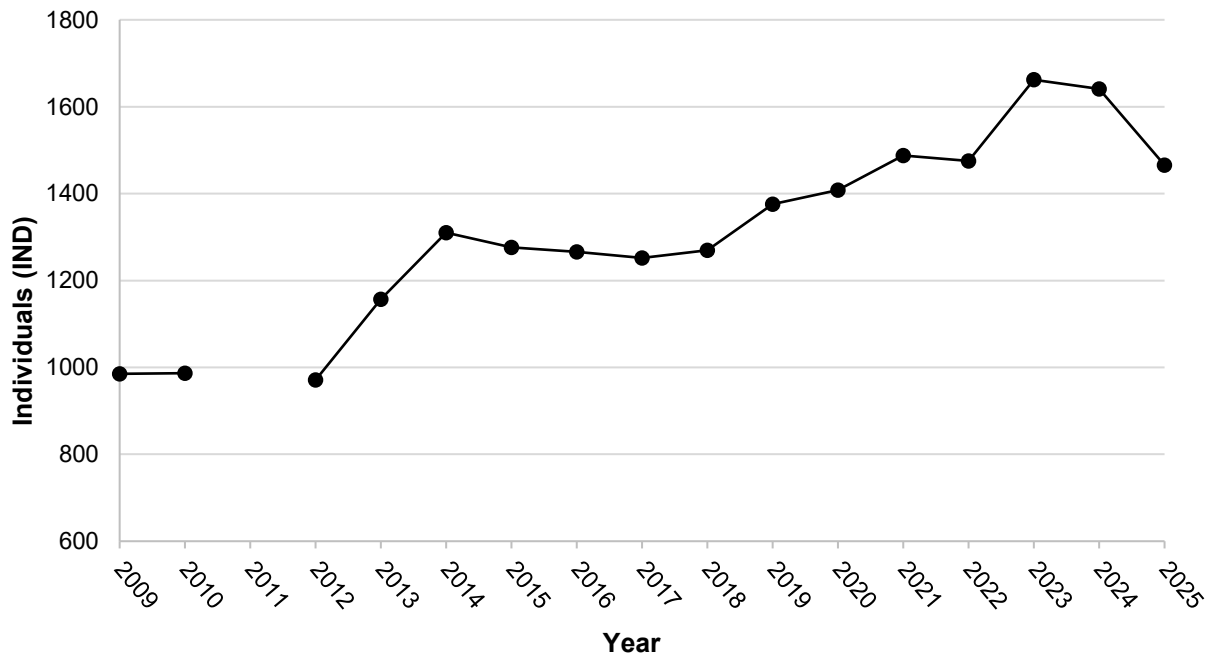


Figure 15: Total number of Common Guillemot individuals from 2009-2025 across six study-plot areas, excluding Grandstand viewpoint.

Razorbill study-plot counts

Six study-plots were counted between 0800 and 1600 on five occasions between 01/06/2025 and 17/06/2025. The mean of the study-plot counts for Razorbills was 902 individuals which is a 16.2% decline from the mean 2024 count of 1077 individuals (Table 9). This is the lowest mean count since 2019, 867 individuals, and represents a departure from an increasing population trend (Fig. 16). The Razorbill population remains high however when compared to historical results, but the sharp decline from 2024 is a concern. Perhaps the record low productivity witnessed this year caused individuals to depart the cliffs before the counts were completed, as there is a significant difference between the highest count (1024) and the lowest count (776). Again, analysis of drone images taken this summer will hopefully shed some light on these results and whether this drop in numbers is mirrored across the colony, or just fluctuations within the study-plot areas.

Table 9: Razorbill study-plot count results for the last 5 years, excluding Grandstand viewpoint. Green indicates the highest count for each year.

Count	2021 IND total	2022 IND total	2023 IND total	2024 Total Ind	2025 Total Ind
1	1055	1305	1188	1146	1024
2	1027	1108	1327	1016	967
3	903	989	1223	1040	899
4	1047	904	1165	1022	776
5	967	1020	1108	1163	842
Mean	950	999	1109	1077	902

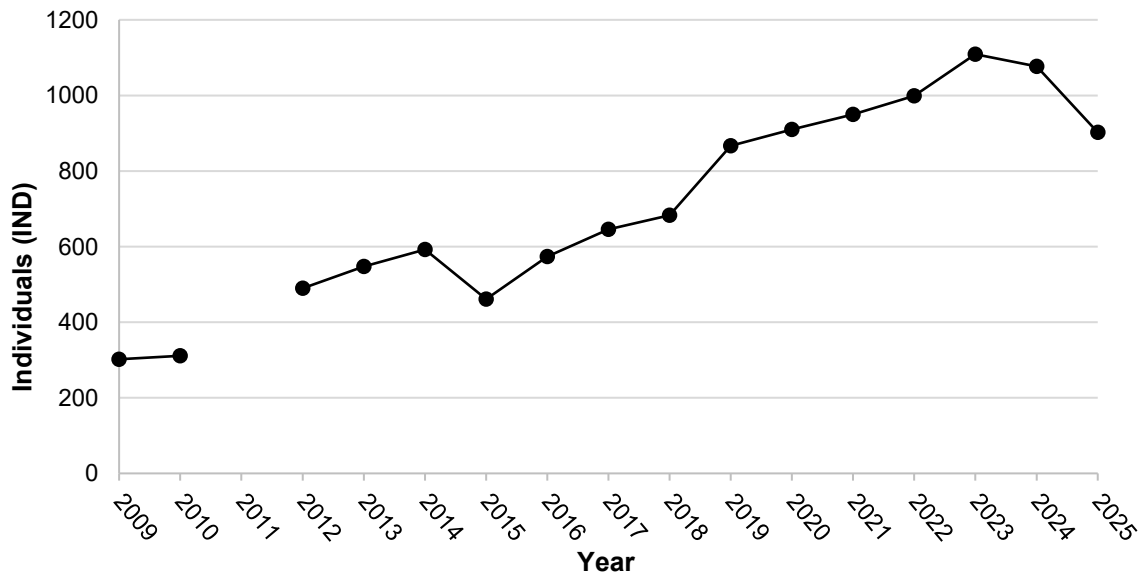


Figure 16: Total number of Razorbill individuals from 2009-2025 across six study-plot areas, excluding Grandstand viewpoint.

Common Guillemot and Razorbill Diet Survey

The following summary has been taken from an unpublished RSPB report (McLoughlin, 2025) of an auk chick diet study undertaken at the colony this summer. A copy of the full report can be downloaded from the [Yorkshire Marine Partnership website](#).

In 2025, for the fifth consecutive year, a programme of Guillemot and Razorbill chick diet monitoring was conducted in the SPA. A total of 61 hours of field observations were undertaken between 5th June and 5th July from Carter Lane, Flamborough. There were 372 feeding observations for Guillemot and 99 feeding observations for Razorbill. As Razorbills feed an average of four fish per feed, there were 326 prey items.

The survey revealed that Guillemot chick diet composition was 64.33% clupeids, likely sprat *Sprattus sprattus*, and 21.86% sandeels *Ammodytes* spp. (Fig. 17). There was an increase this season in the number of clupeids, in 2024 it was 42.2%, and a decrease in the number of sandeels, 54% in 2024. Despite this drop, for the second year sandeels still made up a significant proportion of the Guillemot chick diet, first observed in 2024. Prior to this Guillemot chicks at the SPA had been consuming a largely clupeid based diet for at least 15 years. Lesser Weever *Eccichthys vipera* continue to form a small but sizeable proportion (3.13%) of the Guillemot chick diet, a phenomenon first observed at the SPA in 2023. As in previous years the diet of Razorbill chicks was formed almost entirely of small sandeels, 94.02%.

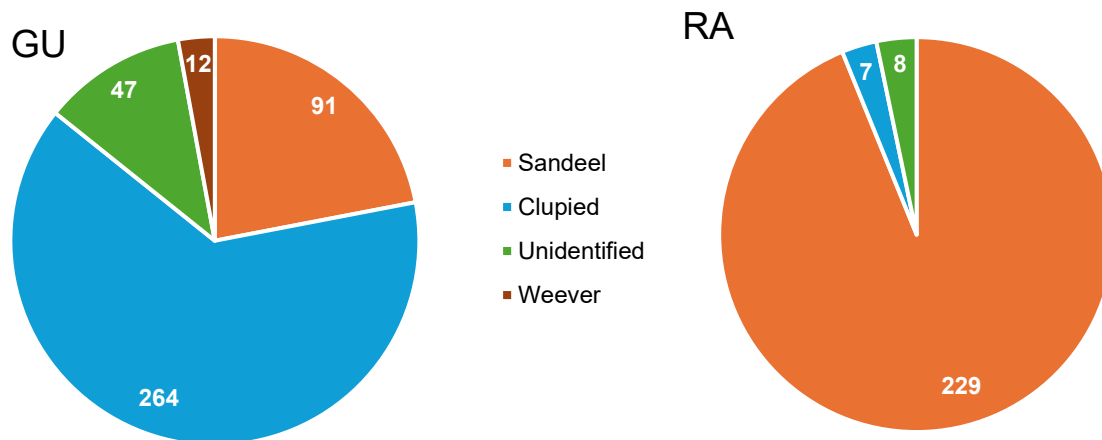
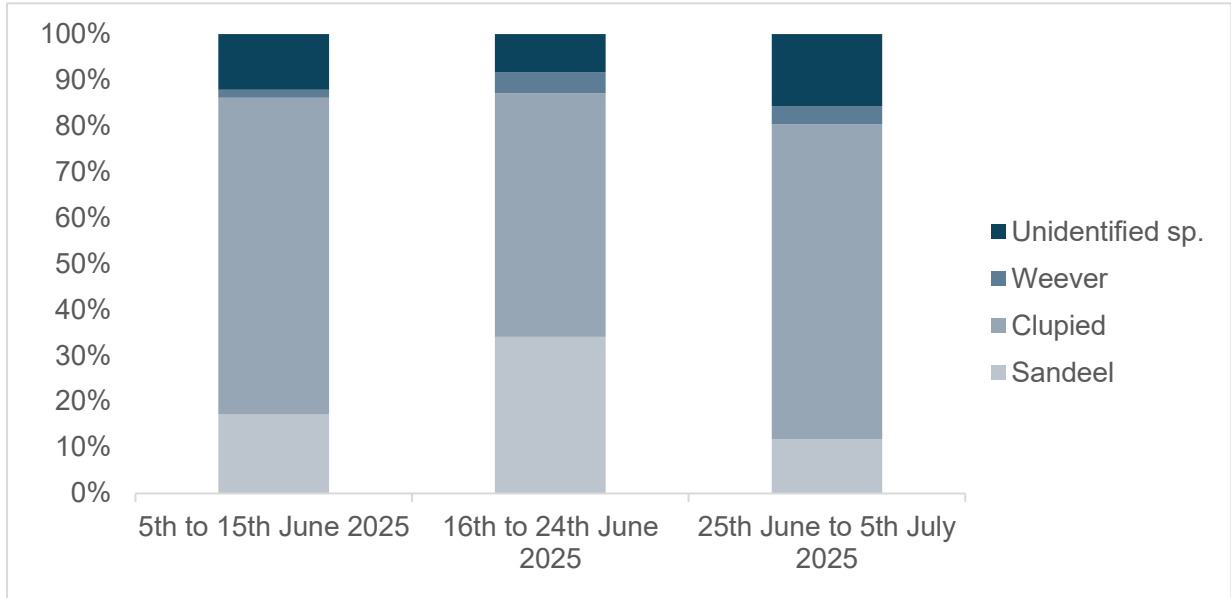


Figure 17: The composition of the feeds that Guillemot (GU) and Razorbill (RA) were observed with across the total monitoring period. The total number of feeding observations for GU was 372 and each feed had a single prey item. For RA there were 99 feeding observations, but 326 prey items identified.

There was seasonal variation seen in the prey species in Guillemot diet (Fig. 18). Initially the diet was comprised of 17.32% sandeels, rising to 34.10% in the mid-season and dropping to 11.76% in the latter stage. In 2024, higher numbers of sandeels were brought in both the initial and mid survey periods before also declining the latter stage. This variation was not seen in the Razorbill diet with sandeels remaining the most common prey item, perhaps reflecting differences in foraging behaviour by the two auk species.

i)



ii)

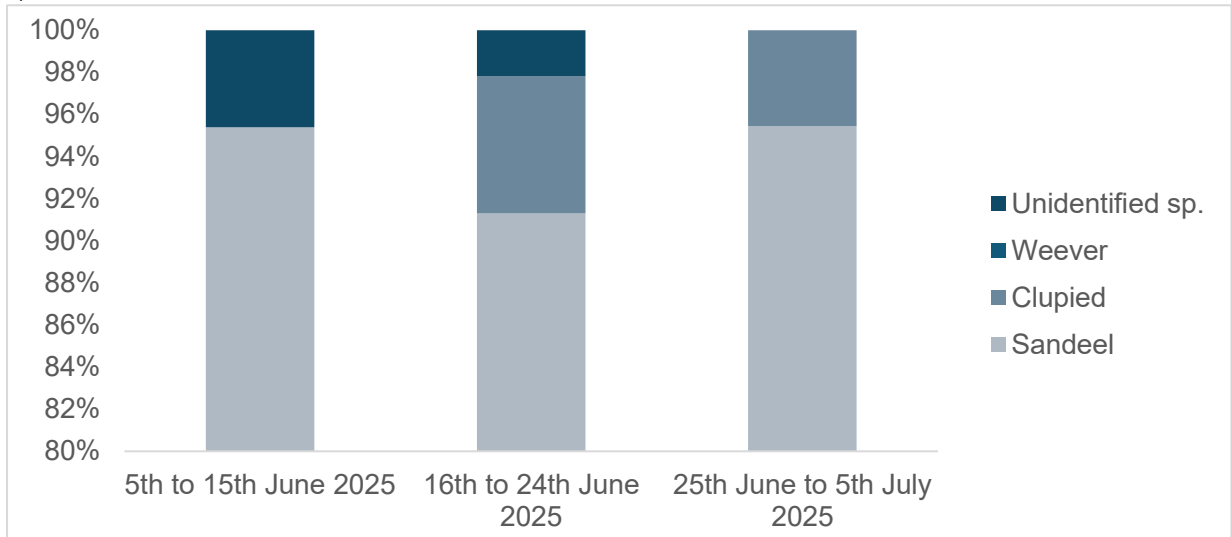


Figure 18: The seasonal variation of prey (not including display feeds), shown in as the percentage of the total feeds in that period, separated by the three equal time periods. i) shows prey fed to GU and ii) prey fed to RA.

Black-legged Kittiwake Retrapping Adults for Survival Project

Background

In 2018, a colour ringing project was set up for Black-legged Kittiwake at North Landing, Flamborough with the aim of establishing long-term adult survival rates. In 2020, the project was formally registered as a Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) with the previous two years data contributing to the project. The results from this study will provide a key monitoring tool when assessing the health of this red-listed species and complement detailed productivity and population monitoring already carried out on Black-legged Kittiwake within the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA.

Results

The colour ringing project is now into its eighth consecutive year, with weekly resighting efforts undertaken throughout April and July inclusive. During that period a total of 76 colour ringed individuals were recorded from previous years, matching the same number resighted in 2024. In 2025, an additional five individuals were added to the project and were fitted with a plain orange colour ring (stated in brackets hereafter) above a metal BTO ring on the right leg, and an alpha-numeric colour ring starting with the letter X on the left leg. These join 11 adults added in 2024 (White), 19 adults in 2023 (Yellow), 19 adults in 2020 (Green), 60 adults in 2019 (Red) and 51 adults in 2018 (Blue), bringing the total number of colour ringed individuals in this project to 165. It is becoming increasingly difficult to catch new birds at the study site as birds have become wary of the catching method, and the site has been worked for eight years. It is proposed that no catching is undertaken for the next couple of years to allow them to settle, whilst still maintaining the same resighting effort which has no impact on the colony. With seven years of resighting data now collected we hope to be able to present some results for the project in the next report alongside national trends, once the data has been analysed.

During the resighting visits this year, an individual was recorded which had originally been colour ringed in 2018. It stayed in the colony for four years and then disappeared for two years, returning this summer. What had it been up to and where did it go in this two-year hiatus, it would be fascinating to know.



Image 1: Black-legged Kittiwake catching team at North Landing, Flamborough 2025.

Gannet Whole Colony Count

In 2025, the Gannet whole colony count was carried out using drone images rather than by boat as has previously been the case. These images will be processed over the winter season and thus there are no results to present in this report. The most recent colony count remains the 2024 count and the results are as follows. The following summary has been taken from an unpublished RSPB report (Clarkson 2024). A copy of the full report can be downloaded from the [Yorkshire Marine Partnership website](#).

In 2022, during the whole colony count, the first signs of HPAI were first recorded in the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA. Gannet was one of the species most affected by HPAI and high levels of adult and chick mortality were observed in specific areas within the colony. A repeat count of the Gannet colony was carried out in 2023 to assess the impact of HPAI on the colony (Butcher et al 2023). A further count was carried out in 2024, as part of a national Gannet census, and to enable a further assessment of the impact of HPAI on the local Gannet population.

The 2024 Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA Gannet colony held 15,794 apparently occupied nest-sites (Fig. 19). A minimum of 1,951 non-breeding birds were also present. Despite the influence of avian influenza, the colony has grown by 21.6% since 2022. However, the rate of growth is not equal across the colony. In the Staple Newk area, the area which prior to HPAI was the hub of the colony and exhibited the highest densities of nesting birds, the rate of growth was only 3.3%, since 2022 (Table 10). This contrasts with increasingly higher growth rates in the size of the colony northwards from Staple Newk.

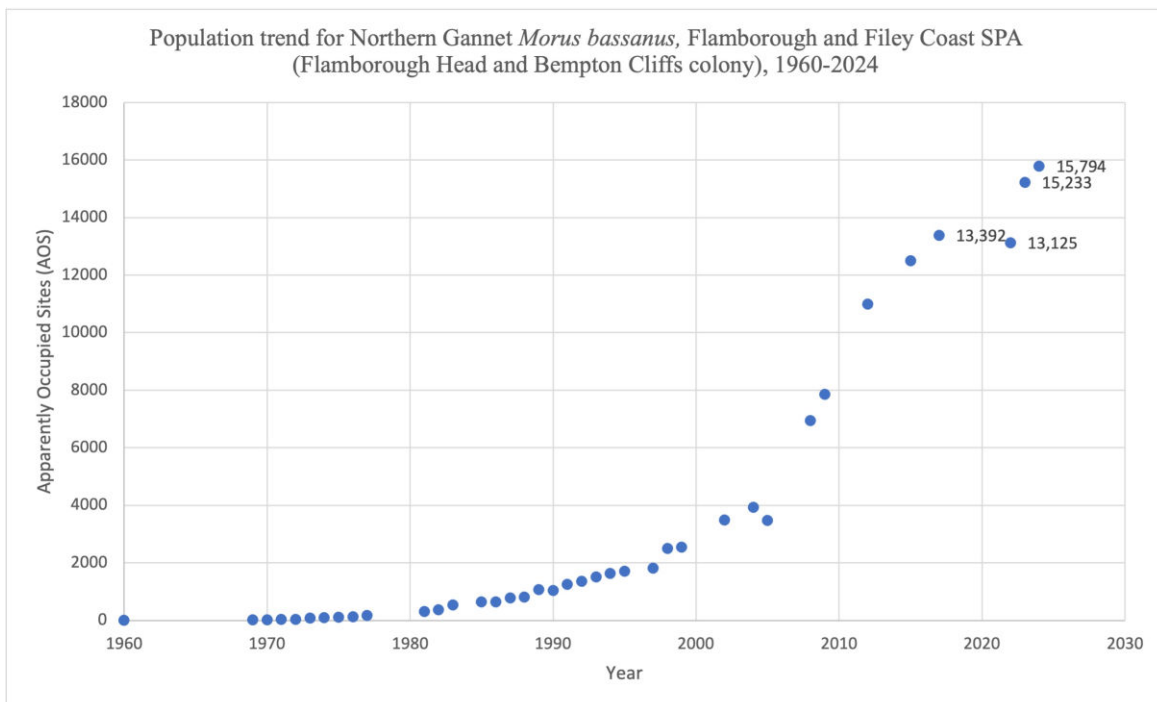


Figure 19: Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*, breeding population trend for the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA colony (Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs colony) 1960-2024.

Table 10. Changing distribution and rates of colony growth of Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* in the F&FC SPA colony, since 2017.

SMP Plot	2022 (AOS)	2023 (AOS)	2024 (AOS)	Percentage growth in Gannet colony since HPAI (2022)
Dyke	12	75	19	
Wandale	1838	1770	1898	3.3%
Grandstand	1324	1576	1571	18.7%
Bartlett	2789	3059	3182	14.1%
Jubilee	1784	1995	2154	20.7%
Buckton	2776	3598	3536	27.4%
Trig-point	2359	2913	3160	34.0%
Speeton	106	224	236	122.6%
Total	13125	15233	15794	20.3%

The growth in numbers is spread across the colony with many new breeding pairs infilling alongside existing nesting territories or establishing colony extensions in clubs of previously non-breeding birds. Several pairs occupying nest territories in 'non-breeding clubs' at the top of the cliffs, are breeding successfully in sites that previously would have been considered unsuitable due to predation risk by predatory mammals.

There have also been significant extensions to the southern and northern boundaries of the Gannet colony in the last five years. This includes a potential significant shift in 2024, when a small number of non-breeding Gannets established a temporary 'club' on Breil Nook, on the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Flamborough Cliffs Nature Reserve, approximately 1.5 km south of the current southern boundary of the colony. In 2025, no Gannets were seen at Breil Nook.

The drone count image analysis for 2024 showed a close correlation with the traditional boat-based colony count. For this species, we are confident that drone imagery is a viable methodology going forward for whole colony population counts of Gannet.

Winter Guillemot Attendance

Winter Guillemot Attendance – Daily Counts

The presence of Guillemot from Bartlett Nab viewpoint was counted daily at 9am from November 2024 to February 2025 by reserve volunteers and staff. Guillemots were present on a total of 61 days over the 120-day period from 1st November until 28th February, 53% of days in the overall period, about 60% of days after the first return in mid-November. There were two patterns in attendance (Table 11, Fig 20). Firstly, increasing numbers through November/December peaking in January, and secondly a regular c. five-day period of attendance, with a peak usually at day three, then reducing for a day or two, followed by absence from the colony, varying from 1 to 10 days.

Table 11: The presence of Guillemots each month, the number of mornings that they were present, the percentage of days they were present that month and the peak count on cliffs, the sea, and totalled.

Month	No. of mornings Guillemots present	% of days present by month	Peak on cliffs	Peak on sea	Peak count
November	9	30%	1,168	700	1,868
December	17	55%	2,070	2,300	4,100
January	23	75%	3,230	3,500	5,800
February	15	54%	2,730	3,500	5,250
Nov – Feb	64	53%	3,230	3,500	5,800

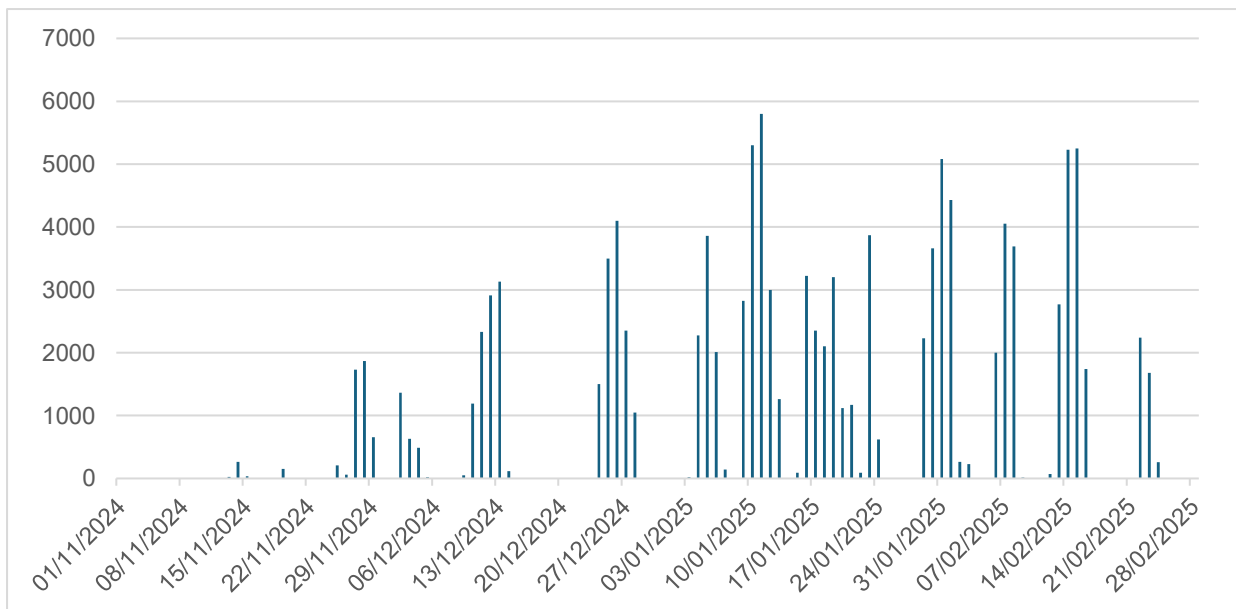


Figure 20: The daily presence of Guillemots from Bartlett Nab from 01/11/2025 to 28/02/2025.

Winter Guillemot Attendance – Timelapse Camera Images

A research project on winter auk attendance was carried out by Bethan Rogers as part of a MSc in Land and Ecological Restoration. This is a brief overview of the report’s findings.

In 2024, two cameras were installed on the cliff top, one at Old Dor and the other at Nettletrip. The cameras are taking time-lapse photographs of several sections of the colony to help test remote monitoring of seabird populations. Throughout the 2024/25 winter the images from the camera at Nettletrip were analysed for the presence of auks. The camera captured 2709 usable images between 07:15 – 12:30 each morning from November 2024 to April 2025.

Guillemots returned to the cliffs from 13/11/2024 and returned intermittently after that date (Fig. 21). In November, the images often only had a single bird on them and typically they were present for under an hour. By late March, as the breeding season approached, site occupancy increased in frequency and duration, with sites often being occupied nearly all daylight hours. Unsurprisingly, peak attendance was 83 individuals on 10/03/2025. These findings suggest a progressive build-up of colony use during the non-breeding season, likely linked to pre-breeding site assessment and social interactions.

Environmental factors also have an influence on the Guillemot attendance. Wind speed and wind gusts have a strong negative correlation with presence of Guillemots, so if wind speed and gusts increase, the numbers in attendance decrease. There was also a moderate negative correlation between precipitation and attendance, also a weak negative correlation with mean temperature and attendance.

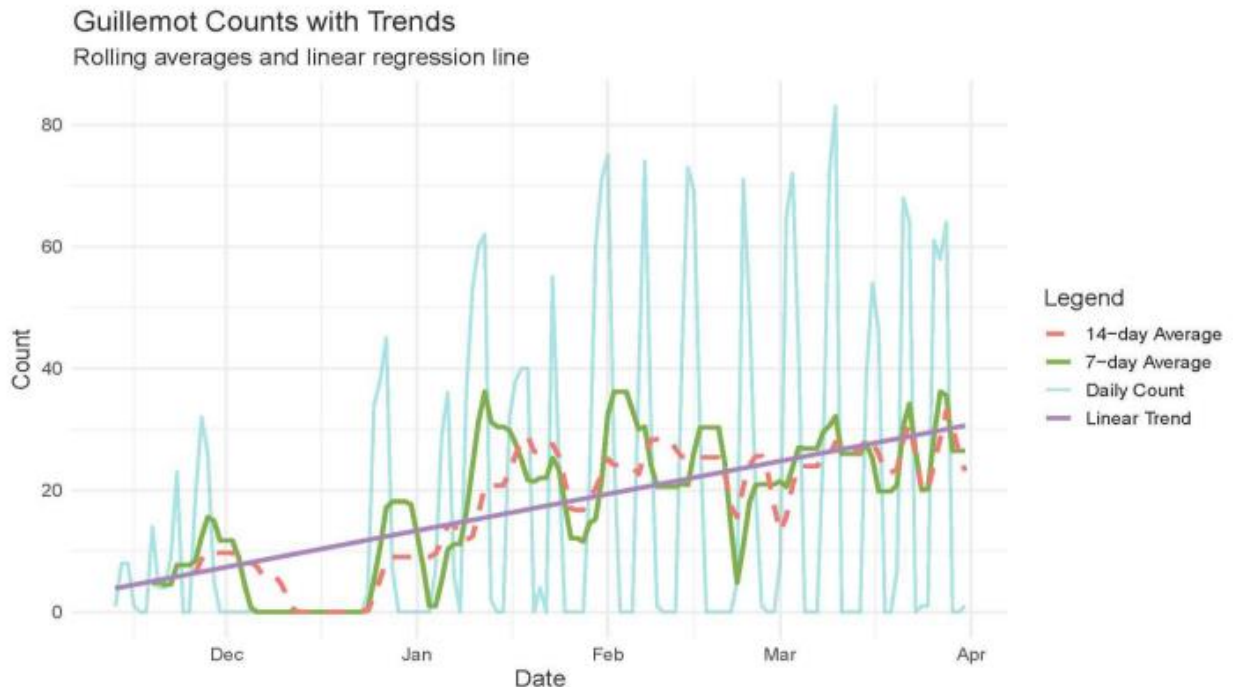


Figure 21: The count of Guillemot attendance on the images by date. (Rogers 2025)

Nest Litter Survey

A survey of the amount of litter in Gannet nests across the Bempton Cliffs reserve was carried out on 4th October by Natural England staff members Janie Latchford and Martha Griffin. From the Jubilee Corner, Bartlett Nab and Staple Newk viewpoints, all visible Gannet nests were documented along with any litter they contained. The type of litter in each nest was also recorded and categorised as; rope, fishing line, hard plastic, soft plastic and other plastic/unidentifiable.

Combined results of 1133 nests surveyed showed that 21% of nests contained some form of litter (Fig. 22). The least amount of litter was in nests at Bartlett with just 4% (13 out of 354 nests) of nests and the plastic seen was fishing line and rope. Jubilee also had a low percentage of nests with litter at 10% (39 out of 389 nests) and all these nests had rope with some additionally having fishing line. Staple Newk had the highest percentage of nests with litter at 47% (182 out of 390 nests). The survey at Staple was more difficult due to the sheer amount of ropes spanning multiple nests and so they estimated the proportion of nests containing plastic rather than a straightforward count. When breaking down the litter at Staple, all nests had rope which spanned multiple nests, there was also fishing line, soft plastics and a “blue ribbon” that was classified as other.

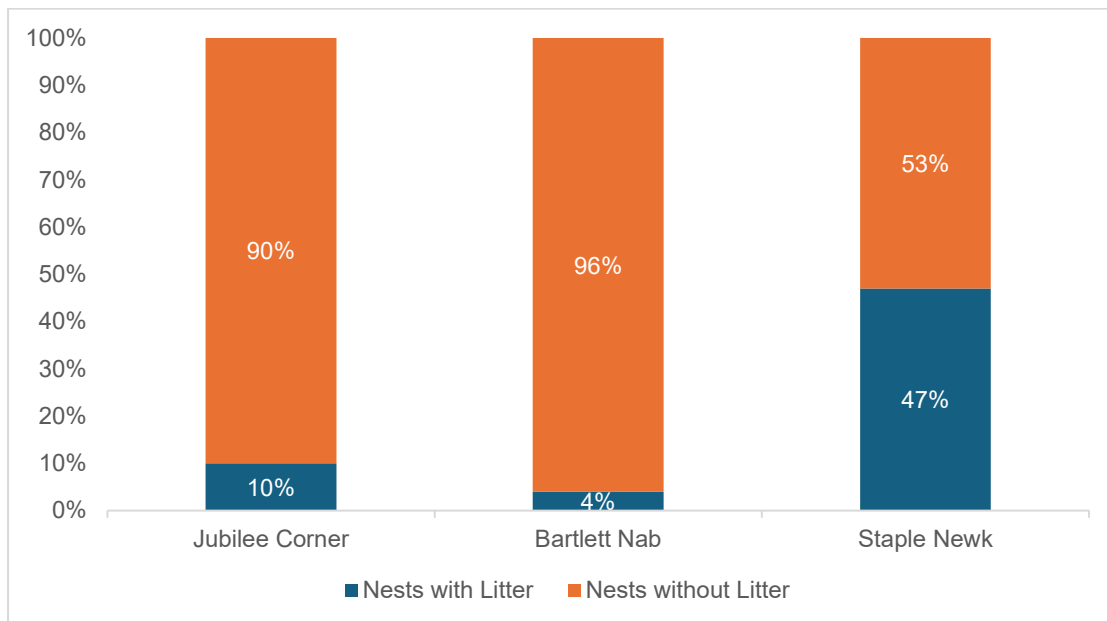


Figure 22: The percentage of nests that contained litter, blue, and the percentage that were clear of litter, orange, at each of the three sites that were surveyed.

It is not a surprise that Staple had higher amounts of litter than the other sites surveyed. Litter at Staple is much less likely to fall off and more likely to encompass more nests as it is much flatter than Bartlett and Jubilee, which are much more classic cliff face nest sites.

European Shag Colour Ring Resightings Project

Only one colour-ringed Shag was noted at the colony this year. Green DAN was seen once during routine productivity monitoring, the seventh year that this bird has been recorded. To date, 35 individuals have been recorded here (Table 12).

Table 12: European Shag colour ring re-sightings at Flamborough & Filey Coast SPA 2014 – 2025.

Code	BTO ring number	Year Ringed	Age	Colony	Years recorded at Flamborough & Filey Coast SPA
EUH		2014	Pullus	Fidra	2014, 2017
CLR		2014	Pullus	Farne Islands	2014, 2015
END	1478565	2014	Pullus	Inchmickery	2014, 2015, 2016, 2017
CHC	G8898	2006	Pullus	Isle of May	2014, 2015, 2016, 2017
CNE		2014	Pullus	Farne Islands	2014
ACE	1472974	2014	Adult	Craigleith	2015, 2016
ESB	1478625	2014	Pullus	Inchmickery	2015
ARI		2014	Pullus	Craigleith	2015
NEJ		2015	Pullus	Farne Islands	2015
DAN	1485389	2016	Pullus	Isle of May	2017, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2023, 2024, 2025
UWE		2016	Pullus	Farne Islands	2017
FTA		2016	Pullus	Isle of May	2017
IAX		2016	Pullus	Isle of May	2017
HUD		2016	Pullus	Isle of May	2017
LRR		2016	Pullus	Farne Islands	2018, 2021, 2022
TPC	1396622	2009	Adult	Craigleith	2014, 2015, 2016, 2017
RZF		2013	Adult	Farne Islands	2015
PCA		2010	Pullus	Farne Islands	2015, 2016
AUL	1483281	2015	Adult	Isle of May	2016, 2017
BLJ		2017	Adult	Isle of May	2018, 2019
AFP		2014	Pullus	Isle of May	2014, 2019
AUH	1483074	2014	Pullus	Isle of May	2016, 2017, 2018
ADA	1473962	2014	Pullus	Isle of May	2016, 2018
IPJ		2016	Pullus	Isle of May	2016, 2018
DAP	1472058	2015	Pullus	Isle of May	2017
IDT		2016	Pullus	Isle of May	2017
CUX	1472024	2015	Pullus	Isle of May	2017
HZA		2015	Pullus	Isle of May	2017
EZS		2018	Pullus	Farne Islands	2018
TDI	1716199	2022	Pullus	Isle of May	2023
NDC		2014	Pullus	Isle of May	2014
FTX		2012	Pullus	Isle of May	2014
CTF		2018	Pullus	Isle of May	2018
UDA	1495246	2020	Pullus	Isle of May	2021
AFN	1453306	2011	Pullus	Isle of May	2017

Recreational Disturbance

Kindly provided by the Yorkshire Marine Nature Partnership



Data on recreational activities and wildlife disturbance events has been recorded around the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA consistently since 2013. The majority of data is collected 'ad-hoc' by volunteers and staff from RSPB Bempton Cliffs and other local organisations. Students from regional universities are also invited to conduct 'intensive surveys' throughout the main seabird breeding season. This information is used to support management of the site and to educate user groups on the sensitivities of the breeding seabird colony, via the Yorkshire Marine Nature Partnership (YMNP).

Over the years this research has helped to identify a number of activities that have the potential to disturb the natural behaviour of the breeding seabird colony. This has led to the development of user-group specific codes of conduct and voluntary agreements, designed to allow activities to continue whilst reducing any negative impacts on the seabirds. These agreements have been bolstered by partnership arrangements such as Operation Seabird, and the active engagement of local Police, RSPCA and the Marine Management Organisation in responding to recreational disturbance issues.

Since the Covid pandemic (2020 – 2021), recreational disturbance reports have been fewer in number compared to pre-Covid figures. The 2025 season did not reverse this trend and reporting is still significantly lower than pre-Covid levels. Furthermore, no students were recruited to gather additional data during the 2025 season.

Overall, 15 seabird disturbance reports were received in 2025, of which all were considered to cause high to moderate disturbance. This year, personal watercraft (Jet Skis) accounted for the majority of records (8), for the first time since 2020 which is an interesting change to a previously consistent downward trend for this activity. Other notable activities were motorised boats and canoes / kayaks.

Continued monitoring over the next few years will be crucial to understand these fluctuations further and explore whether a lower level of reporting equates to a lower level of disturbance. However, the YMNP feels that wildlife disturbance is not accurately reflected in these reporting figures, and that incidents of disturbance are actually much higher. The YMNP is exploring how monitoring recreational activities around the SPA can be improved, in future years.

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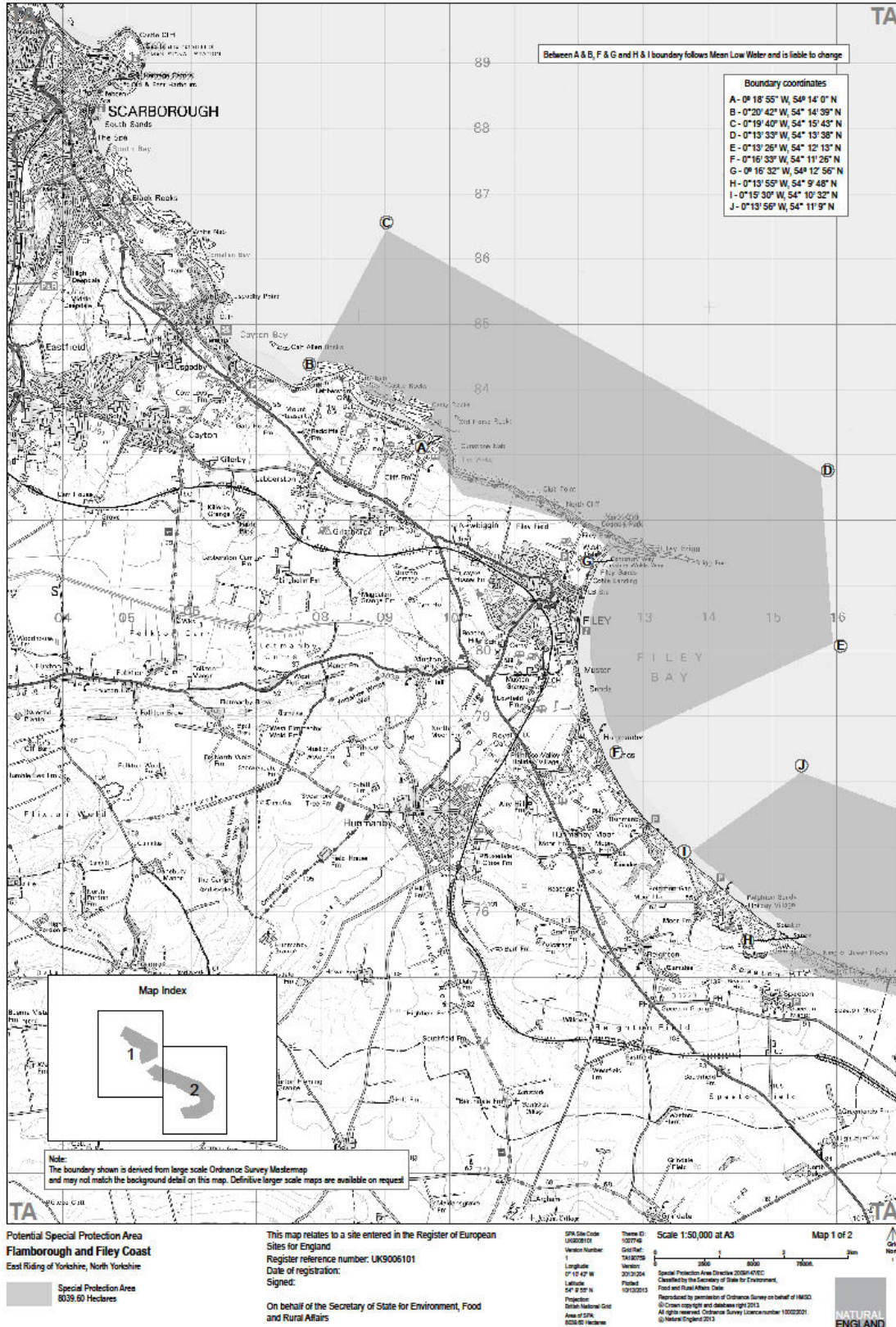
Blue Dolphin Holiday Park at Filey for allowing access to reach important sections of the colony for monitoring works.

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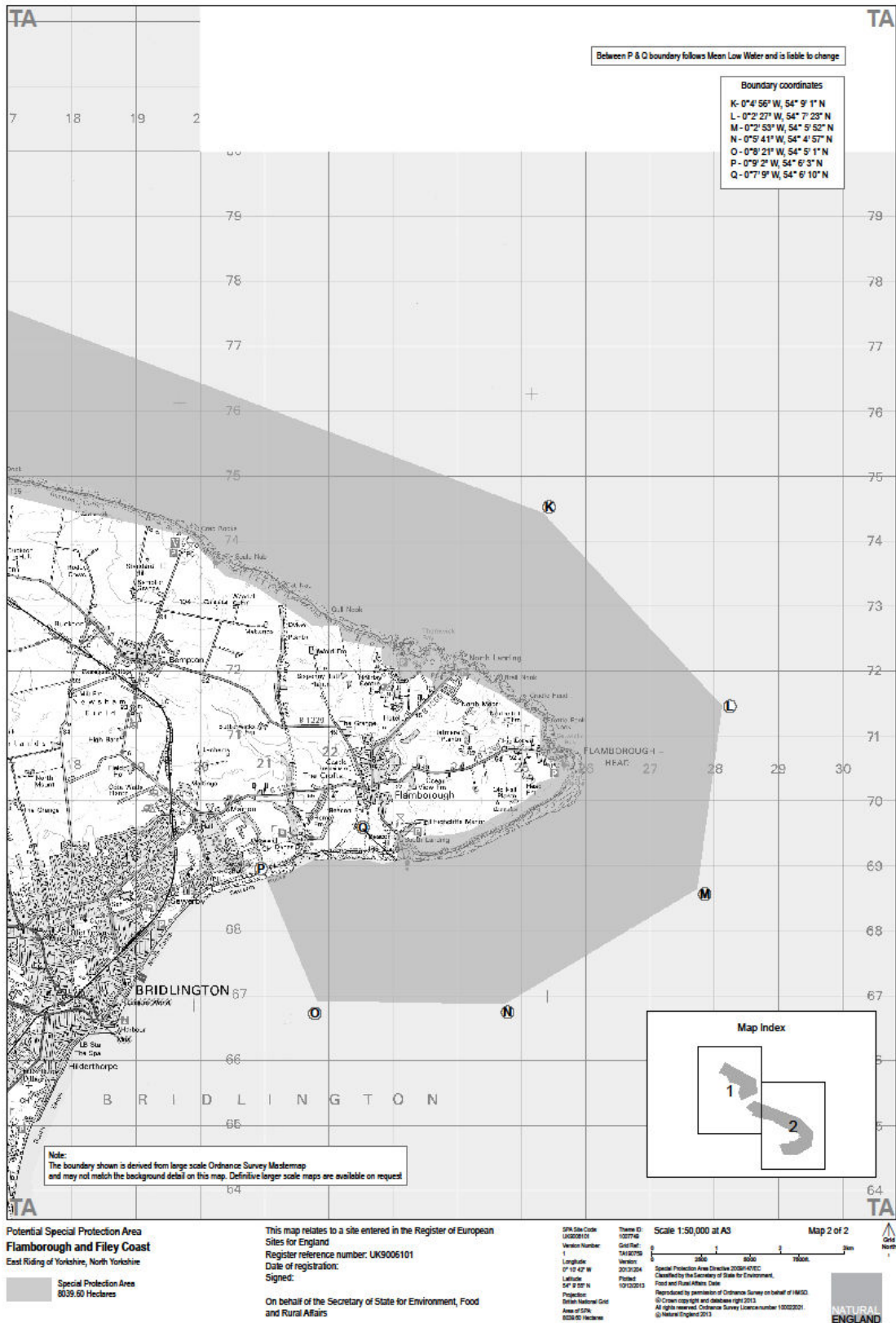
Without all of whom the Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA seabird monitoring programme would not be possible.

APPENDIX 1: Flamborough and Filey Coast SPA boundary maps

North



South



APPENDIX 2: Productivity monitoring plot locations

Northern Fulmar productivity plots – Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs



Northern Fulmar productivity plots – Filey



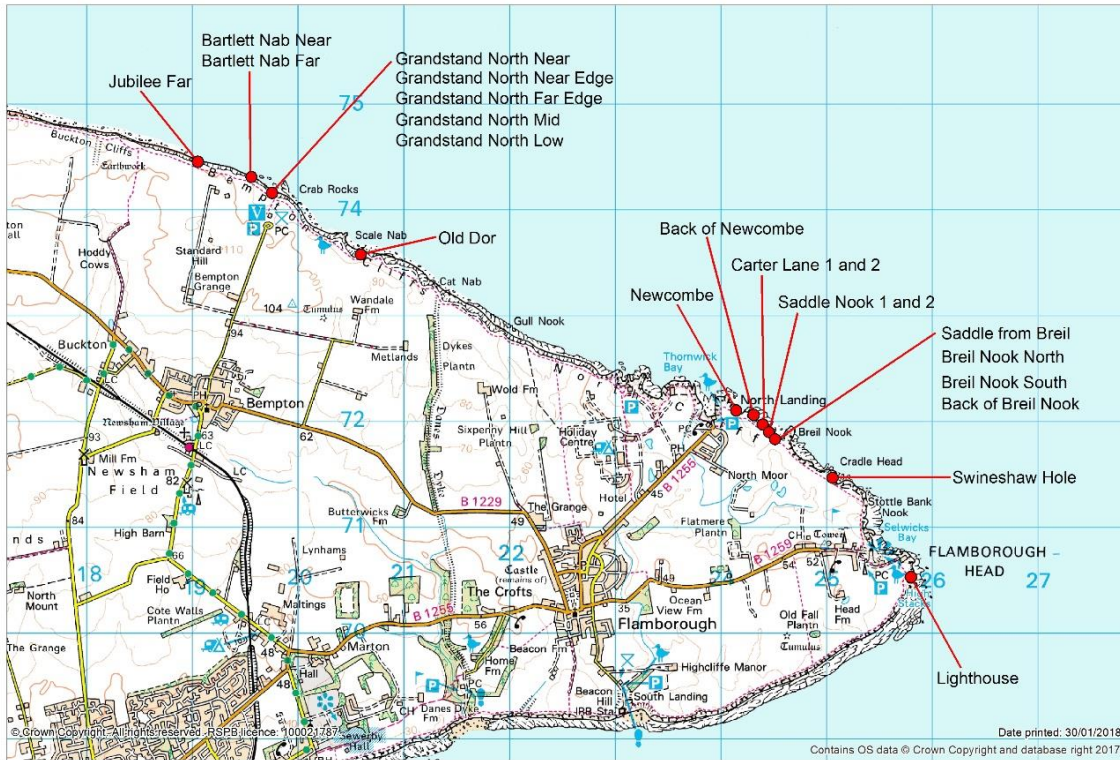
Northern Gannet productivity plots



European Herring Gull productivity plots



Black-legged Kittiwake productivity plots – Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs



Black-legged Kittiwake productivity plots – Filey



Common Guillemot productivity plots



Razorbill productivity plots



APPENDIX 3: Study-plot monitoring locations

Black-legged Kittiwake study-plot locations



Common Guillemot study-plot locations



Razorbill study-plot locations

