

12 November 2021

Compiled by NEBBS
group coordinator

Laboratory work, autumn 2021

We have processed several beached birds at the Dove Marine Laboratory (Cullercoats, Newcastle University) on days in September (7, 8, 15 and 16), October (6, 12 and 13) and November (2, 3, 9 and 10) with further November days to follow (16, 17, 23 and 24) and into December. To date this has allowed the initial processing of 17 northern fulmars (11 male, 4 female, 2 unknown) and 18 guillemots (11 male, 6 female, 1 unknown). During this lab work training has been provided to and valuable assistance received from Matthew Livsey (Newcastle University fourth-year MBiol Zoology student) and two of our surveyors: Rose Di Mascio and Pauline Gilbertson. Stomachs and intestines will be provided to Matthew for contents analysis as part of his final year project. During the remainder of November and December, further laboratory work will proceed on guillemots, razorbills and very likely with little auks.

Five razorbills are to be processed, all found in our region in September 2021 during the recent starvation incident. Similarly we have processed six guillemots from this incident. Tissues (stomach, intestines, head, liver and kidney) from each of these birds will be provided to the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) for testing to try and ascertain any underlying cause for the incident. Francis Daunt, from the CEH, has been accumulating information about the incident which has affected auks from Orkney to Norfolk and across into southern Norway, the Netherlands and Belgium. Subsequent auk deaths in Northeast England have been very much reduced compared to September 2021 figures (see NEBBS News Note No. 11, v2, 28 Oct 2021).

Of the 17 fulmars which have been examined at the laboratory this autumn, six were found and collected in Northeast England during 2020 and eleven during 2021. Their stomach contents will be analysed in the Netherlands.

We extend many thanks to the Dove Marine Laboratory staff and researchers for allowing the use of their facilities and providing continuing encouragement over many years.

As the space afforded by our new freezer (funded by Northumberland & Tyneside Bird Club; see NEBBS News Note No. 10, 27 Sept 2021) becomes available, **surveyors are invited to collect** a few fresh auks (guillemot, razorbill, little auk and puffin) this winter for future study. As standard practice we continue to collect beach-washed fulmars and kittiwakes with intact abdomens please.



Please continue to monitor your beaches, and more frequently at this time of the auk incident. Be cautious in handling the birds and consider wearing protective gloves. Please keep me informed of your findings. Please age the auks nicely (WTips+/-, 0+0, W+0/1/2/etc) – and ask me for details on methods (specifics should be noted).

Photo 1. Student Matthew Livsey works on common guillemot URIA-NEE-2021-008, a first-year male, found dead 9 Oct 2021.

In conclusion Please continue to return your regular survey reports. I send thanks for your continuing involvement. Laboratory work continues with opportunities to observe and assist.

Kind regards, Dan Turner (Group coordinator).

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