



PROTECTING SEABIRDS  
FROM INVASIVE PREDATORS



# Media release

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## Major EU funded project launches campaign to **help protect UK seabird islands**

- Internationally important seabird colonies at risk from ground predators

A project to help protect the UK's internationally important seabird islands is going public today (Friday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2019) with the launch of its new campaign **Save Our Seabirds from Invasive Predators**.

The Biosecurity for LIFE project, which was awarded £700,000 of funding from EU LIFE last year is a partnership between the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the National Trust and the National Trust for Scotland.

This campaign aims to raise awareness of the risk to seabirds such as puffins, Manx shearwater and European storm-petrel from predators such as rats, stoats and mink – and the measures people can take to avoid accidentally transferring them to important seabird colonies on islands.

Measures include encouraging boat owners to check their boats, cargo and baggage, and for day trippers to check their bags and keep any foodstuffs in animal proof containers.

The UK is home to an estimated eight million breeding seabirds, with up to half of the EU populations of seabirds breeding here.

Many of our most important seabird breeding colonies are on islands that are naturally free of predators. Around the world predation of seabird eggs and young by invasive, non-native predators is one of the leading causes of their decline. Over the last few centuries, many seabird colonies in the UK have suffered from falls in population or been lost completely in this way.

Tom Churchyard, Biosecurity for LIFE Project Manager said: "Putting good biosecurity measures in place for seabird islands will reduce the risk of new predators arriving and having a negative impact on breeding birds.

"Good biosecurity entails prevention and early detection of new invasive species, and being able to respond rapidly to incursions if they do occur.

"This threat is often underestimated – to date, very few of the UK's internationally important seabird islands have any protection against the arrival of new predators.

"New incidents are reported every year from islands around the UK, and climate change among other factors is expected to make these a more common occurrence."

The four-year 'Biosecurity for LIFE' project will work with island managers, conservation organisations, island communities and key marine industries to develop UK capacity to implement seabird island biosecurity to help keep the islands safe from predators that aren't naturally found there.

Through training, an awareness raising campaign, and practical on-the-ground conservation work, the project hopes to secure a future for the UK's seabird islands free from this threat of predation. Many of these islands are already protected under European and national legislation as Special Protection Areas and the measures put in place by the project will help ensure they remain safe places for seabirds to raise their young.

Dr David Bullock, Head of Species and Habitat Conservation at the National Trust said: "It's vital that the UK addresses this acute seabird conservation issue. Many of the UK's incredibly important seabird populations, such as shearwaters, puffins, terns and storm-petrels, are in serious trouble and their colonies have to be free from disturbance in order to breed successfully. We need to do all we can to help them, not only to secure their future but also to protect our wider marine environment."

Dr Richard Luxmoore, Senior Nature Conservation Advisor at the National Trust for Scotland said: "Looking after some of Europe's largest seabird colonies, we can't afford to take shortcuts with biosecurity and we welcome this opportunity to overhaul and publicise our guidelines".

**Ends**