

NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE

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Kittiwakes champion visits St Abbs

The National Trust for Scotland hosted Gordon Lindhurst MSP on his first visit as kittiwake species champion at their St Abb's Head National Nature Reserve.

Kittiwakes have been present at the site which has been cared for by Scotland's largest conservation charity for the past forty years, but there is now real concern over the future of the species, as numbers continue to decline.

Property Manager Liza Cole outlined the charity's work in monitoring seabirds at the important east coast site. The kittiwake colony at St Abbs has been in decline since its height in 1989 when it had a very healthy population of 19,000. In 2016, only 3000 of the species were recorded there.

Gordon Lindhurst, MSP for the Lothian region, said: "I am delighted to be the Species Champion for Kittiwakes and am particularly pleased to see them here at St Abbs along with all of the other seabirds that make up this important colony. I have learnt so much about the changing fortunes of Kittiwakes and the pressures that they are under and look forward to helping to promote their cause in Scotland."

Dr Richard Luxmoore said: "Kittiwakes feed largely on sandeels which breed in huge numbers on the shallow sandbanks off the mouth of the Firth of Forth. Research carried out at the nearby Isle of May has shown that sandeel numbers and Kittiwake breeding success are closely related to cool sea temperatures in the North Sea during the winter. As the sea has warmed up over the last 20 years breeding success has fallen. Other human activities, such as commercial fishing for sandeels and potentially collision with offshore windfarms, combine to exert further pressure on the already struggling seabirds."

The seabird colony at St Abb's Head National Nature Reserve is the most accessible colony in Scotland and barely an hour's drive from the capital. It attracts around 45,000 visitors a year which make a substantial contribution to the local economy. But this volume of visitors could also bring further issues

through disturbance from both walkers and boats. The National Trust for Scotland has initiated a programme of research with students from Napier University to investigate the impacts, if any, of visitor pressure on seabirds and is working with various user groups to develop a code of conduct for the area.

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Editor's Notes:

Images:

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