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National Trust for Scotland calls for public to help save Scotland's seabirds

- **Conservation charity names 5 simple steps to help protect iconic wildlife**
- **Avian flu, climate change and rats among the threats to bird colonies**
- **At-risk species include puffins and Leach's storm petrels**

As concerns grow about the continuing global spread of avian flu, the National Trust for Scotland is asking the public to join in with its efforts to protect Scotland's under-threat seabirds. The conservation charity, which has over 1 million seabirds under its care, has identified five things that people of all ages can do to help protect some of Scotland's best loved wildlife, including puffins, gannets, guillemots and storm petrels, as this year's breeding season gets underway.

Avian flu has had a devastating impact on seabird populations in Scotland. Tens of thousands of seabirds died from avian flu in Scotland in 2022, with 65 dead guillemot chicks found at the St Abb's Head National Nature Reserve in a single day and two thirds of great skuas on St Kilda wiped out by the disease last year. Other existential threats to Scotland's globally important seabird species include dwindling food stocks and intensifying storms, both linked to climate change, and pollution.

Ellie Owen, Senior Seabirds Officer at the National Trust for Scotland, explains how the public can help: 'As part of the Trust's activity to care for Scotland's nature, beauty and heritage, our amazing rangers and other staff will be working relentlessly this spring and summer to give our seabirds the best chance to survive and thrive in our different colonies, including on St Kilda, St Abb's Head, Canna, Staffa, Mingulay and the Murray Isles. There is plenty the public can do to help us conserve and protect Scotland's seabirds, so that future generations can marvel at them too. We'd be hugely grateful for our supporters' and other people's help on five simple steps for saving our seabirds.'

The five steps suggested by the Trust cover a range of issues from helping protect seabird chicks from predators to joining campaigns or citizen science projects. Tourists, dog owners and simply those with an internet connection and some spare time can all play a part.

Follow the 'check, clean, close' rule: Predators like rats or stoats can wreak havoc among eggs and chicks if they arrive on key colonies like St Kilda, Canna or other islands, so the Trust is asking visitors to prioritise biosecurity (the practice of protecting places from the threats to wildlife posed by introducing new diseases or types of plants

or animals that do not naturally occur there). All the islands under the Trust's care have emergency response plans for this, but the best way to keep chicks and eggs safe is to stop predators reaching their shores. So, if you're planning a boat trip, please **check** your bag and clothes for pests; **clean** your boots or shoes with disinfectant; and **close** any food containers tight shut (since they can attract stowaways onto boats or into bags).

Give seabirds space: Visitors to the coast can help by maintaining a good distance from nests and birds that are feeding. People and dogs may disturb or destroy the nests or burrows of birds that raise their young close to the shore. Dog owners are asked to keep their dogs on a short lead or close at heel when near to any places where ground nesting birds breed or feed, or even to leave their dogs at home, especially during the breeding season (1 April to 30 September).

Sign up to a campaign: Look out for seabird (or wildlife) focused campaigns you could back, helping persuade politicians to support high levels of environmental protection, stewardship and biodiversity. A particular concern of the National Trust for Scotland is the impact of fishing practices which damage our seabed and health of some of the fish stocks on which seabirds feed. The Trust wants better protection for our inshore waters to allow them to recover and thrive, and you can help achieve this by joining the campaign: <https://ourseasscotland.eaction.org.uk/bring-back-the-fish>.

Become a citizen scientist: One way the public can help is by taking part in research and monitoring of seabirds themselves, as citizen seabird scientists. For example, in May-August this year, the Trust will be asking to collect images from the public of puffins carrying food to their chicks. Trained volunteers will analyse the photos to try to spot problems emerging in what puffins at NTS sites are finding to feed their chicks. Keep an eye on nts.org.uk for advice on how to carefully collect these photos without disturbing puffins and how to submit them online. And look out for other seabird-related citizen science projects online as well.

Get involved in National Trust for Scotland seabird activities: The Trust has recently launched a Save our Seabirds fundraising campaign to help it take immediate action to protect its valuable seabird colonies before it's too late. Money raised will help rangers to undertake vital monitoring projects to understand avian flu, invest in innovative biosecurity solutions, and support research on how the world can help seabirds survive risks like dwindling food stocks, avian flu and climate change. If you'd like to support this campaign or find out more about it, visit nts.org.uk/sos.

You could also visit Trust properties to see amazing seabirds and seabird experiences, such as the annual 'jumping' where guillemot and razorbill chicks are coaxed by their fathers to leap off a cliff edge on their first flight!

Ellie Owen continues: 'The challenges facing seabirds are very grave, yet every action can make a difference. Back in 2005, the National Trust for Scotland eradicated the brown rat from the isle of Canna; a non-native species, it wreaked havoc on the closed

eco-system by eating the seabirds' eggs and chicks. But after Canna was officially rat free in 2008, seabird numbers bounced back with shag, puffin and guillemot numbers doubling in just ten years. By supporting our five simple actions, our fundraising campaign and other activities, anyone can help to make this type of change happen themselves.

Philip Long OBE, the National Trust for Scotland's Chief Executive, said: 'A Scotland without puffins, kittiwakes or great skuas seems unthinkable. But the threats facing these and other seabirds are so immense that we all have to think of this as a real possibility.

'When we launched our 10-year Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone strategy a year ago, we were bold in our ambitions to care for Scotland's magnificent heritage, and that heritage includes the seabirds and other wildlife that shelter, breed and feed on our lands. Throughout this year, our staff will be out there in our beautiful coastal places, helping nature to flourish and engaging with the public to help them understand how to take action to help save our seabirds. We hope as many people as possible will support them in different ways and take these five simple steps to help save Scotland's seabirds for future generations.'

More information about the National Trust for Scotland's Save Our Seabirds campaign can be found at nts.org.uk/sos

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Notes to editors

About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.