

A note on seabird colony Fowlsheugh, Scotland



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The seabird colony Fowlsheugh

This is just a short note on a visit on 4th-5th July 2009 to the second largest seabird colony in Britain; Fowlsheugh. It is a cliff colony which each year hosts around 130 000 breeding seabirds! It is situated on the east coast of Scotland near Stonehaven (see map below) and is very accessible.



Map of Scotland showing the approximate location of Fowlsheugh encircled in red.

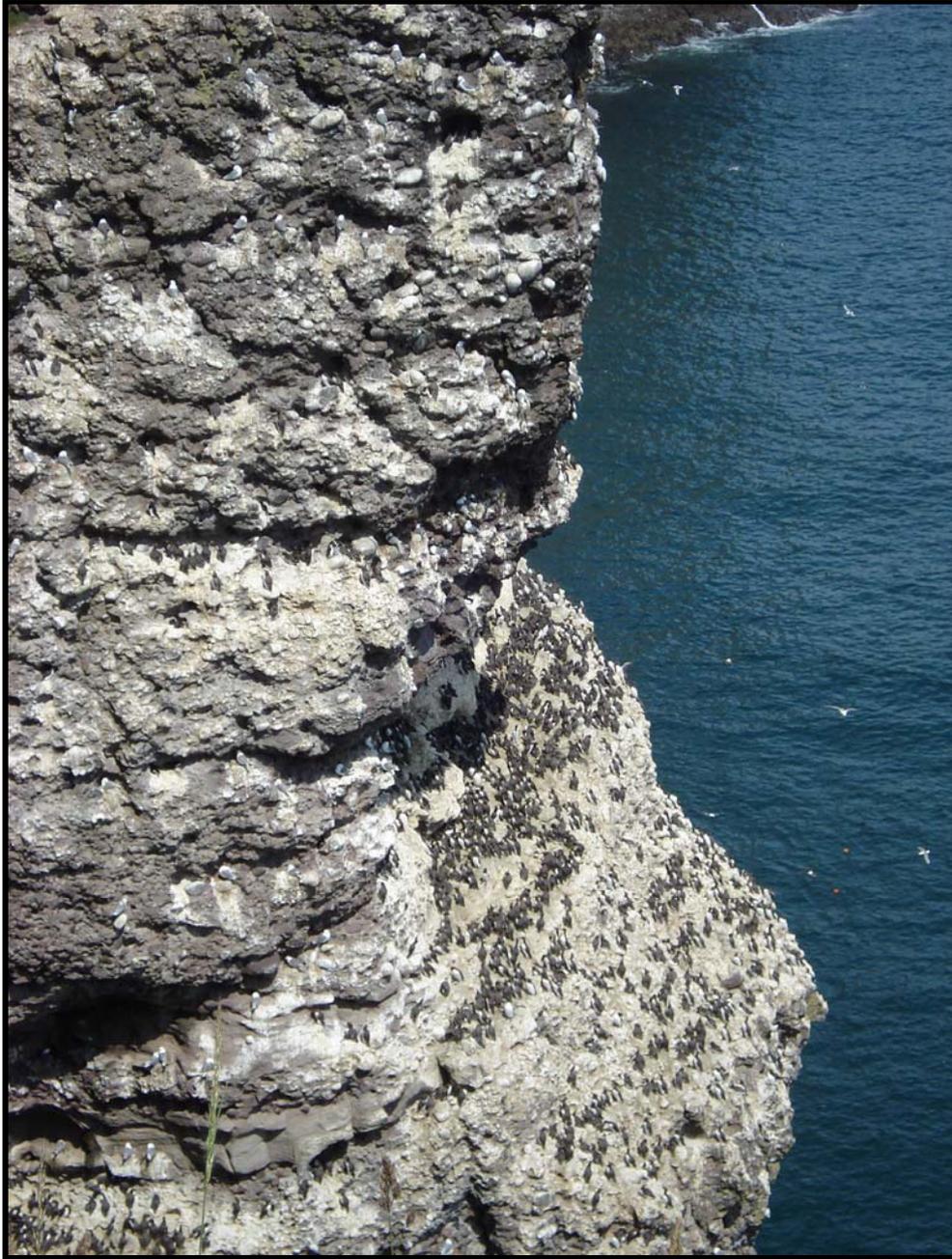
The site is reached from A92. 4.8 km south of Stonehaven you will see a sign towards Crawton in east direction. Take this narrow road until you find a small parking, ca 1-1.5 km. This is the parking to the site and the entrance is ca 200 meters south from here.



The coast at Fowlsheugh has many narrow bays with steep cliffs.

A part of the area is a RSPB-reserve (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and along the coast there is a path that allows you to walk just by the edge of the cliffs and thereby very close to the nesting birds (although, caution is advised to avoid disturbing the breeding birds). The reserve is unmanned and without entrance fee or facilities, it is not one of those exploited “park-like” reserves. The colony contains first of all Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes and Herring Gulls, but also many Fulmars and some Puffins. It is not the biggest colony of the British islands, which is possibly why it doesn’t pop up when you search the internet for seabird colonies in Britain, but it must be one of the absolutely most accessible. It is not more than 180 to 200 km from Edinburgh or Glasgow and is even possible as a day trip from these. Many of the other big colonies in Scotland are out on the islands in the archipelago of the west coast and thereby less accessible. If you want to experience a seabird colony and want a good experience-to-effort ratio this site is potentially the best alternative! The site is a wonderful place, with a fantastic coastline of around 70 meters high cliffs and the closeness to the birds makes the visit unforgettable.

As a bonus one has good chances to see dolphins and whales further out to sea. During our visit we (my girlfriend Teresa and I) saw several Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) and possibly a couple of Harbor Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*). This certainly added to the total experience of the place.



Guillemots and Razorbills are the vast majority of the birds breeding at Fowlsheugh.

When to visit

The seabirds are ashore from April to mid July, so any visit outside this time period is more or less meaningless. We visited 4th and 5th of July and then the place was packed with birds, both on the cliffs, on the water and in the air.

The timing within the day is not very critical since the cliffs are towards east, meaning that the light is fairly good throughout most of the day. However, an early visit would give wonderful pictures if you have the intention of making photographs of the birds. We visited both evening and morning and the evening was very nice as well, although the cliffs are then in shadow and taking photos is tricky. Activity in the colony is high throughout the whole day, but if you want the maximum amount of birds on the cliffs you should visit also in the evening, since many birds are out foraging during the day.

Literature

Prior to the trip we bought the excellent birding guide 'Where to Watch Birds in Scotland' by Mike Madders (ISBN: 978-0-7136-5693-0). This book has numerous birding sites all over Scotland and is great if you are planning to do a more complete tour of the country. Our trip was not primarily focused on birds.

Information about Fowlsheugh can be found on RSPB's homepage:
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/f/fowlsheugh/index.asp>

Or on Wikipedia:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fowlsheugh>



The views over the coast, the overwhelming numbers of birds and the closeness to them makes a visit to Fowlsheugh an unforgettable experience.

If you have any questions or just want to comment on this report, please drop me a line.

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