



February 2018

Dear T.A.G. supporters,

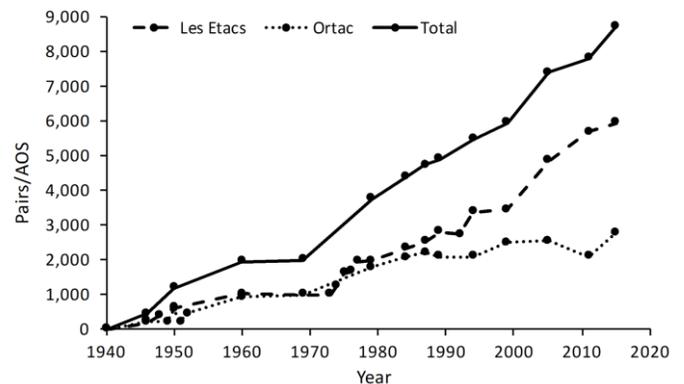
The Gannets made it back on to Les Etacs on the 4th February this year, quite early compared to the last few arrivals (the previous earliest was the 27th January in 2013). The birds did come and go steadily for the first week, occasionally leaving the rocks bare, but seem to have permanently settled by the 10th with hundreds back on both colonies by then.

One of the reasons they do not immediately settle is the Gannets need to rest and to feed up on fish after their northwards migration. At this time of year you will also see the Gannets travelling in a small groups low to the water in a 'V' shape to save energy. Studies have shown that keeping in this tight formation over long distances can save up to 70% of the bird's energy as the experienced leader bird breaks up the air flow, making life easier for the following birds.

Most birds on migration will try and cross the water in one journey which is why they often have to build up such large fat reserves before a crossing. However, seabirds like Gannets can stop and rest on the water as their specially oiled feathers allow them to float without becoming waterlogged.

This year the T.A.G. project will again follow the Gannets on their foraging trips around the Channel and this summer we expect to see the results of our ten geolocators which tracked the Gannet migration this winter

There are three species of Gannet in the world – the Northern Gannet (breeds Europe and North America and the largest of the three), the Australasian Gannet (breeds south east Australasia) and the endangered Cape Gannet (breeds on six islands off southern Africa).



Total number of pairs/apparently occupied sites of Northern Gannets on Les Etacs and Ortac from 1940 - 2014

Looking at our data from the colonies over the past 74 years we can see the numbers of Gannets are increasing. However in the past few years this increase has slowed, perhaps indicating the colonies are nearing their carrying capacity, or the maximum number of Gannets there is space for., particularly on Ortac.

If, as suggested, the colonies are becoming full, it remains to be seen whether the population will plateau or the birds will find new sites to nest in. One concern is that as Gannets take up entire areas, were they to choose a space with existing seabird colonies these birds may be forced to find somewhere else (e.g. Coque Lihou and its Razorbills and Guillemots). However they do not seem to have attempted nesting anywhere new so far!

For more information on T.A.G. please contact Claire on peopleandwildlife@alderneywildlife.org or 01481 822 935



The first few Gannets back on Les Etacs

