

FUGLAÁRIÐ 2023



BEN PORTER AND JENS-KJELD JENSEN *STORM-PETREL STUDIES ON NÓLSOY*

Another exciting field study season on the Storm-petrels of Nólsoy has just come to an end, with a diverse team from across Europe coming together to study these amazing little seabirds in their largest known colony in the World.

Storm-petrels are one of the planet's smallest seabirds, and whilst some information is known about their lives, we still know very little about their biology, diet, movements at sea and migratory behaviours because of their small size and night-time existence.

This year's work saw the local Nólsoy ornithologists Jens-Kjeld Jensen and Jógvan Thomsen joined by returning visitors Anne Ausems (Netherlands) and Ben Porter (Wales), and a wider team including Anna K. Znój (Poland), Mark Bolton (Scotland), Zoe Deakin (Wales), Hannah Hereward (Wales), Rob Thomas (Cardiff University, Wales) and Jade Philips (Wales), along with the support of Sjúrdur Hammer from the Faroese Environmental Agency.



The aim of the research in late summer 2023 was primarily to try to deploy GPS tags on adult Storm-petrels to find out where Nólsoy's birds are finding food out at sea during the breeding season. This work takes many weeks to carry out, and is only possible with birds that are breeding in the amazing custom-made nestboxes that Jens-Kjeld Jensen and Jógvan Thomsen have installed in the colony. These nestboxes allow researchers to study Storm-petrels through the breeding season in easily accessible boxes – their natural nest sites are under rocks and boulder scree, which makes it almost impossible to study these birds in their nests.



These nestboxes are of a pioneering design unique to Nólsoy, which has come about following several years of experimental work by Jógvan and Jens-Kjeld.

In 2020, Jógvan Thomsen made some of the first artificial nestboxes for Storm-petrels and Manx Shearwaters in the southern area of the Nólsoy colony. These were further developed in 2021 and the design was tweaked by Jens-Kjeld Jensen. More than 10 Storm-petrel pairs tried breeding in the 30 boxes during summer 2021, which was an amazing result – usually it takes many years before birds start breeding in a new nest site like this.

The nestbox design was further improved in 2022, especially to help weather-proof the boxes, and then by summer 2023 a total of 72 boxes were in place across Nólsoy. The installation of these nestboxes helped the development of plans for a research project by Ben Porter and Rob Thomas from Cardiff University (Wales), in collaboration with Sjørður Hammer from the Faroese Environmental Agency. Ben carried out pilot study work in the colony in 2021 and 2022, and is now ready to begin a three-year PhD project focused on the island's Storm-petrels.

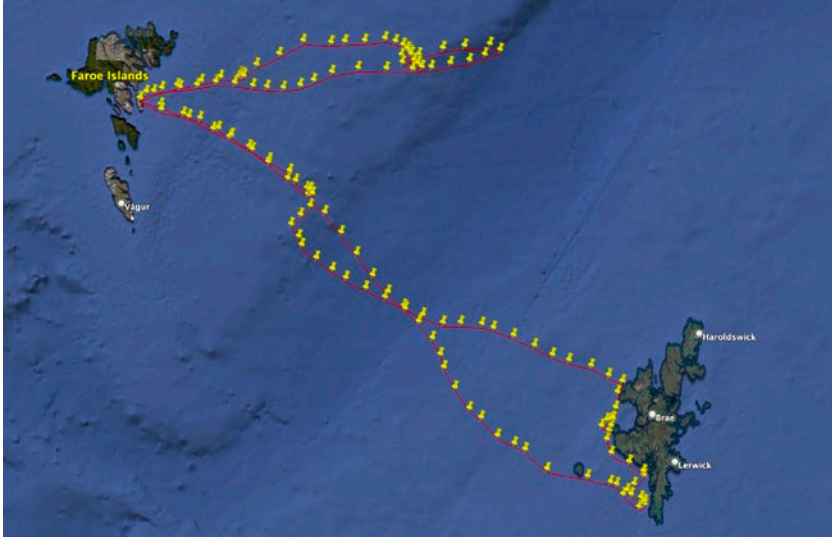


Also in the 2023 team was Dr. Anne Ausems, who first visited the Faroe Islands in 2018 as part of her research with the University of Gdansk (Poland) to collect material for the published scientific paper: 'Differences in tail feather growth rate in Storm-petrels breeding in the Northern and Southern hemisphere. Ausems, Wojczulanis-Jakubas & Jakubas, 2019'. Anne continues annual research work in the Faroes and on Nólsoy's Storm-petrels, and was a key part of the team on the island during the 2023 field season.

Working together in September 2023, this team of researchers was able to uncover some fascinating information on the Storm-petrels of Nólsoy. A total of five GPS tags were successfully deployed and retrieved from breeding adult birds in the colony, and this revealed some amazing foraging journeys south-east to the Shetland Isles and east almost to the coast of Norway! Some

foraging trips were over 1000km in length, and a number of key areas for feeding have been visited by several of the tracked birds. This is only the second time ever that Storm-petrels have been tracked from the Faroes, and so every tag retrieved is providing new and exciting insights into their behaviours at sea. This information is very important in order to understand how these small seabirds use the offshore waters, and how they might be affected by developments and changes to ocean current dynamics under a changing climate.

Regular monitoring of the Storm-petrel boxes revealed that nests were made in 60% of the boxes, and 30% of the boxes had chicks in by early September. Infrared cameras were fixed to the lids of the nestboxes and allowed the study of behaviours in the nests throughout the day and night. It is now many weeks until the fluffy chicks in these



nestboxes will grow their full flight feathers and fledge the nests, before migrating thousands of kilometers to the South Atlantic Ocean.

Jógvan Thomsen has spent a lot of time fitting these Storm-petrel chicks with metal rings on Nólsoy before they fledge from the colony each year, and this work has now begun to bear fruit. This year, for the first time ever, Storm-petrels that were ringed on Nólsoy have been found elsewhere in Europe: one chick ringed on Nólsoy on 29. October 2021 was captured on 12. August 2023 in Alnes, Godøya, Norway. Another bird that was ringed on 17. October 2021 was caught on Fair Isle, Scotland (United Kingdom) on 8. May 2023.

It is an exciting stage for the study of Storm-petrels in the Faroes, and many more discoveries will undoubtedly be taking place in the coming years as various research projects begin.

For now, the research team has departed the Faroes and Jens-Kjeld and Jógvan will continue to monitor the nestboxes until the chicks fledge in November. Next year will hopefully bring many more surprises for the group.

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