

Berwick Wildlife Group's Trip to the Farne Islands.
Saturday 14th July 2007.
Organiser - Elizabeth Bamford.

Fabulous Farnes.

A force 5 off shore wind battled against a huge onshore high tide, resulting in an exhilarating boat trip from Seahouses to Inner Farne on July 14th for our visit. A huge swell was created with large peaks and troughs. We got wet on the way out and would get wet again on the return journey - but it was more than worth it.

A mile and a half out of Seahouses we saw Puffins, Kittiwakes, Gannets, Herring Gulls, Guillemots and Shags all feeding. The birds were bringing sand eels particularly to their young on Inner Farne. A large colony of Atlantic Grey Seals performed well, the high tide leaving only a small area exposed where young seals born last autumn were lounging. About 40 other seals were in the water.

The strong tide made viewing nesting birds on the outer islands impossible, so extra time on Inner Farne was now guaranteed to everyone's delight. Entering the relative calm of the landing stage bay of Inner Farne a cacophony of sound greeted the Group – the Tern colony. Equipped with padded hats, helmets and every other type of head protection we took the short walk from the landing stage to the information centre. We enjoyed a short talk from an assistant warden on the birds of Inner Farne, and then out into the wind and sunshine again.

The nesting season this year was early but a good year generally for all the birds in spite of the losses caused by wild weather last month. But it is the Kittiwakes that are struggling this year. Their young are being fed a large number of pipe fish, these often too big and very poor nutritionally. One nest reportedly had over 20 pipe fish surrounding the dead chick.

The reputation of the Terns on Inner Farne is well documented. The Arctic Tern with its scarlet beak and the Common Tern with a black tip to its red beak were easily spotted. Terns lay eggs with two or so days between. Tern parents are very careful not to allow the older chick to dominate and take all the food. They take turns! Tern chicks were on the paths, in the windswept vegetation and behind seats. Adult terns were feeding Sand Eels to their young,

as were Puffins. How fabulous to be within touching distance of a Puffin. Occasionally gulls would swoop and peck the Puffin in an attempt to make it drop its food parcel. They could also be seen lurking at the entrance to the Puffin burrows in the hope of a free meal. Shag posed shamelessly on the cliff edges and ledges, their downy chicks rump to the wind, as were their parents.

Photo opportunities were endless but a pair of lead-filled boots would have cut down the camera shake in the gusting wind. A wonderful afternoon and our thanks to the Billy Shiel company and the wardens of Inner Farne.

Elizabeth Bamford.