



Alderney
Wildlife Trust

PRESS RELEASE

17th February 2022

The Gannets have returned to Alderney Light at the End of the Tunnel?

At approximately 12:00 on Thursday the 16th of February Gannets were sighted making landfall on Les Etacs through the Alderney Wildlife Trust's (AWT) [GannetCam](#). Very quickly hundreds of these majestic birds were making landfall, with thousands circling the colony. This was a repeat of landfall in 2022, both in terms of date and the awful weather! This year's landfall was awaited anxiously following the outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) which devastated gannet colonies worldwide.

Alderney's two Gannet colonies make up more than 1% of the world's Northern Gannet population, with approximately 6,000 pairs on Les Etacs and a further 2,700 pairs on Ortac. They sit within Alderney's Internationally [important wetlands \[Ramsar\] site](#). Despite this staggering number, Alderney's Gannets are under constant pressure and in 2022 they were exposed to a new threat, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. HPAI reached Alderney in June 2022 and in a matter of weeks the disease had ripped through both colonies and UK experts, using data from bird rings deployed by the Channel Island Bird Ringing Scheme (CIBRS), have estimated at least 20-25% of the adult population was killed. Their return offers Alderney hope that the colony will rebuild and the wait is on to see how many nest sites are filled in 2023.

HPAI could not have come at a worse time for the Gannets. Since 2015 Alderney's colony, as with other southern colonies, has seen the first signs of slowing population growth. This coupled with increasing pressures such as warming sea temperatures, and offshore wind developments, are now compounded by the arrival of HPAI. Alderney's General Services Committee, supported by wildlife and veterinary experts (the Ramsar Advisory Group), States Works, Alderney Animal Welfare Society (AAWS), the CIBRS, Alderney Bird Observatory (ABO) and the AWT responded to the spread of HPAI in 2022. This group of organisations, working with other bodies from across the Channel Islands, is now developing a programme to monitor for any new outbreaks of HPAI in wild birds and planning how to minimise the impact should it return to Alderney.

The GannetCam live webstream, along with the historic webstreams (including the Gannets arrival yesterday), can be seen at any time on a dedicated [Facebook page](#). The webcams enable people from around the world to revel in Alderney's spectacular wildlife first-hand and in real-time. They are also an invaluable tool for monitoring; in 2022 GannetCam assisted in tracking the spread of HPAI, helping make Les Etacs one of the best monitored Gannetries in the world.

Quote

Alex Purdie - Alderney Wildlife Trust's Ramsar Officer

It is a fantastic sight to see the Gannets return and offers a glimmer of hope, but the wait is now on to see how many nest sites are filled.

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Background

[Living Islands: Live project](#) - was set up in 2013 to help primary school teachers from across the British Isles and provide educational materials to anyone interested through the medium of wildlife webcams. The site regularly has over 200,000 views per annum and its mission is for people to get involved with conserving marine habitats and specifically helping protect Alderney's seabird populations and the other wonderful marine life.

GannetCam was launched in 2021 thanks to the support of a Guernsey family who sponsored the installation of the new system on the south coast of Alderney. In 2023 residents and visitors to the island will be able to drop in at the AWT's Wildlife Centre and directly control GannetCam, using its very sensitive lens to explore the Ramsar site, as well as getting a close in view of the colonies.

PuffinCam was updated in 2022 and which will once again go live when the Puffins return in late March. It gives hundreds of thousands of viewers a direct window into the trials and tribulations of Alderney's most colourful residents live. There are three cameras on Alderney's Burhou Puffin colony (Main Camera, Close-Up Camera and Colony Camera). These capture valuable data and give the public an insight into the lives of Puffins. PuffinCam will be going live in March, so check back [here](#) to observe these amazing animals.

Ramsar

About the reserve

The West Coast and Burhou Islands Ramsar site comprises the western coast of Alderney and adjacent shallow waters and islets in the strongly tidal, high-energy system of the northern Channel Islands. It achieved the Ramsar designation in 2005 through regionally, nationally and internationally important populations of seabirds. In particular, the islets of Ortac and Les Etacs support over 1% of the world population of Northern Gannet. It also provides a habitat for a seal colony to the north of Burhou Island and some fish and shellfish species such as Lobster, Ormer, Bass and Plaice.

The site hosts about 100 species of seaweeds, which play a significant role in supporting all marine fauna and thus the large seabird population. Besides commercial and non-commercial fishing, tourism is the main activity: there is a visitor centre that provides both educational measures for children and information materials for the public.

Since designation data has been collected on 10 seabird species for population size and productivity success rates; marine habitat mapping is carried out in new locations each year and terrestrial surveys are a large part of the monitoring work. The recording of this data is continued and expanded each year by the AWT in order to better understand the ecological processes of the Ramsar site and conserve its diversity within the convention guidelines.

Species – Click on the link to find out more about key species in Alderney's Ramsar Site

- [Northern gannet](#)
- [Puffin](#)
- [Fulmar](#)
- [Shag](#)
- [Razorbill](#)
- [Ringed plover](#)
- [Oystercatcher](#)
- [Guillemot](#)
- [Curlew](#)
- [Storm Petrel](#)

About the Alderney Wildlife Trust

The Alderney Wildlife Trust is one of the 46 [Wildlife Trusts](#) working across the British Isles. Support from our members and volunteers allows us to manage over 130 hectares of terrestrial land for wildlife - quite considerable on an island of only 800 hectares. We also manage over 20 km of footpath to ensure public access to the Island's countryside whilst minimising the impact on the wildlife that lives there. We work with the local community to engage them with their natural environment in order to protect Alderney's wildlife for the future.

Our mission is to study, protect and champion Alderney's wildlife. We wish to see a thriving natural island where wildlife and natural habitats play a valued role in addressing our island's future and the climate and ecological emergencies that face us.

Quote - Dr. George McGavin, Patron AWT

Alderney is a very special place and by helping the work of the Alderney Wildlife Trust you can make a difference. After all, if you love where you live, you'll want to look after it.