



BIOSECURITY
FOR LIFE

RAISING AWARENESS OF BIOSECURITY:

*How to help everyone
save our seabirds*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Biosecurity requires collaboration. The UK's globally important seabird islands are better protected, thanks to the support, hard work and commitment of many.

The project would like to firstly thank its funders: EU LIFE, NatureScot, Natural England, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Natural Resources Wales, and the Scottish Nature Restoration Fund (NRF).

Thank you for the vision and commitment of the partners: the RSPB, the National Trust, and the National Trust for Scotland. The Steering Group and staff of all organisations supported, guided, and collaborated with the Biosecurity for LIFE project team to enable their work.

We are grateful for the hard work and commitment of the project team, the project managers, and biosecurity officers who brought the vision to life. Their expertise brought people together, helped communicate the issues and inspired people to take action for seabirds.

And finally, thank you to the thousands of people living on and visiting our seabird islands, who took time to listen, participate and help protect seabirds.



Razorbill, Isle of May.
Photo credit: Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

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PLEASE NOTE:

Hyperlinks featured throughout this report are available on the digital version. All hyperlinks are indicated by a light blue highlight with an underline as shown here: [Hyperlinks](#)

To view a digital version of the report please visit: biosecurityforlife.org.uk/awareness



THE BIOSECURITY FOR LIFE PROJECT

The “Biosecurity for LIFE project: safeguarding the UK’s globally important seabird Special Protection Area (SPA) islands from invasive alien species [LIFE17 GIE/UK/000572]” is a partnership project between the RSPB, National Trust and National Trust for Scotland.

The £1 million project was awarded funding from EU LIFE, with co-financing from NatureScot, Natural England, and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). Additional funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Natural Resources Wales, and the Scottish Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) was secured during the project.

The five-year project ran from August 2018 to July 2023 and worked with a wide range of stakeholders (island communities, businesses, managers, landowners, conservation organisations and statutory bodies) to develop UK capacity to plan and implement biosecurity measures to safeguard seabird islands against the threat of invasive non-native mammalian predators arriving and becoming established. Through training, awareness raising and practical on-the-ground conservation work, the project aimed to secure a future for the UK’s seabird islands free from this threat of predation.

SUMMARY

Collaboration between island communities, businesses, managers, landowners, conservation organisations and statutory bodies has vastly improved biosecurity on the UK’s seabird Special Protection Area (SPA) islands.

Globally significant seabird populations are now better protected against the threat of invasive non-native mammalian predators.

BACKGROUND

The UK is home to globally important populations of seabirds, many of which are threatened. Seabirds face many challenges at sea, such as climate change, being caught in fishing gear (bycatch), and plastic pollution of the oceans. The major threat they face on land is invasive non-native mammalian predators. These invasive predators, including rats, mice, stoats, hedgehogs, mink, and feral cats, are not naturally found on (native to) the islands where seabirds breed. Adult birds, chicks, and eggs are very vulnerable to predation from them. Measures can be put in place to try to stop these invasive predators from getting to these seabird islands; this is called ‘biosecurity’.

The most important UK seabird colonies are found on islands that have been recognised as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and are historically free of invasive predators. Some seabirds breeding in the UK are found exclusively on these predator-free islands. The Biosecurity for LIFE project aimed to put in place biosecurity measures across all 42 of these SPA islands across the UK. At the start of the project, many of these islands did not have biosecurity measures in place and awareness about the threat posed to breeding seabirds by invasive predators was generally low amongst island communities and visitors. The project has worked with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government agencies, landowners, communities and others to put in place biosecurity measures on these islands.

A big part of enabling this and encouraging buy-in was raising awareness of what biosecurity is and why it’s important for keeping seabirds safe.

Biosecurity: the practice of protecting places from the threats to wildlife posed by introducing new diseases or types of plants or animals that do not naturally occur there.

Incursion: when an invasive non-native mammalian predator has recently spread to an island but has not yet established a population. An incursion response is the planned actions taken when it is thought an invasive predator has reached an island.

STRATEGY AND BENEFITS

The project targeted a wide range of stakeholders, who could all impact on biosecurity in different ways.

A large variety of people have a role to play in making an island biosecure, so raising awareness with each group is important. For example, the ways in which someone visiting an island can impact on biosecurity may differ from those of someone who works on a ferry or at a fish farm, as does how they may learn about biosecurity and implement it.

Because of this, the project used many different methods to engage with and target groups specifically to ensure awareness was raised with them. Awareness is an important part of biosecurity, as it facilitates buy-in and compliance. Ensuring it was done in an engaging and thorough way was vital for all parts of the project.



A Northern Gannet, one of the species we are trying to protect, on Noss in Shetland. Photo credit: Holly Paget-Brown

INVOLVING SCHOOLCHILDREN

It was important to include children who live on and visit seabird islands to help them understand biosecurity, raise awareness and enthusiasm with their wider families, and potentially inspire future conservationists. Through a popular co-design process with six Scottish schools and a youth group, an education resource pack was created that is now used in schools and other education settings across the UK.

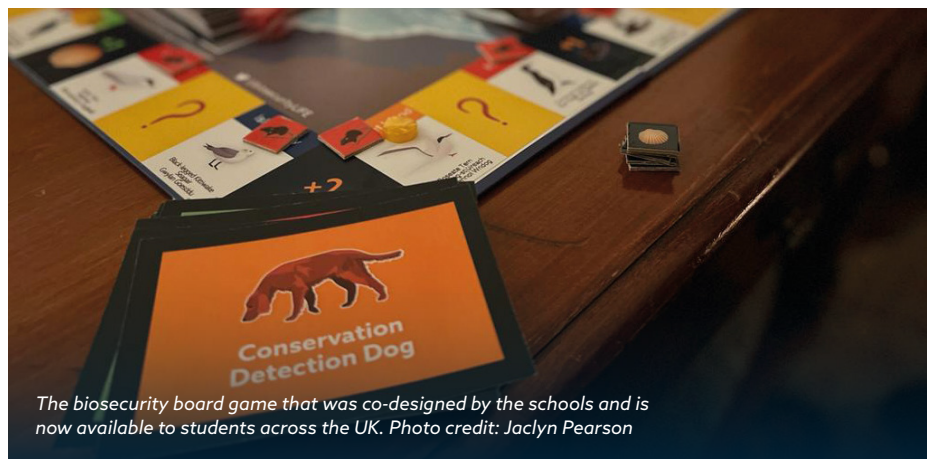
The children directed their own learning to engage with a complex topic that could otherwise have been hard to teach them. They showed a lot of enthusiasm for the topic and got involved in making songs, informative videos, outdoor activities and designing a board game, just to name a few.

This [Save Our Seabirds Education pack](#) has engaged 3,200 students across the UK, which is twice the project's original target!

The team also produced and sent out copies of the board game that the children designed to many schools and other children's groups who were interested. A [case study paper](#) was published on the co-design project as an example of a 'useful and empowering model for conservation education'.

The education pack is an excellent, comprehensive resource that will highly engage and motivate children in relation to an important environmental issue and which makes planning and delivery easy and enjoyable for teachers.

“ **Teacher**



The biosecurity board game that was co-designed by the schools and is now available to students across the UK. Photo credit: Jaclyn Pearson

DEMONSTRATION SITES CREATED

One of the aims of the project was to create an opportunity for hands-on learning about biosecurity and to make it a visible and normalised part of an island's conservation efforts. To do this, three demonstration sites on Canna, Mousa and the Farne Islands were established.

Here, children and other visitors can learn more about biosecurity in a hands-on way. The sites feature island specific leaflets, Explorer Backpacks, and trails to engage visiting families with biosecurity.

On Mousa, this directs people to examples of surveillance work, encourages them to think about ways in which invasive predators might get to the island and highlights what is at stake if they did. On the Farne Islands, there is

a card activity full of questions and facts about the islands, biosecurity, and the seabirds that breed there. This has also been used by the rangers on the island to engage with visiting schools and families.

Throughout the year, thousands of people visit these islands and the demonstration sites give them the chance to gain a better understanding of biosecurity by getting them to see and think about it in a practical setting.

It's great that people visiting the island have the chance to use the demonstration trail to learn more about biosecurity and why it's important for the seabirds on Mousa.

“ **Mousa Warden, The RSPB**



An Explorer Backpack that visitors can use at the demonstration site on Mousa. Photo credit: Holly Paget-Brown

ISLAND COMMUNITIES AND VISITORS

People who live on or visit seabird islands are key to helping prevent invasive predators from reaching an island, and for carrying out surveillance or incursion work. This is why it is important to raise awareness so they can help to stop the spread of invasive predators.

To engage people who are actively visiting or living on seabird islands, biosecurity officers put up over 90 information signs at ports, harbours, marinas, boat clubs and tourist information centres. Many of these were placed at departure points to the seabird islands themselves to be visible to those who were about to go to an island.

Those in other places were chosen to reach people who either owned boats and might sail to these islands or aimed at tourists who might visit. These were designed to show people in a simple and quick way how they can help biosecurity and why it is important. Due to their placement, they are a great way to raise awareness with people who are potentially about to visit a seabird island and could be creating a biosecurity risk.

In addition to the signs, the biosecurity officers distributed leaflets to places such as tourist information centres, boat clubs, local businesses, ferry waiting rooms and the islands themselves.

This gave people who were planning to visit an opportunity to read more about biosecurity and keep a copy to refer to later. This has been successful on the Farne Islands.

We have posters and leaflets to interest and educate the public. Visitors have responded well – they're curious as to how we manage these remote places.

“ Farne Island Ranger,
National Trust



Everyone can help!

Are you travelling to, between or around islands? Make sure you don't take any stowaways with you!

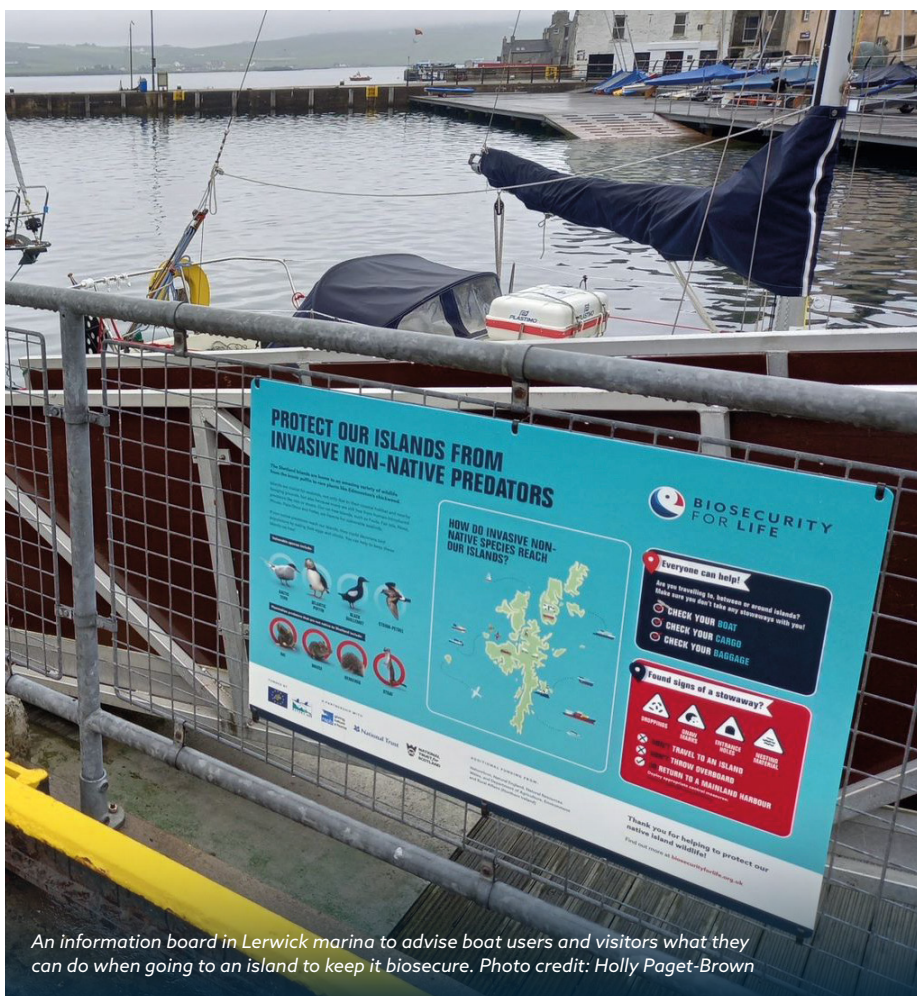
- CHECK YOUR BOAT
- CHECK YOUR CARGO
- CHECK YOUR BAGGAGE

Found signs of a stowaway?

			
DROPPINGS	GNAW MARKS	ENTRANCE HOLES	NESTING MATERIAL

- DON'T TRAVEL TO AN ISLAND
- DON'T THROW OVERBOARD
- DO RETURN TO A MAINLAND HARBOUR

Deploy appropriate control measures:
biosecurityforlife.org.uk/boats



An information board in Lerwick marina to advise boat users and visitors what they can do when going to an island to keep it biosecure. Photo credit: Holly Paget-Brown

Thanks to the Biosecurity for LIFE project, we now have a new information panel which has been installed at Martin's Haven on the mainland; the main embarkation point to the islands. It highlights the issue of biosecurity and explains what visitors can do to help keep these amazing islands safe from invasive non-native predators.

“ **Middleholm Area Ranger,**
National Trust

It's brilliant to see biosecurity information on display to the public at key sites across Shetland. Raising awareness and highlighting the steps people should be taking to protect our islands is vital and these signs help do that. I also love that they're attractive to look at so stand out amongst other signs.

“ **Shetland Warden,**
The RSPB

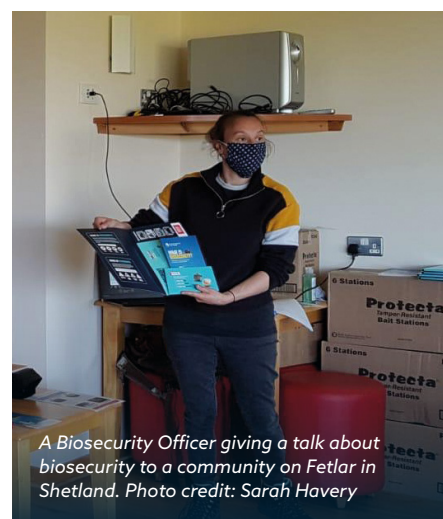
Another way that the project engaged with island communities and visitors was through talks and events. The biosecurity officers gave talks to more than 3,400 island residents, conservation staff and bird survey groups, who are often the only visitors to islands. Officers also spoke with over 2,200 people at public events such as boat shows, agricultural shows, conservation conferences and family conservation days. This was more than double the project's aim. This was achieved through island community visits, presentations and training sessions. Some were held on the islands themselves, whilst others took place at conferences, conservation societies, shows, bird clubs, NGOs and more. These events reached a wide variety of people, both those who already had an interest in seabirds and the islands they live on, and those who had little experience with them. Each talk was tailored to the audience, which was key to help give people information that would best help to keep islands biosecure in a way that was relevant to them.

These events have helped us get biosecurity measures on the ground on islands and to get people involved and interested. Those who have attended these talks and events have not only incorporated biosecurity measures into their island visits but also gone on to report invasive predators they have seen and taken on biosecurity surveillance for the project.

Thanks to this, there have been 24 reports of suspected sightings, and full incursion responses were needed for seven of these. This has helped to protect many islands and their seabirds, which otherwise could have been impacted by invasive predators and whose numbers could have declined. This was particularly important during the avian flu outbreaks, which have placed more stress on seabirds across many islands.

It's been great to see people really engage with biosecurity and want to protect seabirds. This was especially the case with communities who live on these islands and who care for their native species. Following a talk with Fetlar's residents, almost everyone took away a surveillance box and continue to check them for signs of invasive predators.

“ **Biosecurity Officer,** Biosecurity for LIFE



A Biosecurity Officer giving a talk about biosecurity to a community on Fetlar in Shetland. Photo credit: Sarah Havery

BOAT USERS

Those who operate boats to or near these islands, as well as their passengers, create a potential and often high-risk pathway for invasive predators to reach seabird islands. These predators could stow away in cargo, luggage, fishing gear or even the boat itself. Raising awareness among boat users is therefore key to helping sustain and enhance biosecurity.

The project has provided training and [resources](#) to boat operators working in the vicinity of the Special Protection Area islands. This enabled them to set up important barriers that reduce the risk of invasive predators stowing away on their vessels, alongside practical skills to identify that a stowaway might be onboard. Even those boat operators who had already heard about biosecurity learnt a lot from the project training sessions and commented on how vital it was for their motivation that they be reminded of the importance of the small daily tasks they carry out to keep these special places safe. These boat operators are often the main people who introduce these islands



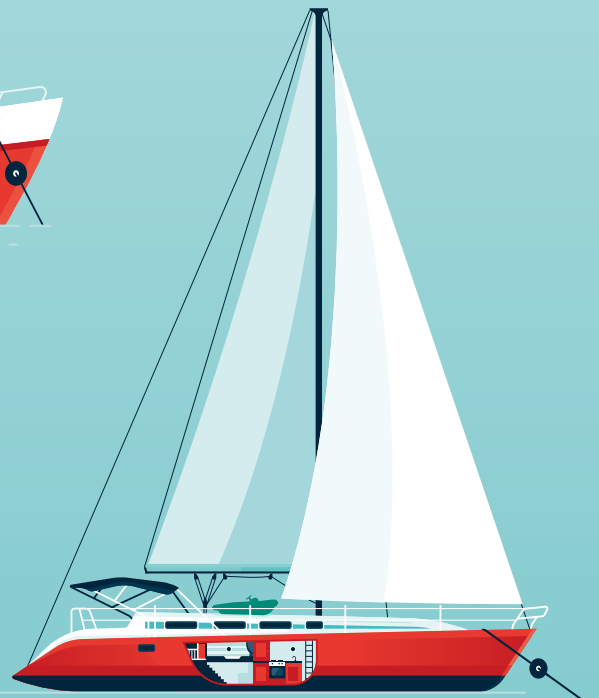
A Biosecurity Officer providing training to boat users.
Photo credit: Tom Churchyard

to tourists and therefore have a key part to play in raising awareness. They were particularly fond of some of the statistics, such as one pregnant female rat can produce a colony of 300 in eight months, as these can really catch the attention of visitors and encourage them to properly check their luggage before boarding a boat.

To reach more boat users, 850 boat packs were created and distributed. These contained information specific to different kinds of vessels to help target different stakeholders such as tour operators, fishing vessels and personal boats such as yachts and kayaks. It also contained stickers and tools to detect

species that they could display on their boats to help strike up conversations about biosecurity with passengers.

The project also worked with the WiSe scheme, which encourages wildlife-safe nature watching, by holding training events. WiSe provide training to wildlife cruise operators, dive and service boats, yacht skippers and sea kayakers, and people participating in coastering, stand-up paddleboarding and wild swimming. They now train people in biosecurity as part of their courses, which is another great way to raise awareness in the long-term with those who could have an impact on island biosecurity.



INFORMING THE WIDER PUBLIC

Every person who reads or hears about biosecurity can help prevent an incursion. Knowing about it and what species shouldn't be on these islands provides a chance to help stop invasive predators reaching them or enables their early detection and reporting during an island visit. This is a vital part of improving biosecurity on these important islands and enabling more rapid incursion responses.

One of the best ways to reach a large number of people is through the use of the media. The project did this through radio, newsletters, magazines, newspapers, blogs, television and even putting information in tide tables! Across the project, all of these combined had over 10,000,000 views.

The project used Twitter and Instagram to update people on activities and to share information, lessons and news about biosecurity.

Social media has been great to reach people with an interest in seabirds and the islands they nest on, as well as to connect with other projects in the UK and beyond doing similar work. People have shown an interest, with a rising following of over 800 on the Twitter page and 200 on Instagram. Posts about the conservation detection dog have particularly boosted views and engagement.

A [biosecurity animation](#) was created to be played at places such as harbours and on ferries. It is also played at Land's End airport, which takes people to the Isles of Scilly, raising awareness of the simple actions passengers can take on their outward travel. There are over three flights a day six days a week, throughout the year (up to 12 flights a day in peak season), so even in this one location it is seen by 20-50 people daily. This was a great way of spreading information to people who had more time to engage and offered a different way to get their attention.



Doing a radio piece with BBC Shetland.
Photo credit: Holly Paget-Brown

CONSERVATION PROFESSIONALS

Those who work for conservation NGOs or government agencies often have an important part to play in ensuring biosecurity is implemented on islands.

On many islands, they are the people putting biosecurity into action by managing risks, conducting surveillance and responding to incursions of invasive predators. Raising awareness with this group and providing training has helped to make biosecurity part of island operational procedures and bring its importance to the forefront of island conservation work. Many of our awareness raising materials, such as the signs, leaflets and demonstration sites, also help to improve their capacity and ability to continue to spread an understanding of biosecurity to others as well.



A Biosecurity Officer training land managers and rangers on Annet Island. Photo credit: Jaclyn Pearson

LESSONS TO SHARE



Atlantic Puffin, Isle of May. Photo credit: Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

WHAT WE LEARNED



- A simple and clear brand from the project outset enabled a suite of campaign materials to be efficiently produced. It helped the team to produce consistent messaging through different channels to each audience. Budget for the external branding company was a good investment and produced professional and eye-catching materials.
- Stakeholder mapping and consultation helped to create the right key messages for each audience. Project officers found communicating easy because the resources were pitched appropriately.
- Co-designing the education resource pack with schoolchildren was a great way to bring different skills and expertise together. It capitalised on both education design and biosecurity knowledge, allowing the project to pinpoint how to best help children learn about biosecurity and be more engaged with it. It was also very powerful at engaging island and coastal schoolchildren with the topic.

Most of our awareness raising materials can be found on our [website](#). This includes our information signs, animations, booklets and more, which are accessible for future use.

CONCLUSION:

AWAWARENESS LEADS TO ACTION



The awareness raising campaign has managed to reach a wide range of stakeholders who can all play an important part in keeping an island free from invasive predators, from boat operators to tourists, to islanders and island managers.

By using such a variety of techniques, the project has reached a large proportion of people who will visit the seabird islands and also provided long-term resources to ensure that this awareness continues. As well as raising awareness with target audiences, the project has given island staff, boat operators and communities the confidence and resources to start a conversation about biosecurity with

visitors through the training, signs, and material distributions. The difference in awareness before and after the project is substantial and the team has managed to reach an audience far greater than the project's original targets, showing that methods worked and were well received. Awareness is key to generating enthusiasm for biosecurity and its implementation, and project efforts have been effective. This can be seen in the large increase of the UK Special Protection Area islands that are now actively involved in biosecurity since the project started: going from 25% to 95%. This would not have been possible without the awareness raising campaign.

25%

BEFORE CAMPAIGN

95%

AFTER CAMPAIGN

**ISLANDS ACTIVELY
INVOLVED IN BIOSECURITY**



**BIOSECURITY
FOR LIFE**

 @biosecurityLIFE  @biosecuritylife

Find out more at biosecurityforlife.org.uk

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