swell. A chum of dogfish liver mixed with popcorn was deployed at regular intervals and was quickly churned up in the sea, with many fragments below the surface; we also dripped cod-liver oil. The chum odour dispersed downwind, away from the islands, and on both days European Storm-petrels arrived in force, building into uncountable numbers that we estimated at 500+.

We noted that many of the European Storm-petrels were diving to collect fragments of dogfish liver below the surface. Some dived close to the vessel, making it possible to watch them swim underwater. Gauging dive depth was difficult, but dives probably did not exceed 0.5 m. Assessing horizontal distance travelled was confounded by drift, though most birds appeared to surface near the dive point, with a few travelling possibly up to 1 m. Video footage taken on 10th August captured 16 incidents of diving where the whole body was submerged, and two examples of partial submersion. The video permitted timing of the full-submersion dives to the nearest 0.04 seconds and showed them to vary between 0.72 and 1.96 seconds, with a mean of 1.28 seconds (standard deviation 0.48, n=16). It seems likely that the particular combination of sea conditions and type of chum used produced the unusually high frequency of dives observed on these trips.

References

Bried, J. 2005. Diving ability of the Madeiran Storm-petrel. *Waterbirds* 28: 162–166.

Flood, R. L., & Thomas, B. 2007. Identification of 'black-and-white' storm-petrels of the North Atlantic. *Brit. Birds* 100: 407–442.

Griffiths, A. M. 1981. European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* feeding by diving off South Africa. *Cormorant* 9: 47.

Heaney, V., Lock, L., St Pierre, P., & Brown, A. 2008. Breeding seabirds on the Isles of Scilly. *Brit. Birds* 101: 418–438.

Robert L. Flood (correspondence author)
14 Ennor Close, Old Town, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly TR21 0NL; e-mail tubenose@tiscali.co.uk
Ashley Fisher
Trehill, Silvesters Lane, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly TR21 0NA
Andrew Cleave
31 Petersfield Close, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG24 8WP
Paul Sterry
West Wit, New Road, Little London, Tadley, Hampshire RG26 5EU

A newly discovered colony of European Storm-petrels in Italy

On 31st May 2008, on the north coast of Lampedusa Island (a small island in the Mediterranean, about 20 km^2 in extent, c. 120 km from Tunisia and c. 195 km from Sicily, Italy), I noticed the characteristic musty odour associated with a storm-petrel breeding colony. The avifauna of Lampedusa is well known, and Moltoni (1970) found just one nest of European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*, on the neighbouring islet of Lampione, 18 km ENE of Lampedusa.

On 6th June 2008, I returned to the site, a large cave, at night and discovered a large colony of European Storm-petrels breeding in small cavities in the cave walls. Although I could not estimate the total number of birds present, many tens of individuals were entering the cave and milling around at the cave entrance. Subsequent daytime visits in August 2008 failed to provide any further information on numbers present.

Two subspecies of European Storm-petrel occur in Europe, distinguishable in terms of both biometrics and genetics: nominate *pelagicus* breeds in the eastern North Atlantic, while *H. p. melitensis* (see editorial comment, below) is restricted to a small number of islands in the Mediterranean. The latter is characterised by its larger size and the fact that it breeds at a younger age, including some at one year old (Hemery & D'Elbée 1985; Catalisano *et al*. 1988; Bretagnolle 1992; Lo Valvo & Massa 2000; Lalanne *et al*. 2001; Cagnon *et al*. 2004). The population is much smaller than that of the North Atlantic, believed to be in the range of 8,500–15,200 pairs, compared with 430,000–510,000 pairs in the North Atlantic (BirdLife International 2004). The breeding range of *H. p. melitensis* includes the Balearic Islands (1,800–4,000 pairs), Corsica (c. 100 pairs), Sardinia (c. 500 pairs, including c. 300 pairs on a single islet off the northwest coast; Paddau *et al*. 1997), Sicily (1,700–2,500 pairs, mostly on the island of Marettimo; Lo Valvo & Massa 2000, Albores-Barajas *et al*. 2008), and Filfla, Malta (5,000–8,000 pairs), together with

small numbers on other islets in the region (e.g. Lo Cascio 1994; Ientile & Massa 2008).

European Storm-petrel is considered to be of Least Concern by BirdLife International (2004), but the restricted range and small population of *H. p. melitensis*, combined with a large decline in numbers in recent years, has resulted in it becoming threatened in the Mediterranean basin. This is mainly due to habitat degradation and the introduction of predators, including rats and domestic cats (Massa 2006). Considering the rarity of the Mediterranean subspecies and the scarcity of its colonies, the discovery of a previously unknown colony on Lampedusa is important for the conservation of this taxon. Moreover, urgent action is required to reduce disturbance at the remaining colonies and to minimise the effects of predation. Since European Storm-petrel is nocturnal when visiting breeding colonies, and has certainly been overlooked in the past, other unknown breeding colonies may exist in similar situations elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Giusi Nicolini and the staff of the Nature Reserve and of the Protected Marine Area of Lampedusa Island who agreed to allow me to visit the cave. I also thank Angelo Dimarca and Tommaso La Mantia for their contribution.

References

Albores-Barajas, Y. V., Soldatini, C., & Ientile, R. 2008. Recolonisation of abandoned breeding grounds by storm petrels in Sicily. *Oryx* 42: 5–6.

BirdLife International. 2004. *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status*. BirdLife Conservation Series No. 12, Cambridge.

Bretagnolle, V. 1992. Variation géographique des vocalisations de Pétrels ouest-paléarctiques et suggestions taxonomiques. *Alauda* 60: 251–252.

Cagnon, C., Lauga, B., Hémery, G., & Mouchès, C. 2004. Phylogeographic differentiation of storm petrels (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) based on cytochrome b mitochondrial DNA variation. *Marine Biology* 145: 1257–1264.

Catalisano, A., Lo Valvo, F., Lo Verde, G., & Massa, B. 1988. Dati biometrici sull'Uccello delle tempeste (*Hydrobates pelagicus*). *Atti IV Conv. Ital. Orn., Naturalista Sicil.* 12 (Suppl.): 261–265.

Hemery, G., & D'Elbée, E. 1985. Discrimination morphologique des populations atlantique et méditerranéenne de Petrel tempete *Hydrobates pelagicus*. In: Oiseaux marins nicheurs du Midi et de la Corse. *Ann. du CROP* 2: 63–67.

Ientile, R., & Massa, B., 2008. Uccelli (Aves). In: A.A.V.V., *Atlante della Biodiversità della Sicilia: Vertebrati terrestri*, pp. 115–211. Arpa Sicilia, Palermo.

Lalanne, Y., Hemery, G., Cagnon, C., D'Amico, F., D'Elbée, J., & Mouches, C. 2001. Discrimination morphologique des sous-espèces d'Océanite tempête: nouveaux résultats pour deux populations méditerranéennes. *Alauda* 69: 475–482.

Lo Cascio, P., 1994. Accertata nidificazione di Uccello delle tempeste, *Hydrobates pelagicus*, nelle isole Eolie (Aves: Procellariiformes). *Naturalista sicil.* 18: 179–180.

Lo Valvo, F., & Massa, B., 2000. Some aspects of the population structure of Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* breeding on a Mediterranean island. *Ringing & Migration* 20: 125–128.

Massa, B., 2006. Biological significance and conservation of biogeographical bird populations as shown by selected Mediterranean species. *Avocetta* 30: 5–14.

Moltoni, E. 1970. Gli uccelli ad oggi riscontrati nelle Isole Linosa, Lampedusa e Lampione (Isole Pelagie, Canale di Sicilia, Mediterraneo). *Riv. ital. Orn.* 40: 77–283.

Paddau, R., Delitale, G. M., Farris, E., & Guillot, F. 1997. Dati preliminari su una colonia di Uccello delle tempeste *Hydrobates pelagicus* nella Sardegna nord-occidentale. *Avocetta* 21: 42.

Bruno Massa
Stazione Inanellamento, Università di Palermo, Dipartimento SENFIMIZO, Viale delle Scienze, 90128 Palermo, Italy

EDITORIAL COMMENT BOURC presently considers European Storm-petrel to be a monotypic species, although in view of evidence showing that *H. p. melitensis* is genetically, acoustically and biometrically distinct, this may be subject to review.
Eds

Common Buzzard playing with plastic bag

One afternoon in July 2008, I saw a Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* circling over Penton Copse, near Hatherden, Hampshire, a place where I see this species regularly. This individual was some 300–500 m high in the sky and, having stopped the car, I realised that the bird was 'playing' with a plastic carrier bag. The bag was filled with air and thus acted like a small sail. The buzzard let it fall for some 20 seconds or so, followed it down, then caught it and regained height before repeating the procedure. This routine was repeated about ten times.

Lawrence Leask
4 The Close, Hatherden, Andover SP11 0HW