



# AVIAN DEMOGRAPHY UNIT

The Avian Demography Unit undertakes bird research in partnership with BirdLife South Africa

## *The ADU migrates to Scotland*

In early April no fewer than nine staff and students of the Avian Demography Unit travelled north to attend two ornithological conferences in Scotland. The British Seabird Group held its Eighth International Conference in Aberdeen with the theme 'North Atlantic Seabird Populations', while Edinburgh hosted the 'Waterbirds around the World' Conference, co-organised by the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee and Wetlands International.

The two meetings had dates which overlapped, so it was not really feasible to attend both, leading to a lost opportunity for ADU participants, given the high costs of travel. Attending two back-to-back meetings with only a few hours' travelling time between them would have been a bonus. However, the Avian Demography Unit was represented at both meetings and made a number of presentations.

At the Aberdeen conference René Navarro and Ralf Mullers (a visiting Dutch student from the University of Groningen) presented a poster on the timing of breeding in Cape Gannets. This species is closely related to the North Atlantic Gannet, so the ADU study of differences in growth rates of chicks from early- and late-laying birds proved of interest to the audience of mainly European researchers.

At the Waterbirds Conference, the ADU was present in force with seven members and contributed seven posters and four oral presentations. In addition, James Harrison and Dieter Oschadleus organised 'side events' to discuss plans for the co-ordination of bird-ringing across Africa and the analysis of waterbird ringing data across the entire African-Eurasian region. The ADU's Director, Les Underhill, was Chair of the Scientific and Programme Committee for the conference (and his role continues on the conference's editorial panel). John Cooper gave the closing plenary lecture on migration patterns and international efforts to conserve albatrosses in the Southern Ocean to a full house of

*John Cooper, the ADU's Chief Research Officer, meets HRH, The Prince of Wales.*

*Bass Rock, as seen from the Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick.*



JOHN COOPER

nearly 500 delegates, and in the presence of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. HRH then delivered his address, which showed his own commitment to the conservation of these magnificent birds. Later, John and Les met the Prince at a small reception.

The closing event of the Waterbirds Conference saw more prominence for the ADU: Masters' student Jenny Griffin and post-doctoral student Aeshita Mukherjee won awards for their posters on the African Penguin and Indian wetlands, respectively.

The ADU made full use of opportunities to see more of the country before and after the conferences, as well as on the official excursions. Doug Harebottle had a meeting with the African Waterbird Counts Committee in the Orkneys and gave several presentations,

including one to the Highlands Ringing Group in Inverness. John Cooper realised a long-held desire to visit Bass Rock, a large gannetry made famous among marine ornithologists by the pioneering studies of Bryan Nelson. Being able to drive the remote cameras (with 20x times zoom capability) at the Scottish Seabird Centre on the mainland opposite the rock was a special experience. There is scope for such a development in South Africa at a place like Gansbaai, where visitors could zoom in on seals and penguins on Dyer and Geyser islands without causing the disturbance that actual landings would incur. Aeshita Mukherjee travelled on to a Black Stork conference in Hungary.

All in all, a good migration for the Avian Demography Unit.

*Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, 7701 Rondebosch. Tel. (021) 650 2423; fax (021) 650 3434; e-mail adu@adu.uct.ac.za web www.aviandemographyunit.org*