

## COMMON GUILLEMOTS *URIA AALGE* SUCCESSFULLY REAR A RAZORBILL *ALCA TORDA* CHICK

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Harris, M.P. & L.J. Wilson 2002. Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* successfully rear a Razorbill *Alca torda* chick. *Atlantic Seabirds* 4(3): 123-126. *In 2002 on the Isle of May (south-east Scotland) a pair of Common Guillemots Uria aalge successfully reared a young Razorbill Alca torda apparently following fighting for nest-sites.*

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Two cases of Razorbills *Alca torda* successfully rearing young Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* have been recorded at the mixed seabird colony on the Isle of May, south-east Scotland (Harris & Wanless 2002). These two auks have very similar patterns of breeding and feed their young on the same species of fish. However, Razorbills are 35% smaller than Common Guillemots and typically bring in loads of small fish for their young rather than a single bigger fish (Harris 1970). Hence, although young Common Guillemots should have no problem in swallowing fish brought to them by Razorbills, the reverse might not be true. Here we report, apparently for the first time, on the successful rearing of a Razorbill chick by a pair of Common Guillemots on the Isle of May.

During late April and early May 2002, we noted much fighting among members of a pair of Razorbills and a pair of Common Guillemots on a small (<0.5 m long) ledge near the top of a cliff. These pairs were at long-established sites less than 20 cm apart (Fig. 1). The male Common Guillemot was uniquely colour-ringed and had bred at this site for several years; the other birds were unringed, but we believe that the Razorbill pair was newly established, or at least new to the site, as previously there had been a colour-ringed female at this site. On 10 May, the colour-ringed Guillemot was incubating an egg but by the next morning it was not there and the site was occupied by two unringed Razorbills, presumably from the neighbouring site. We next checked the site four days later when the Common Guillemot was again incubating an egg. We did not record a Razorbill at this site again that season. The egg hatched on 14 June and it soon became apparent that the Common Guillemots were rearing a Razorbill chick (Fig. 2). From our observations, we believe that fighting between the neighbouring pairs during 10 or 11 May resulted in the Common



*Figure 1. The positions of the two long-established sites of the Razorbill (partly hidden between a stone and the wall, left) and Common Guillemot (in the open, right) in 2001 (Mike Harris)*

*Figuur 1. Locaties van de nestplaatsen van de Alk (links, gedeeltelijke verborgen tussen een steen en de muur) en de Zeekoet (rechts) in 2001 (Mike Harris)*

Guillemot pair losing their egg and the Razorbill pair temporarily occupying the site. The Razorbill pair must have laid an egg on or very soon after this and this egg was subsequently usurped by the Common Guillemot pair.

The Razorbill chick fledged on the night of 8/9 July. The usual chick-rearing period for the Razorbill on the Isle of May is 19 days ( $n = 336$ ; 95% Confidence Interval 18-20 days; personal records), so the 24 days in this case was rather long. The chick had lost all its down feathers by 1 July and we were surprised that it remained so long. Although we did not handle the chick, it appeared to us to be very small and thin compared with other Razorbill chicks in the area that were near fledging age. In 2002, Common Guillemots on the Isle of May fed their chicks sprats *Sprattus sprattus* 10-13 cm long and lesser sandeels *Ammodytes marinus* 9-12 cm long. These sprats, and to a lesser extent the sandeels, were substantially larger than those normally fed to young



*Figure 2. A male Common Guillemot with the Razorbill chick that it had reared a few hours before the chick fledged in 2002 (Janos Hennicke).*

*Figuur 2. Man Zeekoet met het door hem groot gebrachte kuiken van de Alk, een paar uur voor het kuiken "uitvloog" (Janos Hennicke).*

Razorbills. Most of these fish could probably have been swallowed by a large Razorbill chick but some would have posed problems to a small chick. Perhaps this chick's growth had been retarded by unsuitable food.

In both these species, the male parent takes the chick to sea. In the Common Guillemot, if a chick is lost at or soon after fledging, the male often, perhaps always, returns to the colony (Harris & Wanless in press). The colour-ringed male Common Guillemot was not seen again in 2002 so we are confident that this young Razorbill fledged successfully.

ZEEKOETEN *URIA AALGE* BRENGEN MET SUCCES EEN KUIKEN  
VAN EEN ALK *ALCA TORDA* GROOT

In 2001 bracht een paar Zeekoeten op Isle of May met succes een kuiken van een Alk groot. Tijdens een "gevecht" met een paar Alken ging het ei van de Zeekoeten verloren. Daarna bezetten de Alken het zeekoetnest tijdelijk en hebben er een ei gelegd. Met het bezetten van hun oorspronkelijke nest hebben de Zeekoeten ook het ei overgenomen en uitgebroed. Hoewel het kuiken klein leek is het, na een lange kuikenfase, met succes "uitgevlogen".

REFERENCES

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