

## Seawatching, Feb - Apr 1991

There was an almost daily coverage in these months in Noord-Holland (NH) at Hondsbosche Zeewering (Hbz) and Egmond aan Zee (Egm). From sites in Zuid-Holland (ZH), data were collected at Bloemendaal (Bloem) and Scheveningen (Schev), but only in Feb. The main events in these months were the cold-rushes in the first half of Feb, the massive numbers of Eiders and scoters along the coast and the northward migration of Little Gulls and terns in Apr.

From the 3rd until the 12th of Feb, temperatures were constantly below zero. The Wadden Sea, IJsselmeer and inland waters were nearly completely ice-covered and these conditions forced wintering grebes, ducks and waders to depart in southerly directions or to the coast. Movements of Great Crested Grebes were not particularly impressive, but on several days over 1000 birds were seen. Hundreds of Curlew were seen every day during the spell of cold weather at Hbz and Egm, many more at Schev. On the 3rd, 1186 individuals were counted here. Massive cold-rushes of Oystercatchers were reported (e.g. 4900 S, Schev 10 Feb), over 1500 Knot were seen on 7 Feb, (Egm), 4000 on 8 Feb (Hbz). Many diving ducks were entering coastal waters, but also dabbling ducks like Wigeon and Shoveler (including 165 on 6 Feb, Egm) were seen in considerable numbers. The largest numbers of Pochards (550) and Tufted Ducks (850) were spotted on 6 Feb at Schev. On the 12th (when temperatures raised), more than 1400 Scaup and 150 Pochard were seen at Hbz. The best day, however, was the 10th at Schev when 1000 Goldeneyes and 5500 Smew (another 630 the following day) flew by! The number of Smew seen (at Schev only!) is a large part of the European population and well in excess of the 2500-4000 Smew wintering on the IJsselmeer this year (MP). Moreover, the Smew on the IJsselmeer did not even leave the area this winter. Evidently, the Smew seen in the cold-rush must originate from other, as yet unknown wintering grounds. After the period of hard weather, some passage of returning grebes, geese, Curlew and Golden Plover (e.g. 1900 on 26th, Schev) was recorded.

The already vast numbers of Eider Ducks along the coast of Noord- and Zuid-Holland (see *Sula* 4(2): 81-82) were boosted by a new influx during the spell of cold weather. Hundreds of Eiders could be seen flying south every day and the swimming flocks in the surf increased to a maximum late Feb. Especially along the coast of Noord-Holland, flocks of hundreds or even thousands could be seen, with maximum numbers at Egm on 19 Feb (12,000 individuals), at

Bergen aan Zee on 25 Feb (5700), at Hbz on 19 Feb (2000), and at Bloem on 14 Feb (1700). Numbers declined slowly in Mar, but in Apr substantial numbers could still be seen. Fair numbers of Common Scoters were seen swimming with the Eiders during Feb and early Mar. In the latter period, the scoters became 'restless' and started flying short distances up and down the coast. Northbound passage commenced in the third week of Mar and peaked the first half of Apr (best day: 7300 N on 8 Apr, Hbz). The massive concentration of scoters north of Terschelling, mentioned in *Sula* 5(1): 39, was also recorded during seawatches on the island: 12,000 E on 17 Apr.

The first Sandwich Terns were spotted rather early in the year (10 Mar), but overall numbers were very low this spring. 'Commic' terns did far better. From early Apr onwards, numbers increased until the last week of Apr and early May. Over 1000 'commic' terns were seen every day in this period and often more than 2000 individuals on a day could be seen. The maximum was 7000 on 28 Apr (Egm). On 22 and 23 Apr, Arctic Terns were abundant. This season was good for Little Terns, also peaking late Apr/early May. On 8 days over 100 of these delicate birds were counted, with a maximum of 300 on 26 Apr (Egm). A few hundreds of Black Terns were seen in the same weeks.

Like in the last few years, Little Gull numbers gradually increased from the end of Mar onwards, with hundreds per day already in the second week of Apr. The largest numbers were seen late Apr and early May, when daily totals exceeded 1000 quite frequently. The total number counted may this year have been around 30,000 individuals. In Zuid-Holland, numbers were far lower than along the coast of Noord-Holland and at Bloem (ZH) Little Gulls flew far out, indicating that this species takes a short-cut of the curve in the Dutch mainland coast (SG).

**Information from:** NZG/CvZ database, M.O. Bleijerveld, R.E. Brouwer, K.J. Eigenhuis, D. van Elswijk, S. Geelhoed (SG), N.F. van der Ham, K. Holleman, F. Majoor, M. Platteeuw (MP), R. & W. van Splunder, L. Stegeman, K. Woutersen. IS