

**STUDIES OF SEABIRDS AT SEA, OFF NORWAY**

Our plans for 1987 and 1988 are regrettably somewhat loose. We have proposed a major survey of the Skagerrak and North Sea area for 1987-1990, where open sea-studies of seabirds will be a major part. The funding (ca. 4.000.000 NKR) will have to be decided by a vote in the Parliament, hopefully before the end of the spring session. If turned down, very little open sea-studies will be carried out south of 62°N, except for a possible cruise in the North Sea 10-30th July 1987.

A major effort is being carried out in the Barents Sea, however, in con-

nection with the proposed oil-exploration in these high arctic waters. These studies are led by Tromsø Museum. There are good reasons to worry about the environmental consequences on the fragile arctic ecosystems on these latitudes, were future oil spills at below zero temperatures may effect seabird populations dramatically. The breeding stocks of auks have dropped seriously in Northern Norway the last few years. Our former largest Guillemot colony, Hjelmsøya in Finnmark, held ca. 110 000 breeding pairs in 1964. Last year the number was down to ca. 5 000. There seems to have been a 75% decline in the total Norwegian Guillemot population in the last 20 years. Overfishing and drowning in fishing-nets seem to be the most probable reasons for the decline. The recent invasion of Harp Seals (zie: Sula 1(1):18, red.) seems te reflect the unbalance in the Barents Sea ecosystem.

Data-programming have made progress lately. We now are able to draw combined maps of seabird distribution and oil spill predictions with the aid of a computer and a plotter. These combined maps are tailored especially for risk evaluations prior to oil field developments.

To contact the Norwegians: Torgeir Nygård, Directorate for Nature Management, Research Division, Tungasletta 2, N-7004, Trondheim, Norway.

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Medewerkers aan deze rubriek waren C.J.Camphuysen (CJC), J.de Korte (JdK), Torgeir Nygård (TN), J.E.den Ouden (JEdO) en Andy Webb (AW).