Monthly report of bird research and conservation activities on Gough Island

RSPB Gough 68 Team

10 August 2023

Seabird monitoring

Abundance monitoring

In July 2023 we conducted 20 counts of 1 seabird species in their respective study areas. For some species different segments of the population were counted (breeders, loafers, non-breeders) and the approximate stage of the nesting cycle was recorded for each count. The details of the number of birds counted per species are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of seabird counts on Gough Island

Species	Group counted	Stage of nesting cycle	N study areas	N counts	N individuals
ATPE	INCU	INCU	1	5	42
ATPE	LOAF	INCU	1	1	1
ATPE	OCCU	INCU	2	7	100
ATPE	UNOC	INCU	2	7	109

Nest monitoring

In July 2023 we monitored the status of 18 nests of 1 species in their respective study areas. The details of the number of nest visits per species are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of nest monitoring on Gough Island

Species	N of nests	N of nest visits
TRAL	18	18

Survival monitoring

In July 2023 we observed or recaptured 6 individually marked birds of 2 species in 3 study areas. The details of the number of contacts per species are provided in Table 3. For details of the individual Gough Buntings recorded see Table 5 in the section on landbird monitoring below.

Table 3: Summary of ringing and resighting on Gough Island

Species	N of study areas	N of individuals	N of contacts
GOBU	2	5	5
SKUA	1	1	1

Observations of dead birds

In July 2023 we found carcasses of a total of 0 birds of 0 species in 0 study areas.

Landbird monitoring

Overall number of moorhen records

Since February 2022, all moorhen detections (calls heard, individuals seen) have been documented to facilitate an assessment whether moorhen numbers are changing over time or remain constant. Moorhen detections occur either opportunistically in the course of other fieldwork, or during dedicated transects where moorhen calls are first passively recorded and then solicited through the broadcast of moorhen vocalisations on a hand-held speaker system. Since June 2022, several camera traps (n = 8-10) have been used in the lowlands to record moorhens continuously at locations where calls had repeatedly been heard. Because the cameras are more efficient at detecting moorhens, the playback transects were discontinued in October 2022 because they provided disproportionately few records.

The number of opportunistic moorhen records is confounded by effort, which is not accounted for in the summary in Table 4 below. In addition, in most cases it is impossible to determine whether separate records reflect the same or different individuals, and no inferences can be drawn as to how many moorhens still persist on Gough Island. The records are nonetheless a useful indication that at least some moorhens are still alive on Gough Island in August 2023

Table 4: Total number of moorhen records since January 2022 recorded either opportunistically, during playback transects, or on camera traps. Records are summed over each month.

Month	Year	N opportunistic records	N playback responses	N camera trap records	Total records
Jan	2022	0	1	0	1
Feb	2022	5	4	0	9
Mar	2022	11	3	0	14
Apr	2022	3	2	0	5
May	2022	11	5	0	16
Jun	2022	8	5	18	31
Jul	2022	10	1	8	19
Aug	2022	6	6	8	20
Sep	2022	4	2	15	21
Oct	2022	3	1	41	45
Nov	2022	2	0	20	22
Dec	2022	5	0	21	26
Jan	2023	1	0	8	9
Feb	2023	1	0	38	39
Mar	2023	7	0	136	143
Apr	2023	1	0	55	56

Month	Year	N opportunistic records	N playback responses	N camera trap records	Total records
May	2023	0	0	38	38
Jun	2023	1	0	32	33
Jul	2023	6	0	37	43

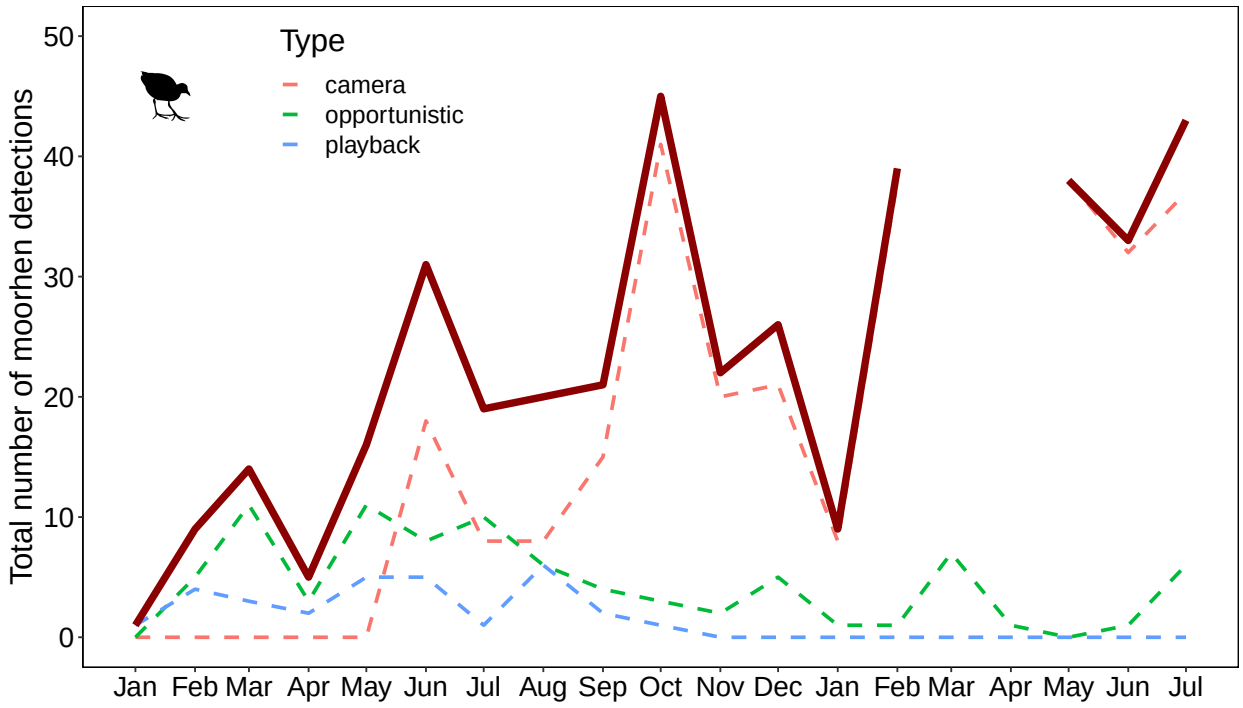

Fig. 1: Total number of Gough moorhen detections until August 2023, summarised over each month.

Spatial distribution of moorhen records

Prior to June 2021, Gough moorhens were widespread and could be heard everywhere in suitable habitat below 400 m above sea level around the island. Since February 2022, moorhens have only been recorded at isolated locations near areas where captive birds were released. The map below shows the records in space and time since January 2022 - note that these detections are not corrected for effort and more detections can be a result of increased search or recording effort in certain weeks.

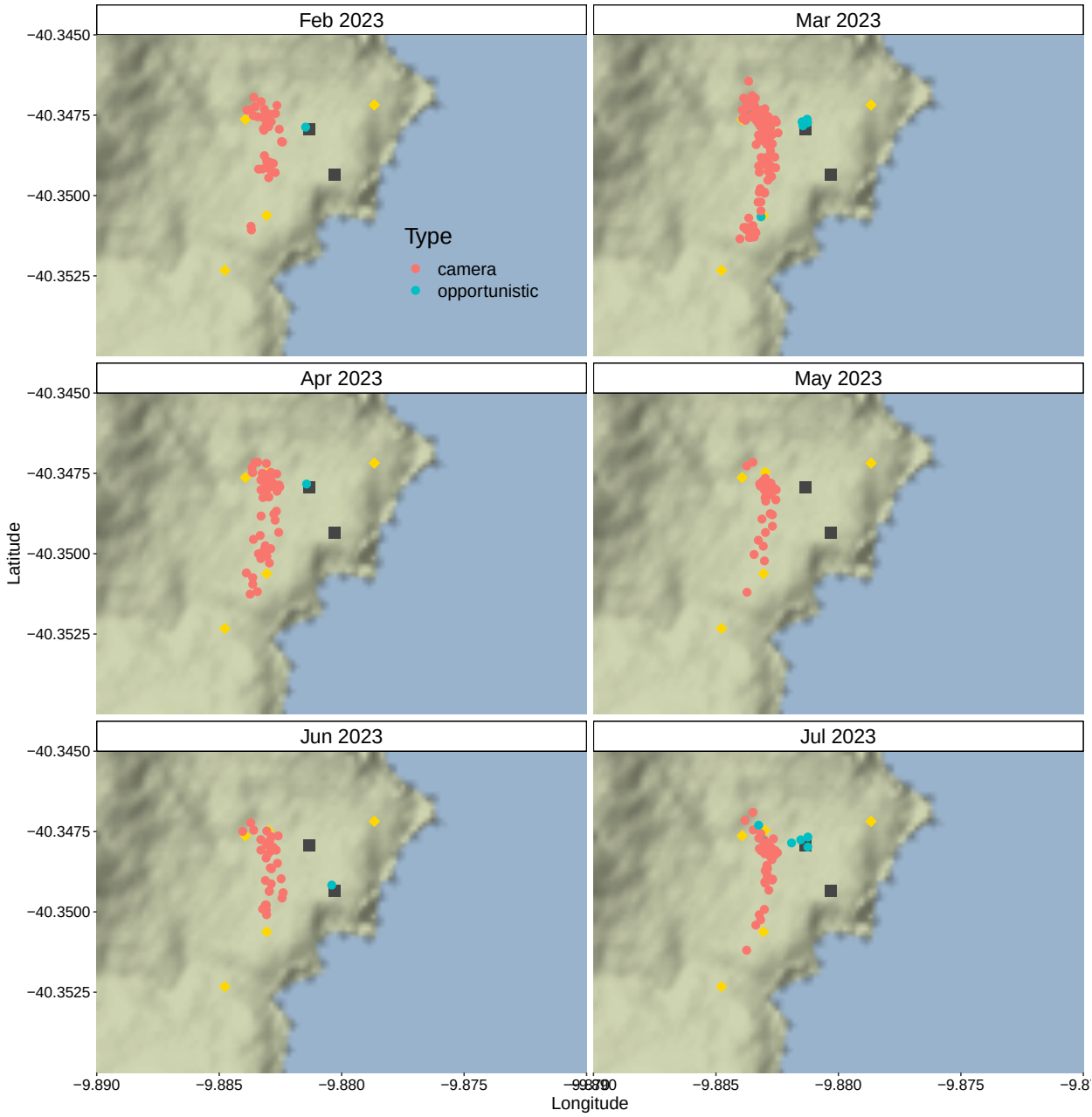

Fig. 2: Distribution of Gough moorhen detections until August 2023. Grey squares are weather station and helipad, and locations are randomly scattered by 10 m to avoid overplotting. Yellow diamonds indicate where captive moorhens were released in October 2021 (only 5 of the 6 release locations are visible on this map).

Sightings of colour-ringed Gough Buntings

In July 2023 we observed 5 colour-ringed Gough Buntings, of which 5 were released from temporary captivity during the mouse eradication operation in 2021, and 0 of these were seen for the first time since their release. As of 10 August, 2023, out of the 111 Gough Buntings released, **38 individuals (34%) have been seen in the wild**. The details of the recently sighted individual birds and where they were resighted are provided in Table 5 - if no individual Gough Buntings were resighted in this month the table is not shown. Note that the vast majority of wild Gough Buntings is not individually colour-ringed, so the sightings reported here are no indication about the overall size of the Gough Bunting population.

Table 5: Recent sightings of individually marked Gough Buntings

BirdID	Metal ring	Colour	Release Location	Previously seen	Last sighting	Last Location
GOBU077	SK09144	M/OB	Seal Beach	22 Jul 2022	05 Jul	Weather station
GOBU084	SK09128	M/OO	Admirals	18 May 2023	07 Jul	Crane Point
GOBU091	SK09131	M/PK	Seal Beach	19 May 2023	05 Jul	Weather station
GOBU101	SK09138	M/YY	Admirals	27 Jun 2023	20 Jul	Weather station
GOBU104	SK09140	M/RW	Seal Beach	07 Mar 2023	29 Jul	Weather station

Count of landbirds

In July 2023 we conducted 0 counts of 0 transects in 0 habitat types for the two endemic landbirds, Gough Bunting and Gough Moorhen. The details of the number of birds counted per species are provided in Table 7.