

Common Name:	Shag
Scientific Name:	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>
Manx Name:	Fannag varrey
BoCC IoM 21 classification:	RED
IUCN 3.1 classification:	Least Concern
MBRC:	A
Legal classification:	Schedule 1

The European Shag is a common breeding resident on the Isle of Man, forming large post-breeding flocks in late summer and autumn. Historical evidence indicates the Shag has been present around the Manx coastline for many centuries, with bones found in Perwick Bay midden deposits dating back to AD 90 (Garrad, 1972). However, detailed information on its abundance prior to the opening of the Observatory in 1959 is limited.

In 1938, Kenneth Williamson reported finding 80-120 nests between Kione Roauyr and Kione ny Halby, 8-10 nests at Culbery, and 'some numbers' below Amulty, Oirr Vooar, the cliffs beneath the old lighthouses, and on the Stack (Cullen & Jennings, 1986). Regular counts of the breeding population began in 1959.

Several complete island censuses of Shag breeding numbers have been conducted since then. Slinn (1971) recorded 550 nest sites, with approximately half on the Calf. By the mid-1980s, the population had increased to between 581 and 664 Apparently Occupied Nests (AON), with 200-250 on the Calf (Moore, 1987). The Atlas survey in 1999, which was the most detailed of its kind, identified a further increase to 887 AON, with 193 on the Calf and an additional 38 AON estimated from a 1998 survey of Baie N'Ooig and Amulty (Sharpe & Sapsford, 1999).

However, nearly 20 years passed before another census was conducted. The Seabird Census (2017-18) found a significant decline to between 306 and 446 AON, with only 107 AON on the Calf. This represents a decline of 33-47% compared to the 1986 baseline. Comparing the maximum figure from 2017 (446) with that from 1999 (912) reveals a more severe decline of 51% (Hill et al., 2019).

The total sightings graph suggests that the pattern of Shag occurrence around the Calf has remained relatively stable over the last 64 years, though numbers recorded have increased during the latter two decades compared to 1959-1979. Unfortunately, the use of "present - no count" records from 1959 to the late 1990s, which account for 58% of the 14,998 records, complicates statistical analysis. Therefore, breeding population figures, monitored in 50 of the years within this review, provide a more reliable measure.

The breeding graph shows a steady increase in population numbers during the 1960s and 1970s, followed by a gradual decline continuing into the first quarter of the 21st century. The trendline indicates an exponential decrease from a high of 350 pairs to around 125 pairs. In recent years, breeding numbers on the Calf have stabilized closer to 100 pairs, with 102 AON in 2021 and 107 AON in 2022. This represents a decline of approximately 75% compared to the maximum figure of 400 AON recorded in 1977, 1982, and 1983.

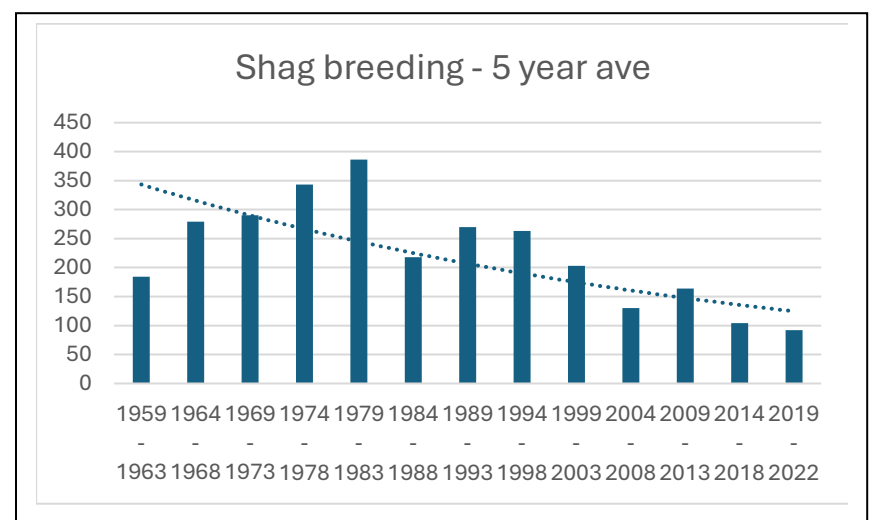
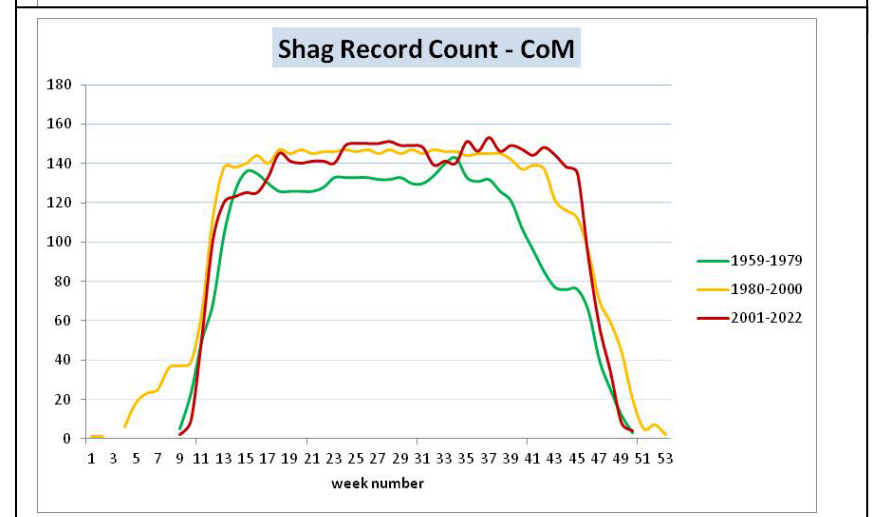
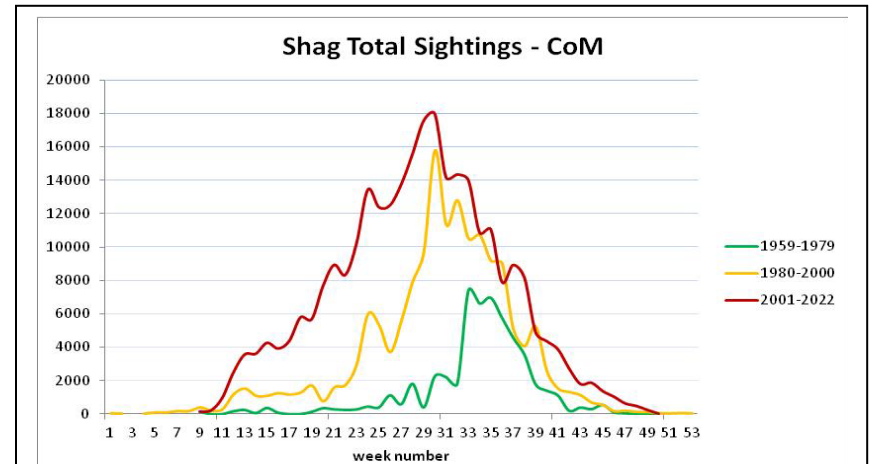
Accumulative monthly total of records (1959 – 2022):

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
28	138	1049	1755	1866	1858	1922	1906	1822	1623	941	90

Shags are present around the Calf of Man throughout the year, with breeding birds attending their nest sites even in January and February. Eggs and young are often present in nests by March, although early clutches can be vulnerable to cold and stormy weather. The European Shag have a prolonged breeding season, with some nests remaining occupied into August.

Shag numbers peak in late summer when juvenile and adult birds form large feeding flocks, attracted by the rich feeding opportunities in the coastal waters, particularly around Warts Bank to the southeast of the Calf. During this time, flocks often roost at Kione ny Halby, where daytime counts of 200-300 birds are common, and up to 600 birds are recorded in most years. There have been 49 counts of flocks ranging between 600 and 920 birds, and six counts exceeding 1,000 birds. The highest recorded count was 1,500 birds on 9th August 1972, with all high counts occurring between mid-June to mid-September. Cullen & Jennings (1986) reported exceptional numbers in 1967, estimating up to 4,000 birds off the Calf, though these figures are not included in the Calf daily logs.

From the 6,266 records containing counts, nearly half a million Shags have been recorded. This suggests that if counts had been recorded for all sightings, the total number of birds counted would likely exceed one million. This extensive data underscores the significant presence and seasonal fluctuations of Shag populations around the Calf of Man.



A total of 8,146 Shag have been ringed on the Calf between 1959 - 2022 generating 611 recoveries and just six controls:

Shag	Eire	England	Irish Sea	Isle of Man	Northern Ireland	Scotland	THE NETHERLANDS	Wales	Grand Total
Recoveries (yellow)	8	45	1	321	23	187	1	25	611
Controls (red)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6

The majority of Shag recoveries from the Calf of Man involve birds found within the Irish Sea basin. However, there have been several notable reports of birds found further afield:

West Coast of Ireland:

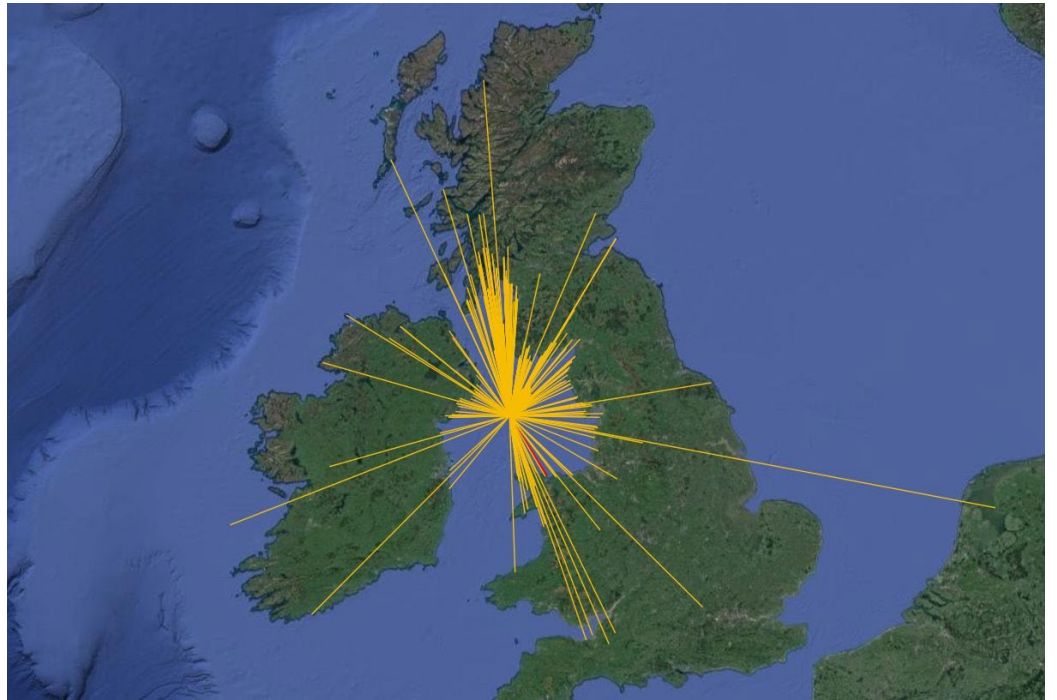
- Four birds in County Donegal (185–266 km)
- Single birds in County Cork (390 km) and County Galway (244 km)

East Coast of Britain:

- Hawsker, North Yorkshire (279 km)
- Isle of May, Fife (277 km)

Although the European Shag is almost exclusively coastal, there have also been five inland reports:

- Two individuals in Somerset (340 km & 354 km)
- Single birds in West Yorkshire (187 km), Shropshire (204 km), and High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire (378 km)



There has been one foreign recovery, a nestling ringed in June 2002 that was found long dead in Molkwerum, The Netherlands (688 km), two years, eight months, and 17 days later.

Additionally, one bird ringed on Puffin Island, Anglesey, was subsequently found breeding on the Calf of Man. Initially ringed as a nestling in June 1997, it was caught alive as a breeding female in April 2008 at the age of 10 years, nine months, and 18 days. This bird was found breeding again in 2011 and 2012, and finally in June 2018, by which time it had reached the age of 21 years and seven days.

These recovery records highlight the wide-ranging movements of Shags, both within and beyond their usual coastal habitats. They also underscore the longevity and site fidelity of some individuals, contributing valuable data to the understanding of Shag population dynamics and behavior.

References:

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