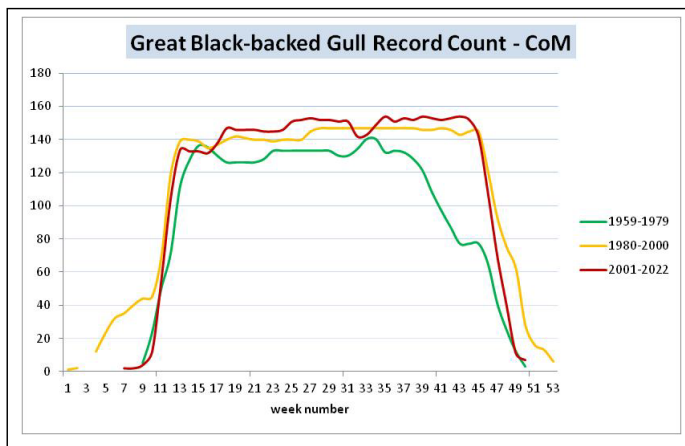
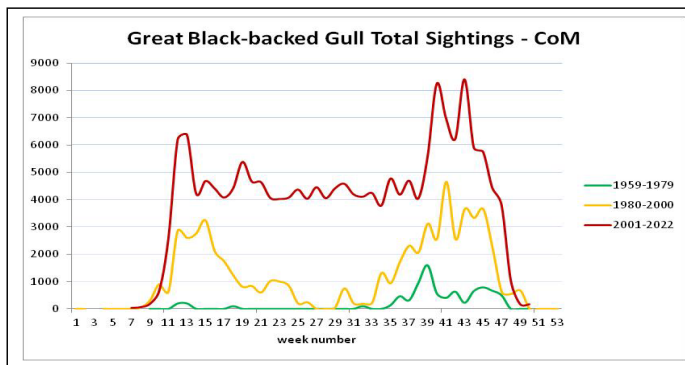


| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Common Name: | Great Black-backed Gull |
| Scientific Name: | <i>Larus marinus</i> |
| Manx name: | Juan mooar |
| BoCC IoM 21 classification: | RED |
| IUCN 3.1 classification: | Least Concern |
| MBRC: | A |
| Legal classification: | |

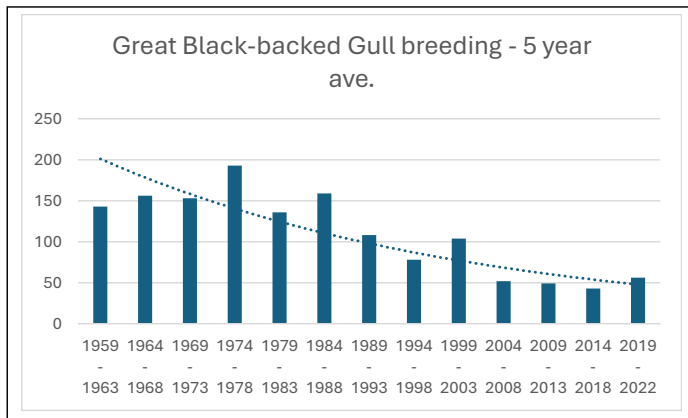
The Great Black-backed Gull is a common breeding resident, passage migrant, and winter visitor around the Isle of Man. It is frequently seen along much of the island's coastline and even in some inland areas, reflecting the island's proximity to the sea.

Historically, Ralfe noted that the Great Black-backed Gull was not uncommon in winter but lacked convincing evidence of breeding. However, Williamson (1940) reported that fishermen from the southern part of the Isle of Man claimed that the large 'Parson Gull' had been nesting on the Calf Stack since the late 19th century. Ralfe confirmed that breeding on the Calf began by 1914 at the latest. By 1935, the Calf had become the principal breeding site, hosting about 19 pairs. The first mention of



breeding on Kitterland came in 1938, with two pairs reported. The following year, Williamson noted that Kitterland had developed 'quite a colony,' and the population on the Calf was believed to have potentially tripled (Cullen & Jennings, 1986).

Between 1959 and 1994, the Great Black-backed Gull maintained a breeding population on the Calf of Man of between 110 and 200 pairs annually. During the peak years of 1974 to 1976, the number of occupied nests (AON) reached 220, with 30 to 70 AON on Kitterland. However, in 1995, the population saw a significant decline, dropping to just 52 AON on the Calf, with no count available for Kitterland at that time.



A thorough seabird survey in 1999 recorded 101 AON on the Calf and 44 AON on Kitterland, suggesting that numbers likely remained relatively stable in the following years. Unfortunately, monitoring of Kitterland was not consistently feasible during the 1990s and 2000s.

From 2003 to 2015, the population on the Calf fell to between 33 and 58 AON. The absence of counts for Kitterland during this period means these figures might have been an underestimate of the actual population. Monitoring of Kitterland resumed in 2016, revealing just six AON on the island and 32 AON on the Calf. This marked a significant population decline of 83% from the peak levels in the mid-1970s.

A slow recovery has since been observed, with the population increasing to 41 AON in 2017 and reaching between 50 and 56 AON from 2018 to 2021. A comprehensive survey in 2022 found a total of 66 AON, including 20 AON on Kitterland.

The Great Black-backed Gull is a year-round presence on the Calf, although records for the winter months of December, January, and February are likely underrepresented. The majority of winter records come from periods when wardens were present for extended stretches, such as during the winters of 1978–81 and 1991–95.

Accumulative monthly total of records (1959 – 2022):

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| 41 | 170 | 1107 | 1763 | 1863 | 1840 | 1939 | 1930 | 1856 | 1740 | 1089 | 136 |

The total sightings graph reveals substantial fluctuations in population dynamics across different decades. However, an examination of the data indicates that 67% of the 15,474 records from 1959 to 2022 were recorded as "present – no count." This common practice, especially prevalent in the first 40 years of the Observatory, significantly impacts data interpretation and skews population estimates.

The annual record count graph provides a clearer picture. Despite observed declines in the breeding population, overall population levels have remained relatively stable throughout the review period. Over a quarter of a million individuals have been counted from 1959 to 2022. Given that two-thirds of all records were "0" values, it is plausible that the total number of individuals observed could exceed three-quarters of a million.

Counts of up to 200 birds are common, representing 32% of all sightings. Additionally, there have been 106 counts of between 204 and 500 individuals. Counts exceeding 500 birds have been recorded on just 11 occasions, including four instances of 800 birds and high counts of 900 on October 19 and November 19, 2009.

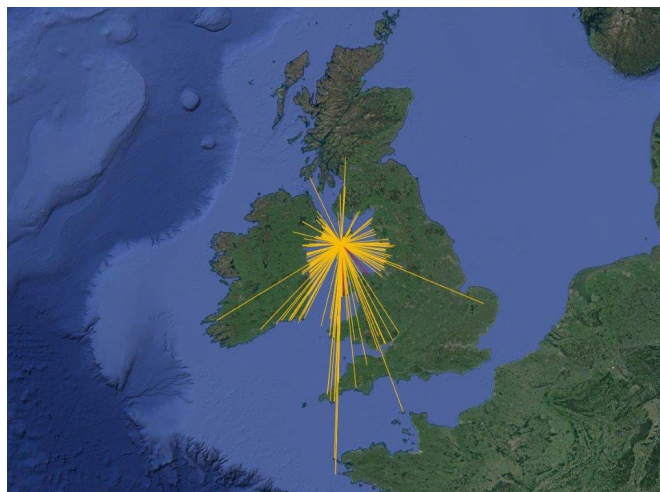
The species appeared to thrive on the Isle of Man during the 1980s and 1990s, peaking at 405 pairs in 1999 (Sharpe & Sapsford, 1999). In the British Isles, a slight decline of up to 11% was noted between the 1969-70 Census and Seabird 2000 (1998-2000), with subsequent annual monitoring suggesting that this decline might have continued (BTO). While the UK and Scottish indices increased during the 1990s, they declined thereafter, with values remaining below baseline levels, particularly in Scotland (JNCC, 2022).

On the Isle of Man, the breeding population fell to 85 AON in 2017, marking a decline of 79% since 1999 and 78% since the 1986 baseline. The decline on the Calf has been more pronounced, at 82% from 1986 to 2017, compared to a 49% decline on Kitterland. This decline is notably more severe compared to the overall British Isles decline of 2% since 1986 (Hill et al., 2019).

A total of 2,899 Great Black-backed Gull have been ringed on the Calf between 1959 – 2022, which has generated 444 recoveries and 10 controls:

| Great Black-backed Gull | Eire | England | FRANCE | Irish Sea | Isle of Man | Northern Ireland | Scotland | Wales | Grand Total |
|-------------------------|------|---------|--------|-----------|-------------|------------------|----------|-------|-------------|
| Recoveries (yellow) | 103 | 61 | 3 | 3 | 88 | 96 | 8 | 82 | 444 |
| Controls (red) | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 10 |

The recoveries map reveals that Great Black-backed Gulls ringed on the Calf primarily disperse within the Irish Sea basin. The majority of reports (45%) come from Ireland, particularly from counties Dublin (45), Louth (40), and Down (91). Eastward movements are less common, with only 44 birds (10%) found in the northwest of England. Additionally, 19% of reports originate from Wales, especially Pembrokeshire (49). A few birds have been recorded further south in Devon (2), Cornwall (13), and even France. Notable French



recoveries include a nestling ringed in June 2014 and seen at Lampau, Ouessant, Finistère (386 km away) 121 days later, and another ringed in July 2018 observed at Anse du Loc'h, Finistère (416 km away) three years, seven months, and 12 days, as well as four years, four months, and 19 days later. Few birds travel north, with just eight reports from Scotland within a range of 90 to 220 km.

Commented [CB1]: New map required with corrected East Anglia/Cornwall recovery and perhaps separate map for controls.

As most Great Black-backed Gulls ringed on the Calf are nestlings, it is expected that their movements mainly involve young birds dispersing from their natal area. Approximately 68% of reports come from within three years of ringing. Among the remaining 142 reports, 90 were received within six years, 36 up to 12 years, 10 up to 17 years, and six from birds over 18 years old. The longevity record is held by a nestling ringed in June 1989 and reported by a fishing trawler just off the Calf 23 years, 11 months, and 17 days later.

Breeding Great Black-backed Gulls in Britain and Ireland are largely sedentary and rarely travel far from their breeding sites (Harris, 1962). First-year and immature birds tend to range further than adults. Harris (1962) suggested that birds from northern breeding locations may travel further than those from southern populations. The Migration Atlas data supports this, showing median recovery distances of 39 km for birds from northern Britain, and 33 km and 23 km for those from the northwest and southwest, respectively. Of the 444 recoveries of Calf-ringed birds, 408 involved nestlings ringed in June or July, with a median recovery distance of 98 km for the 96 individuals subsequently reported dead.

The number of birds ringed elsewhere and subsequently found on the Calf is relatively low, with only 10 reports involving six individuals. Among these, three birds were ringed as nestlings on Ireland's Eye, Co. Dublin (111 km away). One of these was first observed on the Calf in September 2020, when it was just over 10 years old, and it subsequently bred on the Calf over the following two years. Another bird, also ringed as a nestling at the same location, was seen on the Calf four years, four months, and 10 days later. Additionally, a bird ringed as a nestling at Dalkey Island, Co. Dublin (121 km away) was found on the Calf one year and 14 days later, while a bird from Lambay East, Co. Dublin (99 km away) was seen on the Calf three months and 23 days after ringing. The only other control was a nestling ringed at Yns Gwylan Islands, Gwynedd, Wales (141 km away) and observed one year, one month, and seven days later.

Since 2012, coloured alpha/numerical darvic rings have been used on the Calf, resulting in a varying percentage of birds also receiving uniquely identifiable colour-rings in addition to their metal rings. Initially, due to supply issues with suitable rings, this practice was not consistently implemented until after 2017. The effectiveness of this initiative is evident in the increased annual reporting rates for this species. Prior to 2014, an average of 2.4 reports of Calf-ringed Great Black-backed Gulls were received annually. Since 2015, this average has risen to 38.4 reports per year. During the period from 2012 to 2020, the reporting rate for all colour-ringed Great Black-backed Gulls was 46.5%.

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[Great Black-backed Gull | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#)

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