

Sceilg Mhichíl Seabird Conservation Monitoring 2022 – summary



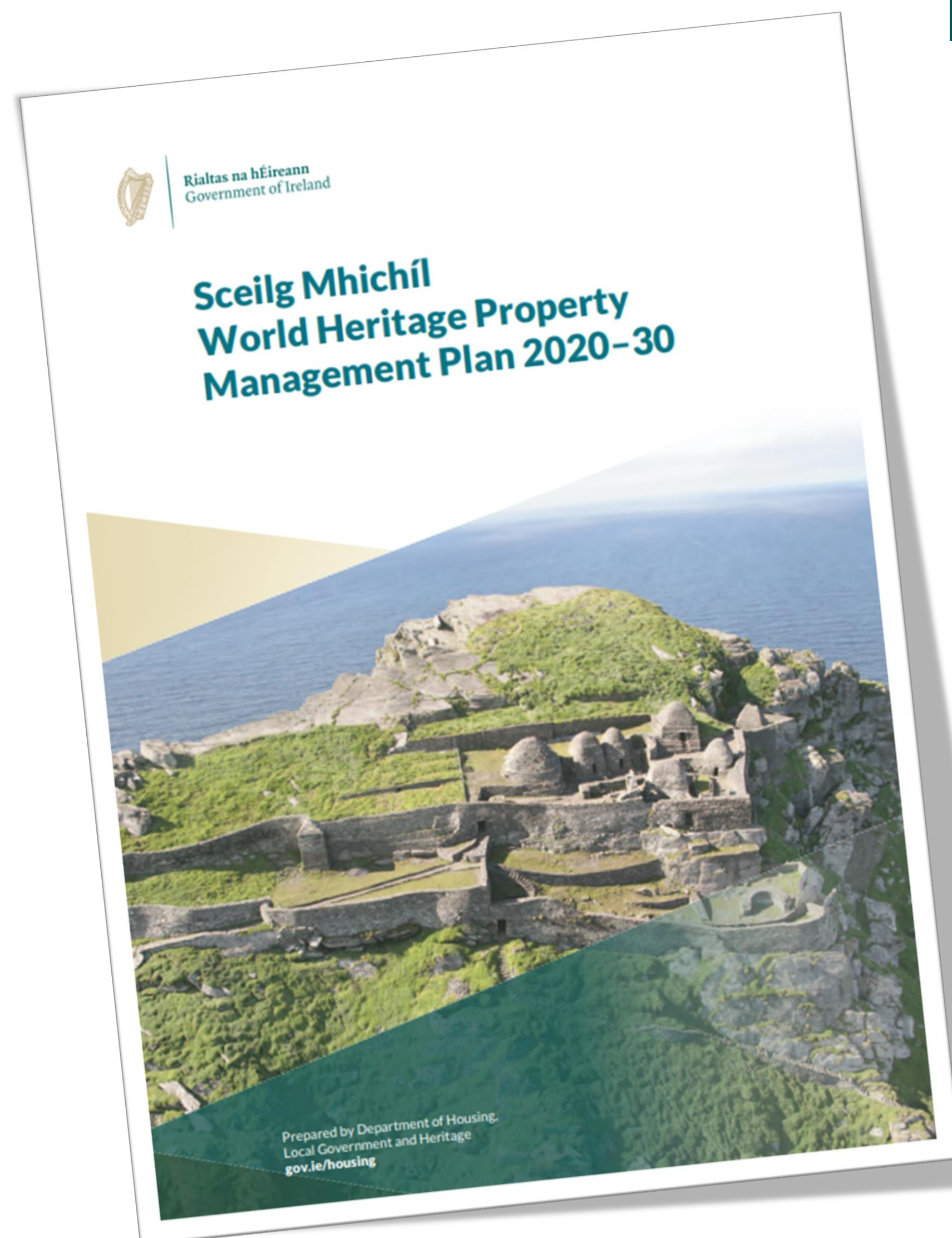
Background I



- Special Protection Area for a range of breeding seabird populations.
- Other important natural history features coexist with the seabird populations – this site is also a Nature Reserve
- Strategically important in terms of Ireland's overall seabird monitoring programme to inform conservation management actions at the national and international levels
- NPWS undertaken survey, monitoring and research work on a near annual basis since the early 1990s facilitated by OPW and NMS
- Due to logistical constraints, the range of works have been largely confined to standard seabird surveys of a subset of the island's populations and pulsed censuses of other bird populations.



Background II



- World Heritage Property Management Plan 2020 – 30
 - recognises the importance of the island's natural heritage alongside its built heritage
 - frames the scope of the seabird monitoring and conservation management work for this decade
- Objective No 4 of the Management Plan is to identify and conserve the natural heritage of the island. Flowing from this objective are 18 specific actions
- Natural Heritage conservation also cross cuts accross other objectives of the Management Plan including: Statutory and Policy; Sustainable tourism and Visitor Management; and Research
- In order for these objectives to be met it was necessary for NPWS to increase the level of on island effort to begin to develop a sustainable and fit for purpose seabird monitoring programme for the period 2020 – 2030.



Contracted on-site support



A4.4 Ensure an ecological assessment is undertaken for any project or activity which might significantly impact on the biodiversity of the island (including screening for Appropriate Assessment if necessary, for any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on the species and their habitats for which the SPA has been designated) so that nature conservation issues are considered alongside built heritage.

and

A4.5 Continue to develop the seabird-monitoring programme, with particular attention to burrow-nesting seabirds, in order to derive, among other things, robust population estimates, population trends and the identification of pressures acting on the populations. Such data will inform the management of both public access and the works programme in monitoring potential effects of human activities.

- Spring 2022 - RFT for the provision of seabird monitoring and works advisor uploaded on E-tenders
- Brian Power of Envirico Ltd. Contracted until October 2022



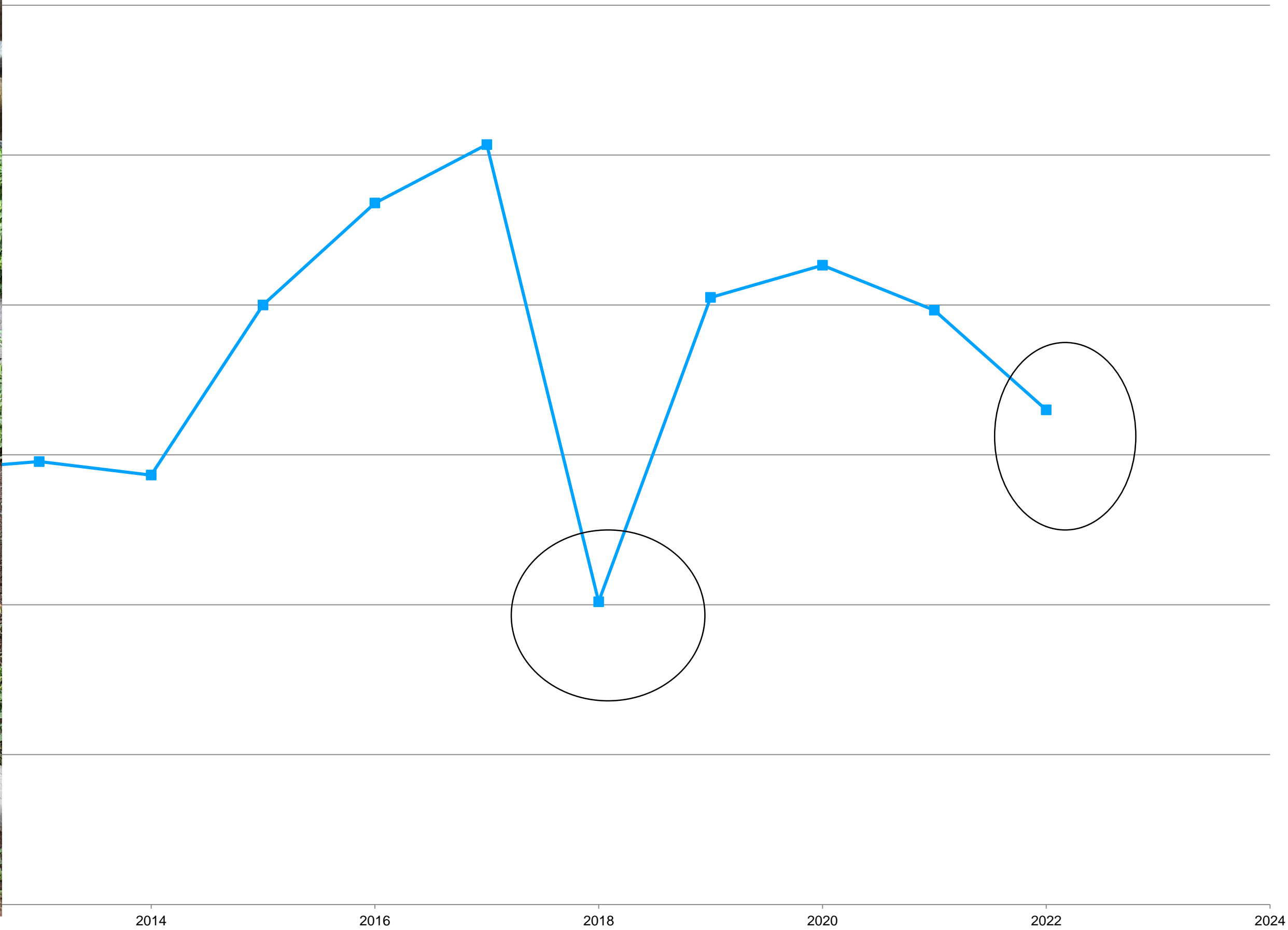
Survey & Monitoring I: Standard Breeding Seabird Survey



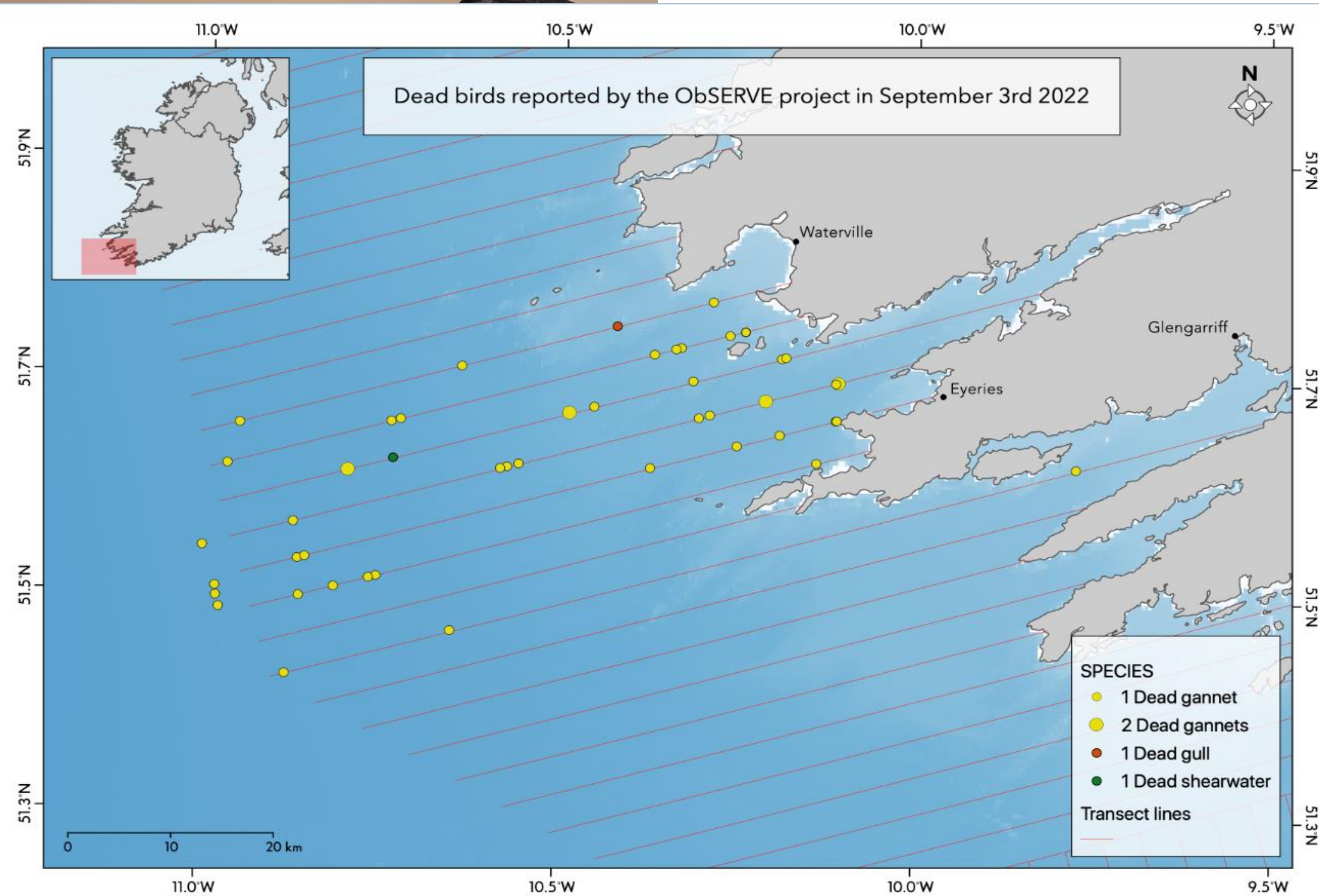
- Near annual basis since 1990s
- Usually undertaken over a weekend in mid June
- Large dataset accruing that can inform both on site and wider regional conservation management
- In 2022 this survey was severely constrained due to the temporary closure of the island due to rock fall incident
- Only population estimate for breeding Kittiwake population produced



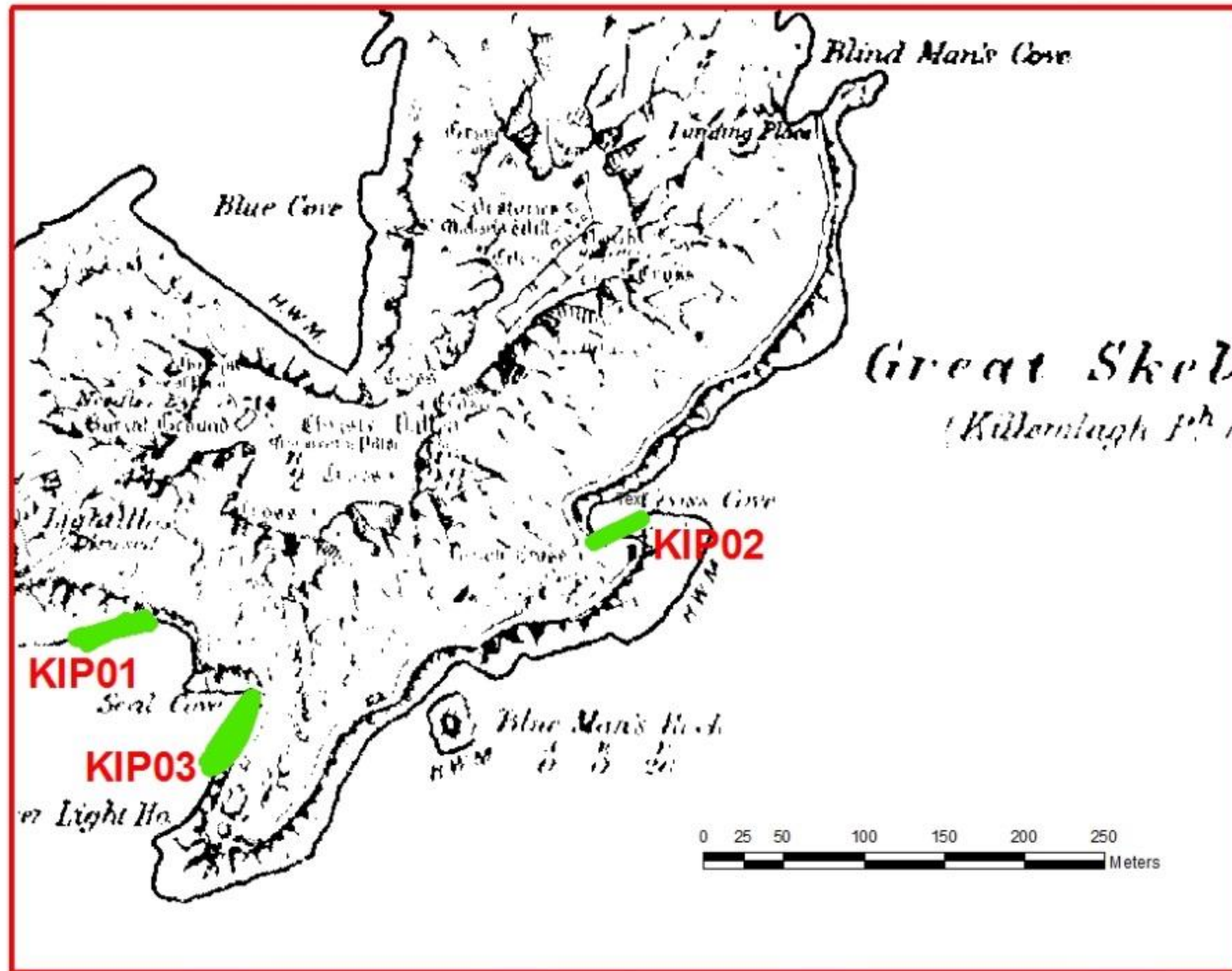
Great Skellig Kittiwake Breeding population



Avian Influenza 2022



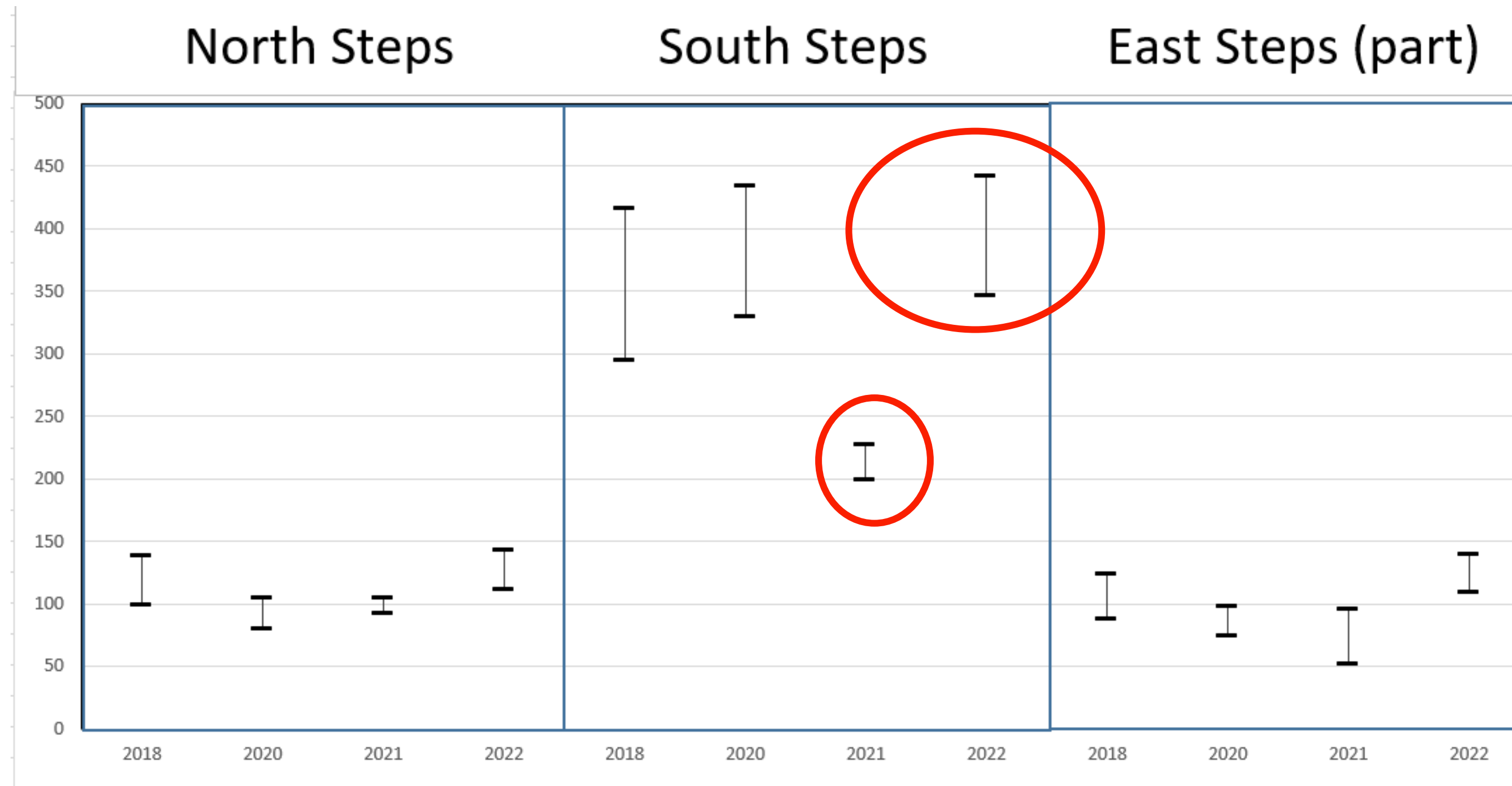
Survey & Monitoring II: Kittiwake Productivity Monitoring



- Kittiwake is in decline at the national level
- After population size, productivity is the next most useful metric to help assess conservation status
- One of only a handful of colonies around Ireland that is the focus of annual productivity monitoring
- KIP01 – 0.65 fledglings per pair (0.77 in 2021)
- KIP02 – 0.00 fledglings per pair (0.26 in 2021)
- KIP03 – 0.72 fledglings per pair (0.88 in 2021)



Survey & Monitoring III: Storm Petrel Monitoring I

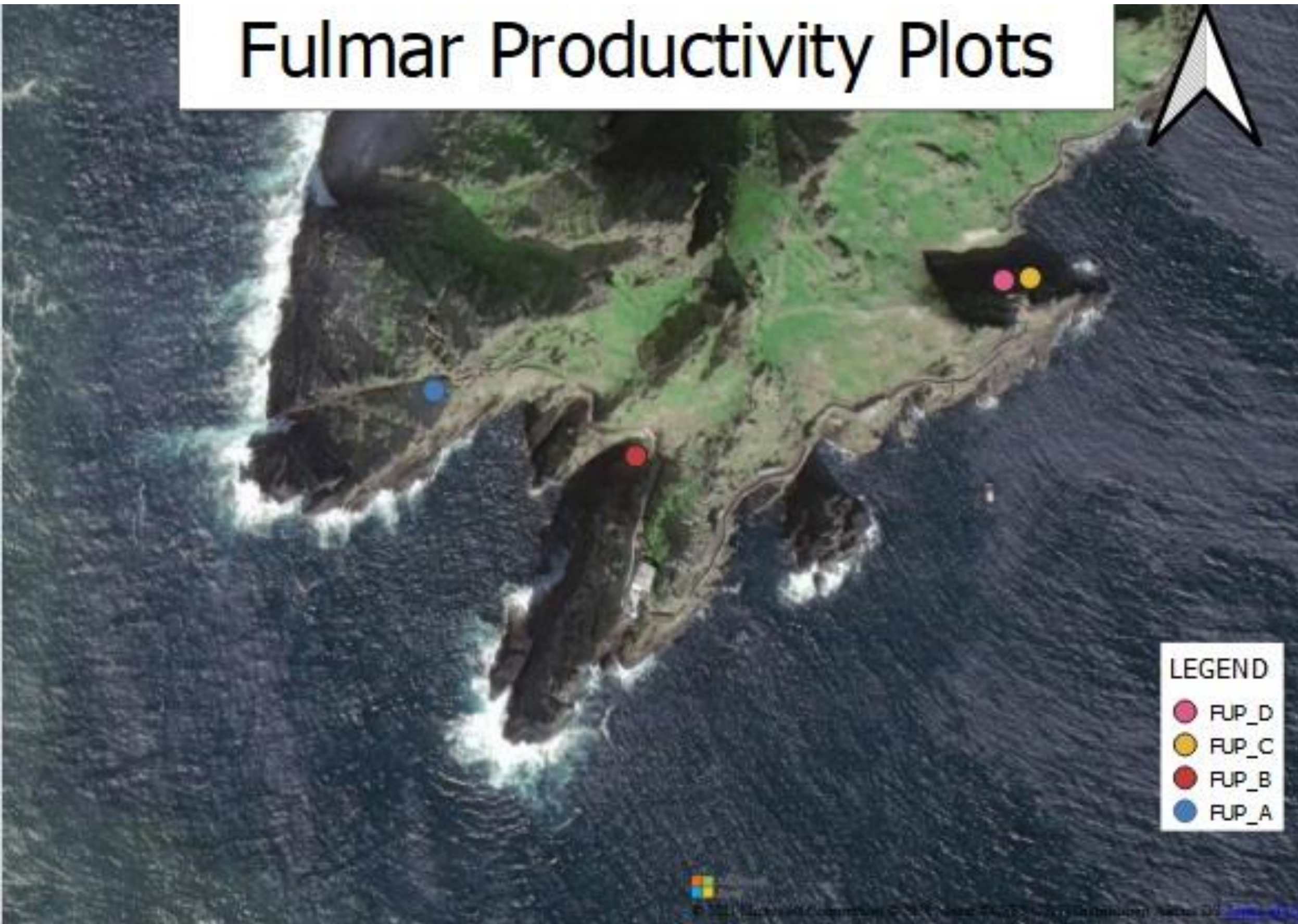


- Focus on undertaking repeated surveys for Storm Petrel of the three sets of main steps on the island i.e. the North, South and East steps
- So far data collected for the breeding seasons of 2018, 2020, 2021 and 2022
- Populations recovery for the South Steps





Fulmar Productivity Plots



- The breeding attempts of circa pairs tracked across four plots for the second year in a row
- Last year the estimated productivity of 0.47 (± 0.14 SE) is broadly in line with long-term averages for Britain and Ireland
- 2022 data not yet available



Survey & Monitoring V: Manx Shearwater Monitoring



Summary

looking forward to 2023



- The temporary closure of the island coupled with self imposed and precautionary biosecurity restrictions in light of Avian Influenza outbreaks in Europe and Ireland significantly impacted on the scope and intensity of seabird monitoring on Skellig Michael in 2022
- The impact of May 30th 'sweep' on the island's Kittiwake population needs further analysis
- The recovery of the South Steps Storm Petrel sub-population is welcome but further analysis to investigate the potential cause of the 2021 event is warranted
- Continue on with the enhanced seabird monitoring (including the installation of more artificial nest sites)
- Further planning to work safely in an potential AI future

