

World Migratory Bird Day 2015

Energy – make it bird-friendly!



Statement from Stanley Johnson Ambassador of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS)

Today, World Migratory Bird Day, I want to pay tribute to one of nature's wonders: the short-tailed shearwater (or *puffinus tenuirostris*), sometimes known as the 'mutton-bird'.

A few weeks before Christmas last year, I was lucky enough to visit Flinders Island. Flinders lies at the eastern end of the Bass Strait which separates Tasmania from mainland Australia. 18 million mutton-birds breed each year on Flinders out of a total world population of maybe 28 million birds. Flinders is a key staging-post for one of the world's great migrations.

There is some dispute among the experts about the mutton-birds' precise migratory route. Is it straight-up-and-down? Is it circular? Is it a figure-of-eight? What is certain is that the birds cover thousands of miles each year, from south to north and back again.

During my brief stay on Flinders, I was taken to visit on an uninhabited off-shore island where a small group of scientists was running transects across a vast nesting area, noting which burrows contained fledgling birds and which were empty.

I watched, fascinated, as the team-leader plunged his arm deep into a burrow to bring up a small, plump chick.

"The birds come back each year in September, regular as clockwork" he said, "In a few weeks this chick will head out to sea. He or she may be on the wing for years. But this place, this very burrow, will always be home."

Stanley Johnson

Ambassador for the United Nations Convention on Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS)