

# The Balearic Shearwater in France: historical background

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Photo JL Dourin

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### Le Croisic: where the history began

**late 19th – early 20th centuries:** specimens collected near Le Croisic for the Museum of Natural History in Nantes  
(Dr Louis Bureau, 1847-1936)

**late 1920-1930s:** Noël Mayaud (1899-1989) came to Le Croisic and met both Louis Bureau and the shearwaters  
→ description of the species moult + its status in France

the southern coast of Brittany then was the only place where Balearic Shearwaters were known to occur in large numbers, June – September.

*Alauda* 3 (1931) : 230-249, errata 457.

*Bull. SSNOF*, 5ème série, VIII (1938) : 56-86



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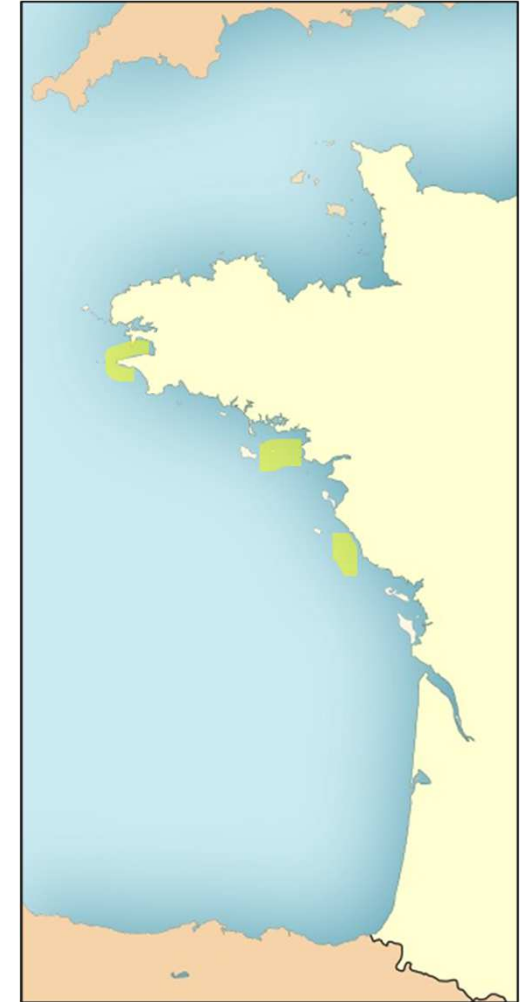
### **1950s – 1970s**

development of field ornithology and birdwatching

no regular survey

however various sources indicate:

- 1,000+ off Vendée and in Mor Braz (sardine fisheries)
- x100 at the tip of Brittany (until the sardine fishery collapsed)
- regular occurrence north to western Channel (much lower numbers)
- rare but regular winter records, a few individuals



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### 1980s

- ship-based line transects at sea (Georges Hémery, MNHN)
- land-based censuses of coastal rafts, mostly off Vendée

→ estimate: 8,000 – 10,000 ind. summering in Biscay  
mostly from Vendée to south Brittany (“Mor Braz”)

→ calendar as described in the 1930s (June – September)

- links between birds distribution and:
- nutrient-rich cold water fronts (satellite imagery, G. Hémery)
  - fisheries (with Patrick Le Mao, IFREMER)

*Rev. Ecol. (Terre Vie)* 69 (2014) : 356-359

*Mediterranean Marine Avifauna*, NATO ASI Series G 12 (1986): 513-517

*Status and Conservation of Seabirds*, 1989 (1993): 135-145, SEO



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### 1990s

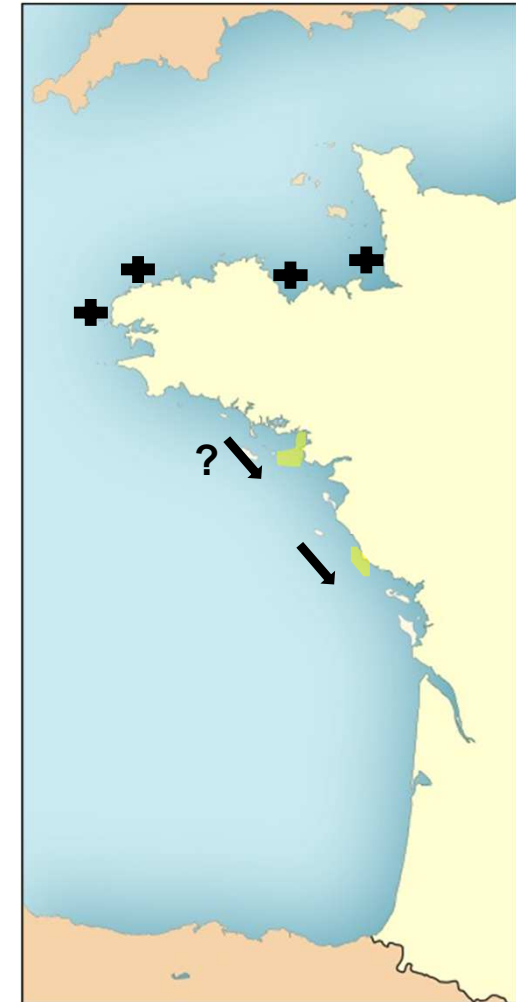
Life Project *Pardela Balear* (SEO-BirdLife Spain) invited to update the species status in France

Search for data (birdwatching societies) + protocolled surveys in Vendée and Mor Braz

- far less birds in Vendée (fishery failure)
- much fewer birds found in Mor Braz (overlooked offshore?)
- increasing abundance (>1,000) in western Channel
- overall ca.3,000 birds lacking (partly overlooked?)
- first suggestion that **the core of the distribution was moving north** as an effect of global warming

*Scientia Marina* 67 (2003): 143-148

*La Pardela Balear* (2004), SEO-BirdLife Spain



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### 21<sup>st</sup> century (1): citizen science + international co-operation

- coordinated survey from Normandy south to Vendée involving birdwatchers and nature conservation societies (2009-2012, with Laurent Thébault)
- Interreg project FAME (2010-2012, RSPB & partners)
- joint studies with British researchers (Russel Wynn & coll.)

- 8,000+ ind. *i.e.* numbers similar to 1980s
- incl. 4,000+ birds together at various sites on 6 occasions since 2010  
record of 6,400 ind. / Mor Braz, 7<sup>th</sup> August 2020
- birds arrive earlier (April-May) and depart later (October-November)
- overwintering: 700-1,000 / January 2008, then 800-925 / January 2012

*Ornithos* 16 (2019) : 209-213

*Ornithos* 20 (2013) : 206-209

*Ornithos* 28 (2021) : 140-143



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### 21<sup>st</sup> century (2): international scientific cooperation

- confirmation that land-based observations reflect the species main distribution
- confirmation of the northward trend in distribution  
(up to N France and SW England)
- confirmation that change in distribution is linked to global warming through changes in fish distribution and induced changes in fisheries

*Endangered Species Research* 25 (2014): 1-18

*British Birds* 100 (2007): 392–406

*Biology Letters* 3 (2007): 529-532 & 7 (2011): 702-705

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### 21<sup>st</sup> century (3): **calls to Balearic Shearwater conservation**

2004: **Critically Endangered** at global scale (IUCN)

- French waters obviously host a significant part (>25%) of the global population
- this part is increasing (rather stable numbers while the global population is decreasing)
- birds have to undertake longer migrations → more energy needed
- birds are facing more risks (fish stock depletion / interactions with fisheries / habitat modifications)

2006: formal **call for the species conservation in France** (La Sorbonne University, Paris)

- Interreg project FAME (2010-2012) was an answer to this call, although inconclusive

2011: **International Species Action Plan** / European Commission

2012: the species is included as an **ACAP species**

*Alauda* 75 (2007) : 287-289

ACAP (2012) <http://www.acap.aq>

2011. International species action plan (2011), SEO/BirdLife & BirdLife International.



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Then...



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