

Strong winds due to climate change may hit seabird populations

STRONGER winds forecast as a result of climate change could hit populations of seabirds by affecting how easily they can feed, a new study warns.

Research into a common UK coastal seabird showed that when winds are strong, females take much longer to find food compared to their male counterparts. Scientists expect that if wind conditions worsen as predicted, this could have a serious impact on the wellbeing of female birds, and ultimately the number of their species.

Many female seabirds are smaller and lighter than males, and so must work harder to dive through turbulent water. In addition they may not hold their breath for as long or fly as efficiently as males. The latest study suggests that in poor weather conditions, this sex difference is exaggerated.

Researchers from Edinburgh University, the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH) and British Antarctic

Survey carried out a two-year study on shags on the Isle of May National Nature Reserve in the outer Firth of Forth.

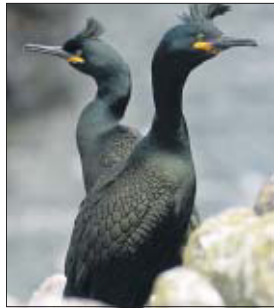
Shags are dark, long-necked birds similar to cormorants. Small tracking devices were attached to their legs to measure how long they foraged for fish in the sea.

The scientists found that when coastal winds were strong or blowing towards the shore, females took much longer to find food than males.

Their research, carried out as part of a long-term CEH study on the island that began in the 1970s, was funded by the Natural Environment

Research Council and published in the *Journal of Animal Ecology*.

Dr Sue Lewis, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Biological Sciences, who led the study, said: "In our study, females had to work harder than males to find food, and difficult conditions exacerbated this difference."



TESTS: Shags featured in the Isle of May study.

