THE OBSERVER

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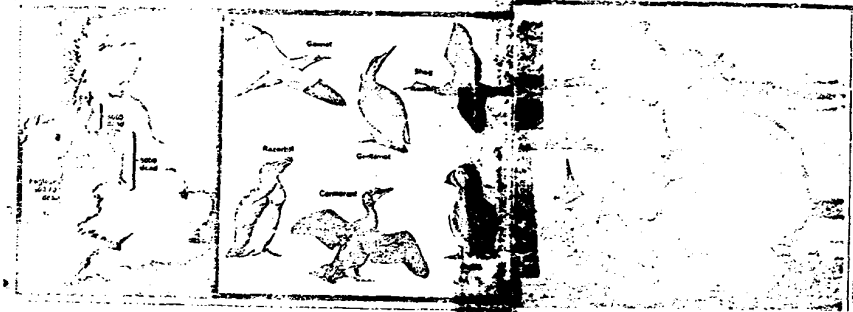

Employers: Switch cash to schools

Bomb[illegible] throw[illegible] hunted

from DAVID T[illegible]

ATHENS, 18 [illegible] FOLLOWING this [illegible] explosions of eight [illegible] bombs which slightly [illegible] six people, an organi[illegible]

Biggs family 'held hostage'

from COLIN CHAPMAN

SYDNEY, 18 October

AUSTRALIAN police, because it is known that robber Ronald Biggs has [illegible]d them for more than [illegible] years, appear to be using [illegible]mily as hostages.

[illegible]olice throughout Australia [illegible] today for Biggs, last of [illegible]bers still at large, his wife, [illegible]aine, was locked up in [illegible] women's prison in Mel[illegible]—Australia's Holloway—[illegible] three young children were [illegible] care of police.

Biggs, after being arrested [illegible] during the night, was [illegible]d in custody on a charge [illegible]ing the country under a [illegible] on an illegal passport.

[illegible] reported suggestions that [illegible]d be allowed to return to

Left: Where the dead sea-birds have been washed ashore. Centre: the six species most affected. Right: a bird protection officer with a dying guillemot on an Ayrshire beach.

'Sea birds starved to death'

by GERALD LEACH

EXPERTS now believe that the 10,000 or more dead sea-birds found on the north-west coast of Britain were killed by starvation after a change in the plankton living in the seas off Ireland and Scotland.

If they are right the death roll could climb higher as more birds fail to find any fish far out in the Atlantic where they feed at this time of year. Already the number of deaths makes the disaster the worst of its kind since records started about 200 years

But scientists have not ruled out poisoning by man-made chemicals as the cause of a major virus epidemic. Leakages from war gases dumped in the Atlantic are not thought to be the killer, mainly because very few dead fish have been found.

One of the main clues to the starvation theory is that nearly all the dead birds are emaciated, with inflamed intestines. They show all the signs of having died on empty stomachs, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said yesterday.

Another major clue was a report yesterday from the Marine Biology Laboratory at Portaferry, Northern Ireland, of a massive shortage of plankton—the tiny sea plants and animals that form the main food for fish, and therefore of birds further up the food chain.

Usually the plankton bloom in huge numbers during March to May off Ireland and Scotland. But this year the bloom did not occur until mid-summer, so that young fish hatching from their eggs in the spring found very little food available. Most of the young fish died, leaving insufficient food for the seabirds.

A third peg for the theory is that the RSPB believes the seabirds have been dying in large numbers for several weeks. There was no sudden surge of deaths, as would be expected with poisoning or an epidemic.

The disaster seemed to be sudden because it was only last week, when scattered reports of bird deaths were added together, that the RSPB realised that something very big had happened.

As a check, plans were made yesterday to drive a carload of dead birds through the night from Scotland to the Nature Conservancy's Monks Wood laboratories for tests of toxic chemicals, and to Cambridge University's pathology laboratories for virus tests.

So far the only direct tests have been on one guillemot from Scotland which lay in a refrigerator all last week at Monks Wood.

On Friday night they revealed that its liver contained 11 parts per million of DDE (a breakdown product of the insecticide DDT) and 11 parts per million of a by-product of the plastic industry called PCB [illegible]

These poisonous chemicals get into the sea through the air and rivers, are taken up by fish, and can reach high levels in fish-eating birds. But the levels found in the Monks Wood guillemot, though disturbing, are not nearly to be

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