

Egg Rock Update

Newsletter of the Seabird Restoration Program of the National Audubon Society

1997

GANNET RESTORATION AT PERROQUET ISLAND

Restoration of Northern Gannets to Perroquet Island, Quebec, began this summer and the project is already off to a promising start. National Audubon Society's (NAS) Seabird Restoration Program teamed up with two new partners, the Quebec-Labrador Foundation (QLF) and the Mingan Islands Cetacean Study (MICS) to conduct this pilot study in gannet attraction.

Perroquet Island (named for its colony of sea parrots—Atlantic Puffins) is located on the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the Mingan Archipelago. An "immense" colony of gannets nested on the island until 1859, but excessive hunting for cod fishing bait fol-

lowed by the disturbance associated with the construction of a new lighthouse, eventually led to the end of this once thriving colony. Although gan-

nets are now protected from hunting and the lighthouse has been automated, the *Fou de Bassan*, as they are known locally, have not recolonized their historic home and only six colonies exist in North America.

The project uses a social attraction technique (display of decoys and recorded colony sound) that has successfully led to colonization by terns, murres and albatross. Funded

by The Baird Foundation and Baillie Fund of Long Point Bird Observatory, the Perroquet Island project follows two years of testing techniques at Seal Island NWR (Egg Rock Update 1995). The decoys and solar-powered CD system (which broadcast the colony sounds of the Bonaventure Island gannet colony) were moved from Seal Island to Perroquet Island this year. This now places the attraction equipment at a site closer to gannet colonies on Anticosti and Bonaventure Islands.

Minga O'Brien, Research Assistant, helped set out 47 life-size, polyethylene decoys and the sound system in early June. During June and July, she counted other resident seabirds such as puffins and



Setting out the first gannet decoys at Perroquet Island: Minga O'Brien, Research Assistant (far right), with Project Leaders (l to r): Richard Sears, MICS; Kathleen Blanchard, QLF; and Stephen Kress, NAS. Photo by Kathleen A. Blanchard

razorbills while keeping a watch for gannets. Her two-month vigil was rewarded on August 4th, when an adult gannet circled the decoys five times be-

fore settling down among the models.

GANNETS LAND AMONG DECOYS

Within the next week, as many as three gannets visited the artificial colony at the same time. One of these birds—"Fergus le Fou" as it came to be known—was a regular, staking out a favorite spot nearly every day in August and early September. Dur-

ing the first two weeks of August, 319 gannets were sighted near the island and hundreds more were observed in the distance.

It will likely take many years before breeding occurs, but the abundant sightings and landings in the project's first year offer hope that with a little coaxing, these magnificent birds will return to their historic home on Perroquet Island.





PUFFIN NEWS

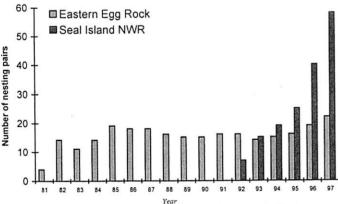
EASTERN EGG ROCK

The number of nesting puffin pairs at Eastern Egg Rock reached a record high this summer with 22 pairs tallied. Puffins were present in larger than usual numbers throughout the summer with a high count of 52 birds on July 24.

Puffins were restored to Eastern Egg Rock in 1981 when four pairs nested. They

were the first breeders from the 954 puffin chicks translocated to Egg Rock from Great Island, Newfoundland from 1973 through 1986. The transplant project was a joint NAS-Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) effort. Egg Rock's puffin colony increased to 19 pairs by 1985, but then leveled off to 15 to 17 pairs for nearly a decade before rising to 19 pairs in 1996, and to a record high of 22 pairs this summer.

In recent years, some of the translocated birds have not returned to the island and many unbanded puffins (non-translocated) are showing up. In 1991, only one pair of Egg Rock puffins was comprised of two non-translocated birds. However, as of this year only 14 of the original translocated birds returned, and 58% of these were paired to non-translocated (unbanded) puffins. Additionally, there were seven non-translocated pairs (both birds unbanded), and all six of the newest nests belonged to unbanded pairs. Some of the 14 surviving translocated puffins are reaching "respectable" ages-six were 20 years old this summer. Some of this colony growth can be attributed to native chicks hatched at Egg Rock (banding them before they fledge is usually impossible because their nests are located deep in rock crevices); however, two puffins banded as chicks at Machias Seal Island (located on the US-Canada border) and nine banded at Matinicus Rock were observed prospecting at Egg Rock this summer.

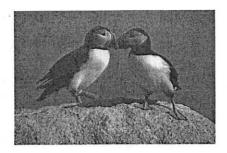


Growth of puffin colonies at Eastern Egg Rock and Seal Island NWR.

SEAL ISLAND

The new puffin colony on Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) increased this year to 58 pairs—a 45% jump over the 1996 count of 40 pairs. This follows a steady trend of growth since 1992 when seven pairs nested—the first in 105 years.

Seal Island NWR, a 100-acre treeless island, is located 20 miles offshore from Rockland, Maine in outer Penobscot Bay. As



late as the 1850s, it was the largest puffin colony off mid-coast Maine, but hunting for food and feathers extirpated the colony by 1887. In 1984, NAS and CWS began a cooperative program with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to restore Atlantic Puffins and Arctic Terns.

The project was similar to the earlier puffin restoration conducted at Eastern Egg Rock, but here up to 200 puffin chicks were

translocated from Newfoundland most years. In total, 950 puffin chicks two to 40 days old (most were between ten and 14 days) were moved from their hatching burrows in Newfoundland to Seal Island where they were reared in sod burrows. Most chicks were fed once each day on a diet of vitamin-supplemented thawed fish. The chicks were banded with individually-numbered plastic leg bands and stainless steel USFWS bands as they neared fledging (departure from burrows). A few of these chicks began returning in 1987, but large numbers were not observed until 1990 when the "class of 1988" began to show a strong rate of return. To date, 87 of 188 puffin chicks fledged from this class have returned to Seal Island or one of the other Maine puffin colonies.

The rapid growth of the Seal Island colony is due to an influx of young puffins from other Gulf of Maine colonies. The likely source for these is nearby Matinicus Rock (6 miles west) and Machias Seal Island (85 miles east).

MATINICUS ROCK

The art of "puffin grubbing" in rock jumbles reached new heights—actually depths—this summer. The Matinicus Rock team broke its previous record of 51 puffin chicks pulled from under the boulders for banding. The new record was achieved



Interns search the crevices below large granite boulders where the Maine coast puffins nest. Puffin "grubbing" and banding of puffin chicks is an important way of assessing the status of the Gulf of Maine puffin population. Photos: Stephen Kress

by Sue Schubel and her team of research assistants who retrieved and banded the last chick, number 53, just a few days before the end of the field season.

Grubbing chicks from their burrows is the first step in our banding studies of Matinicus Rock puffins. Observations of these chicks in later years at Matinicus Rock and other Maine islands can reveal how many chicks are surviving at sea.

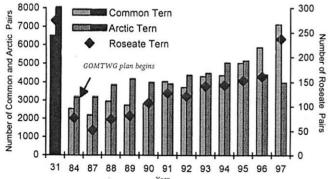
TERN NEWS

MAINE TERN NUMBERS CONTINUE TO RISE

The populations of nesting terns on the Maine Coast continued their upward trend at Audubon-managed sanctuaries this summer. The number of endangered Roseate Terns was especially noteworthy as the state population increased by 47% from 161 pairs in 1996 to 237 pairs this summer. Common Terns also showed an increase of 21%, growing from 5,847 pairs in 1996 to 7,102 pairs in 1997. Though Arctic Terns numbers have slipped for the past two summers to 3,976 pairs, their numbers are still 25% higher than they were in 1984 when a concerted effort to increase Maine tern populations began.

This summer's weather was ideal for rearing tern chicks, with little rain or fog and no significant storms. Food for chicks (mainly hake, herring and sand launce) was also in ample supply. The result was exceptionally high productivity at managed sanctuaries—about 10,000 tern chicks fledged. These included 7,271 Common Terns, 1,883 Arctic Terns and 290 Roseate Terns.

The increases are especially heartening because coastal Maine tern numbers (Common, Arctic and Roseate) declined for about 50 years due to competition and predation by Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. Gulls displaced terns from their historic nesting colonies because they nest earlier than terns (who migrate to the southern hemisphere and have a longer journey back to the breeding grounds). Terns also avoid nesting near gulls who eat their eggs and chicks. When gulls occupy the prime seabird nesting sites, terns are forced to nest in marginal habitat too near the mainland where they suffer from human disturbance and mainland-based predators.



Maine Coast tern numbers declined between 1931 and 1984, then increased with tern management.

In 1984, concerned biologists formed the Gulf of Maine Tern Working Group whose goal was to reverse this trend. Audubon's Seabird Restoration Program teamed up with the USFWS and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to devise a plan to restore key sites with the aid of resident island stewards during the nesting season. This plan, along with effective



Common Tern with chick. Photo by Walker Golder

management of Roseate and Common Terns on Bird Island, MA and Great Gull Island, NY, has resulted in a dramatic increase in Common and Roseate Terns on Maine islands. From 1984 to 1997, Common Terns increased by 179% from 2,543 to 7,102 pairs; endangered Roseate Terns increased from only 76 pairs to 237 pairs—an increase of 211%!

HIGHLIGHTS AT AUDUBON SANCTUARIES

Eastern Egg Rock—Roseate Terns continued 11 years of colony growth since 1987, increasing from two to 138 pairs, representing 58% of the Maine population. This season 207 young Roseate terns fledged. The colony of Common Terns fledged about 2,890 young and is the largest in Maine at 1,441 pairs.

Stratton Island—Roseate Terns increased from seven pairs in 1996 to 56 pairs in 1997 and produced 68 fledglings; Common Terns increased from 708 pairs in 1996 to 821 pairs and produced 1,814 fledglings—the highest productivity per pair of any Maine colony. Jenny Island—Twelve pairs of Roseate Terns nested and fledged 22 chicks among 1,068 pairs of Common Terns. Tiny Jenny Island (only three acres) nows ranks as the third largest Common Tern colony in Maine and the only breeding site for terns in Casco Bay.

Pond Island NWR—Five pairs of Common Terns nested this summer on Pond Island in the mouth of the Kennebec River, an encouraging increase from the single pair that nested there last year. However, disturbance by a Great Horned Owl interfered with successful breeding. This is the second year of the effort to restore terns to the mouth of the Kennebec River.

Seal Island NWR—Common and Arctic Terns increased from 1,736 pairs in 1996 to 1,797 in 1997. Seal Island remains Maine's largest tern colony. While the number of nesting pairs was similar, production of fledglings nearly doubled this year increasing from 1,128 in 1996 to 2,078 in 1997.

Matinicus Rock—A total of 934 pairs of Arctic Terns nested on Matinicus this summer, ranking "The Rock" as the largest Maine colony of this state-threatened species. Good weather and an ample food supply permitted the terns to fledge 990 young—more than twice as many as in 1996.



ALBATROSS UPDATE

The project to attract Laysan Albatross to Kaohikaipu Island off the coast of Oahu, Hawaii continued with its fourth field season (see *Egg Rock Update* 1994). This joint project of the NAS, USFWS and the Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife began in the fall of 1994. Its objective is to test techniques for establishing an albatross colony using decoys and sound equipment and to encourage prospecting albatross to nest on this state wildlife sanctuary—rather than at airport runways and public recreation areas.

A team of 30 volunteers assisted project coordinator Dr. Gail Grabowski Kaaialii and research assistant Lance Tanino in tallying 926 hours of observation on 181 days from mid-December 1996 through April 1997. Observers carefully monitored the island, looking for live albatross among the 40 adult decoys, six decoy chicks, six decoy eggs and sound playback equipment (which broadcasts the sounds of an active nesting colony). Albatross were seen on, over, or flying by the island on 40 days representing 29% of observation days. One or more albatross were observed on the island for 16 days. Albatross activity was greater than the previous year, when the great birds were observed on only 19% of observation days. Dr. Richard Podolsky, co-director of the project, presented a paper on the project at the Cooper Ornithological Society meeting held in Hilo, Hawaii, in May.

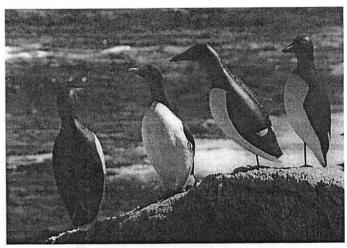
We acknowledge with appreciation the 1997 volunteer Albatross observers: Bob Becker, Arlene Buccholz, Lorraine Campbell, Marion Campbell, Michelle Daney; Charmie Dang; Pete Donaldson; Donald Gambill, Katherine Hernando, Karyn Herrmann, Hattie Higa, Marti Kazlowski, Stan Kazlowski, Barbara Lewis, Marianne Long, Eloise Lurito, David McFaull, Lynnea Overholt, Vern Pang, Cheryl Phillipson, Tom Spring, Scotty Sugiyama, Hideko Taketa, Emilia Thomas, Phyllis Turnbull, Mayra Vega, Corrine Waterhouse, John Wendell, Thia West, and Bob Westmoreland.

MURRE UPDATE

alifornia-Restoration of Common Murres toDevil's Slide Rock entered its second season (see Egg Rock Update 1996). Murres were known to nest at this rock as early as 1937, and there were 2,900 nesting on top of the 36' x 78' sea stack as recently as 1982. A combination of severe weather (El Niño), gill nets, and oil spills decimated the colony by 1986. In January 1996, biologists from the USFWS, NAS and the National Biological Service (NBS), placed 384 adult murre decoys, 36 decoy chicks and 48 decoy eggs along with 12 three-sided mirror boxes and two CD-sound systems which broadcast murre colony sounds. In 1996, a high count of 29 birds were observed on the rocksix pairs laid eggs and of these, three chicks fledged—the first young produced at Devil's Slide in a decade. This year, nine pairs nested (the first egg was found two weeks earlier than in 1996) and six chicks fledged. The season high count was 39 individual murres.

We gratefully acknowledge the 1997 California murre team: Mike Parker, leader; Jennifer Boyce, Harry Carter, Ginny Collins, Elizabeth McClaren, Dave Notthelfer, and Richard Young. aine—Murre restoration also continued at Matinicus Rock. Here, murres bred as late as 1883, but egging and hunting for food and feathers depleted this southernmost population on the Atlantic coast. In 1992, two days after setting out 15 decoys and broadcasting murre colony sounds, a murre was seen among the decoys. Additional decoys were added in each subsequent year to total nearly 100 this year. The number of murres visiting the decoy area at any one time has remained steady during the last six years, ranging from one through eight (except in 1993 when 21 were seen at once).

This year, however, murres were seen on a higher proportion of days and later in the season than previous years. The number of days in which murres attended the decoy group increased from 37% of 51 observation days in 1992 to 76% of 82 days in 1997 with regular attendance through the first week of August. In contrast, murres were rarely observed after the end



Murres continue to frequent the decoy plot at Matinicus Rock. Visits to the decoy area by live murres continued a month beyond the period of time they attended in the previous five years of the restoration project.

Photo by Irwin Simon

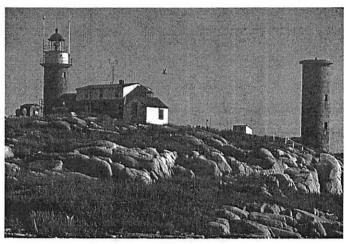
of June in previous years. Researchers also noted an increase in murres returning to the decoy ledge carrying fish—a breeding-related behavior rarely observed in previous years. This is a hopeful sign suggesting that some of the murres which began prospecting years earlier, are reaching breeding age and are considering nesting.

MOE'S TOWER RECEIVES NEW CAP

atinicus Rock, the most remote seabird nesting colony on the Maine coast, has a long and colorful history as a light station. The first beacon, fueled by whale oil, was in a wooden tower. This was replaced in 1846 by a twin-towered lighthouse built of granite quarried on the island. These twin lights warned ships of dangerous waters during the peak of the coastal schooner trade. During this time, the Rock was home to its most famous keeper, young Abbie Burgess, noted for keeping the light burning during the absence of her lightkeeper father.



In 1857, the original granite towers located at each end of the lighthouse were replaced by two new towers, each 48 feet high to the lantern top and spaced 180 feet apart, working as a double light to enhance identification of the island. The replacement towers were built of massive granite blocks, precut on the mainland and then assembled on site. But by 1923, the island's north tower was abandoned and capped to prevent deterioration and the south tower was equipped with a flashing light. The north tower is now known as "Moe's tower" in memory of



Moe's tower before (above on right) and after (left) installation of new cap. Photos by Stephen Kress and Susan Schubel



a worker who allegedly fell to his death from atop the tower. According to our project staff, his benign ghost still haunts the island.

Moe's tower is now used as an observation platform for counting and studying seabirds, but exposure of the interior to the elements was taking a toll. The protective cap had long been missing, causing deterioration of the interior brickwork and corrosion of the ornate iron stairway. Enter Susan Schubel—the island's intrepid supervisor, who took on the ambitious task of designing a new and better cap for the venerable tower. This was no small undertaking, since the cap would have to withstand gale-force winds and yet permit bird observations to continue. With help from André Breton, John Drury, Terry Goodhue and Erica Chipman, the construction of the new cap was completed after a week of hard work—just in time for a test by a gale-force storm that trapped the team on the Rock for an extra three days at the end of the season.

NFWF MATCHING GRANT RECEIVED

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) has pledged up to \$50,000 in matching funds to National Audubon Society to assist Audubon's Seabird Restoration Program on the Maine Coast. The grant is intended to help Audubon protect and restore seabird colonies and conduct an outreach seabird education program in Maine K–12



Students in Susan Mann's third-grade class at Chelsea School, Chelsea, Maine, participate in the "blubber mitts" experiment. Audubon's Education Coordinator, Pete Salmansohn (right), explains how body fat protects the birds from icy cold water.

schools. The Seabird Restoration Program received the grant in part because of its history of challenging private donors, foundations and corporations to contribute to seabird conservation. The grant will give a one-to-one challenge match for cash gifts to National Audubon for its Maine Coast Seabird Program. ❖

OUR SINCERE APPRECIATION GOES TO THE 1997 MAINE RESEARCH TEAM

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Sally Ober Dmitri Panfilov Chris Pennock Elaine Pourinski Jodi Quimby John Quimby John Quimby Barbara Rhoad Carey Rowsom Sandra Ruggerio Kristin Scheibel Irwin Simon Melinda Simon Diane Tessaglia Leslie Thurston Gabriel Willow

NEW SEABIRD EDUCATION PROGRAM LAUNCHED IN MAINE SCHOOLS

To help build a culture of conservation, National Audubon launched a new outreach school program in Spring 1997 to share the excitement of Project Puffin with children in coastal schools. The program focuses on grades three through eight and is presented by an Audubon naturalist who makes a series of visits to classrooms. Puffins and other seabirds easily lead students into core curriculum areas including science, English, math, geography and social studies.

Because of their popular appeal and status as one of Maine's most beloved birds, puffins easily interest students in studies that might otherwise seem distant, such as understanding ocean food chains. Pete Salmansohn, Education Coordinator for the Seabird Restoration Program, knows this well, and is effectively using the puffin's charm to teach subjects ranging from world geography, graphing of seabird population changes and ecological adaptations. These subjects are taught in a hands-on style which directly engages the student's attention and participation.

The program began in early April and ran through late May, reaching 900 students in 16 schools, each class receiving from one to five visits from Audubon naturalists. The program received startup funding from Davis Conservation Foundation, Sea World, John Hay Charitable Trust, John Sage Foundation and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

NEW BOOKS AND VIDEO ENRICH SCHOOL PROGRAM

The Seabird Education Program outreach coincides with publication of two new Audubon books authored by Stephen Kress and Pete Salmansohn and published by Tilbury House of Gardiner, Maine. PROJECT PUFFIN: How we brought puffins back to Egg

PUFFIN has a compan-

Rock is a 40-page, full-color hardback about how puffins and terns were restored to Maine islands. Although written as an upper-level children's book, it is suitable for all ages and contains many photos of puffins and other Maine seabirds. PROJECT

GIVING BACK TO THE EARTH

ion guide, Giving Back to the Earth, which contains more than 40 handson activities that involve role playing, art, games, local activism, graphing skills, science projects and habitat improvement. The

games, local activism, graphing skills, science projects and habitat improvement. The activities are grouped within seven theme areas: seabird adaptations; marine ecosys-

tems; history of human impacts on seabirds; current human impacts; observation; one person can make a difference; and projects to help restore and protect animals, plants and habitats.

Both books are available from most bookstores or contact the publisher at: Tilbury House, 132 Water St., Gardiner, ME 04345 or phone 1–800–582–1899.

A new 30-minute video about Project Puffin was produced by National Audubon for the Audubon's Animals Adventure series on the Disney Channel titled "Puffin Adventures." The film features extraordinary underground and underwater footage. Project Puffin is offering this video as a gift for supporters at the \$50 or higher level.

25,000™ PASSENGER BOARDS AUDUBON BOAT TOURS

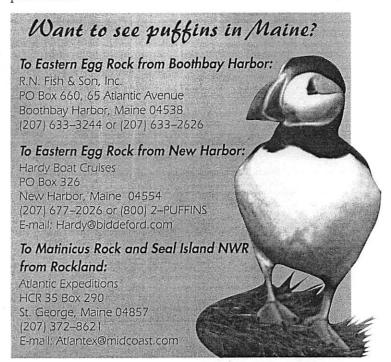
Project Puffin began cooperating with mid-coast Maine boat operators in 1988 by placing Audubon naturalists on board puffin watching trips headed to Eastern Egg Rock departing from



Alex Shultis boarded the puffin watching trip on Hardy III in New Harbor, Maine as the 25,000th passenger! Left to right: Pete Salmansohn, Stephen Kress, DownEast Energy Puffin (Aran Shetterley), Alex Shultis, Stacey Davidson and Al Crocetti (owners of Hardy Boat Cruises). Photo by Herman Kress

Boothbay Harbor and New Harbor. In 1990, tours were added to Matinicus Rock and Seal Island NWR. The cooperation benefits Audubon, the public, boat operators, and ultimately, the seabirds by providing contributions from each passenger fare to help support our protection and restoration program.

The pleasant weather and few foggy days this summer were ideal for puffin watching trips, resulting in record-breaking attendance. A total of 4,760 passengers climbed aboard this year—more than twice the number (2,215) that participated in 1996. On July 28th, young Alex Shultis was surprised when the giant puffin from Down East Energy of Brunswick, Maine acknowledged him as the 25,000th passenger to board one of Audubon's puffin tours.



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In Memory of Melville H. Ireland

SPECIAL GIFTS 1996-1997 CONTRIBUTORS

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- Anthony Hill for donating a GPS system for the Project boat and the materials to staff of the USFWS for assistance with the Hawaii albatross project
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 - tional Audubon Society—special thanks go to Frank Gill and Norm Brunswig. Project Puffin is supported by the Science and Sanctuaries Divisions of the Na-

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- Mr. & Mrs. Charles Lee for the gracious hospitality they provide the Stratton

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This issue of Egg Rock Update is dedicated to Chris McNamara who we remember for his friendship and generosity to our staff at the Matinicus Rock field station.

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