



Egg Rock Update

Newsletter of the Seabird Restoration Program
of the National Audubon Society

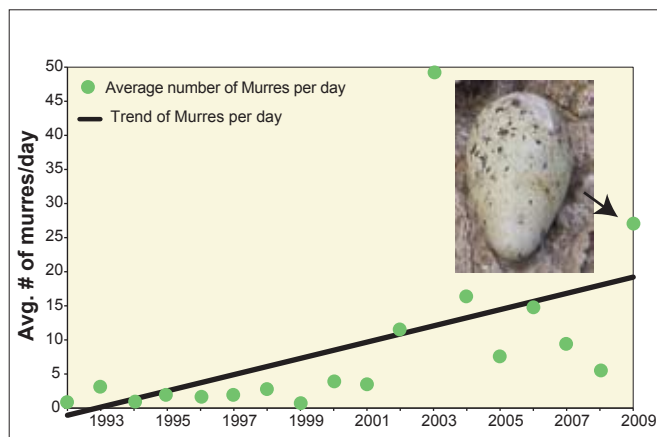
2009

COMMON MURRES NEST AT MATINICUS ROCK

An egg collected from “Matinicus Isle” in 1883 now on display at the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology is a sober reminder that uncontrolled shooting and egg collecting led to the extirpation of most Maine seabirds by 1900. Early Maine records inspired Project Puffin to use social attraction methods such as decoys and sound recordings in 1992 to lure murres back to this remote island located 26 miles south of Rockland.

Matinicus Rock seabirds have benefited from protection since 1900, when the island’s light keeper was hired by Audubon founder William Dutcher. Today, the island is part of the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge, and is managed cooperatively with Audubon’s Seabird Restoration Program.

When the murre attraction program began, murres were already visiting the island, but seldom coming ashore. To encourage nesting, about 150 incubating and standing murre decoys were positioned in suitable

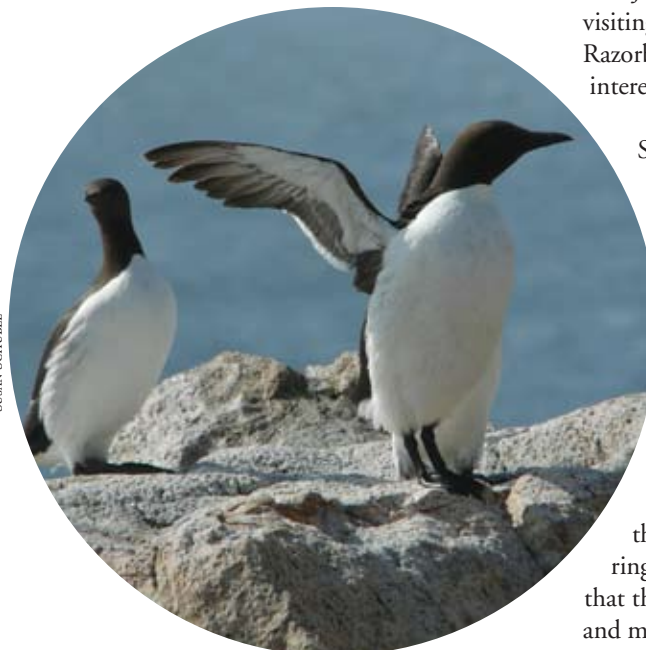


The average number of murres visiting Matinicus Rock has slowly increased—culminating in 2009 with the first nesting in over a century.

habitat along with four-sided mirror boxes and several decoy murre chicks and eggs. Because nesting murres often vocalize at their colonies, murre sound recordings were played 24 hours a day. Murres immediately frequented the decoys, but every year numbers would peak in late June and then decline to just a few birds by mid-July. However, since 1992, the numbers of murres visiting the island slowly increased, as did the nesting Razorbill population, which likely helped to hold the interest of visiting murres.

A murre colony founded in 1994 on Machias Seal Island supported between six and 150 pairs of murres in recent years. Prior to this, the only other Gulf of Maine colony was on Yellow Murre Ledge, a Canadian colony located ten miles from Machias Seal Island.

This year about 116 murres were observed on June 9th. Interns noticed a location among the decoys where birds were consistently present and “hunkered down.” On June 26th, 17 years after attraction efforts began, interns Maria Cunha and Yvan Satgé discovered a single murre egg. Six days later, they found the egg destroyed—probably by a Herring or Great Black-backed Gull. It’s likely, however, that this nesting murre pair will return next summer, and may attract even more nesting pairs. This nesting expands the murres’ range by more than 110 miles, restoring the species to the eastern United States. It also further confirms the value of social attraction methods for seabird restoration.



SUSAN SCHUBEL

Decoys and sound recordings enticed a pair of Common Murres to nest at Matinicus Rock this year—the first nesting since about 1883.

INSIDE

- Matinicus Rock Manx Shearwater Fledgling
- Extreme Rain
- Island Updates
- Education & Outreach



RICHARD DODOLSKY

The 2009

Maine Research Team

Front: Liz Zinsser;

First Row (left to right): Alison Koczek;

Alcides Morales Peréz; Rosalie Borzik; Peggy Friar;

Steve Kress; Debbie Wood; Pam Loring;

Maria Cunha; Joe Giambruno; Mai Onoue

Second Row (left to right): Maki Briggs; Pete Salmansohn; Scott Hall; Becca Loeb; Lindsay Galland; Janneke Petersen

Third Row (left to right): Anderson Jean; Lauren Scopel; Enold-Louis Jean; Katie Kauffman; Juliet Lamb; Yvan Satgé

Fourth Row (left to right): Bob Taylor; Matt Klostermann; Kevin Kelly

Absent from photo: Phyllis Austin; Nate Balboni;

Sean Beckett; Andre Brétón; Clancy Brown;

Laura Budd; Lisa Burns; John Drury; Sandy Flint;

Ted Gaine; Alisa Glassman; Michelle Goh;

Marilyn Grant; Mary Gunther; Nicki Hall;

Anthony Hill; Anne Kauffman; Jeff Kimmons;

Lucy Klostermann; Mark LaBarr; Katie LaCreta;

Mandy Lightcap; Mike Mangiaracina;

Joe Masi; Garth McElroy; Susan Meadows;

John Meyn; Thomas Mullin; Dan Ober;

Kristin Pennock; Caesar Rahman; Nicholas Record;

Susan Schubel; Jason Sears; Sam Slater;

Rich Stanton; Mia Strauss; Will Taubman;

Stella Walsh; Ellen Westhaver.

Project Puffin Visitor Center

Volunteers

Bill Cook; Sharon Hoover;

Brian Trask; Marilyn Trask

Scholarship and Award Recipients

Josephine Daneman Herz

International Seabird Scholarship

Alcides Morales Peréz, Quebradillas, Puerto Rico

Duryea & Peggy Morton Seabird Internship

Yvan Satgé, Feas, France

**Cornell Lab of Ornithology
International Program award**

Enold-Louis Jean, Les Cayes, Haiti;

Anderson Jean, Les Cayes, Haiti

Audubon International Program Award

Alcides Morales Peréz, Quebradillas, Puerto Rico

MATINICUS ROCK MANX SHEARWATERS RAISE A CHICK

On Tuesday September 8th, a Manx Shearwater near-fledgling was discovered on Matinicus Rock. While increasing numbers of shearwaters have visited the island regularly since 1997, the discovery of the chick provides proof at last that this species has colonized Matinicus Rock. This is the first time that a Manx Shearwater chick has been known to have reached fledging age within the United States. The young bird was found by a team of Audubon and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service researchers as they checked shearwater burrows on the 22-acre island, which already holds the distinction of being Maine's most diverse seabird nesting island.

Audubon's Scott Hall, along with Brian Benedict, Bob Houston, Matt Klostermann, and Lauren Scopel of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, discovered the chick in a relatively shallow burrow—one of six known burrows on the island. Upon first examination the shearwater appeared to be an adult. But a closer look revealed remnant patches of fluffy light gray down around the legs—proof that this was a nearly fledged chick.

Manx Shearwaters (*Puffinus puffinus*) nest throughout the eastern North Atlantic, especially in Great Britain. These crow-sized albatross relatives have three-foot wingspans, and are named for their habit of flying low over the water. Studies in Britain indicate that they may live 56 years and travel over five million miles during their long lives. Regular visitors to the western North Atlantic since the 1950s, their breeding was first confirmed in 1973 when a pair produced a chick on Penikese Island in Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts; the outcome of this nesting was not confirmed. In 1977, a second North American and first Canadian breeding record was confirmed on Middle Lawn Island in Newfoundland; a small population has continued to nest there.

A Manx Shearwater was first observed on Matinicus Rock in May 1997 and a nest-



ROBERT HOUSTON

Cause for celebration! The first known fledgling Manx Shearwater in the U.S.

ing burrow was discovered the following year. Two birds were seen briefly together in 1999 and appeared regularly in 2000. From 2001 to 2004, shearwaters used this burrow on multiple occasions. An egg was found in the burrow in 2005, but failed to hatch. In 2006 and 2007, up to 19 Manx Shearwaters were seen around the island. In 2008, a new burrow was found, and visiting adults were documented with an infrared camera, but breeding was not confirmed. Several adjacent burrows were discovered later in 2008. It was in one of these burrows that the fledgling was discovered. Manx Shearwaters at Matinicus Rock benefit from the presence of the Audubon interns who keep predatory Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls away from their nesting burrows.

Researchers had waited patiently until the end of the 2009 nesting season to check the burrows in order to avoid disturbing the shearwaters during the 120 days a pair needs to hatch and raise a chick. Had they checked the burrows even a few days later, this historic event might have been missed! ♦

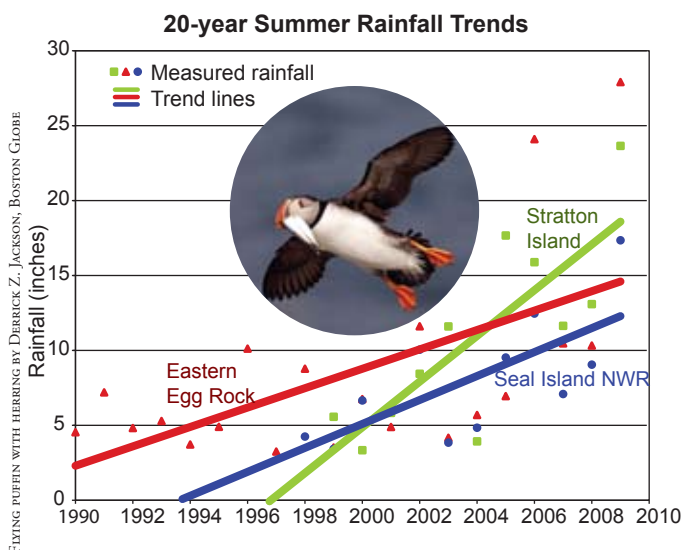
Tours and Visitor Center Flourish Despite Economy and Rain

- More than 10,000 visitors learned about puffins and Maine seabird conservation at Project Puffin Visitor Center, 311 Main Street, Rockland, Maine. The work of Paul Bartlett of Edinburgh, Scotland, is currently on display.
- Audubon narrators hosted over 6,000 people on 88 cruises. The popular Eastern Egg Rock tours depart from New Harbor (Hardy Boat Cruises, 800-2-Puffins), and Boothbay Harbor (Cap'n Fish cruises, 800-633-3244).

EXTREME RAIN AFFECTS MAINE SEABIRD NESTING

HERRING BUFFERS THE EFFECTS OF WEATHER

Extreme rains are a predicted outcome of global warming¹ and observations from this past summer are consistent with a pattern of wetter-than-usual summers on Maine islands. Yet even given this trend, summer 2009 was memorable for record-breaking amounts of rain. High rainfall usually results in poor seabird nesting, but this year the negative effects were countered on some islands by the exceptional amount of Atlantic herring that parent seabirds brought to their chicks.



While it's usually difficult to separate the effects of weather, from food and predator impacts on chick survival, this year the extreme weather and abundant herring were clearly dominant forces.

For example, last summer Eastern Egg Rock seemed to be sitting under more rain clouds than any of our islands. Interns recorded nearly four times the usual rainfall, with 27.9 inches of rain from late May to early August. This compares to an average of 7.4 inches during the same period for the previous 20 years. The rain and cool temperatures (daily highs averaged just 60° F.) especially affected the terns, whose surface nests are easily impacted by weather. Despite the extreme rain, most terns faired well through incubation and the first week following hatching. During this period, adults could shelter their eggs and small chicks under their bodies and wings. Rain that fell after the chicks were about a week old did the greatest damage, as the larger chicks were more exposed and their food demands were greater. At this age, chilling rains often lead to chick death through exposure.

Because of the chilling effects of rain, the appearance of a consistent and abundant supply of high-calorie herring was especially important this summer. Atlantic herring typically makes up about 20% of the Common Tern chick diet, but last summer, herring

comprised more than 50% of the chicks' diets across all islands.

At Eastern Egg Rock, herring, while more common than usual, still made up just 20% of the food delivered to Common Tern chicks. That inadequate amount resulted in only 0.7 chicks per nest fledging. Likewise, Arctic and Roseate Terns had the lowest productivity in eight years. Even puffins, which nest beneath a protective cover of boulders, had less nesting success, producing 0.79 chicks per nest, notably below the 21-year-average of 0.90 chicks per nest.

In contrast, islands with higher proportions of herring and less rain had much higher nesting success than Egg Rock. At Stratton Island, for example, Common Terns fledged 1.74 chicks per pair, far better than the island's typical average of just one chick per pair. This excellent productivity occurred despite 23.7 inches of rainfall from early May to early August. Here the diet of tern chicks contained 42% herring—more than twice that received by Egg Rock chicks

HURRICANE BILL

In late August, Hurricane Bill roared up the Atlantic coast. It missed a direct hit to Maine, but the storm created 20-foot waves that flooded about two-thirds of the puffin nesting habitat at Seal Island NWR. This thriving new puffin colony was fortunate as most of the puffin chicks had fledged just before the storm. Apparently, the abundant herring which nurtured this year's puffins helped the chicks fledge earlier than usual. This near-miss was another reminder

of how vulnerable Maine's puffin nesting islands are to flooding from storms and predicated ocean level rise from melting Arctic ice.

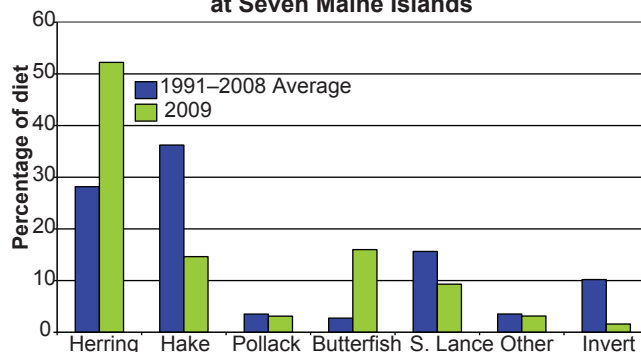
An expanded version of this article is available on line in the *Egg Rock Update* archives at www.projectpuffin.org.

¹ Richard P. Allan and Brian J. Soden 2008. Atmospheric Warming and the Amplification of Precipitation Extremes. *Science*. Vol. 321, 5895:1481–1484.



A Common Tern chick peeks out from under the protective cover of its parent during a summer rain shower.

Foods Delivered to Common Tern Chicks 1991–2009 at Seven Maine Islands



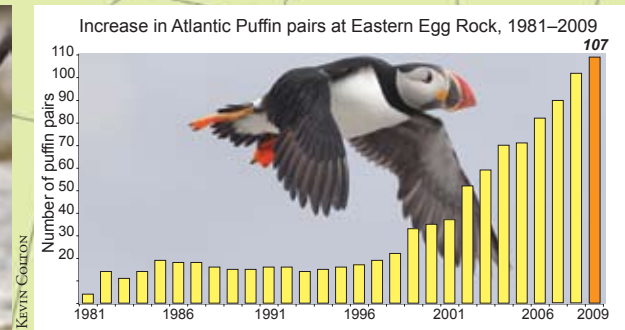
In 2009, herring increased to record high amounts in tern chick diets.



COMMON TERN BY ALISON KOCHER



BLACK GUILLEMOT BY SANDY FLINT



KEVIN COLTON

OUTER GREEN ISLAND

- 26 inches of rain
- 58°F: Average temperature for May through August
- 1.68: Average number of Common Tern chicks per nest
- 3rd-highest Common Tern productivity in Gulf of Maine
- 42%: Percentage of Atlantic herring in Common Tern chick diets

Common Terns achieved the second highest productivity level since colony restoration in 2002. As the colony grows, seabird guano is fertilizing the weedy flora, increasing plant growth and making it difficult for terns to find the bare habitat for nesting. Various techniques including deep-soil burns, weed barriers, and sod removal were tested in an effort to solve this problem.

JENNY ISLAND

- 1.72: Average number of Common Tern chicks per nest
- 50%: Percentage of Atlantic herring in Common Tern chick diets

Despite poor weather, the tern colony had its highest productivity since 1997. This was largely due to the absence of predators and an excellent diet for the chicks.

POND ISLAND N.W.R.

- 2nd-highest Common Tern nesting population since 1996
- 346 Common Tern chicks fledged

Cool temperatures, high rainfall, and predation defined the season. The season began with the successful trapping of a Great Horned Owl (released in northern Maine). A second owl and a Merlin visited in early July, causing parent terns to leave their young exposed at night. A downpour of nearly two inches on July 9 resulted in the loss of half of the study chicks.

STRATTON ISLAND

- 9% increase in number of nesting Common Tern pairs
- 42%: Percentage of Atlantic herring in Common Tern chick diets
- 1.74: Average number of Common Tern chicks per nest
- 132 Snowy Egret nests
- 100 Glossy Ibis nests
- 21 Black-crowned Night Heron nests

Encouraging progress was made in the battle to remove invasive oriental bittersweet from heron nesting trees in 2009.

MAP BY ROBERT HOUSTON



BLACK GUILLEMOT BY SANDY FLINT

TURNING EARTH FOR TERNS



SUSAN SCHUBEL

Last April, 16 Portland (Maine) High School students and their teacher, Cyndy Martin, participated in a tern habitat improvement project on Outer Green Island. Associate Director Rose Borzik received a TogetherGreen Leadership Fellowship—an Audubon initiative funded by Toyota—to support “Turning Earth for Terns” and engage students in tern habitat restoration. Gnome Landscape of Falmouth, Maine loaned landscaping tools for the project, Portland Fire Department transported the group to the island, and Robert Houston of the USFWS Gulf of Maine Program provided logistical support.



EASTERN EGG ROCK

- 28 inches of rain
- 107 Atlantic Puffin pairs nested
- 12 **new** Atlantic Puffin pairs
- 60°F: Average temperature for June through August
- 2,127 Laughing Gull pairs nested
- 2nd-highest nesting population since 1996

The restored puffin colony experienced a record increase. All of the Adopt-A-Puffin birds returned this year, with Y54 and Y33 reaching the venerable age of 32 years! Now they are the oldest known puffins in North America. Extreme rainfall and the coolest temperatures recorded in the last eight years contributed to low productivity for all nesting seabirds.

SEAL ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

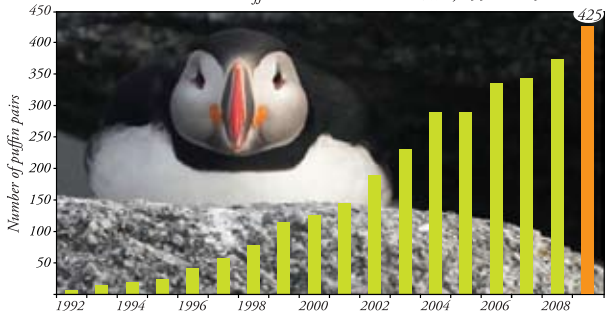
- 17 inches of rain
- 425 Atlantic Puffin pairs nested
- 52 **new** Atlantic Puffin burrows
- 651: Atlantic Puffin daily high count
- 2nd-largest tern colony in Maine
- 11 Razorbill pairs nested
- 2,400 Common and Arctic tern fledglings
- 48%: Percentage of Atlantic herring in Atlantic Puffin chick diets
- 67%: Percentage of Atlantic herring in Common Tern chick diets
- 41%: Percentage of Atlantic herring in Arctic Tern chick diets
- 5th year, 36 days of Red-billed Tropicbird visits

Three of the four puffins fitted with geolocator tracking devices in 2008 returned without the devices, hence their winter range still remains a mystery. Eight new geolocators were attached to other puffins with an improved mounting method. Funding was provided by Maine Sea Grant.



ROSE BOZIK

Increase in Atlantic Puffin Pairs at Seal Island NWR, 1992–2009



KEVIN COITON

MATINICUS ROCK

- 389 Razorbill pairs nested (about 65% of the Maine population)
- 1,161 Laughing Gull pairs nested
- 1.74: Average number of Common Tern chicks per nest
- 0.71: Average number of Atlantic Puffin chicks per nest
- 0.38: Average number of Razorbill chicks per nest

In 2008, 20 Razorbill nest boxes were placed in the colony to provide additional habitat and to aid monitoring. Only two boxes were used in 2008, but nine were occupied in 2009. Heavy rain and cool temperatures impacted all species and productivity was lower than usual.

	Common Tern	Arctic Tern	Roseate Tern	Least Tern
Seal Island NWR	1,636	932	0	0
Matinicus Rock	359	1,278	0	0
Eastern Egg Rock	1,074	100	101	0
Pond Island NWR	438	2	0	0
Jenny Island	578	0	3	0
Outer Green Island	837	2	0	0
Spratton Island	1037	11	76	72
Total	5,959	2,325	180	72

Number of pairs of nesting terns at Audubon-managed sanctuaries as of the June 2009 census. Yellow boxes indicate numbers that increased from 2008; gray boxes show declines.



COMMON TERN BY SANDY FLINT

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

MIDWAY ATOLL TOUR

Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge is the destination for a birding and photography tour from March 1–9, 2010, to be led by Project Puffin director Stephen Kress and photographer Joseph Van Os. Midway Atoll hosts the world's largest Laysan



JOSEPH VAN OS

Join us for a most amazing birding and photography visit to Midway Atoll NWR.

Albatross colony and nearly two million seabirds of 18 species. The tour is limited to 13 participants, and part of the registration fee benefits Project Puffin. Comfortable, recently remodeled accommodations and delicious meals are available at this historic military base. Learn more about the tour

by visiting www.photosafaris.com/photography-trips-2010/midway-project-puffin.

HOG ISLAND ORNITHOLOGY PROGRAMS

Audubon ornithology programs will return to Hog Island, Maine in June, 2010. Project Puffin will offer three six-day programs in June and one session in September. Timed to coincide with the nesting season and fall migration, the programs will be led by renowned ornithologists, including authors Kenn Kaufman, Stephen Kress, and Scott Weidensaul. For more details about these popular classes for adults and teens, visit www.projectpuffin.org



STEPHEN W. KRESS

NEW GLOBAL WARMING PROGRAM

A Horizon Foundation grant is supporting development of a global warming curriculum for our Maine school outreach program. Lessons about how a warming climate will affect

puffins and other seabirds through ocean-level rise, changing fish populations, higher sea surface temperatures, and increased rainfall will be based on actual data collected on Project Puffin's islands in the Gulf of Maine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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In addition, we thank Brad Allen and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries

and Wildlife for permission and logistic support for our work on Eastern Egg Rock, Jenny Island and Outer Green Island. We also thank Beth Goettel, Brian Benedict and the staff of Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge for their continued cooperation for our studies on Seal Island NWR, Pond Island NWR and Matinicus Rock. Robert Houston, Biologist for the USFWS Gulf of Maine Program graciously provides logistic and field support. We also thank the Prout's Neck Audubon Society for their loyal support for our work on Stratton Island.

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