



# Egg Rock Update

Newsletter of the Seabird Restoration Program  
of the National Audubon Society

2011

## WHERE DO PUFFINS WINTER?

### 16 TRACKING DEVICES RECOVERED!

Each summer by mid August, puffins disperse to their mysterious winter home. It's as if they had an appointment and must not be late. Where do they go and what do they do? These questions have been asked by generations of curious puffin enthusiasts.

### Solving the mystery

While technology has shed light on the remarkable migrations of birds ranging in size from albatross to hummingbirds, little has been learned about the movements of puffins. They are among the most challenging of animals to carry tracking devices. Puffins dislike tracking devices because they encumber them while diving for small fish. The importance of discovering the winter range is much more than a matter of curiosity, as coastal development for oil, gas and wind may threaten the puffin's winter home.

### Enter geolocators

Miniature band-mounted devices called geolocators are presently the most promising technology for tracking puffins at sea. They work by comparing day length with time to arrive at a location. Four years into the use of geolocators, we are coming very close to learning where puffins go when they are at sea. Our progress has gone like this:

2008: Scott Hall, former Project Puffin research coordinator, attached several test geolocators onto leg



*Puffins spend nine months of the year at sea, yet their behavior, migration and location at sea remain largely unknown.*



NATHAN BANFIELD

*Geolocators were recovered from 14 of 18 Matinicus Rock puffins in 2011. The tiny devices indicate latitude and longitude by measuring day length and time.*

bands of captive puffins at Sea World, Orlando. Four were attached in a similar way to puffins at Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge.

2009: All Seal Island puffins managed to pull off the geolocators attached in 2008. Eight more were attached to puffins using stronger methods.

2010: Five of eight Seal Island puffins equipped in 2009 were resighted, but these birds did not nest and could not be captured to remove the devices (from which the data must be downloaded). Smaller geolocators were placed on 18 puffins at Matinicus Rock.

2011: Matinicus Rock co-supervisors, Caroline Poli and Nathan Banfield recovered 14 of the 18 geolocators affixed in 2010 by capturing puffins with the devices at their nests. Also, two of the 2009 units were recovered at Seal Island by trapping puffins near their nesting burrows. We know a few of the geolocators have a full year's worth of data, while the batteries in others malfunctioned. Interpreting the results and coming up with reliable maps will take time over the winter. There is much to celebrate in the achievements of this past summer toward unraveling this great mystery. Fifteen additional puffins were fitted with geolocators at Matinicus Rock and Seal Island—our quest for more data continues.

**Mission:**  
Developing techniques for restoring seabirds to historic ranges and encouraging the protection and appreciation of seabirds worldwide.



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The 2011  
Maine Research Team

**Kneeling:** Pete Salmansohn; Sarah Gutowsky;  
**First Row** (left to right): Genevieve Klick; Tracie Bellinger;  
Jason Tappa; Halley Ray Walsh; Erica Marx; Steve Kress; Debbie Wood;  
Anne Rohn; Julia Gillis  
**Second Row** (left to right): Michelle Fournier; Rolanda Steenweg; Caro-  
line Poli; Jennifer Howard; Nuria Clodius; Talia Perez Martinez; Janii  
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**Third Row** (left to right): Benjamin Donnelly; Nathan Banfield;  
Kimberly Ann Lynch; Andrea Miller;  
**Fourth Row** (left to right): Stephen Mugel; Iván Mota Echavarria;  
Wayne MacCabe; Kory Kwasow; Scott Hall.  
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Award Recipients

**Duryea & Peggy Morton Seabird Internship**  
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**Hobart William Smith Colleges Intern:** Stephen Mugel  
**Mt. Holyoke College Intern:** Nuria Clodius  
**Warren-Wilson College Intern:** Halley Ray Walsh

Dear Friends of Project Puffin:

Fourth of July at Eastern Egg Rock marked the 30th anniversary of our first puffin nesting after nearly a 100-year absence. The last of the original population was trapped for food about 1885. I'll never forget watching a puffin dropping into the boulders on July 4, 1981—I knew then that we would eventually suc-  
ceed in restoring a long-lost colony of puffins. We waited eight years for that moment. Thirty years later, 123 Egg Rock puffin nests produced healthy chicks!

Project Puffin is also notable for its longevity. Our successes have much to do with the staying power of our loyal staff. Scott Hall, one of our long-standing team, fledged from Project Puffin this summer to accept a new position, as manager of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's new seabird conser-  
vation program.

High on our list of successes for summer 2011, is the training offered to our class of 20 interns from ten states, Canada, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. In addition, we were assisted by 23 volunteers, including staff from Sea World Orlando, Sea World Texas, the Omaha Zoo, and the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

When Project Puffin began, I hoped that, eventually, a puffin colony would thrive at Egg Rock without ongoing human assistance. However, we've learned that sustainable seabird colonies on Maine islands require the ongoing pres-  
ence of summer interns. Gulls—whose numbers have risen in response to increasingly available fishing bait and garbage—would dominate quality nesting islands if we were not present to keep them and other predators from displac-  
ing puffins and other rare seabirds. Growing coastal Bald Eagle and Great Horned Owl populations are similar threats.

Nearly all of the funds for our seabird projects and intern training come from generous and caring people. Aside from our small endowment, most of our annual \$800,000 budget must be raised each year to provide ongoing stewardship for the 23 species of 42,000 waterbirds that nest on our Maine sanctuaries.

I hope that you will return the attached envelope with a contribution or a planned giving gift to help sustain Project Puffin's future. Employer matching gifts will help extend your support. When thinking of the coming holidays, please remember that you can help puffins and other Maine seabirds through our Adopt-A-Puffin program and by shopping our on-line store for great holiday gifts. Your entire gift will go to help puffins and other Maine seabirds.

I hope to see you next summer in Maine at a Hog Island session, a puffin watching tour or at our Rockland Visitor Center.

Stephen Kress

Stephen Kress  
Director, Project Puffin



“Whenever I think about Project Puffin, the endangered Black-capped Petrel always comes to mind. It breeds mainly on the island of Hispaniola (Dominican Republic and Haiti). I believe the Black-capped Petrel can be a great species to start a similar rein-  
troduction program. I hope to start such a project for Black-capped Petrels in Hispaniola.”

—Iván Mota, 2011 Project Puffin intern  
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic



GIVING SEABIRDS A HELPING HAND

ROAD SCHOLARS AID AUDUBON BIOLOGISTS  
IMPROVING HABITAT FOR MAINE SEABIRDS

Rare and endangered seabirds often require direct management of nesting habitat, but this is difficult during the breed-  
ing season. Too much disturbance can expose seabird chicks to extreme weather, such as excessive sun, rain or chilling wind. For these reasons, many of the projects that are necessary for seabird management in Maine are not possible until the birds leave the nesting habitat in late August. This reality is the reason behind the development of the Road Scholar Hog Island program, ‘Maine Seabird Biology and Conservation,’ offered during May and Sep-  
tember in 2010 and 2011.

Everything fell into place perfectly on September 12 when all 22 participants from our September Road Scholar program landed on Eastern Egg Rock to tackle projects that would have been impossible earlier in the summer.

Projects for all skills

Plenty of projects were available for varied skills. Invasive plants (well-fertilized by terns and Laughing Gulls) are crowding the habitat of endangered Roseate Terns, and huge amounts of plastic and other marine debris accumulate in the seabird habitat.

Participants with carpentry skills rebuilt two intern tent plat-  
forms and the old wood was reused to create new nesting burrows for Leach's Storm-Petrels. Volunteers also created new tern habitat for Common and Roseate Terns at both Eastern Egg Rock and Stratton Island by securing large sections of outdoor carpet on the soil and sand to create open patches for tern nesting. Terns will



STEPHEN KRESS (3)

Road Scholar volunteers installed outdoor carpet as weed barriers to  
enhance tern nesting habitat.

GLOBAL REVIEW OF SEABIRD RESTORATION PROJECTS

A landmark scientific paper reviewing seabird restorations projects worldwide is scheduled to appear in the January 2012 issue of the prestigious *Journal of Wildlife Management*. The paper, titled ‘Global review of active seabird restoration projects’ is the first comprehensive review of the use of translocation and social attraction projects worldwide. Now standard practice in the toolbox of seabird managers, the methods were pioneered by Stephen Kress, first at Eastern Egg Rock and later at six other Audubon managed sanctuaries in Maine. The paper is authored by Holly Jones of the University of California Santa Cruz and Stephen Kress.

For more details visit: <http://projectpuffin.org/eru.html>

not use habitat where the vegetation becomes too crowded or tall as it is hard for them to find their chicks amid the tangled mats that result from a season's explosive plant growth. Funding for the materials used in this project was provided by a grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA).

Lobster Trap Removal

For years, our teams working on Stratton Island (located in Saco Bay, south of Portland) hoped for additional help removing the growing heaps of lobster trap debris. This summer, island co-supervisors Wayne McCabe and Jason Tappa and other interns hauled dozens of the heavy, rust-  
ing traps to the landing beach. Their hard work inspired Lucy Lacasse of the Prout's Neck Audubon Society to help orga-  
nize a removal program. This is a complicated process, considering the traps are abandoned, but technically still property of the local fishermen. With permission from the Maine Marine Patrol, plans were set in place to move the traps off the beach. Road Scholar volunteers and Audubon staff helped remove the gear from the island. This was a tremendous effort and collaboration that will greatly reduce the risk of entanglement by Stratton Island birds.

To learn more about the 2012 Road Scholar sessions at Hog Island, visit <http://hogisland.audubon.org> ❖



A Black Guillemot entangled  
in an abandoned lobster trap  
at Eastern Egg Rock.



Volunteers and staff did the heavy lifting and then shoved the landing skiff  
off of Stratton Island, carrying abandoned lobster gear to the mainland to  
be claimed by lobsterman or recycled.





# Maine Island Updates

**WEATHER** Air temperatures were similar to the past ten-year average. At 58.7 degrees F, sea surface temperature was the second warmest in the past ten years. Rainfall was below average. Only seven inches of rain was recorded at Egg Rock, compared to a high of 28" in 2009. These relatively dry conditions were ideal for most seabirds.

**PREDATORS** Mink and other mammals were not an issue this summer. A Peregrine Falcon harassed the Matinicus Rock colony early in the nesting season. Ravens preyed on Razorbills for the first time, and Laughing Gulls continued their negative impact on terns at Egg Rock and Matinicus Rock. Great Horned Owls caused a near collapse of the Pond Island NWR tern colony, but one was successfully trapped from Jenny Island and relocated. Black-crowned Night-Herons raided the Stratton Island tern colonies and required control and night watches.

**FORAGE FOODS** Southern Maine tern colonies had abundant food, while those nesting on the eastern-most islands brought back low-quality food for their chicks resulting in poor nesting success. The variety of fish fed to puffins appears to be increasing.

## STRATTON ISLAND

- 960 pairs of Common Terns nested—the second highest number since 2002.
- Roseate Tern fledger A05 (below) was banded as a chick at Stratton Island and sighted August 22 in Ipswich, Massachusetts.
- Protected by island stewards who guarded them at night from Black-crowned Night-Herons, 59 pairs of Least Terns produced at least 28 chicks.
- Two pairs of American Oystercatchers produced four fledglings—a record for the island.
- A post-season banding station managed by volunteer Stella Walsh (right) operated until the end of September; 563 birds of 53 species were banded.
- An educational kiosk and visitor blind were built.

MAP BY ROBERT HOUSTON

PHILLIP BROWN



BOB BUTAKY

## JENNY ISLAND

- 753 pairs of Common Terns nested—the second highest number in 10 years.
- 1,265 chicks fledged—an average of 1.9 chicks per nest.
- The highest Common Tern nesting success in the Gulf of Maine followed the capture of a Great Horned Owl early in the season. The owl was relocated far from the island by Avian Haven, a rehabilitation center located in Freedom, Maine.



SANDY FLINT

*Egg Rock Island Supervisor Rolanda Steenweg and Resident Intern Jennifer Ma enter the Common Tern colony wearing unusual hats to protect their heads from aggression from breeding Common Terns.*

## POND ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

- A Great Horned Owl (below) compromised the nesting success of the 565 pairs of Common Terns as parent terns abandoned at night.
- Two pairs of Roseate Terns nested, but also abandoned as owl visits commenced.

## OUTER GREEN ISLAND

- A total of 1,067 pairs of Common Terns nested, the second highest since the project began here in 2002; about 1,900 young fledged.
- Tern food was abundant. Hake and herring made up most of the tern chick diet.

*Jennifer Howard (left) and Stella Walsh at the Stratton Island fall banding station.*



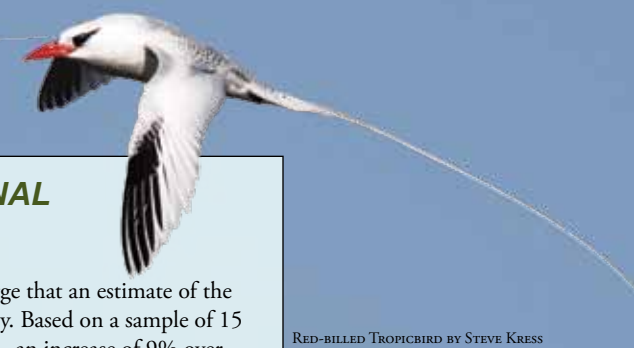
STEPHEN KRESS

## EASTERN EGG ROCK

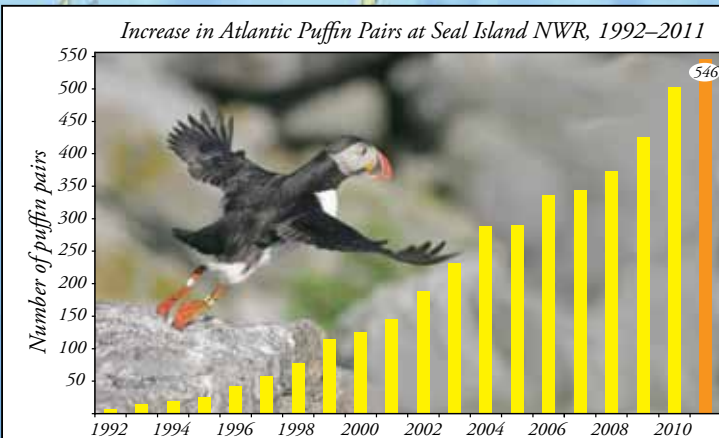
- 123 puffin pairs nested—tying the all time high record. Nearly all of the pairs fledged a chick.
- Roseate Terns increased to 90 pairs (from 82 in 2010) and fledged 65 chicks.
- 829 Common Terns pairs surpassed 2010's 714 pairs.
- Laughing Gulls nests increased 32% to 2,051, approaching the all time high of 2,127 nests in 2009.
- Eight geolocators were recovered from adult Arctic Terns that had carried the devices to their winter homes and back.
- Thirty years ago the first puffin nested at Egg Rock! Two 34 year old puffins, Y54 and Y33 returned. Y33 raised another chick, while Y54 returned for just one day. She was absent in 2010.

## SEAL ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

- The puffin colony has grown so large that an estimate of the number of nesting pairs is necessary. Based on a sample of 15 study plots, we estimate 546 pairs—an increase of 9% over 2010—produced about 400 chicks.
- Maine's largest tern colony reached a new record of 3,037 pairs (1,201 Arctic and 1,836 Common Terns).
- About 2,300 chicks fledged despite poor quality food—mostly large butterfish early in the season and low quality shrimp later.
- A Red-billed Tropicbird (above) frequented the island for 56 days for its seventh consecutive summer at Seal Island.



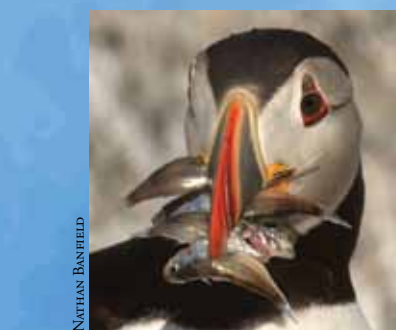
RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD BY STEVE KRESS



BRUCE SCHULTZ

## MATINICUS ROCK

- A record 214 puffin chicks were banded—more than twice as many as in recent years.
- A Peregrine disrupted the tern nesting season in May and early June; yet 859 pairs of Arctic Terns nested (a 27% increase over 2010, but well below recent years.)
- Tern productivity remains low at about 0.5 chicks/pair, likely because of predation from Laughing Gulls and abundant butterfish (too large to swallow) in the chick diet.
- The Manx Shearwater colony increased from one known nest with a chick in 2010 to four nests with chicks in 2011. In addition to the four chicks, twelve adult Manx Shearwaters were banded.



NATHAN BANFIELD

*Puffins added three new fish species to their diet. Redfish (Sebastes spp.) (above) comprised a surprising 23% and haddock made up 6% of fish delivered to chicks. Rough scud was also noted for the first time. Atlantic saury, (right) is also a relatively new, but still uncommon part of the puffin's Maine diet.*



NATHAN BANFIELD



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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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# Project Puffin

## SEABIRD RESTORATION PROGRAM

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Bill Scholtz



RAGHU RAMANUJAN

### LEAVE A LEGACY FOR SEABIRDS

With the addition of the following paragraph in your will, you can leave a legacy for seabirds through the Seabird Restoration Program: Project Puffin Endowment Fund.

"I bequeath \_\_\_\_\_% of my residuary estate (or a specific sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_) to the National Audubon Society, Inc., a not-for-profit environmental conservation organization with its headquarters at 225 Varick St., 7th Fl, New York, NY 10014 for the permanent endowment of its Seabird Restoration Program (also known as "Project Puffin").

### ADOPT-A-PUFFIN

**Puffin devotees who contribute \$100 or more (tax deductible) to the Seabird Restoration Program will receive a certificate of adoption for one Eastern Egg Rock puffin, along with a photograph and a biography of the bird.**

Call us at (607) 257-7308 or adopt online at [www.projectpuffin.org](http://www.projectpuffin.org)



Bill Scholtz

### 2012 Hog Island Programs

- Seabird Conservation
- Joy of Birding
- Field Ornithology
- Coastal Bird Studies for Teens
- Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week
- Family Camp
- Audubon Chapter Leadership Program
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