



Egg Rock Update

Newsletter of the Seabird Restoration Program
of the National Audubon Society

2015

WINTER HOME OF MAINE PUFFINS REVEALED

Surprising migration takes puffins in unexpected directions

Until this summer, the winter home of Maine puffins was largely unknown, but that has suddenly changed with revelations discovered this year. In 2011, two first-generation geolocators were recovered from puffins tagged at Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge in 2009. These suggested that after the nesting season, puffins fly north to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and then south to the continental shelf where they float at sea for the remainder of the winter. This was big news—but neither bird nested again, suggesting that their winter movements may have also been affected by the devices.

In 2010 a much smaller and lighter second-generation geocator became available. With high hopes, 39 of the new tags were attached to puffin leg bands in 2010–12. Although 31 of these tags were retrieved, none contained migration data because of manufacturing defects. Despite this huge disappointment, 28 improved tags were attached to puffins in 2013 and 2014. By the summer of 2015, 21 of these were recovered. These tags revealed a remarkable story.

The tagged puffins travelled northward in August to the western Gulf of St. Lawrence. The geolocators also revealed that as days shortened, the puffins left the

Gulf of St. Lawrence and headed south to the edge of the continental shelf—where they spent the rest of the winter—before arriving back in Maine by early April. The exact routes remain a mystery.

The areas most frequented during the winter months were about 200 miles southeast of Cape Cod—including an area known as New England’s “coral canyons and seamounts.” This vast, largely unexplored area includes canyons deeper than the Grand Canyon, along with submerged mountains (seamounts) noted for colorful corals, some as large as small trees. Puffins are likely attracted to the region because of productive upwelling that offers abundant food—the same conditions that favor whales, porpoise, tuna, sailfish, and other seabirds. Cashes Ledge, another underwater mount inside the Gulf of Maine, was also popular with puffins, as it is for whales and other sealife. The discovery that puffins winter over these canyons and sea mounts provides another reason to protect these areas from fishing, mining, and energy development.

Project Puffin acknowledges William and Mary Anne Perks, Shirley Egan, and the late Robert Wanner for their loyal support for the geocator project.



Above: At the end of the nesting season, Maine puffins fly to the western Gulf of St. Lawrence (top circle) before heading south to the “coral canyons and seamounts” southeast of Cape Cod (bottom circle). Nesting islands Matinicus Rock (left) and Seal Island NWR (right) are shown as red dots.

Right: Geolocators attached to leg bands on puffins in 2013 and 2014 have helped shed light on the winter movements of puffins. Weighing less than a nickel, the devices measure day length and date—data used to approximate latitude and longitude.



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

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STEPHEN W. KRESS

The 2015 Maine Research Team

Front Center (left to right): Keenan Yakola; Kristina McOmber. **First Row:** Steve Kress; S.J. Kwiatkowski; Araks Ohanyan; Aubrey Alamshah; Bailey Black; Col Lauzau; Kaitlyn Williams; Susie Meadows; Sue Schubel. **Second Row:** Rose Borzik; Isabel Brofsky; Laura Brazier; Aspen Ellis; Ciara McCarty; Marisa Browning-Kamins; Jess Steketee; Ravin Thomasson; Colin McKevitt; Rebeca Linhart; Paula Shannon. **Third Row:** Jorge Rojas Valenzuela; Yiwei Lu; Zhongyong Fan; Johnny Nugent; Nicolas Kaminow; Nathaniel "Zeke" Smith; Liam Berigan; Madison Sutton; Debbie Wood. **Absent:** J. Borzik; E. Bravo; S. Dodge; N. Dodge; C. Governali; M. Grant; A. Hernandez; A. Hill; J. Kimmons; E. Kurth; M. LaCreta; D. Ladd; R. Lambert; A. Liss; C. Mayer; F. Mayer; A. Milarski; B. Murphy; A. Newman; D. Ober; E. Ober; S. Ober; C. Olson; G. Olson; C. Pennock; K. Pennock; C. Peterson; J. Peterson; R. Peterson; E. Rhodes; P. Salmansohn; J. Shields; E. Westhaver.

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 Yiwei Lu; Jorge Valenzuela

PUFFINS TELL OF CHANGES IN MAINE FISH

Project Puffin has recently completed a ten-year review of puffin chick diets. Some of the changes are worrisome responses to warming oceans; others offer hope that puffins can adapt to eating fish species that are new to their diet. One thing is certain: the kinds of fish puffins catch and their proportion in puffin chick diets reflect changes in fish populations in the surrounding waters. Likewise, the proportion of puffin eggs that hatch, the number of chicks that fledge, and the growth rates of puffin chicks are all useful indications about the productivity of the Gulf of Maine.

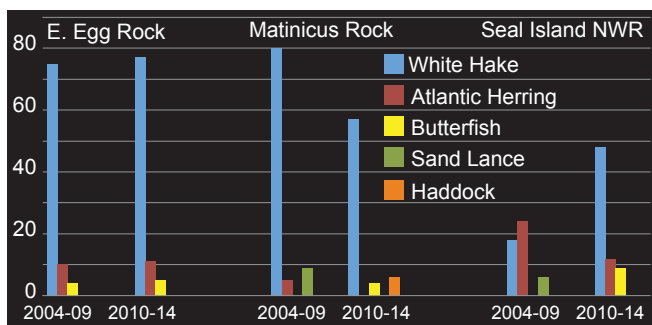
SOME KEY CONCLUSIONS

- White hake continues through the ten-year study as the most important food in puffin chick diets, comprising 75% of the fish delivered to puffin chicks.
- Atlantic herring, the second most important food, has dropped to only about 10% of the puffin chick diet during 2010–14.
- Haddock, a recovering species, has increased in chick diet as herring has declined.
- Butterfish spiked in puffin chick diets at all islands during the warmer ocean years of 2010–12, but has since become less important in cooler recent years.
- Puffin chick hatching and fledging success were stable during 2009–11, then declined steeply during the ocean heat wave years of 2012–13, and rebounded in 2014–15 with cooler ocean temperatures.
- On average, the body weight of puffin fledglings has steadily declined since 1993 and a lower percentage of puffins have survived to adulthood in more recent years.
- In 2014, dawn-to-dark feeding observations at Eastern Egg Rock revealed that, from hatching to fledging, puffin parents deliver a total of about 2,500 small fish to each chick.



DERRICK Z. JACKSON

Left: Typical puffin chick breakfast at Eastern Egg Rock. White hake make up most of the diet; most chick feedings occurred in the early morning.
Below: These five-year averages show that white hake is by far the most commonly fed food, followed by Atlantic herring which is declining. Haddock and sand lance are promising additions to puffin chick diets.





STEPHEN W. KRESS

SAND LANCE SUMMER

The cold winter of 2014–15 set the stage for cooler sea surface temperatures during the first half of 2015 and a reprieve from the warming trend of previous years. This was good news for the puffins as hake, herring, and sand lance were relatively abundant, leading to higher hatching and fledging rates for puffin chicks. At Seal Island, puffins fledged 0.81 chicks per pair, the highest rate since 2007. Much of this success was due to the abundance of sand lance, which made up more than half of all fish fed to Maine puffin chicks—the most reported in 11 years of observation. Ironically, sand lance was once the primary food for European puffins ranging from the United Kingdom to southern Iceland, but the great decline of sand lance in response to warmer seas over the past ten years has now resulted in near-complete nesting failure for European puffins. This fall, for the first time, puffins were listed among Europe’s most vulnerable birds.

Left: A parent puffin returns with a large load of sand lance for its chick at Matinicus Rock.

SEABIRD ISLANDS BENEFIT FROM CLEANUP

Seabird nesting islands are usually remote and isolated from people, but extreme weather results in the accumulation of massive amounts of debris along shorelines. In Maine, most of the debris originates from the lobster fishery. This includes storm-tossed and mangled traps, tangles of rope, and lots of buoys. These pose an entanglement risk to nesting seabirds such as terns, puffins, guillemots, eiders, and gulls.

Project Puffin created a unique partnership with Toyota TogetherGreen, the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, NOAA Marine Debris Program, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge to remove derelict lobster gear, plastic, and other debris from six Maine seabird nesting islands.

The big cleanup began in the spring of 2015 with the collection and staging of much of the debris prior to the seabird nesting season. Some of this gear was salvaged directly from the islands by local lobstermen, but most was transported back to the mainland and nearby Vinalhaven Island for reuse, recycling, or proper disposal. It took an impressive assemblage of volunteer lobstermen, community members, Audubon staff, Refuge staff and Road Scholar participants from Hog Island working together to remove and process the debris. Seventeen boatloads of marine debris were removed from six islands.

Project Puffin staff members Paula Shannon and Sue Schubel visited the islands in September, October, and November to lead the cleanup and participate in the heavy lifting. Says Shannon, “We’re thrilled to have assembled such a diverse group of funders and volunteers to help us with this massive cleanup.” Among the interesting things found amidst the debris were a baseball bat in excellent condition, and a message in a bottle thrown off a ferry from Portland, Maine to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia in 2003.



STEPHEN W. KRESS

Lobster traps that are deposited on islands during storms can trap seabirds like this Black Guillemot.



SUSAN SCHUBEL

A small portion of the lobster buoys collected at Matinicus Rock were temporarily hung from the light to demonstrate the scale of the lobster gear clean-up on the island. Most of the buoys were later reclaimed by the local lobstering community.



STEPHEN W. KRESS

At Seal Island NWR, Project puffin staff collect buoys and storm-crushed lobster traps during the massive clean-up funded in part by Toyota TogetherGreen.

2015 Maine Island Highlights

ZHONGYONG FAN



EASTERN EGG ROCK

- Puffins increased to 150 nesting pairs—an all-time record number! Nearly all of the chicks fledged.
- Puffins enjoyed a healthy diet consisting of 59% white hake, 20% sand lance and 8% haddock.
- Endangered Roseate Terns increased by 15 pairs to 77 pairs, and state-threatened Arctic Terns increased by 13 pairs to 75 pairs—both are the highest number in the past four years.
- Nearly 2,000 pairs of Laughing Gulls nested at Egg Rock and some attempt to steal food from puffins. Meals of large sand lance and butterfish are especially attractive to the gulls.

STEPHEN W. KRESS



JENNY ISLAND

- A record-breaking 1,268 pairs of Common Terns nested. These produced about 1,700 fledglings!
- Fifteen pairs of Roseate Terns nested—on average fledging a single chick.

MELISSA GREGG



STEPHEN W. KRESS



ISLAND WEATHER

Following a long and cold winter, warm spring temperatures came late to the seabird islands in 2015. Both air and sea surface temperatures were below 10-year averages for the field season. While rainfall in June was relatively normal, rain was scarce later in the summer with well below average precipitation in the latter part of the season. No storms significantly affected breeding success this year.

OUTER GREEN ISLAND

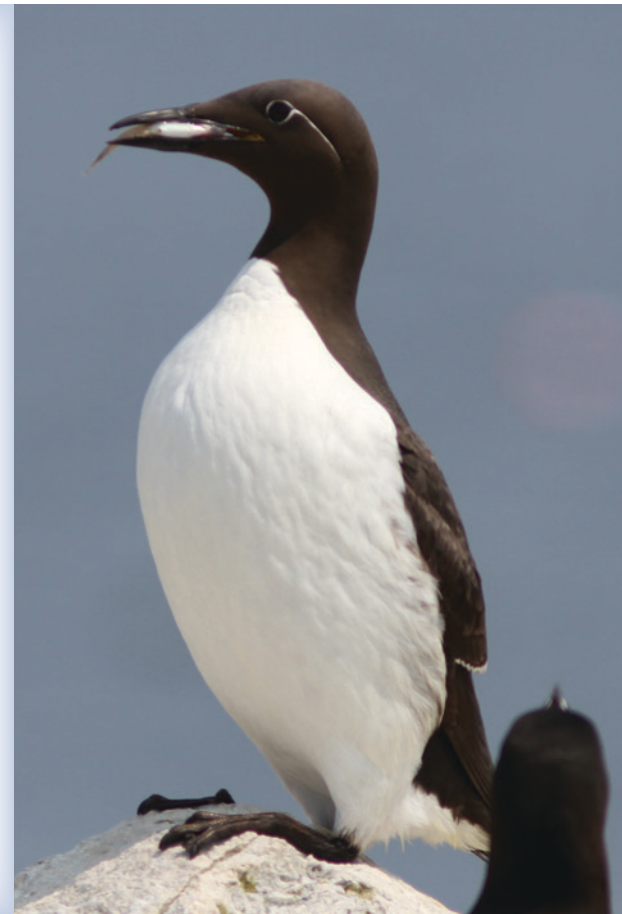
- Common Terns sailed past the previous record-high colony count with 1,353 pairs—an 18% increase over the previous high.
- These produced 1,840 fledglings.
- White hake and herring were the principal foods brought to chicks.

MATINICUS ROCK

- Arctic Terns enjoyed the highest nesting success since 2002—701 pairs fledged 834 young. Fewer nesting Laughing Gulls and abundant white hake and sand lance helped the terns.
- Puffin hatching and fledging success was normal, with an average of 0.64 chicks fledged per pair. Sand lance made up more than half of the fish fed to puffin chicks; haddock, redfish, white hake, and herring were also in the puffin diet.
- Common Murres were observed carrying fish at potential rock nesting habitat, but no chicks were confirmed. The nearest existing murre colony is about 100 miles to the northeast at Machias Seal Island on the U.S./Canadian border.

SEAL ISLAND NWR

- Puffins fledged an average of 0.81 chicks per pair, the best success since 2007. Sand lance, an exceptionally good food, made up more than half of puffin chick food with the balance herring and pollock.
- Common and Arctic tern colonies were similar to last year at 1,345 and 902 pairs respectively, fledging 1,573 and 974 chicks.
- Razorbills continued to increase; 32 nests were found, an increase from 22 nests in 2014.
- There were 17 pairs of state-threatened Great Cormorants that nested, fledging 35 young.
- A record-breaking 151 species of resident and migratory birds were observed, including the Red-billed Tropicbird (“Troppey”) for its 11th year.



ISABELLE BROWN



ZHONGYONG FAN

POND ISLAND NWR

- A near-record high of 685 pairs of Common Terns fledged 1,055 chicks—the highest nesting success in Maine.
- This success was due in part to an abundant supply of sand lance and swift capture and removal of two Great Horned Owls.
- A Peregrine Falcon also frequented the colony capturing terns in flight and on the ground.

ISABELLE BROWN



STEPHEN W. KRESS

STRATTON ISLAND

- 1,396 pairs of Common Terns nested at Stratton Island, making this the largest Common Tern colony in Maine; likewise, federally endangered Roseate Terns increased to 108 pairs, marking a steady increase since 2010. Common Terns fledged about 1,200 chicks and Roseate Terns fledged about 150.
- Predatory state-endangered Black-crowned Night-Herons attacked state-endangered Least Terns this summer. Two night-herons were removed, but not before they ate all of the Least Tern eggs and chicks.
- Great Egrets have continued to increase since the first two pairs nested in 1994. This year 52 pairs nested—a jump of 63% above the 32 pairs nesting in 2014.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

AUDUBON BIRD CAMS

Project Puffin completed its fourth summer partnering with Explore.org. Much to everyone's dismay, an eagle snatched the two osprey chicks that were dubbed "Big" and "Little" on June 26 from their Hog Island nest. It's hoped that osprey parents Rachel and Steve will return next season to try again. Puffins fared much better. The abundant fish that were available resulted in more puffins, razorbills and murrelets "on cam" throughout most of the summer. Puffin parents Phoebe and Finn successfully fledged their chick "Joy" with the heaviest weight of any of their chicks in recent years. Viewers of the cams helped Project Puffin by reporting the kinds of foods fed to the puffin chick. Also, a Black Guillemot cam, a world first, was added to the cam line-up. In total, the cams received over 4.2 million views in more than 200 countries worldwide.

THE DERRICK Z. JACKSON DIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP

A new Hog Island scholarship is now available for an African American or Latino educator thanks to Derrick Z. Jackson, co-author with Stephen Kress of the new book: *Project Puffin: The Improbable Quest to Bring a Beloved Seabird Back to Egg Rock*. The scholarship is funded through the sale of Derrick's remarkable photos of Egg Rock puffins. Interested applicants should contact the Hog Island Registrar at hogisland@audubon.org.

PUFFIN BOAT TOURS

A new record of more than 8,200 people took part in the popular puffin watching tours to Eastern Egg Rock in 2015. Puffin-watching cruises sponsored by Cap'n Fish tours from Boothbay Harbor and Hardy Boat Cruises from New Harbor operated 11 trips per week with Project Puffin naturalists on board. The new record was possible in part because of the ideal weather without major storms.

INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIPS AND INTERNSHIPS

With support from the Josephine D. Herz International Seabird Fellowship Fund, Project Puffin provided training to five seabird biologists from other countries in 2015. This year's fellows included Esmeralda Bravo and Alfonso Hernandez-Rios from Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas A.C. This is Project Puffin's partner for seabird restoration on the Pacific Coast of Baja California. Also in 2015, Project Puffin hosted Lu Yiwei and Fan Zhongyong, both from Zhejiang Province, China, both collaborators with the Chinese Crested Tern Restoration Project. Jorge Valenzuela, an experienced bird biologist from Chiloe Island, Chile also participated. The fellows heard lectures about the Gulf of Maine from noted experts such as Dr. Michael Fogarty from NOAA and learned hands-on seabird conservation methods as part of a team of 21 interns and seasonal biologists on Maine seabird islands. They also attended the end of the season meeting of the Gulf of Maine Seabird Working Group where more than 60 biologists from Massachusetts to New Brunswick shared outcomes of their field seasons.

HOG ISLAND AUDUBON CAMP

A total of 412 adult, teen, and family campers took part in 13 six-day programs led by inspiring instructors about birds and natural history. Some of the programs provided opportunities for hands-on conservation projects that benefitted Maine seabirds; participants in all of the sessions during the seabird nesting season viewed puffins at Egg Rock.



With abundant food, puffins had more time to 'loaf' in front of the puffin cam at Seal Island NWR.



Attendees of the 2015 Gulf of Maine Seabird Working Group's annual meeting gather in front of the Hog Island Fish House.



Passengers aboard the Audubon-sponsored puffin cruises learn about many seabird species in addition to puffins.



Dr. Michael Fogarty from NOAA explains the ecology of the Gulf of Maine to the 2015 interns and international fellows.



Hog Island campers from the June Road Scholar service program were greeted by the Egg Rock research team, who were happy to have assistance removing marine debris.

2014–2015 CONTRIBUTORS

Contributions listed were received from October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2015. Space restrictions prevent us from listing our 1,257 Supporter-level friends. Every donor is important to us and we sincerely regret any omissions. Your continuing participation makes our work possible.

IN MEMORY OF

Susan Leake Jones

Rosalie Borzik
Miles Durfey
Warren Jones
Project Puffin staff



Our dear friend Susan Leake Jones died on February 8, 2015. Each June and July from 1993 to 1996, Susan volunteered as island Research Assistant and as a naturalist guiding daily seabird and whale-watching trips in Penobscot Bay. No matter the sea conditions and weather, Susan enthusiastically shared her love of seabirds and Project Puffin.

IN MEMORY OF

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Holy Martyr's Church, Falmouth ME

Debbie Jackson & Proust's Neck Assoc.
Derrick Z. Jackson
Kieve-Wavus Education:
Bill Chapman & Henry Kennedy
Lucy LaCasse
Charles Lee
Dr. James Li
Maine Audubon: Bob Bittenbender
Kristin Mosher and Bill Wallauer
Chris O'Neal
Janice & Lennart Olson
Rich Parker
Proust's Neck Audubon Society
Proust's Neck Yacht Club:
Scott Akerman; Eric Unterborne
R.N. Fish & Son, Inc.
Juanita Roushdy
Bill Scholtz
David Scully
Alan Twombly, Harbormaster,
Falmouth, ME
Stella Walsh
George Wood
Rick & John Woodruff



STEPHEN W. KRESS

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR SEABIRDS

With the addition of the following paragraph to 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 biography and a color picture of their puffin.

**Adopt online at
projectpuffin.audubon.org/donate-project-puffin
or call us at (607) 257-7308**



BILL SCHOLTZ



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