



# Egg Rock Update

Newsletter of the Seabird Restoration Program  
of the National Audubon Society

2017

## EGG ROCK PUFFINS INCREASE TO 172 PAIRS

*After three years of little growth, breeding pairs increase by 15 percent!*

The Eastern Egg Rock puffin colony increased from 150 to 172 pairs during the 2017 nesting season, further supporting the link between cooler water and puffin breeding success. The 22-pair increase at this southernmost Maine nesting colony is the highest one-year bump in the nesting population since puffins first recolonized Egg Rock in 1981. The increase occurred during slightly cooler sea surface temperatures—which apparently set the stage for abundant forage fish near the island.

Puffins were hunted for feathers and food at Eastern Egg Rock until the last birds were killed in 1885. By 1900, except for a few pairs at nearby Matinicus Rock, puffins no longer nested in mid-coast Maine. To restore the colony, Project Puffin translocated 954 chicks from Great Island, Newfoundland to Egg Rock from 1973 to 1986. An additional 950 were moved to Seal Island NWR—another nearby, historic puffin nesting island.

In 1981 five pairs nested at Egg Rock, eight years after the first chicks were moved to the island. The tiny colony remained dangerously vulnerable until 1999 when numbers began to slowly increase—a pattern that continued until 2012. Since 2012, the number of nesting pairs has fluctuated along with changes in sea surface temperatures (SST). In warm years, fewer pairs nest; many that attempt to nest either fail to hatch

a chick or rear an underweight chick. By contrast, in cooler years, more pairs nest and puffin chicks usually grow faster and weigh more at fledging—a key attribute that helps them survive at sea.

In 2017, the Gulf of Maine SST was just a half degree Centigrade cooler than the same period in 2016. This small drop in temperature coincided with a notable increase in puffin nesting success. The eastern Gulf of Maine (where puffins nest) experienced a larger and later than-usual spring bloom of phytoplankton. This provided ample food for the copepods and other zooplankton that in turn feed the small white hake, sand lance, and haddock that puffin chicks depend upon.

### Other Maine colonies also had a positive year

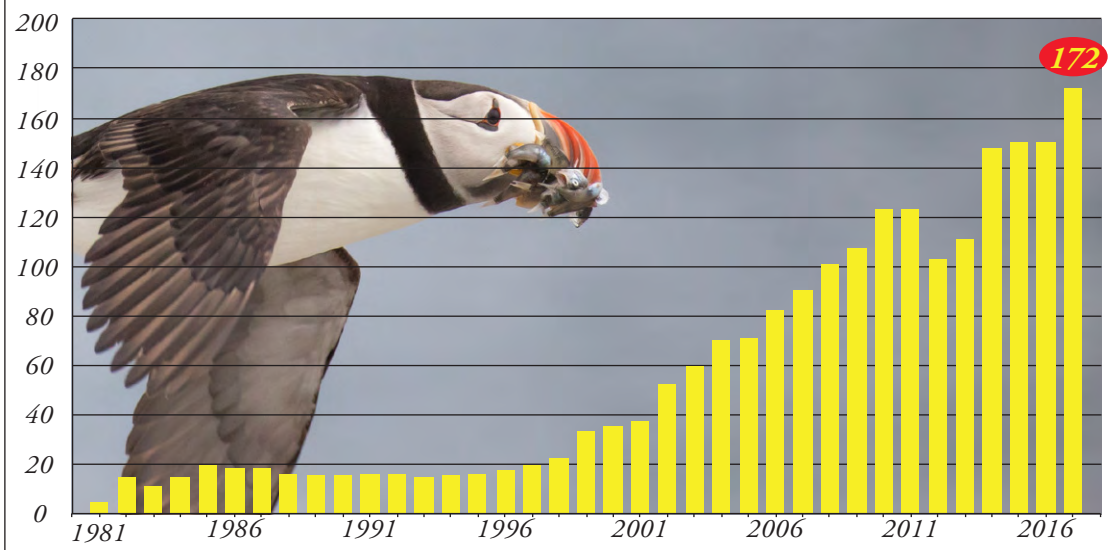
Puffins nesting at nearby Seal Island NWR and Matinicus Rock had a similarly good year. At Seal Island, 86% of the puffin pairs successfully fledged a chick—one of the best seasons ever recorded for this restored colony. In sharp contrast, during the warm water summers of 2012 and 2013, only 30% and 10% of pairs, respectively, fledged chicks. This year, Seal Island's puffin chicks had a good supply of high quality food, with white hake, Atlantic herring, sand lance, and haddock comprising most of their diet. Poor foods such as butterfish and sticklebacks were rarely brought back to any of Maine's puffin islands this year.



DERICK Z. JACKSON

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

Eastern Egg Rock breeding puffin pairs 1981–2017



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## The 2017 Maine Research Team

**First Row (left to right):** Rose Borzik; Steve Kress; Tiffany Huenefeldt; Debbie Wood. **Second Row:** Keenan Yakola; Isabel Brofsky; Bridget Strejc; Wray Gabel; Paula Shannon; Amy Kopec; Shannon Carvey; Rachel Bratton; Kim Sawyer; Annie Colgan; Adrienne Young; Katelyn Depot; Matt Dickey. **Third Row:** Charles Southwick; Coco Faber; Joanna Morelli; Alyssa Eby; Shannon Blake; Illiana Termuehlen; Will Kennerley; Rock Deliquanti; Earl Johnson; Sue Schubel. **Fourth Row:** Pete Salmansohn; Clare Flynn; Nathaniel “Zeke” Smith; Tasha DiMarzio; Laura Brazier; Frank Mayer. **Absent:** Alejandro Aguilar Vargas; Aubrey Alamshah; Jacqueline Anderson; Alicia Aztorga Ornelas; Amy Clark; Ted Gaine; Yuliana Bedolla Guzman; Kimmy Birrer; John Parker Davis; Camille DeJesus; Noel Dodge; Suzanne Dodge; Amy Donaghy; Sean Donaghy; Rebecca Esch; Sandy Flint; Karen Gafvelin; Holly Goyert; Jean Hall; Scott Hall; Meena Haribal; Stacey Keefer; Laura-Marie Koitsch; SJ Kwaitkowska; Robby Lambert; Julie Larson; Mandy Lightcap; Ayla Liss; Ryan McAndrews; Abby McBride; Angela McIntyre; John Nugent; Sally Ober; Corrine Olson; Glenn Olson; Kristin Pennock; Jean Peterson; Randy Peterson; Rachael Prestigiacomo; Heather Simmons; Anna Nellis Smith; Jess Steketee; Ravin Thomasson; Jesse Tutterow; Emily Waldman; Tammy Walling; Paul Wilburn; Ellen Westhaver.

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**Duryea & Peggy Morton Seabird Internship:** Coco Faber, Shannon Blake & Will Kennerley  
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DERBRICK Z. JACKSON

*Since 2010, haddock (a recovering fish population in the Gulf of Maine) has become a consistent part of puffin chick diet.*

Likewise, 80% of the puffin pairs at nearby Matinicus Rock successfully fledged a chick on a diet of mostly white hake, sand lance, and haddock. While Acadian redfish was an important part of the diet in 2016, it was rarely fed to chicks in 2017. In this food-abundant year, Project Puffin's resident biologists and interns were thrilled to find consistently fat chicks right up until fledging day. During 2012's ocean heat wave, Matinicus Rock's fledgling puffins weighed about 250g. In contrast, this year's fledglings averaged 350g. On the Canadian border, Machias Seal Island's puffins also did well, with 55% of puffin pairs fledging chicks—far better than the 12% that fledged chicks in 2016.

## The Bigger Picture

Although most of the Earth's oceans are warming due to human-caused climate change, the Gulf of Maine is noted for being one of the fastest-warming marine habitats on Earth. Maine's puffins, already at the southern limit of their range, serve as sensitive indicators of the effects of SST. The pattern in recent years is that warmer water and increased run-off from rivers contribute to smaller and earlier phytoplankton blooms. In these conditions, white hake and Atlantic herring move to cooler water to find food, resulting in fewer of the puffins' preferred forage fish.

With insufficient food, puffins fledge fewer young; those that do fledge head off to sea without the fat reserves needed to survive and this leads to a trend of fewer puffins returning to join the breeding population in recent years. But as this year's nesting season demonstrates, the news for puffins is not all grim. Due to successful fisheries management, two commercially important forage fish—Acadian redfish and haddock—are on the rebound, following decades of overfishing. In 2016, puffins at the southernmost Maine colonies made good use of Acadian redfish. Haddock is the other “rising star” forage fish. Prior to 2010, haddock was not part of the Maine puffins' diet. Since then, however, it has become a regular dietary component. In 2017, haddock made up 14%, 10% and 6% of the foods fed to puffin chicks at Seal Island NWR, Matinicus Rock, and Eastern Egg Rock, respectively. This demonstrates the importance of well-managed, sustainable fisheries, and gives us hope that a more diverse diet will help the puffins adapt to their changing ocean home. **See the expanded story at [projectpuffin.org](http://projectpuffin.org).**



## RESTORING SEABIRDS OF BAJA CALIFORNIA PACIFIC ISLANDS

The year 2017 marked the conclusion of a bold five-year collaborative project to help seabirds at Pacific islands along the Baja California peninsula as a model for future cooperation across the border. In 2012, the project set out to restore populations of seabirds damaged from DDT released from the Montrose Chemical Plant in San Diego and oil that escaped from the freighter, S.S.



Above: Double-crested Cormorants (circled) on Todas Santos Island near Ensenada, Baja California chose to nest among cormorant decoys and audio playback systems. (Right) A Cassin's Auklet shows its large egg in an artificial nest box on Todas Santos Island.

Photos © GECI

*Jacob Luckenbach*, which sank near the Farallon Islands of central California.

Collaborating partners included the Audubon Seabird Restoration Program, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas (GECI), and the Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature (MFCN). GECI took the lead to help seabirds nesting on Mexican islands. The across-the-border collaboration began because seabird species spend part of their year or even some breed both in the Pacific Ocean

islands of California, USA and Baja California Peninsula waters. The program, administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, was made possible by nearly \$4 million in funding from The Montrose and *Luckenbach* Trustee Councils. Additional partners in this project have been the fisheries communities, several Mexican government agencies including the Natural Protected Areas Commission (CONANP), The National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO) and the Mexican Navy (SEMAR).

The innovative collaboration was based on social attraction via decoys, mirrors, artificial burrows and recordings of seabird call—methods first pioneered off the Maine coast. These islands in the Pacific were previously cleared of introduced mammalian predators and were ready for active recolonization. The restoration program successfully started new seabird colonies at seven project islands off Baja California's Pacific coast. The California Brown Pelican, Brant's Cormorant, Cassin's Auklet, Ashy Storm-petrel, and Scripps's Murrelet were among the species that benefitted from the project. In addition, new colonies of Royal, Caspian and Elegant Terns emerged in response to the stewardship for the focal species.

The training of nine early career Mexican biologists at Audubon's Maine Coast Seabird Sanctuaries over the past five summers and the training in acoustic studies by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has provided practical seabird management skills among the GECI staff, so that they can continue to help Mexican seabirds well into the future.

All of these actions came together with the recent decree in 2016 of Mexico's newest protected area: Baja California Pacific Islands Biosphere Reserve. This new reserve will ensure the legal protection of the seabird colonies restored during this project. These accomplishments have demonstrated the benefits of this collaboration and, hopefully, established the basis for future binational cooperation for these borderless species.



## MAD RIVER DECOYS BY AUDUBON

Thanks to Jim and Nancy Henry's generous donation of their Mad River Decoy business, Audubon's Seabird Restoration Program is now manufacturing conservation decoys in Bremen, Maine. In just five months, our team learned the art and science of decoy production, remodeled our mainland barn to accommodate their manufacture, then proceeded to create and ship 280 decoys of nine species ranging from tiny Least Terns to large Black-footed Albatross. The decoys, along with 10 sound boxes to broadcast seabird calls, were shipped to biologists in seven states and four other countries, including Australia, Guadeloupe, and Switzerland, as a means to encourage nesting in safe locations.

Social attraction methods using decoys, mirrors, and sound recordings were first used to lure puffins and terns back to Eastern Egg Rock in the late 1970s. A study published this year in *Biodiversity Science* demonstrated that these methods have become standard practice worldwide. The paper summarizes how 171 projects have used social attraction and the translocation of seabird chicks in at least 16 countries to benefit 64 seabird species—20% of the world's 325 seabird species.



Susan Schubel, Manager of Mad River Decoy by Audubon, puts the final touches on decoy murre eggs.



## ISLAND WEATHER

**W**eather (no extreme rains during chick rearing), abundant hake, herring, and sand lance, and little predation on most islands combined to produce one of the best seabird seasons in recent years. Slightly cooler water and a later than usual plankton bloom in the eastern portion of the Gulf of Maine favored abundant forage fish.

STEPHEN W. KRESS



*Stratton Island hosted the largest Roseate Tern colony in Maine in 2017.  
Photo of Roseate Tern with sand lance by Stephen Kress.*

## JENNY ISLAND

- A new record high count of Common Terns was set with 1,298 nesting pairs.
- Twenty-two pairs of Roseate Terns nested, the most since 2011.
- After a predatory Great Horned Owl was captured and removed at the start of the season, Common Terns fledged 2,024 chicks and Roseate Terns produced 19 fledglings.
- Herring was the most abundant fish fed to Common Tern chicks, followed by sand lance and hake.

## POND ISLAND NWR

- A new record was set with 942 pairs of Common Terns nesting, an increase of 169 pairs over last year's record!
- Despite occasional owl predation and a late season mink, Common Terns fledged 1,583 chicks, fueled by abundant sand lance and herring.
- The bird sighting highlight of the year was a Yellow-nosed Albatross.

## STRATTON ISLAND

- The Roseate Tern population increased to 119 pairs, making it the largest Roseate Tern colony in Maine. These fledged just over one chick per pair.
- A total of 1,127 pairs of Common Terns nested, but fledged just 0.68 chicks per pair due to a poor food supply and Black-crowned Night-Heron predation.
- A night-heron preyed upon the 87 nests of state-endangered Least Terns; only 2 surviving fledglings were confirmed.
- The heronry nest count this year included 104 Glossy Ibis, 8 Black-crowned Night-heron, 43 Great Egret, and 51 Snowy Egret.
- Rare birds seen included Magnificent Frigatebird, Brown Pelican, and Marbled Godwit.

## OUTER GREEN ISLAND

- This island, located 5 miles off Portland, ranked as the largest Common Tern colony in Maine this year following nearly constant growth since it was restored in 2002.
- The 1,434 nesting pairs enjoyed a high productivity of 1.45 chicks per pair, fledging just over 2,000 young terns.
- Tern chicks were primarily fed herring and hake.

*Nineteen active Black Guillemot burrows were found and these produced 1.10 fledglings per pair.  
Photo by Jean Hall.*



**Pond Island**  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

This island is managed by the Petit Manan National Wildlife Refuge to protect  
Common Terns, eiders, puffins, guillemots, petrels.





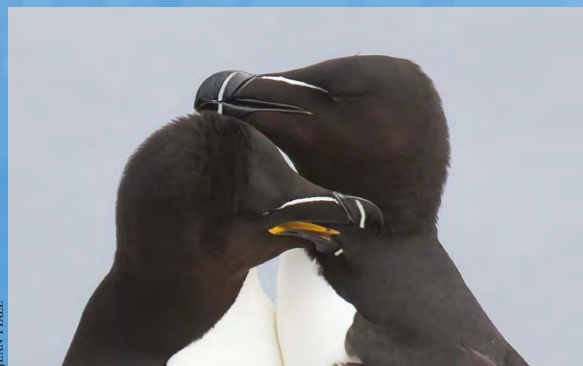
# Land Highlights



## EASTERN EGG ROCK

- The Roseate Tern population exploded to 104 pairs, up 33% from 78 pairs last year.
- All tern species enjoyed above-average nesting success, fledging 1,356, 63 and 134 chicks respectively for Common, Arctic and Roseate Terns.
- Puffin pairs increased by 15% with 172 active nests counted; 19 healthy puffin chicks were banded, a new record for the island!

*A Common Tern chick begs for food.*



*On Matinicus Rock, Razorbills had their best productivity on record, fledging 0.63 chicks per nest.*

## REMEMBERING TWO STELLAR VOLUNTEERS



ANDRE BRETON

**Susan Long** loved reading puffin band numbers. Over 8 seasons (1997, 1999–2005), Susan spent an astounding 556 resighting hours in the puffin island's observation blinds—the fourth-highest effort of all Puffineers over all years! Her passion for nature, watching seabirds, and sleeping in a tent on an island under the stars was contagious.



ANDY THIELE

**Stella Walsh** participated in the research on 6 of our 7 seabird islands (2000–2012 seasons), but also shopped for food and supplies, transported staff to the airport and ferry terminal, designed fish field mark guides, and entered pre-computer-era data into the new databases. She enthusiastically shared her expertise with banding and mist-netting migrant birds with the Stratton Island post-season crews.

## MATINICUS ROCK

- Tern populations held steady with 600 pairs of Arctic and 165 pairs of Common Terns. Common Terns had a record high fledging rate of 1.57 fledglings per nest.
- Razorbills had their best productivity on record, fledging 0.63 chicks per nest.
- Puffins enjoyed an outstanding year with 8 of 10 pairs fledging chicks.
- A Common Murre nest was found deep under a rock, but the egg failed to hatch.
- At least 3 Manx Shearwater pairs produced fledglings.
- The bird sighting highlight: Ancient Murrelet—a Pacific-nesting species!

## SEAL ISLAND NWR

- Excellent forage fish led to nearly 9 out of 10 puffin pairs successfully fledging a chick.
- Productivity for terns was above average for Common and Arctic Terns which fledged 1,280 and 835 chicks respectively.
- Hake, herring, and sand lance were the main foods fed to tern and puffin chicks.
- State-threatened Great Cormorants fledged at least 54 chicks from 22 nests.
- 184 bird species were recorded—20% of all birds in North America!



*Terns enjoyed above-average nesting success on Eastern Egg Rock, and populations held steady on Matinicus Rock.  
Photo of Arctic Tern by Jean Hall*



# EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

## AUDUBON BIRD CAMS

**P**roject Puffin completed its fifth year of collaboration with Explore.org. Our 2017 cams provided a window into the private lives of Atlantic Puffins, Black Guillemot and Osprey diet. Highlights included having the puffin burrow pair produce a healthy chick named Conrad, in honor of Conrad Field, an early Seal Island NWR researcher. Our beloved Osprey pair, Rachel and Steve, raised three chicks nearly to fledging age, but a Great Horned Owl took two of the chicks. The cameras remind viewers that life in the wild requires alertness and luck to avoid predators while finding ample food. Long-lived birds like puffins, terns, and ospreys do not need to be successful every year to keep their populations stable.

## SEABIRD ADVENTURES CELEBRATES 20 YEARS!

**T**wenty years ago Project Puffin launched a school outreach program to introduce local children to the amazing diversity of seabirds that live on Maine's islands. The innovative program features fun and engaging activities that often include data gathered at Project Puffin nesting colonies. Hands-on activities involve costumes, stories and games that teach about migration and conservation threats. Seabird Adventures was first envisioned by educator "Puffin Pete" Salmansohn with a grant from conservationist John Hay, with continued support from the Mid-coast (Maine) Audubon chapter. "Seabird Sue" Schubel has carried the program forward, reaching more than 25,000 students and their families from 50 Maine schools.



STEPHEN W. KRESS

## CHANDRA TAYLOR SMITH SCHOLARSHIP FUND

**N**ational Audubon Society has created the Dr. Chandra Taylor Smith scholarship fund to offer scholarships to the Hog Island Audubon Camp. The fund will make it possible for ethnically diverse educators to attend Hog Island programs. Chandra (pictured above at her first visit to Eastern Egg Rock in 2016) served Audubon from 2015–2017 as its first Vice President for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. The fund recognizes her great achievements in the area of bringing diversity and inclusion to Audubon and memorializes her love of the Hog Island Audubon Camp, which served as an inspiring setting for two diversity summits for Audubon staff from throughout the country. A third summit is planned for summer 2018. Jacqueline Stallworth, an educator from Alexandria, Virginia was the first to attend Hog Island with support from the fund in 2017.

## 2018 Hog Island Programs

Six-day programs for adults, teens, and families

- Spring Migration and Monhegan Is.
- Joy of Birding
- Hands-on Bird Science
- Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens
- Field Ornithology
- Mountains to Sea Birding for Teens
- Arts and Birding
- Raptor Rapture
- Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week
- Family Camp
- Maine Seabird Biology and Conservation
- Living on the Wind: Fall Migration & Monhegan Island



For dates and more information, please visit  
[hogisland-audubon.org](http://hogisland-audubon.org) or call (843) 340-8673



TIFFANY HUENEFELDT

*Steve Kress shows Puffin Society members the remains of an experimental puffin burrow made from ceramic chimney tiles that was tested in 1974.*

## PUFFIN SOCIETY VISITS EGG ROCK

**T**welve members of the Puffin Society joined us for the Egg Rock Island trip in July. The event kicked off at our Rockland, Maine, Project Puffin Visitor's Center with a program update led by Dr. Stephen Kress followed by a private dinner reception overlooking Penobscot Bay. Early the next morning, Steve provided narration on the way to Egg Rock where the group landed and met this year's island interns. Both Steve and island supervisor, Laura Brazier, led society members to the island bird blinds and visited the original sod burrows where they discovered a Leach's Storm-Petrel nesting. Of course, no trip is ever complete without a stop at lovely Hog Island where we enjoyed the sunny day and Chef Cleo's locally-sourced culinary creations.





# 2016–2017 CONTRIBUTORS

*Contributions listed were received from October 1, 2016 through September 30, 2017. Space restrictions prevent us from listing our 1,327 Supporter-level friends. Every donor is important to us and we sincerely regret any omissions. Your continuing participation makes our work possible.*

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## Project Puffin

SEABIRD RESTORATION PROGRAM

159 Sapsucker Woods Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850

A program of National Audubon Society.



In summer, 2017, our outreach team showed puffins and other seabirds to nearly 10,000 passengers on 100 boat trips from New Harbor and Boothbay Harbor to Eastern Egg Rock from June to August. Join us in 2018 to experience the joy of seabirds!

SHAWN P. CAREY

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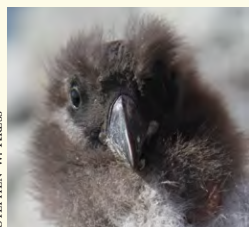


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