

The COVID Pivot

There has seldom been a more challenging field season than that of 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic touching nearly every aspect of Seabird Institute operations. As the nation shut down, we were faced with leaving “our” seabirds unguarded and turning away hundreds of campers and visitors. Our seabird researchers and educators are a determined bunch, however, and met the challenge with ingenuity and pluck.

Because seabirds nest in island colonies, a summer of seabird research is essentially island quarantine. Usually there is a buzz of nearly 30 additional interns and volunteers on and off islands along with frequent runs to resupply, enable additional research projects, and allow news media visits. This year, however, teams of only two or three people per island collected data and conducted research mostly without off-island support or visits. Even the annual June Gulf of Maine tern census was conducted with the bare minimum of socially distanced personnel. The additional safety planning and limited personnel slightly delayed island arrivals, and once the teams reached the islands some found that avian predators of their seabird wards had gotten there first—eagles and owls for example, were making their presence felt. Pressures from predators can make entire colonies abandon a nesting site. In fact, the tern colony at Machias Seal Island *did* abandon this year, likely due to pressure from gulls before Canadian biologists could get out to the islands in early July. These experiences underscore the importance of maintain-

ing a presence on seabird nesting islands, not only to collect data, but to discourage predators and safeguard the colonies. Though ill-timed weather events took their toll on terns, it was a good year for puffins—early birds in particular found enough

food and nested with success!

As the seabird island team was planning to safely deploy teams, it also became quickly apparent that bringing large numbers of people together in our centers for programs was prohibitive. For only the third time in Hog Island Audubon Camp's 84-year history, our doors remained closed to campers. The Project Puffin Visitor Center also remained closed for the season, but both closures provided the team a unique opportunity to explore new kinds of outreach. The pivot to online programming reached 260 participants this summer as “Virtual Teen Camp,” “Family Camp-in-a-Box,” and “Puffin Islands Online” programs were born! Our fall lecture series, “Making Bird Connections,” drew from the rich knowledge of Hog Island and Audubon instructors and the series had 1,800 registrants and has reached tens of thousands of viewers on social media. What's next with our exciting educational content? The “Puffin Islands Online—Expanded Version” and our new “Tern the Page Audubon Book Club” are launching. We hope you will join us in the birdie fun! ♦

In this year like no other, our hardworking staff were incredibly flexible, allowing us to still protect seabirds.

—Don Lyons



Photo: Kay Garlick-Ott

Quarantining together on Eastern Egg Rock, Eden Michaels, Clare Flynn, and Kay Garlick-Ott (left to right) enjoy a sunset from atop the Egg Rock Hilton.

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Egg Rock Update

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the Seabird Institute moved its center of operations from Ithaca, New York, to Bremen, Maine, we said farewell to three long-term staff members. Rose Borzik (left), former Associate Director, started her career with the Puffin Project in 1986, and was responsible for all managerial aspects of the program—from island logistics, to writing and editing content for *Egg Rock Update*, to managing budgets, to being the first person to lead boat tours. Gifts Manager Ruth Likowski (center) joined in 1999 to help manage the Adopt-A-Puffin program, matching donors with their favorite puffins. Office Manager Deborah Wood (right) joined in 2000 to help with administrative and budgetary work, and donor liaisons. We thank and recognize each of them for their hard work and dedication, and for their years of service to the birds we all love. All three were instrumental in the success of the seabird program, and we wish them all the best in the future.



Photo: Tiffany Huenefeldt

The Seabird Institute is the marine conservation pillar of the National Audubon Society's Coasts strategy. We especially appreciate the leadership of Karen Hyun, Vice President of Coastal Conservation in connecting the program's research with the advocacy muscle of Audubon. We are also deeply humbled by the continued support and advice that our program's founder, Steve Kress, continues to provide. His efforts continue to make a difference for seabirds everywhere. Of course, we thank each member of our Seabird Advisory Council for their support and partnership. In addition, we thank Brad Allen, Kelsey Sullivan, and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife for partnership and support on work at Eastern Egg Rock, Jenny Island and Outer Green Island. We thank Brian Benedict, Eddy Edwards, Michael Langlois, Linda Welch, and other staff of the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge for continued partnership on studies at Seal Island NWR, Pond Island NWR and Matinicus Rock. Robert Houston, biologist for the USFWS Gulf of Maine Program graciously provided mapping and other support. John Fitzpatrick and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology support our Ithaca-based staff. We also give heartfelt thanks to the numerous Hog Island lecturers who waived honorariums to donate their time to this year's online programming.

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SAVE THE SEABIRDS



Audubon's Seabird Institute

We are a global hub for science, conservation action, and policy, marrying seabird science leadership with policy and advocacy muscle to expand our conservation impact.

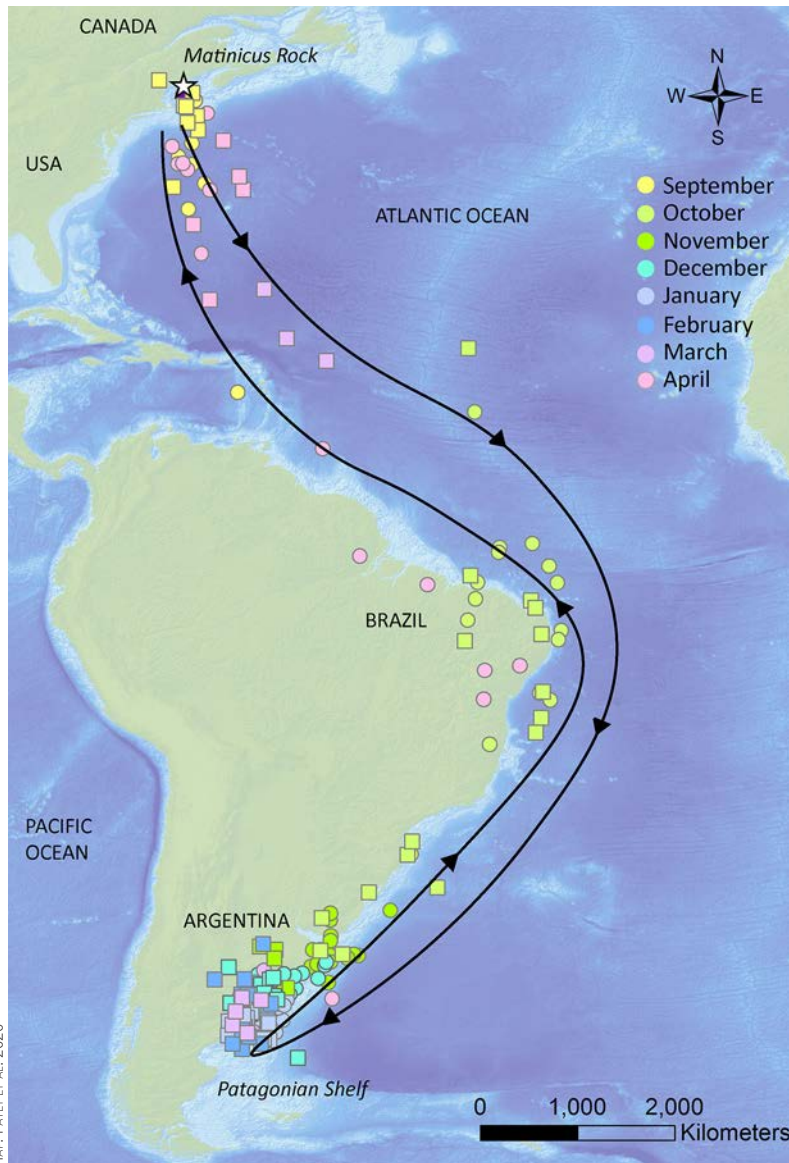
The Mystery of Manx Shearwater Migration

The vast majority of Manx Shearwaters nest in northern Europe but a few pioneering individuals began breeding in the Gulf of Maine at Matinicus Rock in the mid-2000s. While it is exciting to have this amazing species nesting here, it is also interesting to consider where these adventurous individuals spend their time when not breeding in Maine. Do they migrate to the same areas as their European relatives? If they mix with those relatives during the winter, what route do they follow to get there?

Dr. Annette Fayet, from the University of Oxford, led our investigation into these questions. Dr. Fayet has worked extensively with this species at Skomer Island in Wales and previously helped us understand the winter wanderings of puffins. Because we only have a few individuals available to study (when we started in 2018, just five active burrows were established!), we began by capturing two adults and fitting them with “geolocator” tracking tags attached to plastic bands fitted onto their legs. These tags measure light levels every five minutes and those data can be used to determine the bird’s general location by identifying



MANX SHEARWATER. PHOTO: KEITH PRITCHARD/SHUTTERSTOCK



Manx Shearwaters that nest on Matinicus Rock travel a migration path from the Gulf of Maine to the coastal waters of Argentina.

when sunrise and sunset occur each day in the tag’s data log. The light data are stored inside the tag so we had to recapture the tagged birds a year later, in the summer of 2019, to retrieve the data and obtain a map of their migration route.

Both of the individuals from Matinicus Rock headed south upon leaving the Gulf of Maine in late summer 2018, skirting the Caribbean and east coast of Brazil, and eventually arrived into a highly productive region of the South Atlantic Ocean off the coast of central Argentina (see map). This is precisely the area where Manx Shearwaters from Europe spend their winters! The southward route from the Gulf of Maine is unique, however; European breeders don’t cross over the Atlantic Ocean to South America until they reach the equatorial latitudes along the coast of West Africa.

These wintering areas seem particularly important for Manx Shearwaters, as nearly all the individuals tracked from Europe and now the Maine individuals all use this single region. On this portion of the Patagonian Shelf, ocean currents mix and support many pelagic species of birds, mammals, and fish, and also extensive fisheries. Tracking data such as these are critical to identify important bird areas in the ocean environment and advocate for their inclusion in marine protected area designations. ♦

A Key Win On Menhaden Management



OSPREY WITH MENHADEN. PHOTO: ABSELOM ZERT/AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS

A small forage fish called Atlantic menhaden, which serves as a major food source for many seabirds on the East Coast, has been properly recognized as a foundation of the ocean ecosystem. In August, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission voted unanimously to adopt a new management approach to ensure the menhaden population never drops below levels that would put birds and other wildlife at risk. Traditional fisheries management only considers how many of the targeted fish will be left given a particular level of fishing. The new approach uses sophisticated ecosystem models to project how different levels of fishing for menhaden will impact the populations of their predators, based on how much they rely on menhaden for food.

Audubon's Seabird Institute successfully advocated for this more ecosystem-based system of management in partnership with other environmental and sportfishing organizations. We were able to draw on the Institute's policy expertise (Anna Weinstein and Charlotte Runzel) and technical expertise (Don Lyons) to assess the scientific analyses and navigate to the best advocacy solution. We were able to activate several

states and chapters to weigh in at critical times, and commissioners recognized that "bird people" cared about their decision!

Known as "pogies" in Maine, Atlantic menhaden are in the herring family and are critical to the health of estuary ecosystems along the Atlantic Seaboard. Menhaden play a key role in the marine food web, especially for many coastal and marine birds including Brown Pelicans, Bald Eagles, Ospreys, Northern Gannets, Common Loons, terns, and gulls, as well as whales, dolphins, and larger fish.

Menhaden have made a major comeback over the years thanks to improved management. In 2010, after decades of population decline and unregulated commercial fishing, menhaden populations hit a 54-year low. In response, the Commission initiated active management of Atlantic menhaden for the first time and set protections in 2012 to reduce its catch. Because of this action, Atlantic menhaden population levels started to rebound. Whales were even spotted off of the coast of New York for the first time in decades, feeding on the newly abundant menhaden.



MENHADEN (BREVOORTIA TYPHONUM)

In 2017, to continue this progress, the Commission committed to managing this fish for the important role they play in the ecosystem, once sufficient science was completed on the relationship of menhaden with its predators. The initial focus has been on ensuring a menhaden harvest that would allow the sustainable harvest of predatory fish species, like striped bass. We threw our support behind this first step as it is so important to install a predator-focused

framework for future considerations of seabird needs, and because keeping enough menhaden in the ocean for striped bass will help keep more for seabirds as well.

Now, three years later, the Commission has voted to adopt this new management style. This decision blazes a new trail in fisheries management, one that other fishery councils and commissions across the country should follow. ♦

Read the full article at www.audubon.org/news/a-big-day-little-fish-seabirds-rely

MENHADEN ILLUSTRATION: S. F. DENTON/NYSDEC

Seabird Institute Goes to Work in Virginia



PHOTO: VIRGINIA TECH

Chicks snuggle up to a Black Skimmer decoy provided by Audubon's Mad River Decoys.

South Island, Virginia, found at the mouth of the James River and Chesapeake Bay, was created as part of the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel highway development between Hampton and Norfolk in the 1950s. It was first colonized by seabirds in the early 1980s and in recent decades has been the home of Virginia's largest seabird colony. The colony, consisting of Royal Terns, Common Terns, Gull-billed Terns, Black Skimmers, and more, had nested on this island and lived in relative harmony with the endless stream of passing traffic until last fall when Virginia's Department of Transportation moved forward with a project to expand the tunnel. As a result of this expansion, the entire South Island was paved with no plans to mitigate the lost nesting site for the nearly 15,000 birds that would return the following spring.

In February, with encouragement from Audubon's Seabird Institute and other conservation partners, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam made a commitment to protect migratory birds in the state of Virginia and address the adverse effects of the expansion project. The race began to prepare a neighboring island, Fort Wool, and modular barges to be anchored nearby, to become temporary nesting habitat for the returning colony. The Seabird Institute, alongside Virginia Tech and American Bird Conservancy, advised the state on appropriate habitat preparations and social attraction techniques to make Fort Wool a suitable destination for the arrival of its summer residents. The Audubon seabird team also began making decoys and sound playback systems to support the effort!

Four barges were placed near Fort Wool. Gravel and sand were added on the island to expand the available nesting habitat. Trees and predators were removed from the island. Social

attraction measures were put in place as a means of diverting the colony away from South Island Royal Tern, Common Tern, Black Skimmer, and Gull-billed Tern decoys, 170 in total, were placed on Fort Wool, in addition to three sound systems playing layered calls of these species. While it will take years to create a new island to be the colony's permanent home, it is encouraging to see the state's dedication to the wellbeing of migratory birds.

The loss of South Island could have been a devastating blow for seabirds in Virginia, but Governor Northam's actions have implications beyond the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel expansion. Virginia has now stepped up, alongside California, to develop regulations that backstop the federal rollbacks of migratory bird protections and set an exemplary example for other states that are looking to follow suit. The Seabird Institute was able to offer scientific expertise to address an immediate conservation threat and apply our policy advocacy muscle to win greater protections for all birds in the state. ♦



PHOTO: VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

In addition to removing vegetation from Fort Wool, sand and gravel needed to be put down to provide suitable nesting habitat for the colony.

Season Summary

Seal Island NWR

- **Puffin Productivity:** 84% of puffin pairs fledged their chick.
- **Record Razorbills!** 79 Razorbill nests were confirmed for this new record.
- **Look who's back!** "Troppey" the Red-billed Tropicbird came back for its 16th summer!
- **Peculiar Prey:** A new prey, gooseneck barnacles, were served to tern chicks.



ATLANTIC PUFFIN, PHOTO: JEAN HALL

Outer Green Island

- **Progress in Productivity:** An average of 1.22 Black Guillemot chicks fledged per nest, with 20 nests confirmed.
- **Colossal Colony:** The largest Common Tern colony in Maine consisted of 1,775 nesting pairs.

Eastern Egg Rock

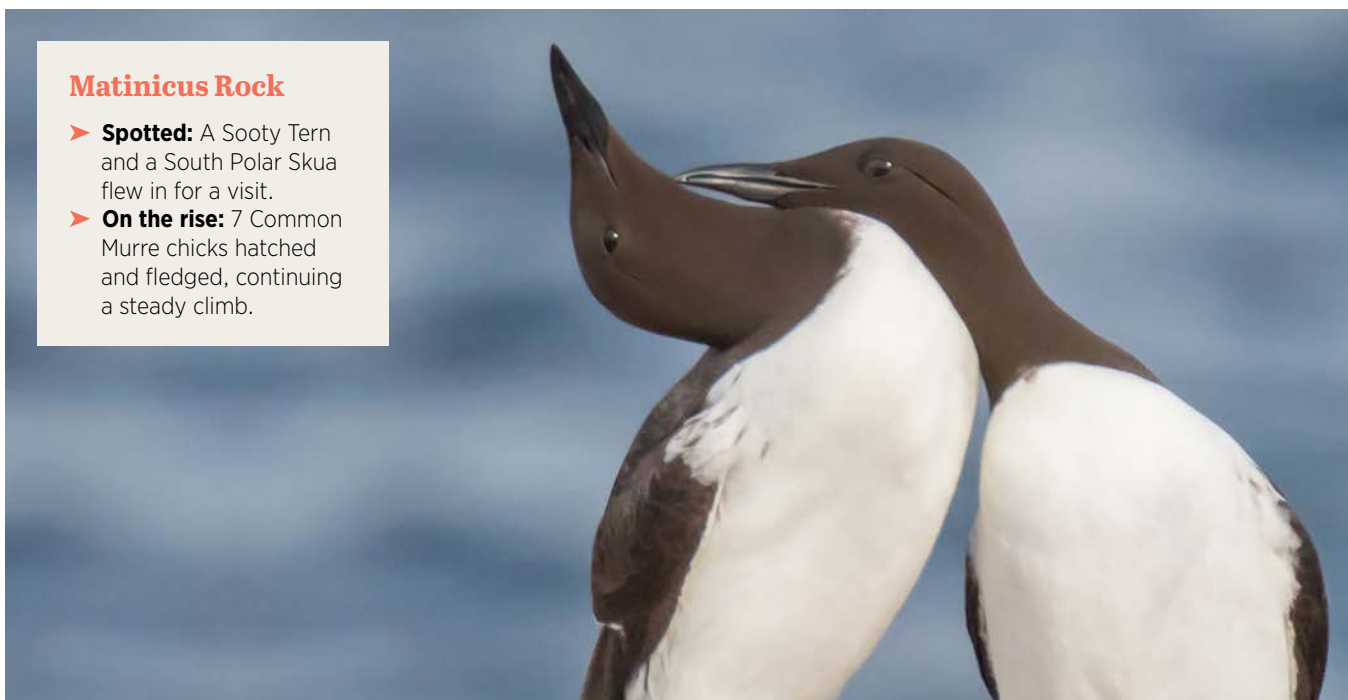
- **Triumphing Terns:** 1,156 pairs of Common Terns nested, rebounding by nearly 100 over last year.
- **Puffin Provisions:** Haddock and hake were specials on the menu.
- **Surprising Predators:** A female Mallard and her ducklings munched on numerous tern nests around the island.



COMMON TERN, PHOTO: JEAN HALL

Matinicus Rock

- **Spotted:** A Sooty Tern and a South Polar Skua flew in for a visit.
- **On the rise:** 7 Common Murre chicks hatched and fledged, continuing a steady climb.



COMMON MURRE, PHOTO: JEAN HALL





BLACK GUILLEMOTS. PHOTO: WALTER GOLDBER

Pond Island NWR

- **Chick's Choice:** Herring and sandlance were gobbled up by Common Tern chicks.
- **New Record!** 1,453 pairs of Common Terns nested.



COMMON TERNS. PHOTO: JEAN HALL



PHOTO: BEN BECKER

Stratton Island

- **Nesting Numbers:** 3 pairs of American Oystercatchers, 114 pairs of Roseate Terns and 1,156 pairs of Common Terns nested.
- **Tropical Traveler:** Regular Roseate Tern nester W47 (christened "Chuckles McGee, PhD" when banded as a chick in 2016) was seen this fall in Aruba.



AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER. PHOTO: CHARLES GANGLAS

Jenny Island

- **Relocated Raptors:** A Great Horned Owl was captured in early June and relocated to northern Maine.
- **Tern Table D'Hôte:** Herring was devoured by Common Tern chicks and Sandlance was demolished by Roseate Tern chicks.

Geotracking Terns in China

The Chinese Crested Tern, one of the world's most critically endangered seabirds, was thought to be extinct for over sixty years before making a remarkable reappearance in 2000 on an island in the Matsu Archipelago between mainland China and Taiwan. Since its rediscovery, scientists have worked with a sense of careful urgency to learn as much as they can about this elusive species.

In 2013, the Seabird Institute's social attraction techniques were used to create a new tern colony on an island off the central China coast known as Tiedun Dao. By the end of that initial season, 19 adult Chinese Crested Terns had been recorded among the 2,600 Greater Crested Terns on the island with at least one successful fledging of a Chinese Crested Tern chick. The following year, a monitoring station was built on the island, allowing scientists to observe tern behavior, and diet, and guard against possible threats to the nesting colony. Terns have nested successfully at Tiendun Dao in most years since and significant data has been gathered but many questions remained unanswered.

An exciting development occurred last year when a team of researchers, included the Seabird Institute's Director of Conservation Science, Don Lyons, successfully captured and tagged an adult Chinese Crested Tern with a satellite tracking device for the first time. "Handling a member of a species that has only around 100 individuals is an amazing privilege and responsibility" said Don. "There was definitely a strong feeling of relief when the tagged bird was back at the nest taking its turn the next morning after we had captured and tagged it."

Researchers were able to track the tern, known as ZE5, using a mapping app on their cell phones. ZE5 spent much of its time close by Tiendun Dao, making occasional longer trips, including a 62-mile flight to another tern colony to the north. Notably, ZE5's flight patterns matched the flight patterns of Greater Crested Terns tagged in the same season and leading researchers to wonder whether their migrations patterns may also overlap.

Tracking data were collected for the 37 days following capture and provided a litmus test for the safety of tagging Chinese Crested Terns. The results also gave researchers never-before-seen insight into their travel patterns. It is also certain that ZE5 has cultivated a fan base from South Korea to Indonesia and across China. Birders throughout the region will be keeping their eyes to the sky with the hope of seeing its banded right leg and catching a glimpse of ZE5 for themselves.

Much of the exciting Chinese Crested Tern recovery story was captured in an Audubon Magazine article in the Winter



CHINESE CRESTED TERN. PHOTO: MORGAN HEIM



Below, Fan Zhongyong releases ZE5, the first Chinese Crested Tern to be tagged with a satellite tracking device.



PHOTO: MORGAN HEIM

2020 issue ("Inside the Race to Save China's Mysterious 'Bird of Legend'"), including a detailed accounting of the effort to capture and tag ZE5. A significant peer-reviewed article summarizing the restoration effort also came out recently in the prestigious scientific journal Biological Conservation ("Creating a conservation network: Restoration of the critically endangered Chinese crested tern using social attraction"). Among the authors were the Seabird Institute's Don Lyons, and three former Josephine Daneman Herz International Seabird Fellows: Yiwei Lu (2015), Zhongyong Fan (2015), and Siyu Wang (2019). Former Herz Fellows Yiwei Lu led the development of the publication and Zhongyong Fan now leads the Chinese Crested Tern research team at the Zhejiang Museum of Natural History. ♦

New Faces

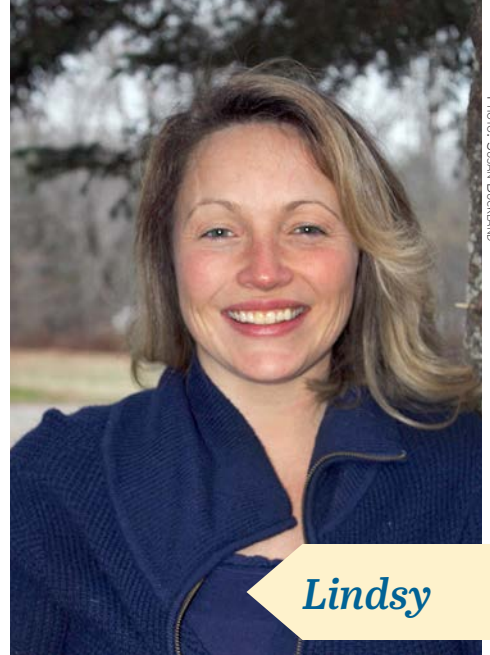
Who's in the Puffin House now?

Todd Wildlife Sanctuary's "Puffin House," the longtime Maine summer residence of Project Puffin founder Steve Kress, recently received a makeover to become the year-round office space for a reorganized Seabird Institute. We are happy to announce the addition of two new team members, Lindsay Buckland and Kimberly Keller, to the new space.

Lindsay Buckland joins us as the Institute's Office Coordinator. She has a strong background in process development, supply chain management and a vast working knowledge of data management. She also brings many years of camp experience having spent time with the Chewonki Foundation and Imua Family Services. She looks forward to taking part in the Seabird Institute's efforts that nurture our community as well as our environment.

Kimberly Keller has taken the reins as our Development and Communications Associate. This is a new role for the Institute, and aside from a degree that includes studies in business management, she brings many years of experience as a nonprofit administrator, working to streamline development operations, increase donor and community engagement and provide operational support. Previously working within the performing arts sector, Kim is delighted to be utilizing her skills to support the Seabird Institute's conservation efforts.

It is a delight to welcome these two new professionals to the Institute as we ground operations locally in support of the Seabird Institute's expanding national focus. The next time you visit, please stop by to say "hi" to the new team! ♦



Lindsay



Kim



The Kress Teaching Pavilion and Native Plant Garden is a new addition to the Todd Wildlife Sanctuary, and honors Project Puffin founder, Stephen Kress.

Seabird Institute's First Graduate Student

Will Kennerley, a current Master's student at Oregon State University, will be working to understand the foraging ecology of Atlantic Puffins and the locations of key puffin foraging areas in the Gulf of Maine. Will has worked four summers for Project Puffin, including seasons on Seal Island, Outer Green, and Matinicus Rock, which he has previously supervised and where he will conduct his current research. Will aims to deploy GPS loggers on adult puffins to determine where they are finding food for their chicks. With the Gulf of Maine being one of the most rapidly warming bodies of water in the world, and increasingly subjected to short-term marine heatwaves, it is becoming crucial to understand where and when puffins can find the food that they and their chicks need. ♦



Will

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Contributions listed were received from October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020. Space restrictions prevent us from listing our 1,734 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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With the addition of the following paragraph to your will, you can leave a legacy for seabirds through the Seabird Institute: Project Puffin Endowment Fund.

"I/we 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"). Federal Tax ID #13-1624102

What is "Grubbing"?

Grubbing happens when researchers contort themselves to reach into puffins' underground nesting burrows to search for puffins or their young chicks. The birds are temporarily removed so they can be weighed and measured and receive leg bands. The researchers then carefully return the puffins to their burrows.



Photo: Bill Schoutz

What is "Billing"?

When puffins rub their beaks together, it's called "billing." This behavior is often observed during courtship and throughout the nesting season as a means to strengthen the bond between a pair of nesting puffins.



Photo: Jean Hall

IN MEMORY

Joe Johansen (1931–2020)

The Seabird Institute mourned the loss of Joe Johansen in 2020. When Joe Johansen was interviewed and hired by Duryea and Peggy Morton for the position of Head Boatman at Hog Island, they certainly hoped for the best, but only history would show what a monumentally perfect fit Joe was for the job. He spent twenty summers on Hog Island at the helm of the *Puffin III*, greeting thousands of campers on many a "bodacious" blue sky or thick fog day. He took the time to learn thousands of camper names, always ready to weave colorful history about nautical life on the Maine coast into the Camp experience. In 1974, recently retired from the Coast Guard, he arrived at Hog Island with his life partner Mary just in time to apply his carpentry talents to help restore Hog Island's venerable buildings.

His arrival also coincided with the first year of the Egg Rock field camp. It is not an exaggeration to say that he made Project Puffin possible. He was always there to help make things happen, to rescue us when needed, and even to help build the "Egg Rock Hilton" by rowing ashore material in 20 or more dory loads. This is just one of the unique monuments that he leaves behind. He safely delivered all 950 Newfoundland pufflings to Egg Rock on the final leg of their 1,000-mile trip. He did this each year for ten years—always at night, sometimes by moonlight, other times in fog and deep seas. I recall so well, Joe standing tall, rowing the first chicks ashore in the dark, lit only by a Coleman lantern at the landing. When the sea was unsettled, he would hop out of the dory into the foaming surf to hold the boat off the rocks as we passed the chicks to safety.

Through his stories and adventures, he gave us a window into a side of the Maine coast that we would not have known or even thought of, all shared with original terminology. If one believes in what follows after "crossing the bar," then I like to believe his "Norwegian Steam" (boundless energy) remains strong and he is out there enjoying "collision pads" (pancakes) with "crank" (coffee) for breakfast, and "tube steaks" (hot dogs) with "red lead" (ketchup) for lunch, swapping colorful stories with other salts about his days keeping lighthouses running. Certainly, his stories will include his days helping puffins return to Eastern Egg Rock.

—Stephen W. Kress



Photo: Richard Podolsky

Joe Johansen (top center) rows Tom Fleischner, Evelyn Weinstein, and Steve Kress (left to right) to Hog Island in 1980.



Project Puffin

SEABIRD INSTITUTE

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ATLANTIC PUFFINS: PHOTO: JEAN HALL



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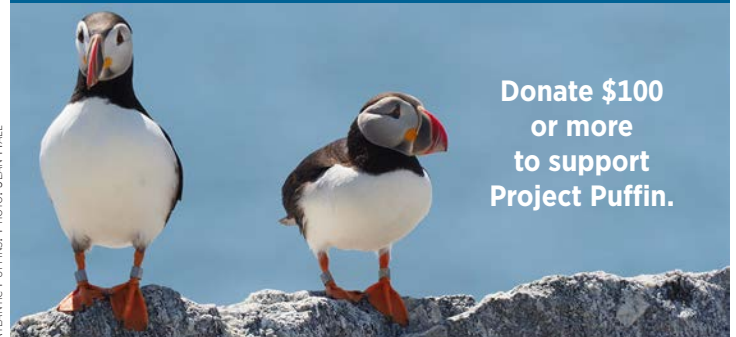


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