

INSTITUTE

# **Egg Rock Update**

NEWSLETTER OF NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY'S SEABIRD INSTITUTE







Protecting seabirds
and the places they need;
the Seabird Institute
advances worldwide
conservation action for
seabirds through cutting
edge science, educational
initiatives, and policy and
advocacy leadership.





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Laurie Bragg
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Manager: Eric Snyder

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Seabird Sanctuary Manager Paula Shannon

Conservation Specialist: Sue Schubel

Manager of Public Programs: Rosy Tucker

Project Puffin Visitor Center Manager: Susie Meadows Senior Coordinator, Tufted Puffins: Katherine Luscher

Office Coordinator: Kelly Bell-Brown Facilities Coordinator:

Jackson Day Senior Office Assistant:

Stacy DeHart
Assistant to the Directors:
Terry Mingle

Assistant Seabird Sanctuary Manager: Amanda McFarland

Communication and Outreach Assistant: Quinn Burkhart

Outreach and Education Assistants: Lauren Owen, Paige Tieken, Amy Welshimer

Hog Island Naturalist: Amanda Leemann

Hog Island Head Chef: Blythe Hazellief

Hog Island Sous Chef: Carter McDermott-

Hog Island Kitchen Assistants: Blair Clark, Isobel Mancini

Hog Island Camp Assistant Arden Kelly

### **Island Research Teams**

# Eastern Egg Rock Island Supervisor:

Alison Ballard
Research Assistants:
Hannah Leabhart Anna

Treadway, Ashley Wilkes

Jenny Island

Island Supervisor: Margaret Jensen Research Assistant Leah Volak

### **Matinicus Rock**

Island Supervisor: Tracey Faber

Research Assistants: Lily Benn, Peyton Caylor, Ashley Mayo

## **Outer Green Island**

Island Supervisor: Curtis Mahon Research Assistant:

## Pond Island NWR

Island Supervisor: Juliana Ramirez Research Assistant: Tori Smith

# Seal Island NWR

Island Supervisor: Coco Faber Research Assistants: Camilla Dupolos, Mark

# Price, Liv Ridley Stratton Island

Island Supervisor:
Ben Becker
Research Assistants:
Sophia Delmonte, Katelyn

# Shelton, Joe Sweeney Herz International Fellows

Rafael Ângel<mark>o Revorêdo,</mark> Brazil Dominique Qu<mark>irola, Ecuador</mark>

# Tomás Tomagno, Argentina PhD Students

Jackie Matthews, OSU Keenan Yakola, OSU

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Carrie Lindsey
Grants Specialist:
Connor Stillwell

### Coastal and Marine Resilience

Policy Director, Audubon CT: Rob LaFrance

Policy Manager, Marine Conservation: Remy Moncrieffe

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Zitske. Danielle D'Auria.

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Northeast Motus

Sally Obei

MountainFilm Communications Mary Ellen Muzio Dan Ober Clara Oliverson Glenn Olson

Jancie and Lenny Olson Oregon Parks and Recreation Department

Mitch Paine
Savannah Pierce

Kaden Pendleton

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Prouts Neck Yacht Club Isabela Riggs

Kirk Robinson
Laura Robinson

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University of Maine, Spruce Woods Research Team & Midden Minders Jane Upshur

USCG Rockland Scott Weidensaul Jeff Wells David West

Alexa Williams Heather Wyman Sara York

Sherrie York Zeiss Sports Optics

# Egg Rock Update Contributors

Writers:
Kimberly Faux
Don Lyons
Katherine Luscher
Rosy Tucker

Quinn Burkhart **Design:**Carli Heggen

Melanie Ryan

Cover photos: Jean Hall (3); Altantic Puffin, Keenan Yakola

Illustrations: Alex Tomlinson/Audubon

Tracking maps: Keenan Yakola



# Welcome to the Flock!

THIS SPRING, THE SEABIRD INSTITUTE welcomed Jackson Day to the team as Facilities Coordinator. Jackson brings a diversity of experience to this role, including having worked for Hurricane Island Outward Bound school and as a naturalist in California. He has worked on schooners and farms in Maine's midcoast region, as well as building a strong island maintenance skill set from from working on his family's properties on Swans Island.

Over the summer, Stacy DeHart came aboard as Senior Office Assistant. Her experience spans positions with higher education institutions, nonprofit organizations, and arts programming, with a consistent focus on creating well-organized, inclusive, and impactful experiences for a wide range of audiences.

Welcome to the team, Jackson and Stacy!



Photos from top: Laurie Bragg/Audubon; Alfonso Rodriguez

# A Note from the Directors

SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION and engagement in Maine and beyond were the hallmarks of our 2025 summer season. We advanced the hemispheric objectives of Audubon's Flight Plan through seabird island stewardship, science to inform and influence the development of offshore wind energy, and engagement of new communities of seabird advocates. Notable accomplishments included new Mindful Birding and Let's Go Birding Together sessions at Hog Island, the second highest Atlantic Puffin fledging rate ever seen at Matinicus Rock, the development of an Oregon Conservation Action Plan for Tufted Puffins, elevated awareness of the importance Atlantic Menhaden and other forage fish as critical seabird food, and the application of Institute tracking data to ensure bird-friendly offshore wind energy areas and practices in the Gulf of Maine and elsewhere. We're grateful for our permanent staff—11 place-based folks in the locations where we work, our seasonal staff-38 people strong, as well as our countless volunteers, partners and other supporters. In 2026 we look forward to growing our impact and celebrating the 90th anniversary of the Hog Island Audubon Camp, an incredible milestone of education and engagement. Enjoy our highlights in this year's Egg Rock Update and stay in touch!

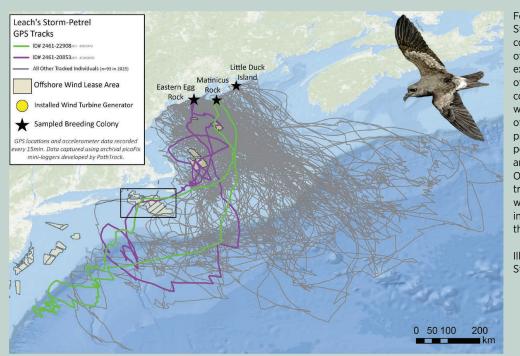
-Dr. Donald Lyons, Director of Conservation Science and Laurie Bragg, Center Director



Center Director, Laurie Bragg, and Director of Conservation Science, Don Lyons. Photo: Jean Hall



# **Assessing Ocean Development Via Seabird Tracking**



Foraging tracks of Leach's Storm-Petrels nesting at colonies in Maine. Routes of some storm-petrels extend as far south as off the mid-Atlantic coast and beyond U.S. waters. Two birds entered offshore wind energy protected areas (tan polygons) where turbines are currently active. One individual (purple track) veered around the wind turbines: the other individual flew through the array.

Illustration: Leach's Storm-Petrel, Tracy Faber.

THE SEABIRD INSTITUTE continued comprehensive tracking studies in 2025 to identify areas critical to seabird foraging and migration. The majority of this work occurred on species nesting across our Maine island sanctuary network, but we also supported tagging efforts in New Hampshire, California, Oregon, Alaska, and Brazil.

Offshore wind energy development has been a major focus, and as wind turbines are installed in waters off Virginia to Massachusetts, we are beginning to document exposure of seabirds to these structures. In August of this year, we recorded the first close-proximity interactions of Leach's Storm-Petrels with actively functioning offshore turbines likely the first interactions of any storm-petrel species with offshore wind anywhere in the world. Two individuals actively nesting in Maine entered a project south of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts (see map). These first tracks, and data collected in future years, will help us understand how storm-petrels and other species respond to turbines, allow

us to assess risk of collision and/or avoidance (and thus loss of habitat), and guide our advocacy for appropriate conservation measures for impacted species.

We are also exploring the use of tracking data to inform proposed ocean development activity in areas outside the U.S. during the migration and wintering period. This includes offshore wind in Canada and multiple Latin American countries. In addition

to ongoing hemispheric tracking of Roseate, Arctic, and Common Terns, this summer we initiated efforts to precisely track the post-breeding migration of Razorbills and Atlantic Puffins. Initial data indicated that many individuals of both alcid species quickly move northward into the Gulf of St. Lawrance in Canada, presumably to take advantage of high value forage fish aggregating there during the late summer and early fall.

Our tracking work continues to build on cutting edge innovation.

This summer, we tagged Common Tern fledglings for the first time, as part of a pilot study to hone safe tagging methods for these inexperienced flyers and ultimately observe their movements following colony departure. We were rewarded with sitings of the first tagged fledgling that departed the Stratton Island colony (where tagging was conducted) just a few days later at a staging site on Cape Cod.



Common Tern fledging fitted with a GPS tracking device on Stratton Island in July. This individual was later seen at a Cape Cod staging area, indicating a safe tag attachment. Photo: Keenan Yakola



Tufted Puffin. Photo: Clara Oliverson

# Collaborating to Bend the Bird Curve on the West Coast

# **Tufted Puffins**

TUFTED PUFFIN POPULATIONS along the California Current Marine Ecosystem have faced significant declines. In Oregon specifically, a 2021 coast-wide survey estimated that the Tufted Puffin population in the state was 553 individuals, down from over 6,000 in 1970. To address this decline, a new Tufted Puffin Conservation Working Group with representation from the National Audubon Society's Seabird Institute, Friends of

The plan's 10-year goal to 'halt the decline' is supported by five objectives:

- 1. Research
- 2. Restoration & Management
- 3. Policy Engagement
- 4. Education & Outreach
- 5. Collaboration & Coordination

Haystack Rock, Bird Alliance of Oregon, and others worked together to create Oregon's first Conservation Action Plan for the Tufted Puffin.

This new collaborative plan provides key players throughout Oregon with a comprehensive and coordinated path forward to protect active Tufted Puffin colonies, identify and reduce threats, and ultimately, restore and maintain a viable, resilient Tufted Puffin population in Oregon.



Tagged Ashy Storm-Petrel. Photo: Mike Parker, CIES

# **Ashy Storm-Petrels**

AS PART OF EFFORTS TO LEVERAGE EXPERTISE honed in Maine and provide broad benefits to seabirds throughout the hemisphere, the Seabird Institute provided tracking tags and guidance to support partners with the California Institute of Environmental Studies and National Park Service to tag Ashy Storm-Petrels in Channel Islands National Park (Santa Cruz Island) off Ventura, California. Ashy Storm-Petrels are a species of increasing conservation concern, and this initial tracking effort indicated overlap with the Morro Bay Wind Energy Area.







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# **Notable News from** the Seabird Islands

# 1. New banding and nesting record highs on four islands!

113 Razorbill burrows were counted at Seal Island NWR.

1,910 COTE Nests on Pond Island NWR

**1,637** COTE Nests on Stratton Island

37 Atlantic Puffin chicks, called "pufflings," were banded on Eastern Egg Rock.

Second highest Atlantic **Puffin productivity ever** at Matinicus Rock!

> Banding—fitting durable, identifying bands onto the legs of birds—is a vital part of bird research. The serialized numbers on each band help scientists track individual birds of many species across countless studies worldwide.

# 2. New species recorded nesting on three islands!

**Great Blue Herons nested** on Stratton Island

**American Oystercatchers** nested on Jenny Island

Carolina Wrens nested on Matinicus Rock

# 3. Bird of the Year

Formally known as Sterna dougallii, the Roseate Tern gets its common name from the ever-so-slight rosy tinge on its breast during the breeding season. Thanks to restoration efforts and habitat management, the New England coastline remains a popular chickrearing destination for the federally endangered species. This summer, a pair of "Rosies"-a term often used by Seabird Institute researchers-nested on Outer Green Island for the first time in four years.

The Seabird Institute continued its partnership with an international team working to address Roseate Tern conservation challenges both in the winter range (coastal Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina) and here in the United States. Director of **Conservation Science Don** Lyons returned to Brazil to assist with a second GPStagging campaign this past February. While there, the team captured and tagged a Roseate Tern that was originally banded on Stratton Island, home to the largest colony of the species in Maine. The bird returned to Stratton Island this summer, and Institute scientists are excited to see if the bird returns to the same location in Brazil this winter.



From top: Razorbills; Eastern Egg Rock Island Supervisor, Ali Ballard, with a newly banded puffling; Common Tern chick with its parent; American Oystercatchers. Photos: Jean Hall



Roseate Tern. Photo: Alfonso Rodriguez



Photo: Laurie Bragg/Audubon

Join the Bird of the Year celebration with our limitededition hats.

Artwork designed by Coco Faber, Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge Island Supervisor. Get yours today at shop.projectpuffin.org.

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# **Inspiring Students** through Seabird Science along Maine's Mid-coast

Kaden Pendleton has been telling the story of Eastern Egg Rock from a distance for a decade. This summer, he finally stepped foot on it.

# PUFFINS HAVE LONG BEEN PART OF MATH AND SCIENCE

lessons for the young students Kaden instructs at Wiscasset Elementary School, just 20 miles from the Seabird Institute's Bremen headquarters. During the summer school break, he works as a part-time captain for Hardy Boat puffin tours and thus circles Egg Rock regularly. As a captain, he not only steers the boat but also shares sightings and stories of interesting wildlife with passengers and crew. A key motivation for him is translating science and conservation work into a cohesive, compelling narrative, both in and out of his classroom.

Puffin boat tours, a partnership between Hardy Boat and Cap'n Fish Cruises and the Seabird Institute, venture out daily to Eastern Egg Rock, where Project Puffin began in the 70s. These sought-after tours demystify the story of Maine's puffin colonies. To enrich the visitor experience, on-board Audubon naturalists provide program history, share current efforts to conserve seabirds, and identify birds spotted throughout the trip. Kaden's decade-long career as captain and crew on the boat eventually persuaded him that he should get to know the island better. As it turns out, his students will be huge beneficiaries!

Wiscasset Elementary's science curriculum is connected to the marine ecosystem just off its shores. As students advance in their coursework, their seabird knowledge grows. Classes compete against each other through "penny war" fundraisers, the funds of which are used to adopt an Egg Rock puffin that the winning class gets to name. "We want the students to realize that science and seabird work doesn't just 'happen' by itself. As responsible citizens, they can help in a variety of ways," Kaden said.

And so, Kaden spent several weeks volunteering on Egg Rock this summer, fully immersing himself as a



Kaden with a puffling that was weighed and measured. Photo: Jean Hall

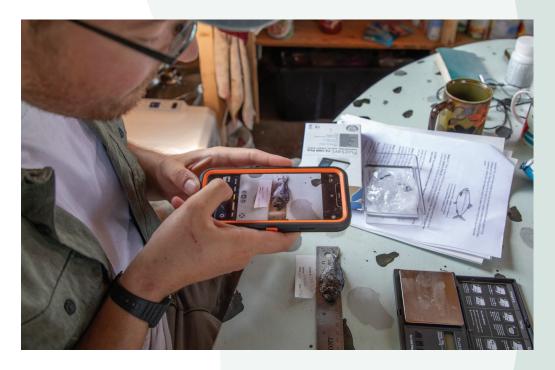
"puffineer". Volunteering works similarly to regular research roles: applicants are screened for outdoor skills and aptitude for island life. Depending on the need, they can participate for two weeks or up to a month. Treated equally to researchers, volunteers do resighting, data entry, take their turn to cook dinner for all, and may even band birds.

> "I love the ecotourism side of this project, which acted as a gateway to realizing I wanted to teach as well."

> > - Kaden Pendleton

"The opportunities out there are amazing. It was what I needed to further my understanding of how this project works, from the inside out," Kaden said.

You don't know what you don't know until you know it. This proves especially true when volunteers have to



"That's what science is about: finding solutions in new places."

- Kaden Pendleton

Kaden records a fish specimen that was dropped by a bird on Eastern Egg Rock. These little forage fish can tell scientists a lot about the health of the ocean.

decipher various terminologies used by the researchers. Kaden arrived on the island unsure what researchers meant when they said "kOH-tee" (written as COTE).

"It just means 'common tern', which is obvious once you know that. But that's another element of the project I understand now and can bring into the classroom and on the boats." Like many other volunteers, he was sad to leave the island when the time came.

Project Puffin has long been considered a place for young scientists and educators to build their field work skills, eventually flying the coop for other conservation and education efforts. Kaden is motivated to help his students realize they can do science at any age.

Classroom puffin burrows and bird blinds are under consideration for the next school year. Kaden is also interested in mimicking the banding part of the season, when chicks are safely pulled from their burrows to receive their unique tags. This vital part of seabird restoration allows researchers to monitor where individ ual birds have been seen elsewhere, on top of knowing their age and health of the colony. He says it would be fun to watch his students learn to collect data the same way he did.

In an era of artificial intelligence, smartphones, and other distractions, it can be hard for public educators to truly engage young students. That's where Kaden sees opportunity. His students will be spending time at Hog Island Audubon Camp in the fall, furthering the chance

them to learn from professional researchers. The realities of conducting field work and misconceptions about seabirds are subjects Kaden looks forward to sharing.

"Of course, humans can cause a lot of damage in many facets of life. But we can improve ourselves and the environment, too. That's what science is about: finding solutions in new places."



Seabird researchers monitor the growth of chicks through productivity studies. Kaden is measuring the wing length, more formally known as the wing chord, of an Atlantic Puffin chick. Photo: Jean Hall



# **Training Educators to Inspire Environmental Change**

## THE MODERN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION MOVEMENT has

some deep roots at the Hog Island Audubon Camp. Inspiring educators to share their passion for ecology and conservation with students has been a core tenet of the camp since operation began in 1936. Today, nearly 90 years later, Hog Island continues to bring people together to appreciate and understand birds and to inspire them to take actions to protect the world on which birds, and people, rely.

Hog Island's focus on training educators endures today through the camp session, Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week. The session offerings have evolved to meet the needs of today's teachers and incorporate trainings centered on indigenous studies, social-emotional learning, urban environmental education, and equity, diversity, and inclusion issues in outdoor spaces.

To ensure Audubon continues to inspire more new teachers—and future generations—to act on behalf of birds and people, program access has been increased by offering a discounted enrollment fee for educators based in Maine and across Audubon's network. Additionally, many generous sponsors send educators to Hog Island every summer. This season, two thirds of Sharing Nature participants were sponsored by local Audubon chapters and other birding groups.

If you would like to provide an unforgettable and lifechanging professional development opportunity to an educator in your community, consider becoming a sponsor! Sponsorship opportunities are available for all camp sessions. To learn more, contact Rosy Tucker at hogisland@audubon.org.



Hog Island Naturalist, Amanda Leemann, shares a specimen seen on a digital microscope. Photo: Jean Hall





Photo: Jean Hall

# **Sharing Seabird Stories**

# IT WAS A SUCCESSFUL

**SEASON** for our education and outreach team! Interpretation aboard Cap'n Fish's Cruises and Hardy **Boat Cruises inspired new** audiences from near and far. Lectures, bird walks, and, kid-friendly programming and bird walks, engaged new audiences at the Project **Puffin Visitor Center and** Todd Wildlife Sanctuary. The **Project Puffin Visitor Center** even broke the visitation record-just set in 2024!

# Thank you for supporting Audubon's Seabird Institute!

We are deeply grateful for the generosity of our 1,195 contributors who make our work possible. Thank you for helping us Save the Seabirds.

Christine and Thomas Brockmeyer\*

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Illustration: Jada Fitch

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**SAVE THE DATE!** 

90th Anniversar

Audubon | Hog Island Audubon Camp



will be held on August 22, 2026! Audubon Camp! A special celebration the 90th Anniversary of Hog Island Join us in 2026 as we commemorate

announced this spring. Stay tuned: registration details will be

# **2026 HOG ISLAND CAMP SESSIONS**

**Adult Sessions (Ages 18+)** 

Arts & Nature

Fall Migration and Monhegan

**Field Ornithology** 

Let's Go Birding Together

Photography of Maine's Birds & Landscapes Mindful Birding

Spring Migration and Monhegan Family Sessions (Families with children ages 9-13)

Family Camp I & II

Teen Sessions (Ages 14-17)

Arts & Nature for Teens **Mountains to Sea Birding for Teens** Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens I & II

All sessions subject to change. \*General camp registration opens November 17th.