



## APNewsBreak: Atlantic puffins in peril in US

By CLARKE CANFIELD

June 02, 2013



*FILE - In this file photo made in July 2007 an Atlantic puffin with a beak crammed with hake makes its way to a burrow to feed its chick, Monday July 9, 2007, on Eastern Egg Rock, Maine. Puffins raise one chick per year. Scores of puffins were found washed ashore in New England, with necropsies suggesting they starved to death. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty, file)*

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The Atlantic puffin population is at risk in the United States, and there are signs the seabirds are in distress in other parts of the world.

In the Gulf of Maine, the comical-looking seabirds have been dying of starvation and losing body weight, possibly because of shifting fish populations as ocean temperatures rise, according to scientists.

The survival rates of fledglings on Maine's two largest puffin colonies plunged last summer, and puffins are in declining health at the largest puffin colony in the Gulf, on a Canadian island about 10 miles off eastern Maine. Dozens of emaciated birds were found washed ashore in Massachusetts and Bermuda this past winter, likely victims of starvation.

Whether dead puffins will continue washing up on shore and puffin chick survival rates will stay low remains to be seen. But there are enough signals suggesting that puffins and other seabirds could be in trouble, said Rebecca Holberton, a professor at the University of Maine who has studied puffins for years.

"It's our marine canary in a coal mine, if you will," she said.

The situation has drawn the attention of scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, Mass., who are looking at how shifting fish populations can affect the productivity of puffins, as well as Arctic terns.

With its colorful striped beak, pear-shaped body and amusing waddle, the Atlantic puffin is sometimes called the clown of the sea. It's also held up as a poster child for successful seabird restoration.

An estimated 6 to 8 million puffins live across the North Atlantic, from Maine to northern Russia. But they almost disappeared from Maine after settlers hunted them in the late 1800s for food, eggs and feathers. By 1901, only one pair of puffins nested in Maine, on remote Matinicus Rock.

Steve Kress, director of the National Audubon Society's seabird restoration program, has worked to restore and maintain the puffin population off the Maine coast for the past 40 years. Puffins spend most of their lives at sea, coming ashore only to breed each spring before returning to the ocean in August. The chicks swim to sea about 40 days after hatching and typically return to the islands after two years.

More than 2,000 of the birds are now in Maine, the vast majority on three islands. But the chick survival rates on the two largest colonies took a dive last summer, possibly because of a lack of herring, their primary food source, Kress said.

On Seal Island, a national wildlife refuge 20 miles offshore that's home to about 1,000 puffins, only 31 percent of the laid eggs produced fledglings, down from the five-year average of 77 percent. Similar numbers were experienced at Matinicus Rock, a nearby island with more than 800 birds.

Instead of feeding their young primarily herring, puffin parents were giving them large numbers of butterfish, a more southerly fish that's becoming more abundant in the Gulf or perhaps more accessible to seabirds because they've moved higher up in the water column. But the chicks ended up starving to death because the butterfish were too big and round for them to swallow, Kress said. Piles of uneaten butterfish were found next to some of the dead birds.

Kress thinks the upward trend in Gulf of Maine water temperatures could be to blame, with last year's record readings causing butterfish to grow faster earlier in the season because of an early phytoplankton bloom, upon which they feed. With a low survival rate, unexplained die-offs and extreme ocean conditions washing away puffin burrows on Seal Island — something he's never seen before — Kress is concerned about what future years will bring.

The puffins in the Gulf of Maine are particularly vulnerable because they live on the outer edge of the bird's geographic range. Moreover, there are signs of distress elsewhere — die-offs in the North Sea and population declines in Iceland, home to more than half the world puffin population, and other places — that have raised fears that extreme weather and warmer ocean waters brought about by climate change may be affecting the birds.

"We don't know how the puffin will adapt to these changes — or if they'll adapt to these conditions," Kress said.

The Gulf of Maine's largest puffin colony — with more than 10,000 birds — is found on Machias Seal Island on the Maine-Canada border 10 miles off the eastern Maine coast. There, the average body weight of both adult and baby puffins has been on the decline, most likely because of a shortage of food, said Tony Diamond, a University of New Brunswick professor who studies puffins on Machias Seal. The amount of herring in the puffin's diet has been falling by about 5 percent a year, he said.

What's more, puffins on Machias Seal are breeding later this year than any time on record, another sign of stress, Diamond said.

Another big concern is the unprecedented puffin die-offs this past winter. More than 2,500 dead puffins were found washed ashore in Scotland, and about 40 of the birds (along with hundreds of razorbills) were found on the Massachusetts shore. More dead puffins were found in Bermuda.

For every bird found dead, there are probably tens or hundreds more that died and didn't wash ashore, scientists agree.

"That's a large number of birds for the Gulf of Maine," Kress said. "We don't have that many birds to spare."

Necropsies on the Cape Cod birds indicated they starved, said Julie Ellis, project director for The Seabird Ecological Assessment Network at Tufts University.

Diamond has seen other seabird colonies virtually vanish overnight. Machias Seal Island used to have more than 3,000 terns, the largest such colony in the Gulf of Maine. But since 2007, only small numbers have come back each summer, and those that have returned haven't been able to breed, Diamond said.

Nobody knows what the future holds for puffins, but anything's possible, he said.

"In the Gulf of Maine, we're on the southern end of the bird's range. It looks like the range might be set to contract northward," Diamond said.

Kress is hopeful the Gulf population will sustain itself. But he's concerned about what he's seeing.

"You never know what climate change will bring," he said. "Historic fish could move out and more southerly fish could move in, and puffins may adapt to the new fish. Only they will know how the story will unfold."

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**Bloomberg  
Businessweek**

## Scientists warn Atlantic puffins in peril in US

By Clarke Canfield

June 03, 2013

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — The Atlantic puffin population is at risk in the United States, and there are signs the seabirds are in distress in other parts of the world.

Scientists say the comical-looking seabirds have been dying of starvation and losing body weight, possibly because of shifting fish populations as ocean temperatures rise.

The fledgling survival rates at Maine's two largest puffin colonies plunged last summer, and the average weight of puffins on Canada's Machias Seal Island off eastern Maine has been falling since 2000. Dozens of emaciated puffins were found washed ashore in Massachusetts and Bermuda this past winter, likely victims of starvation.

Scientists say puffins appear to be eating more butterfish and not as much herring, puffins' preferred food, possibly because of warming waters.

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## Atlantic puffin population is in danger, scientists warn

Fledglings are not surviving and adults' health is declining in major colonies in Maine as scientists see risks elsewhere, too

[guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk),

June 03, 2013



An Atlantic puffin flies with a mouthful of hake on its way to feed its chick on Eastern Egg Rock, Maine.  
Photograph: Robert F Bukaty/AP

The Atlantic puffin population is at risk in the [United States](#), and there are signs the seabirds are in distress in other parts of the world.

In the Gulf of [Maine](#), the comical-looking seabirds have been dying of starvation and losing body weight, possibly because of shifting fish populations as ocean temperatures rise, according to scientists.

The survival rates of fledglings on Maine's two largest puffin colonies plunged last summer, and puffins are in declining health at the largest puffin colony in the gulf, on a Canadian island about 10 miles off eastern Maine. Dozens of emaciated [birds](#) were found washed ashore in Massachusetts and Bermuda this past winter, likely victims of starvation.

Whether dead puffins will continue washing up on shore and puffin chick survival rates will stay low remains to be seen. But there are enough signals suggesting that puffins and other seabirds could be in trouble, said Rebecca Holberton, a professor at the University of Maine who has studied puffins for years.

"It's our marine canary in a coal mine, if you will," she said.

The situation has drawn the attention of scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, who are looking at how shifting fish populations can affect the productivity of puffins, as well as Arctic terns.

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Steve Kress, director of the National Audubon Society's seabird restoration program, has worked to restore and maintain the puffin population off the Maine coast for the past 40 years. Puffins spend most of their lives at sea, coming ashore only to breed each spring before returning to the ocean in August. The chicks swim to sea about 40 days after hatching and typically return to the islands after two years.

More than 2,000 of the birds are now in Maine, the vast majority on three islands. But the chick survival rates on the two largest colonies took a dive last summer, possibly because of a lack of herring, their primary food source, Kress said.

On Seal Island, a national [wildlife](#) refuge 20 miles offshore that's home to about 1,000 puffins, only 31% of the laid eggs produced fledglings, down from the five-year average of 77%. Similar numbers were experienced at Matinicus Rock, a nearby island with more than 800 birds.

Instead of feeding their young primarily herring, puffin parents were giving them large numbers of butterfish, a more southerly fish that's becoming more abundant in the gulf or perhaps more accessible to seabirds because they've moved higher up in the water column. But the chicks ended up starving to death because the butterfish were too big and round for them to swallow, Kress said. Piles of uneaten butterfish were found next to some of the dead birds.

Kress thinks the upward trend in Gulf of Maine water temperatures could be to blame, with last year's record readings causing butterfish to grow faster earlier in the season because of an early phytoplankton bloom, upon which they feed. With a low survival rate, unexplained die-offs and extreme ocean conditions washing away puffin burrows on Seal Island – something he's never seen before – Kress is concerned about what future years will bring.

The puffins in the Gulf of Maine are particularly vulnerable because they live on the outer edge of the bird's geographic range. Moreover, there are signs of distress elsewhere – die-offs in the North Sea and population declines in Iceland, home to more than half the world puffin population, and other places – that have raised fears that extreme weather and warmer ocean waters brought about by climate change may be affecting the birds.

"We don't know how the puffin will adapt to these changes — or if they'll adapt to these conditions," Kress said.

Another big concern is the unprecedented puffin die-offs this past winter. More than 2,500 dead puffins were found washed ashore in Scotland, and about 40 of the birds (along with hundreds of razorbills) were found on the Massachusetts shore. More dead puffins were found in Bermuda.

For every bird found dead, there are probably tens or hundreds more that died and didn't wash ashore, scientists agree.

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Nobody knows what the future holds for puffins, but anything's possible, he said.

"In the Gulf of Maine, we're on the southern end of the bird's range. It looks like the range might be set to contract northward," Diamond said.

Kress is hopeful the gulf population will sustain itself. But he's concerned about what he's seeing.

"You never know what climate change will bring," he said. "Historic fish could move out and more southerly fish could move in, and puffins may adapt to the new fish. Only they will know how the story will unfold."

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## Warming Ocean Puts Puffins in Peril

by [Kieran Mulvaney](#)

Jun 04, 2013



North American populations of Atlantic puffins - rotund seabirds with black-and-white plumage and rainbow-colored beaks - may be in trouble, [according to a recent report](#), with altered conditions as a result of climate change possibly to blame.

### Video: What's an Ocean Garbage Patch?

In the past - particularly in the nineteenth century - puffins were imperiled across large swaths of their Atlantic range by [overhunting for their meat and eggs](#). Since then, they have mostly rebounded, although the birds are still hunted food in some locales, and in Iceland - where there are reckoned to be [several million of the birds](#) - there have been calls for the [hunt to be suspended](#) because of renewed concerns over its sustainability. Elsewhere, on some islands puffins may be at risk from introduced animals such as rats; conversely, in the North Sea, the population is sufficiently robust that it appears to have [withstood the deaths of over 3,500 birds](#) in fierce storms earlier this year.

But, on the western side of the Atlantic, scientists are troubled by the fact that, [according to the Associated Press](#):

*The survival rates of fledglings on Maine's two largest puffin colonies plunged last summer, and puffins are in declining health at the largest puffin colony in the Gulf, on a Canadian island about 10 miles off eastern Maine. Dozens of emaciated birds were found washed ashore in Massachusetts and Bermuda this past winter, likely victims of starvation ... On Seal Island [in Maine], a national wildlife refuge 20 miles offshore that's home to about 1,000 puffins, only 31 percent of the laid eggs produced fledglings, down*

*from the five-year average of 77 percent. Similar numbers were experienced at Matinicus Rock, a nearby island with more than 800 birds.*

The AP's Clarke Canfield reports that instead of feeding their chicks herring, the puffin parents were attempting to feed them butterfish, which were too big for the chicks to swallow. Butterfish is a more southerly species of fish that has become more abundant in the Gulf of Maine as waters have warmed, or perhaps more accessible to seabirds because it has moved higher up in the water column; according to Steve Kress of the National Audubon Society's seabird restoration program, exceptionally warm water temperatures in the Gulf of Maine last year may have prompted an earlier-than-usual phytoplankton bloom, resulting in an early-season boost in numbers of butterfish.

It remains to be seen whether this is a harbinger of future years, or whether, if such changes are a sign of the 'new normal' in the Gulf region, puffins will be able to adapt. Some, however - seeing precipitous declines in some other area seabird colonies - are concerned that starving puffins may be a symptom of a broader problem.

As Rebecca Holberton, a puffin expert at the University of Maine, told Canfield, the seabirds "are our marine canary in the coal mine, if you will."

*Photograph of Atlantic puffins on Machias Seal Island by Thomas O'Neill, via Wikimedia Commons*

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## Warming oceans are killing baby puffins

By John Upton

June 04, 2012

Atlantic puffins — sometimes called the clowns of the sea because of their squat bodies and odd waddles — are finding themselves in a particularly unfunny predicament.

Scientists think warming ocean temperatures are driving the puffins' normal meals of herring away from the coastlines; they're being replaced with other fish that are too large for puffin fledglings to swallow.

We told you in May that record-breaking Atlantic coastal water temperatures were driving some fish away. And on Friday we quoted Oceana scientist Matthew Huelsenbeck warning that the warming of the oceans is "causing significant changes to marine ecosystems."

Well, what could be a more dramatic poster child for these impacts than the vision of adorable pufflings starving to death? From the Associated Press:

Steve Kress, director of the National Audubon Society's seabird restoration program, has worked to restore and maintain the puffin population off the Maine coast for the past 40 years. Puffins spend most of their lives at sea, coming ashore only to breed each spring before returning to the ocean in August. The chicks swim to sea about 40 days after hatching and typically return to the islands after two years.

More than 2,000 of the birds are now in Maine, the vast majority on three islands. But the chick survival rates on the two largest colonies took a dive last summer, possibly because of a lack of herring, their primary food source, Kress said.

On Seal Island, a national wildlife refuge 20 miles offshore that's home to about 1,000 puffins, only 31 per cent of the laid eggs produced fledglings, down from the five-year average of 77 per cent. Similar numbers were experienced at Matinicus Rock, a nearby island with more than 800 birds.

Instead of feeding their young primarily herring, puffin parents were giving them large numbers of butterfish, a more southerly fish that's becoming more abundant in the Gulf [of Maine] or perhaps more accessible to seabirds because they've moved higher up in the water column. But the chicks ended up starving to death because the butterfish were too big and round for them to swallow, Kress said. Piles of uneaten butterfish were found next to some of the dead birds.

Perhaps the puffins could raid area homes and steal fish knives.

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## Puffins in Peril

Scientists warn that the seabird's population is at risk in the U.S.

By Kelli Plasket with AP reporting

June 05, 2013



ROBERT F. BUKATY—AP

An Atlantic puffin flies with a mouthful of fish to feed its chick on Eastern Egg Rock, Maine. Researchers attached a leg band to the seabird for collecting data.

Thousands of puffins—a popular seabird known for its cute appearance—live in Maine and on islands in the Gulf of Maine. But the puffins may be in danger. Last summer, the percentage of laid eggs that successfully produced baby puffins took a dive. Scientists also found a decline in the average body weight of the adult and baby puffins on Machias Seal Island, home to the area's largest colony. Over the winter, dozens of the seabirds from the region were found dead, likely from starvation.



BETTY WILEY—GETTY IMAGES

A pair of puffins stand on Machias Seal Island, home to the Gulf of Maine's largest puffin colony.

What's causing the puffin trouble? Scientists think it may be a shortage of food. With ocean temperatures rising, fish populations have moved around. Normally, puffins' primary food source is herring, a type of fish. A lack of herring in

the area could be causing the problem. Tony Diamond, a professor from the University of New Brunswick who studies puffins on Machias Seal, says the amount of herring in the puffin's diet has been falling by about 5% a year.

Butterfish from the south have become more abundant in the Gulf of Maine and could be a new food source for birds. But Steve Kress, director of the National Audubon Society's seabird restoration program, says butterfish may be too big and round for baby puffins to swallow. "We don't know how the puffin will adapt to these changes—or if they'll adapt to these conditions," Kress told the Associated Press.

## **Protecting Puffins**

The Atlantic puffin is a small, waddling seabird with a colorful striped beak and pear-shaped body, earning it the nickname "clown of the sea." Puffins spend most of their lives at sea. They come ashore to breed each spring and return to the ocean in August. The chicks swim to sea about 40 days after hatching. Puffin populations stretch across the North Atlantic, from Maine to northern Russia.

Maine's puffin population has been at risk in the past. In the 1800s, they were hunted for their food, eggs and feathers. By 1901, only one pair of puffins remained in the state. Thanks to the help of local lighthouse keepers and seabird restoration programs, the state's puffin population has been restored to more than 2,000 birds.

Now, the birds in the Gulf are facing a new challenge to their survival—and they aren't alone. Since 2007, Machias Seal Island's tern population has almost disappeared. In Iceland, which is home to more than half the world's puffins, and other places, scientists have also seen puffin population declines.

Scientists aren't sure what will happen to the Gulf of Maine's puffins. The birds may move further north. Kress says he hopes the Gulf population will sustain itself but that there's cause for concern. "You never know what climate change will bring," Kress said. "Historic fish could move out and more southerly fish could move in, and puffins may adapt to the new fish. Only they will know how the story will unfold."

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# Starving puffins indicate trouble at sea

By Abigail Curtis

June 05, 2013



Bob Duchesne  
Atlantic puffins

BELFAST, Maine — Maine seabirds — including the iconic Atlantic puffin — may be in trouble. Researchers are concerned about starving chicks and dead birds that washed up this winter off Cape Cod and Scotland.

Lately, the razorbill, a species related to puffins, has been demonstrating unusual behavior as well. The seabirds veered far south of their normal migration patterns this year and ended up in Florida instead of the Gulf of Maine for the winter.

Dr. Steve Kress, the director of the National Audubon Society's Seabird Restoration Program, said that the troubling events coincided with warmer water temperatures along the eastern seaboard and abnormally big storms such as last fall's Superstorm Sandy.

Those meteorological phenomena have been connected to climate change, which he said is a new dilemma for seabirds. Puffins were brought back from the brink of extinction in Maine in the early 1900s, and Kress and others are hoping they will not face another major decline.

"Puffins, because they eat fish, are a very good indicator of what's going on in the oceans," he said Wednesday, calling the colorful seabirds the "ocean canary."

"For all the work that we do and have done to restore the puffins, it can be undone by these conditions that are maybe unfolding."

About six to eight million Atlantic puffins live around the North Atlantic Ocean, nesting in Labrador, Maine, France, Iceland, Greenland and northern Russia. An estimated 2,000 of the birds live in Maine.

He said that scientists are waiting to see what happens with this year's puffin chicks, which will soon hatch in their nesting colonies off the coast of Maine. They are hoping for a different outcome than last year, when parent puffins had trouble finding herring, the usual food for their fledglings. Instead, they brought a larger fish called butterfish back to their nests.

"We found dead puffin chicks surrounded by large butterfish," Kress said. "We realized that the little chicks were actually starving ... these fish were larger than the puffins' beak. They struggled to swallow the fish."

Earlier this spring, 3,500 puffins washed up on the shore of Scotland following a series of storms. In Cape Cod, at least 40 puffins and 400 other seabirds died this spring, including 200 razorbills, he said. Many of those birds had not gotten enough food to maintain their body weight or molt out of their drabber winter plumage.

It's not the first challenge for seabirds. Maine puffins were over-hunted in the 1800s for food, eggs and feathers, Kress said. By 1901, only one nesting pair was left in Maine on Matinicus Rock. But conservation efforts over the last decades have paid off. He began a program to re-establish a puffin colony on Eastern Egg Rock off the coast of Knox County 40 years ago. Through Project Puffin, researchers moved puffin chicks from a colony in Newfoundland and raised them on Eastern Egg Rock so that the birds would eventually return to raise their own chicks.

The plan is working, he said, with more than 100 pairs of puffins nesting there now. Some other Maine colonies are located on Seal Island, Great Duck Island, Matinicus Rock and Petit Manan.

Those interested in puffins can watch them via a [live camera on Seal Island](#), located 18 miles offshore of Rockland. It is also possible to adopt a puffin by making a donation to Audubon through [projectpuffin.org](#). The funds help the group keep student interns on the offshore islands during the summer to scare away predators and monitor the birds, according to Kress.

Puffin popularity has not waned as more than 10,000 people in Maine each summer board boats to view them in their offshore island colonies.

"I think the little puffin is charismatic enough to capture people's attention," Kress said. "I hope the message about the puffins being the ocean canary will be something people will care about and think about. We don't have to be actually shooting the birds to destroy them. We can have our effects just by our lifestyles: our carbon footprint, our choice of eating sustainable fish, our use of plastics. All of this affects the seabird's world."

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## Atlantic puffins are in danger

By — Associated Press

June 30, 2013



An Atlantic puffin flies with a mouthful of hake on its way to feed its chick... (Robert F. Bukaty/Associated...)

The Atlantic puffin population, which nearly disappeared 100 years ago, is once again at risk in the United States.

In the Gulf of Maine, the funny-looking seabirds have been dying of starvation and losing body weight, possibly because fish are moving away from the area as ocean temperatures rise, according to scientists.

The survival rates of fledglings, or puffin chicks, in Maine's two largest puffin colonies plunged last summer, and puffins are in declining health at the largest puffin colony in the gulf, on a Canadian island about 10 miles off eastern Maine. Dozens of very thin birds were found washed ashore in Massachusetts and Bermuda this past winter, probably victims of starvation.

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## Puffins On Maine Islands Flock Home

By DAVID SHARP

July, 14, 2013



In this July 1, 2013, photo, a puffin looks around after emerging from its burrow on Eastern Egg Rock off the Maine coast. Forty years ago biologists launched a re colonization effort called the Puffin Project by transplanting puffin chicks from Newfoundland to man-made burrows on the island. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)

PORTLAND, Maine -- The cute and comical seabirds called puffins have returned to several Maine islands and are finding plenty of food for their young chicks unlike last summer when many starved.

Young puffins died at an alarming rate last season because of a shortage of herring, leaving adults to try to feed them another type of fish that was too big to swallow. Some chicks died surrounded by piles of uneaten fish.

This summer, the chicks are getting plenty of hake and herring, said Steve Kress, director of the National Audubon Society's seabird restoration program and professor at Cornell University.

But researchers remain concerned.

Occupancy of puffin burrows on Matinicus Rock and at Seal Island, the two largest U.S. puffin colonies, are down by at least a third this season, Kress said. That likely means many birds died over the winter and others were too weak to produce offspring this season, he said.

With colorful beaks, puffins look like a cross between a penguin and a parrot. They spend most of their lives at sea, coming ashore only to breed each spring, drawing camera-toting tourists by the boatload before the birds depart late in the summer.

The puffins were nearly wiped out a century ago.

So 40 years ago, Kress and his team of researchers launched a recolonization effort called the Puffin Project by transplanting chicks from Newfoundland to man-made burrows on remote Eastern Egg Rock in Muscongus Bay.

Later, they were transplanted to other Maine islands.

Because puffins are less adaptable than other seabirds, they're more vulnerable to environmental changes and serve as a good indicator of the health of oceans and the availability of certain types of fish, Kress said.

There's no guarantee that there won't be more die-offs in the Gulf of Maine as there have been elsewhere, including in Norway and Scotland's Shetland Islands.

"It could happen here. We will learn. The puffins will teach us about the oceans and what's happening to them," Kress said.

## Puffins Return To Maine For Nesting Season, But Climate Peril Looms

By Roxanne Palmer

July 15 2013

Like the swallows returning to Capistrano, the puffins are winging their way back to their nesting grounds around the Atlantic – including two islands off the coast of Maine that play host to the largest colonies of the birds in the U.S.



Puffins returning to Maine islands for the breeding season in 2009. Flickr/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Northeast Region

This year's nesting season looks to be a more joyful occasion than last summer, when many puffin chicks starved to death. A shortage of herring meant that puffin parents could only offer their young fish foods like butterfish, which were much too big for the little birds to swallow. Thankfully, this season more bite-sized food is plentiful, according to Steve Kress, a Cornell University professor who's also the director of the National Audubon Society's seabird restoration program.

"This summer, the chicks are getting plenty of hake and herring," Kress told the Associated Press.



oskaree  
Photography

An Icelandic puffin carries its meal to go. Flickr via Creative Commons/oskaree

The puffin looks a bit like a penguin decked out for Carnival – though its body is tuxedo-like, it sports a brightly colored beak with strips of reddish orange and spots of yellow. It spends most of its life at sea, swimming, hunting, and bobbing atop the waves. Though only about 10 inches long, these birds have impressive stats: they can dive up to 200 feet below the surface; in flight, they can reach speeds of up to 55 miles an hour. Atlantic puffins nest all across the North Atlantic, from Maine up to Canada, Greenland and Iceland, and across the ocean on the shores of England and Scandinavia.

The two Maine islands with the largest U.S. puffin colonies are the 22-acre **Matinicus Rock** and the 65-acre **Seal Island**. Both islands are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Audubon Society. Seal Island is closed year-round because of unexploded ordnance scattered about the refuge, thanks to its former life providing bombing target practice for the U.S. Navy. Matinicus Rock is closed to the public during the puffin breeding season, from April to August.



Puffin mating pairs sometimes touch beaks in a courtship display called "billing." Flickr/USFWS Northeast

This year there are a lot of vacancies at the burrows on Seal Island and Matinicus Rock – occupancy is down by at least one-third, Kress told the AP. Some birds probably died during the winter; others couldn't muster the strength to have offspring this season.

Many researchers worry that the puffin is already suffering ill effects from climate change. Puffin burrows on Seal Island are being washed away by unusually extreme storms at sea. The warming waters of the Gulf of Maine might be contributing to a boom in the butterfish population, crowding out the herring that puffins need to feed their young. Adult and baby puffins on Machias Seal Island (a different place than Maine's Seal Island, located a bit further north on the Maine-Canada border) have been thinner and thinner in recent years. Puffin populations in the North Sea have seen massive die-offs – just this last winter, 2,500 dead puffins washed up on the coast of Scotland, many of them showing signs of starvation.

Exactly what's contributing to puffin declines and deaths isn't certain. But scientists think that what's bad for the puffin is bad for other birds and sea life as well.

"It's our marine canary in a coal mine, if you will," Rebecca Holberton, a puffin researcher at the University of Maine, told the AP in June.

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## Researchers: Maine's puffin population is at risk

**Thursday, July 25, 2013**

(NECN: Marnie MacLean) - They are cute and comical, and every summer thousands of tourists board boats to try and catch a glimpse of the puffin.

The birds that live most of their lives at sea return to Maine each summer to breed.

Restoring them to several islands off the coast of Maine has taken decades, and now researchers are concerned for their future. Last summer, many puffin chicks starved, since warmer ocean waters made it harder for puffin parents to find herring, and instead they caught butterfish, which were too big for the chicks to eat.

Researchers say more puffins washed up on shore over the winter, an indication that perhaps adult birds were also starving.

Stephen Kress, the director of the National Audubon Society's Seabird Restoration Program says it was a sign that climate change is having an impact.

According to Kress, "The oceans are the lungs of the planet, if puffins can't survive on it, what effect will it have on everything else?"

Thankfully, the news is better this summer. Puffins are finding herring and bringing it back to their chicks. Kress calls it a good sign, but worry remains.

Video:

[http://www.necn.com/07/25/13/Researchers-Maines-puffin-population-is-landing\\_mobile.html?blockID=847585&feedID=11106](http://www.necn.com/07/25/13/Researchers-Maines-puffin-population-is-landing_mobile.html?blockID=847585&feedID=11106)

[Click here](#) to learn more about Project Puffin and [click here](#) to watch a live puffin cam.

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# Helping restore puffins in Maine

By Marnie MacLean,

July 26, 2013



**MUSCONGUS BAY, Maine (NECN)** - Forty years. That's how long Steve Kress has been making the trip from mid-coast Maine to a seven acre island in Muscongus Bay. Kress had the vision to turn Eastern Egg Rock into the world's first restored seabird colony.

**PHOTOS:** [Puffins in Maine](#)

It started with 6 chicks back in 1973. Today, it is a noisy community and the star of the island: The puffin. The small bird with the colorful beaks are a tourist attraction. During their short breeding season boats circle the island all day long.

While tourists worry about getting a good photo, Kress and his team are concerned about what they are seeing--or not seeing--on the island.

Normally, puffin parents bring home mouthfuls of herring to feed their young. Last summer, they couldn't find enough of the small fish....and brought back larger butterfish.

About half of the chicks died last year, and more dead puffins washed up on shore this past winter. One of the reasons puffins get so much attention is because researchers say the health of the puffin is a good indicator as to how well the ocean is doing. Kress says the signs of climate change are becoming clear, warmer waters, rising oceans, more rain.

For the researchers who live on Eastern Egg Rock studying seabirds, it was heartbreaking to watch the puffins struggle last summer. Thankfully, the news is better this summer. Puffins are finding herring and bringing it back to their chicks. Kress calls it a good sign, but worry remains. Restoring this bird to Maine has been his life's passion but keeping them here will take more than one person.

Video:

<http://www.wcsh6.com/news/article/251076/2/Helping-restore-puffins-in-Maine>

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