



Egg Rock Update

Newsletter of the Seabird Restoration Program of the National Audubon Society

PIONEER PUFFINS SPEED COLONY GROWTH ON SEAL ISLAND

The puffin colony on Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) can boast 25 nesting pairs after this summer, continuing a trend of steady growth since 1992.

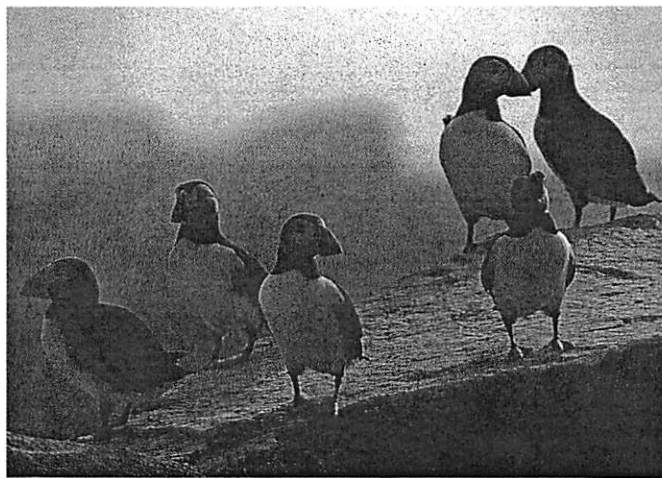
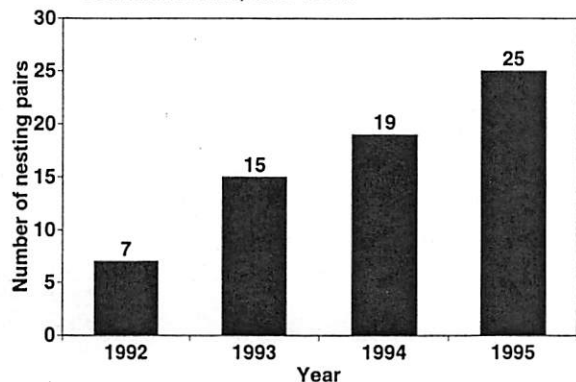
Seal Island NWR, located in Penobscot Bay approximately 20 miles offshore from Rockland, Maine, was once the largest puffin colony on mid-coast Maine, but hunting for food and feathers in the late 1800s led to the loss of the colony by 1887.

In 1984, National Audubon Society, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service began a restoration effort patterned after our innovative program to restore the Eastern Egg Rock puffin colony in Muscongus Bay. This was also a chance to test the methodology on a much larger island (100 acres vs. 7-acre Eastern Egg Rock.) Seal's closer proximity to Matinicus Rock could also affect the eventual outcome of the project since the Matinicus colony could either lure away the translocated puffin chicks or contribute puffins.

A total of 912 translocated puffin chicks were reared in sod burrows and released from Seal Island NWR between 1984 and 1989. Of these, 155 were later sighted at Seal Island or at other puffin colonies in the Gulf of Maine. Three years after the last chicks were translocated, seven pairs colonized Seal. The number of nesting pairs grew to 15 in 1993, to 19 in 1994, and to 25 this year.

The proximity of Seal Island to Matinicus Rock (6 miles west) and to Machias Seal Island (85 miles northeast) is turning out to be an important factor affecting the growth of the Seal Island colony. At Eastern Egg Rock four years after colonization, 88% of breeding puffins were translocated birds. In contrast, only 48% of the puffins currently breeding at Seal Island were Newfoundland chicks reared by Project Puffin interns. Apparently Eastern Egg Rock has a

The number of nesting Atlantic Puffin pairs at Seal Island NWR, 1992-1994.



Stephen W. Kress

Atlantic Puffins congregating on the Seal Island NWR loafing ledges. Non-translocated "pioneer" birds from nearby puffin colonies on Matinicus Rock and Machias Seal Island are speeding the colony's growth.

slower rate of colony growth because of its isolated location at the southern end of the puffins' breeding range. This year, Egg Rock's colony increased by one pair versus six at Seal Island. This supports the hypothesis that pioneer birds in search of a colony site are visiting Seal Island.

Most of Seal's non-translocated puffins probably originated at Matinicus Rock or Machias Seal Island. Two of the Seal Island breeders were banded as chicks at Matinicus Rock and another was banded as a chick at Machias Seal. The rising number of non-translocated puffins at Seal is also apparent in the loafing congregations, where on average about 75% of the birds were unbanded. The size of the groups frequenting the island's "loafing ledges" also increased this summer, with as many as 63 puffins in sight at one time. Clearly, these pioneer puffins are making a difference in the rate of growth of the new Seal Island colony.

Atlantic Puffin nesting pairs in Maine

| | 1994 | 1995 |
|------------------|------|------|
| Eastern Egg Rock | 15 | 16 |
| Matinicus Rock | 129 | 136 |
| Seal Island NWR | 19 | 25 |
| Petit Manan NWR* | 5 | 17 |

*managed by College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine

GOAT AND SHEEP GRAZING CREATES TERN HABITAT

Sheep and other livestock have been a part of island life on the Maine coast for the past 300 years. The earliest settlers lived on the islands, and their livestock helped clear vegetation while providing meat, milk, and wool. In the 1830s, Maine was one of the largest sheep grazing states in the Northeast. Islands were a popular place for sheep since the grazers were safe from predators and fencing was unnecessary. To enhance islands for sheep, farmers often planted pasture grasses such as timothy and quack grass which provided ample forage throughout the year. Hardy livestock were sometimes left on the islands to overwinter. Island sheep require minimal shelter and can sustain themselves on vegetation and the rainwater that collects in pools.

Seed for pasture grasses, however, usually contains weed seed and the combination of grass and weeds greatly reduced the amount of nesting habitat for terns. On Eastern Egg Rock, for example, at least 75% of the island is dominated by these alien plants. Over the past 10 years we have experimented with a variety of methods for controlling vegetation, including burning, applying rock salt, and using landscape fabric barriers (see *Egg Rock Updates* 1986 and 1990.) With the exception of the fabric technique, these improvements benefit terns for only a single season.

Grazing has potential as a new tool for seabird managers. The grazers consume tall plants, exposing low-growing grasses, bare soil, and rock outcrops. These areas are readily used by nesting terns.

In the fall of 1994, we began a study of sheep and goat grazing on introduced pasture grasses at Seal Island NWR. The project is a cooperative study conducted by National Audubon and Petit Manan NWR biologists. To minimize possible disturbance to the newly restored Seal Island colony, we brought the

grazers to the island after the terns departed for their winter home in the southern hemisphere. The fall study was intended to find out if fall-grazed habitat would be suitable for terns the following spring.

Three mature ewes were brought to Seal Island NWR in early September from nearby Metinic Island where sheep breeders have established a hardy Cheviot-like breed. The sheep were placed in an electric fenced area adjacent to a pen that held two Cashmere wethers (castrated male goats.) The five animals were tended until Halloween by Sue Schubel and Kristin Williamson who compared the behavior of the two grazers and studied their impact on vegetation by sampling plant height, percent ground cover and species composition before and after the grazing.

To look at the effects of summer grazing, we brought the goats and two of the sheep back to the island in June and kept them in electric fenced areas until August. The area selected for the summer grazing project was distant from the tern colony. Like the fall grazing regime, summer grazing was intended to create new tern habitat that would benefit terns the next nesting season.

While the final analysis of the project is not complete, it appears that grazing livestock may assist in creating tern habitat. We also learned some

useful information about how grazers can improve tern nesting habitat. Both sheep and goats travel well in boats and readily adapt to island life. Both quickly learned to avoid the electric fence, but toward the end of the summer, the goats repeatedly broke out of the pen, necessitating use of tethers. Both sheep and goats dramatically changed the height of the vegetation. There was no difference in the overall percentage of ground cover after the fall grazing, but the sheep cropped closer to the ground than the goats, exposing more bare soil and rock, and thus providing more nest sites for terns. ♦



In September and October of 1994, Kristin Williamson (left) and Sue Schubel studied the effect grazing by these Cashmere goats and three sheep had on the Seal Island vegetation.



Petit Manan NWR biologist Jennifer Megyesi and the Seal Island interns offload one of three Metinic Island sheep to participate in the summer grazing project.



The newly grazed tern habitat with exposed rock outcrops, now ideal nesting habitat for terns.

TERN NUMBERS REBOUND REGIONWIDE BUT CONCENTRATION AT FEW SITES INCREASES VULNERABILITY

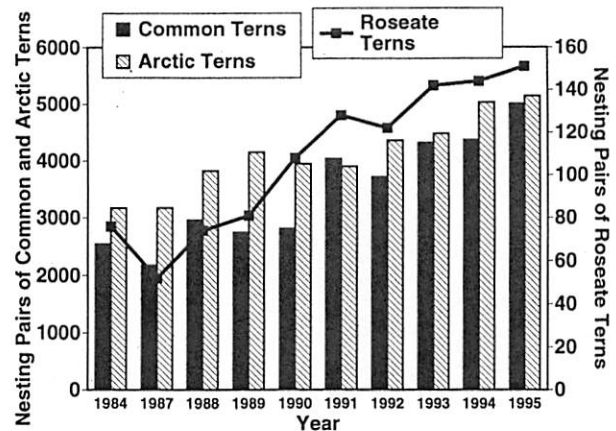
In 1984, a concerned group of biologists formed the Gulf of Maine Tern Working Group (GOMTWG) to consider actions to help reverse a regionwide decline in the number of nesting terns.

Maine tern populations rebounded from millinery hunting in the late 1800s, reaching peak numbers in the early 1930s. At that time, 27 colonies from the New Brunswick border to the New Hampshire border were made up of approximately 8,000 pairs of Arctic Terns, 6,500 pairs of Common Terns and 275 pairs of Roseate Terns. Due largely to predation and competition for nesting habitat by Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls, the Maine coast tern population declined to just 1,720 pairs of Arctic Terns, 2,543 pairs of Common Terns and only 76 pairs of Roseate Terns by 1984.

There were fewer than ten biologists at that first GOMTWG meeting, but those present made a firm resolve for an action program to prevent the extirpation of Maine terns. The steady rebuilding of the Maine coast tern population by the National Audubon Society, other private conservation groups, and federal and state agencies is an encouraging example of effective management that increases biodiversity. It is also a solid example of cooperation between private and government groups.

This past August 14th (eleven summers after the sobering 1984 census,) 51 biologists and concerned conservationists met at Audubon's Hog Island facility to assess the state of tern populations in the Gulf of Maine.

The good news is that between 1984 and 1995, the Maine coast Common Tern population increased 97% to 5,011 pairs, Arctic Terns increased 62% to 5,138 pairs, and Roseate Terns increased 101% to 153 pairs. However during this same period, the number of Common Tern colonies (two or more nests) decreased from 30 colonies to 16; Arctic Tern colonies decreased from 18 to 9, and Roseate Tern colonies decreased from 8 to 3. In 1995, 87-99% of the birds (depending on species) were nesting on just seven islands. But, the overall Gulf of Maine popula-



Changes in the Maine Coast tern population (number of nesting pairs) from 1984 through 1995.

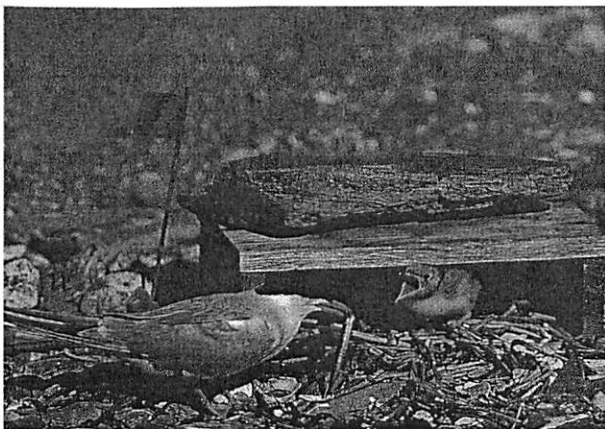
No censuses were conducted in 1985 or 1986.

Data includes Machias Seal Island counts.

Note: Roseate Tern numbers are charted on the right y-axis.
Source: Minutes of the Gulf of Maine Tern Working Group

tion is increasing because of the effective work of tern wardens who are actively working to boost production through habitat improvement and control of predators and disease.

Members of GOMTWG can justly celebrate the substantial gains from dedicated work on behalf of Maine terns, but there is a sobering reality that nearly all of the terns are crowded onto just a few nesting islands. With too many eggs in too few "baskets," predation or a catastrophic event such as disease outbreak, or marine pollution could quickly set the regional gains back by devastating any one of Maine's large tern colonies. ♦



Walker Golder

A Common Tern chick peers out from under a wooden shelter to beg for a fish from its parent. Use of shelters has proven to be a successful management tool for Stratton Island's tern colony.

Project Puffin Birdathon

Our June 6th birding bonanza was a huge success! Pledges and gifts from our supporters and friends and family of our staff and interns netted nearly \$13,000 for Project Puffin and the Maine Coast Sanctuaries. Despite that fact that many of migrants began their migration early, we still finished our day of birding fun with a record-breaking of 155 species and a total puffin count of 105 (and with about as many mosquito bites!) Watch for our invitation to support the 1996 Birdathon next May. Participants can win prizes for correctly guessing our final counts or through our random drawing. And the birds win too because *all* the dollars go to support our work on the coast of Maine!



Our sincere appreciation goes to the 1995 Maine seabird research team:

Supervisors

Jennifer Boyce
Scott Hall
Donna Ramil
Susan Schubel
Kristin Williamson

Interns

Becky Bishop
André Breton
Amy Cook
Sean Donaghy
Stephen Edwards
Edward Gaine
Patrick Hanley
Edmund Hearne
Tammy Jackson
Joseph Nocera
Nathan Stricker

Volunteers

Eric Anderson
Amy Arnett
Lauren Bonica
Elise Brokaw
Susan Carr
Sarah Carr
Mark Carr
Charles Doersch
Dortha Doersch
Charles Gailband
Will Gardiner
Liane Godbey
Mary Gunther
Nicki Hall
Ed Hearne
Chris Hymes
Susan Jones
Sara Lenoë
Sean McCullum
John McPhedran
Loren Merrill
Francine Montemurro
Jennifer Niese
Dan Ober
Tandy Perkins
John Quimby
Barbara Rhoad
Robin Sobelman
Sally Soule
Diane Tessaglia

FIRST SUCCESSFUL NESTING OF OYSTERCATCHER IN MAINE

During the summer of 1994, a pair of American Oystercatchers nested for the first time in Maine, laying a single egg on the shore at Audubon's Little Stratton Island sanctuary. Unfortunately, the egg was washed out by an exceptionally high tide. Oystercatchers returned to the shore of Little Stratton Island this summer and this time laid three eggs. Although the nest was farther from the water's edge, it was still vulnerable to the full moon tides. With extraordinary care, our resident wardens moved the eggs on six separate occasions—moving the eggs and all of the surrounding shells, rock and gravel—until they were well above the highest tides. The parent oystercatchers continued to return to their nest and successfully hatched all three eggs. However, only two chicks were raised to an age of independence—the third chick was never seen with the adults.



Joe Nocera

The first Maine-bred American Oystercatchers hatched on National Audubon's Stratton Island sanctuary this summer. Two chicks were raised to fledging. Note the pipping egg on the left.

PUFFINS AND ECOTOURISTS

Since the puffin colony was restored at Eastern Egg Rock, thousands of tourists have visited the island to see the puffins. Public landings on the island are not permitted, but the boat traffic includes everything from sea kayaks to large tour boats with a capacity for upwards of 100 passengers. We have assumed that boat traffic has little effect on the puffins, but the interaction has not been studied until this summer by Tammy Jackson, a senior at the University of Maine, Orono. For her honor's thesis supported by the Garden Club of America, Tammy observed the behavior of puffins for half-hour periods, before and after the arrival of an evening tour boat. Results of the study are not complete, but Tammy's counts of the number of tour boats have exceeded our highest estimates. During her dawn-to-dusk observations of boat traffic conducted on four days in early August, she counted an average of 111 boats per day carrying 580 passengers. All were bird watching at Egg Rock. During one-hour scans of traffic on 33 days during the six-week period following the 4th of July, she tallied 182 boats carrying 630 passengers!



Walker Golder

WANT TO SEE PUFFINS IN MAINE?

Contact these tour operators:

To Eastern Egg Rock Boothbay

R.N. Fish & Son, Inc.
PO Box 660, 65 Atlantic Ave.
Boothbay Harbor, Maine 04812
(207) 633-3244 or (207) 633-3245

To Eastern Egg Rock New Harbor

Hardy Boat Cruises
PO Box 326
New Harbor, Maine 04554
(207) 677-2026 or (800) 2-1-1

To Matinicus Seal Island New Harbor

Kharacter Cruises
PO Box 632
Rockland, Maine 04841
(207) 594-2164

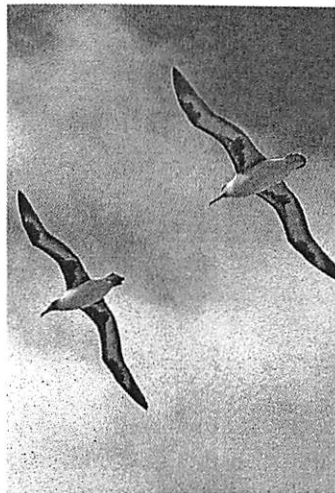
1996 Puffin



LAYSAN ALBATROSS PROJECT CONTINUES IN HAWAII

In the winter of 1993, we began a cooperative project with the Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to attract Laysan Albatross to Kaohikaipu Island, a state wildlife sanctuary (see *Egg Rock Update*, 1994.) In recent years, albatross have attempted to nest on the main island of Oahu, but are usually unsuccessful due to predation by feral dogs and cats. The big birds are also a hazard when they nest at airport runways. The goal is to give the albatross a secure nesting place on Oahu where the public would have a chance to see these great birds.

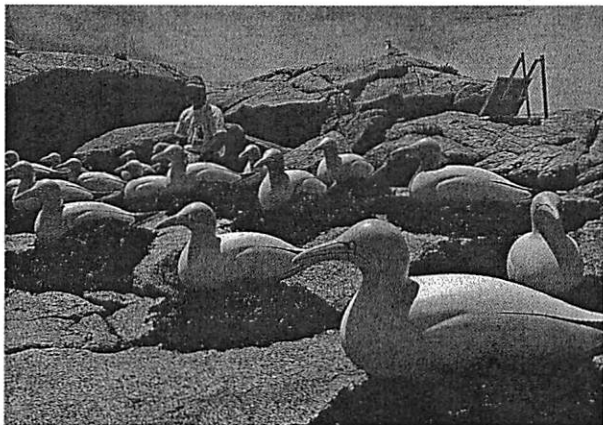
In 1994-95, 41 volunteers watched our set of 49 adult decoys and 8 chick models for a total of 593 hours during 143 days from mid-November until the end of April. The season started very promising with albatross arriving even earlier than the previous year. We observed more than double the number of landings than the same period last year. Individual birds also stayed longer than the previous year. However, albatross activity dropped off toward the end of the season, perhaps due to an *El Niño* event which warmed the water, changing the usual food supplies. In total, albatross were observed on or near the island on 27% of the observation days. We expect that more activity will occur over subsequent seasons.



Scott Hall

GANNET ATTRACTION PROJECT BEGINS

We began a project this summer to establish a Northern Gannet colony on Seal Island NWR. If successful, the new colony will restore the gannets within their historic nesting range in the Gulf of Maine.



Stephen W. Kress

Life-size gannet decoys at Seal Island NWR are stationed on seaweed nests by Island Supervisor Kristin Williamson. In the background is the solar array which powers the CD player broadcasting the colony sounds.

Gannets once bred at two sites in the Gulf of Maine until they were extirpated by excessive hunting for fishing bait in the late 19th century. Both historic sites were named Gannet Rocks. The colony near Grand Manan, New Brunswick is now occupied by a lighthouse which leaves no space for gannets. The other Gannet Rock is located offshore from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. In mid-June, 23 polyethylene, life-size gannet decoys were set in suitable habitat on an east-facing cliff top. We set the models in seaweed nests and an broadcast an endless recording of gannet colony sounds day and night. Gannets flew over the decoys

and frequented the area around Seal Island most of the summer. We hope that some of the gannets will begin prospecting among the models and that these will form the nucleus of a new colony. Lessons learned at Seal Island NWR may also prove useful for attracting gannets back to Gannet Rock, Nova Scotia.

Our sincere appreciation goes to the 1995 albatross watchers:

Volunteer Coordinator
Andy Cowell

Volunteers

Melvin Amantiad
Judy Beard
Ron Beard
Diane Bowen
Arlene Buchholz
Charmie Dang
Sandra Elliott
Fred Farrell
Shirley Gibbs
John Hall
Julie Hansen
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Susan Scott
Tom Spring
Dave Sweeney
Katie Swift
Lois Swift
Steffany Toma
Roger Towberman
Phyllis Turnbull
Eric VanderWerf
John Wendell
Thia West

HAWKS, EAGLES AND OWLS

Sometimes large tern colonies attract bird predators such as Peregrine Falcons, Bald Eagles, and Great Horned Owls. Although these are all native, natural predators on terns, individual predators can sometimes devastate an entire colony's production. Since Roseate Terns are both state and federally endangered, and Common and Arctic Terns are listed as species of special concern, we sometimes take action to protect the terns by relocating hawks and owls (after first obtaining state and federal removal permits.)

Each *species* of predator and often the *individual* predator requires a different response from the tern manager. This was an especially challenging summer for our island wardens who made valiant and successful efforts to protect terns. The following accounts show the variety of responses necessary:

GREAT HORNED OWLS

Jenny Island is located within a mile of nearby forested islands and is especially vulnerable to owl visits. Great Horned Owls have visited Jenny Island every year since 1992, with the number of strikes increasing each year. Last season seven Common Terns and one Roseate Tern died as a direct result of the raids. Other birds died in indirect ways—many terns abandoned their nests in the vicinity of the kills. When nests are abandoned at night, incubation is interrupted, and some chicks die of exposure. Also, nest abandonment causes the terns' incubation period to be

extended, preventing them from producing a second clutch of eggs.

Owls made their first kill at Jenny Island on May 27, at which time Island Supervisor Scott Hall set a live trap to capture the owl. The owl was caught the next night, promptly removed,



One of two Great Horned Owls captured and transported away from the Jenny Island tern colony.

transported 180 miles to the north, and released unharmed. Scott was surprised to find a second owl in his trap on June 14. This bird was transported 60 miles away, this time to the south. After both owls were removed, there was no further predation, and the Jenny Island terns enjoyed a very successful season. In 1995, the colony fledging an average of 2.12 chicks per nest—a nearly perfect breeding success.

PEREGRINE FALCON

This summer, a Peregrine Falcon apparently took up residence on Seal Island and ventured into the tern colony regularly from June 29th through August 11th. The powerful predator easily overtook both adult and young

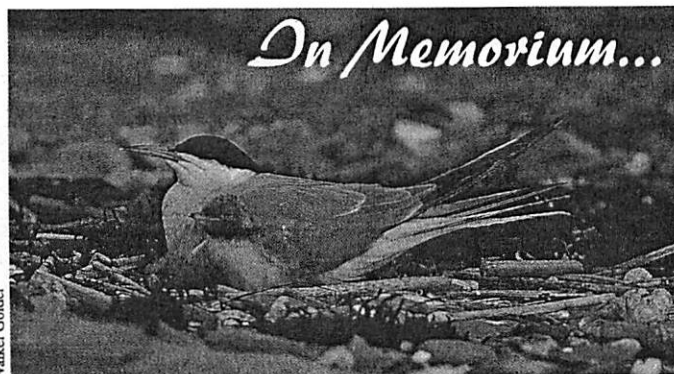
terns. The entire colony (usually more than 2,000 terns) flushed high into the sky every time the peregrine visited, but quickly returned to their nests when the falcon departed. Despite the loss of eight terns, the colony was successful this summer. Common and Arctic

Terns both fledged more than one chick per nest, increasing colony size by 31% (300 pairs). Because Peregrine Falcons are endangered and the strikes were fairly infrequent, no attempt was made to relocate the falcon.

BALD EAGLE

On July 10th, the staff at Stratton Island sighted an immature Bald Eagle and watched from a distance as the young eagle walked into the cormorant colony and began feeding on the nestlings. Eagles have on occasion visited Stratton and its sister, Bluff Island. Our usual policy is to leave them alone—gulls and

terns will actively mob and chase off the intruder. However, a closer look at this eagle revealed pox-like lesions on all its non-feathered parts. Rose Borzick and Donna Ramil were able to capture it easily. In hand, it was obvious that the eagle was weakened by the disease and near starvation. It was transported to a veterinarian who confirmed that the bird was infected with avian pox—a disease highly contagious to other birds. Had the eagle remained in the colony, disease could have spread to the seabirds on both Bluff and Stratton Islands. Regrettably, the eagle did not recover, but we feel fortunate that we were able to prevent further exposure of avian pox at Maine's most diverse colonial nesting seabird colony. ◆



In Memorium...

We are honored that Project Puffin was chosen this year as the recipient of seven memorial gifts. Memorial gifts are just one of a number of ways you can acknowledge your loved one's appreciation of puffins and the natural world.

We would like you to know that Wayne Mones, Director of Gift-Planning for National Audubon Society, is available to help you arrange a bequest or set up an earned income program that allows you to invest in the natural world. To find out about these programs and their tax-advantages, contact Wayne at: 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003 or call (212) 979-3033.

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We also thank the Endangered Species Program of Region 5 National Biological Survey for supporting our Roseate Tern research.

We thank the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife for permission to work on Eastern Egg Rock and Jenny Island, the US Coast Guard for the privilege of working on Matinicus Rock, the USFWS for allowing us to conduct our studies on Seal Island Wildlife Refuge, the Canadian Wildlife Service for cooperating with us on Machias Seal Island. We also thank Don Burgess for providing use of the Hog Island and Curt Cote for his invaluable logistic support.

It is a special pleasure to acknowledge the generous assistance and gifts from the following people:

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- Patrick Ching for donating artwork for an albatross T-shirt
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- Chris MacNamara for Matinicus Rock solar electric system support
- Moss Tents for loaning an Optimum 200 tent for use on Stratton Island
- Jancy & Lenny Olson for housing and caring for the Seal Island goats
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- Pleasant River Fish & Game Club of Columbia, Maine for donating murre decoys for Matinicus Rock
- Prout's Neck Audubon Society and Prout's Neck Women's Auxillary for donating an Avon landing boat, a new observation blind and a portable printer for Stratton Island
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- Godfrey Rockefeller and Herb Pratt for always pulling through when the Stratton Island staff called for assistance
- Ken Schlather and Diane Tessaglia for all their computer assistance
- Sea Life Park staff on Oahu, HI for providing our volunteers with a place to view albatross
- Clark Smith and the staff of the Prout's Neck Yacht Club for their assistance with Stratton Island logistics
- Helen and Chris Tupper and Scott Dunning for their assistance and hospitality they offer to our Jenny Island staff
- US National Guard in Augusta, ME for loaning night-vision goggles
- Charles Walcott and the entire staff of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology for their continued cooperation with Project Puffin
- Amy Wood, DVM, for her assistance with the Bald Eagle

1994-1995 CONTRIBUTORS

SPECIAL GIFTS

In Memory of Michael A. Apgar

Jean Apgar through the Michael A. Apgar Memorial Fund

In Memory of Nathan Belfer

Elisabeth Belfer

In Memory of Michaelene Benwell-Lejeune

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