

Seabird Capitals – The Seabird Ecological Reserves of Newfoundland And Labrador: Marine Protected Areas In a Sea Of Activity And Development

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Most of the breeding seabirds in Atlantic Canada occupy a small number of massive seabird communities along the Newfoundland and Labrador coast. Though there are literally thousands of places where seabirds could nest, powerful social cohesion draws them to a few persistent, often ancient colony sites. The distribution of these breeding hotspots is associated with the frigid Low Arctic waters of Labrador Current. Owing to these associations and to Arctic ranges, studies of seabird behaviour and ecology provide insights into the biological consequences of ocean-climate change. Legislation protects breeding colonies from exploitation, disruption and disturbance, and seabird populations have exhibited remarkable recoveries and growth during the 20th century. Yet natural and human-induced perturbation and mortality away from colonies during both breeding and non-breeding seasons very greatly affect seabird populations. These influences associated with ocean-climate change, fishing, oil pollution and hunting require other forms of spatial and temporal protection. Eco-tourism activities associated with seabird colonies and occurrences have also greatly benefited, contributed to and enhanced the economies and values of local coastal communities. As with other human activities, eco-tourism needs regulation to minimize potential negative influences on seabirds and on the marine environment upon which they and we depend.