

SUMMER WITH THE SEABIRDS

The life of a Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge Island Researcher

Archive 2020 – June, July and August

Welcome!

Welcome to the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge Island Researcher blog! Here you'll find posts and multimedia projects created by island researchers spending the summer on the refuge's many islands. Please check back often for updates!

Archive for June, 2020

A Day in the Life of a Metinic Intern

Posted in [Meticnic 2020](#), [Uncategorized](#), tagged [Arctic Tern](#), [Bird Banding](#), [Common Tern](#), [FOMCI](#), [Island life](#), [Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#), [maine seabirds](#), [MCINWR](#), [Productivity](#) on June 29, 2020

Greetings from Metinic! We've had foggy weather this past week and only two days of full sun.

I thought I would take this opportunity to share what daily life is like on Metinic Island. You may be wondering, "What do they do in their free time?", "What do they miss most about civilization?", or, "Do they even miss civilization?" Hopefully this will provide some insight into what it's like to live in a seabird colony.

Every morning at 7 o'clock we start the day by counting all of the birds seen around the island, including shorebirds, passerines, and raptors. Daily tasks in the tern colony vary week to week but recently we have been closely monitoring our productivity plots to check for newly hatched chicks; banding, weighing and measuring each one to track growth rates.

When the weather isn't on our side, we find ourselves cabin-bound. This is a good time to catch up on data entry, read a book, and wonder, was it the tern or the egg that came first? We have a solar panel that provides us with electricity and a propane stove to cook on. Although we don't have running water, we are supplied with drinking water from the mainland and we use well water for showers and hand-washing. To make showering possible, we heat up a solar shower bag in the sun and it's (almost) as good as a real shower.

By the time the sun is setting, we're usually ready for bed. Every few days we take turns doing a hour-long "night watch" where we use night-vision binoculars to watch for predators in the colony. This is a good time to observe the storm-petrels flying around the cabin and the starry night sky.

To answer my own question posed earlier, we'd say the things we miss the most are hiking, our pets, and moving at speeds faster than a sheep-chasing jog. Despite these things, neither of us are looking forward to returning to civilization at the end of July, even for a hot shower or a car ride.



Emma banding a tern chick in one of our productivity plots.



A common tern overseeing the banding process from Sequoia's head.



Strange cloud formations passing over the island.

Hide-and-seek with PMI's Tern Chicks

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on June 28, 2020

On Petit Manan, the majority of our tern chicks are going through a rebellious teen phase; snapping at our fingers, climbing out of weigh bags, and being quite unreasonable during wing chord measuring. Most of our productivity plot chicks have hatched and been banded, but finding them is challenge since they prefer to hide in thick vegetation. Playing hide-and-seek during our productivity checks is much easier with the larger chicks though. Our largest chick at the moment is a hefty 92 grams! In the meantime, we are observing what food the chicks are being fed during provisioning watches. At the moment, we are seeing an abundance of hake and pollock being delivered, with the occasional over-sized sandlance; but the terns aren't the only seabirds delivering food to their chicks.



Measuring the wing chord of a tern chick during a productivity check.

We've been watching our puffins zip around the shoreline, diving into their burrows to feed their newly hatched chicks. It's very entertaining to sit at the puffin blind, camera at the ready, taking split-second photos of passing puffins with mouthfuls of fish. Next week we'll get the chance to check in on their burrows and hopefully band some puffin chicks!



An adult Atlantic Puffin carrying some hake to its burrow.

A variety of tour boats visit regularly now, among them the massive Bar Harbor Whale Watch vessel, *Friendship V*, which stopped by to ask us questions on our two-way radio. It's great to see people enjoying the island's wildlife, so we point out any loafing seals, eider ducklings, or uncommon birds from the puffin blind to make their tour more entertaining. Speaking of

uncommon birds, we finally got to see an American Oystercatcher wading through the shallows at Green Island, slightly obscured by fog during an alcid count at the lighthouse. We're hoping to see it again, but the strangest birds seem to appear when we least expect them. As the season continues, our spotting scopes are locked on the horizon for shearwaters and other seafaring birds.

Hatching season outside the colony!

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on June 25, 2020 | [1 Comment](#) »

Hello all,

The activity in the Ship Island tern colony has taken a “tern” for the better over the past few days! We have observed numbers (350-400+) close to what we saw before the colony abandonment two weeks ago as well as many new active nests. We are excited to have the terns back and, finally, spending the night on the island again. Other than the Common Terns nesting on the island there are a variety of other breeders that call Ship/Trumpet Island home during the summer.



Large Common Eider Creche!



Savannah Sparrow



Spotted Sandpiper chicks freshly hatched!



Mallard ducklings that found a liking to us during lunch break 😊



Spotted Sandpiper (adult) keeping an eye on its young nearby in the wetland vegetation.



Yellow Warbler nest behind our cabin!



Savannah Sparrow (adult) with a spider species in its beak!



A recently fledged Savannah Sparrow waiting patiently for a parent to arrive with food



Savannah Sparrow fledgling



Yes...they are irresistibly cute!

Stay safe and enjoy this warm weather everyone!

Cheers,

Andy

Nest Record for Metinic!

Posted in [Metinic 2020](#), tagged [Arctic Terns](#), [biology](#), [Birds](#), [chicks](#), [Common Tern](#), [conservation](#), [cute chicks](#), [ecology](#), [FOMCI](#), [Garter Snakes](#), [Island](#), [Maine](#), [Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#), [Maine Islands](#), [MCINWR](#), [research](#), [Science](#), [seabird conservation](#), [snake](#), [Terns](#) on [June 22, 2020](#)
Hello from Metinic!

Sequoia here with this week's blog. Last Wednesday the 17th we had staff come out to the island to assist us with the GOMSWG census. During this census we identified all nests in the colony. This year we counted 910 tern nests, this is a record for Metinic! This number is also lower than the actual nests present because no matter how hard we try we aren't perfect at detecting nests. To account for error we use the Lincoln Index which is a form of mark recapture, where we go out and see what percent of the nests were missed. Once this correction was applied we have an estimated 1,021 nests on the island!

We also had some exciting things happen during our census. We found a Leach's Storm-Petrel, a Savannah Sparrow chick evading a snake who had already caught its sibling, and a few Spotted Sandpiper chicks running around on their stilt-like legs.

Other exciting news, we had our first chick hatch on Friday! An Arctic tern chick was the first to be found in our productivity plot. We nicknamed him Eddy due to the fact that Eddy Edwards, the Deputy Refuge Manager, had the closest guess to the number of nests on the island, which we all thought was a bit high but were proven wrong. Friday afternoon and into the weekend we had many chicks hatching, so now we are getting into the groove of weighing, measuring and banding each chick in our productivity plots.

Through all of our adventures we are sometimes lucky enough to be fueled by the homemade snacks that Carol sends out to us, which we greatly appreciate!

Until next time.



Common Terns tend to be the more tenacious nest protectors. This photo was taken while measuring chicks and getting hit by the parents.



This is a good example of Garter Snake predation on Metinic. It's munching on an unlucky Savannah Sparrow chick. We've sent 31 snakes back to the mainland so far this year.



“You can’t see me”



Eddy, our first chick on the island. Here he is 24 hours old.

Tern Chicks Everywhere!

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on June 22, 2020

It’s time to band tern chicks on PMI, and we have too many to count!

Petit Manan’s first chick this season, an arctic tern, hatched in one of our productivity plots on the 17th. So far he’s our largest chick, and definitely the fan favorite. Since then, dozens of chicks have appeared all over the island. They’re quite talented at hiding, so we watch where we’re walking! In addition to the tern chicks, we’ve witnessed fledgling savannah sparrows clumsily learn to fly, and highly mobile spotted sandpiper chicks teetering around the rockweed.



PMI's first chick of the 2020 season: "B-Chick" in productivity plot B.



A spotted sandpiper chick walking around at low tide, bobbing its tail with every step.

The chicks aren't the only new arrivals to the island; we've also had our first tour boats of the season passing through to get a nice view of the seabirds and Petit Manan Light. On the 20th, we had the chance to see some northern gannets cruising offshore while an island tour boat viewed a

group of puffins, razorbills, and murre at Puffin Point. At the same time, a dozen seals enjoyed the sunny day on Green Island's rocks. Their calls could be heard from all the way from the lighthouse!

In the meantime, we completed our island census and found over 1,000 active tern nests scattered across the island! Some are nearly built bowl nests in Canada mayflower, while others are made on bare rock by the shore. So far our favorite nest is from a common tern that has laid eggs right in front of the outhouse. Banding and weighing the chicks in our productivity plots is the greatest highlight of the day, and we can't wait to see them grow over the remainder of the season. When we finished our productivity plots we had 100 total eggs, so we'll have our hands full when the rest hatch!

28 chicks already banded, 72 to go!



Joe with B-Chick



Amanda with B-Chick

Oh, not again!

Posted in [Ship Island 2020](#), [tagged chicks](#), [Common Tern](#), [Eggs](#), [Great Black Backed Gull](#), [Herring Gull](#), [Maine](#), [Maine Coastal Islands NWR](#), [MCINWR](#), [Nests](#), [refuge](#), [Ship Island](#), [Terns](#), [Wildlife](#) on June 16, 2020

While the other islands are expecting their first chicks any day, we watched as all of our terns left their eggs behind. We were hopeful this year! We had over 100 nests and over 200 eggs. Yet, once again, Ship Island has experienced a colony abandonment!

During the first week of June, we had found some predated terns, likely due to a Peregrine Falcon. Ship is located only a few miles from Mt. Desert Island where several pairs are known to nest. Our worst fears were confirmed when Andy and I both flushed the falcon on June 8. As the day went on, tern numbers decreased dramatically from 300 to 50. By the evening, they were all gone.

We weren't just only concerned about Ship. Over on Trumpet Island, there were no gulls. A predator like a falcon wouldn't cause the gull colony to abandon as well. We began to suspect an otter attack. Although the gulls eventually returned to the island, we visited the following day to look for predation signs. We were relieved to find nests and eggs intact. We even found some newly hatched Herring and Great Black-backed Gull chicks! However, we think we now know the likely culprit: an owl.



We got right to work, setting up more traps and beginning all night stints. But, what do we do to encourage the terns to come back? Since terns nest in colonies, they won't nest if there aren't others terns around them. So, we have to trick them into thinking there are terns there already!

Currently, there are over 30 Common and Roseate Tern decoys around the nesting grounds. To complete the illusion of a lively tern colony, a solar-powered sound system has been set up. During the day and night, we play recordings of a colony on speakers.



Although we haven't caught our owl yet, we think the decoys are working! Throughout the week, we've seen more terns returning and staying longer. Just today, I even witnessed courtship rituals and nest scraping! We're doing our best to give them space to allow the colony to start back over.

Hopefully next week we'll have some better news to share!

Percy

Guillemots and Eiders and Terns, oh my!

Posted in [Metinic 2020](#), [Uncategorized](#), tagged [Arctic Tern](#), [Black Guillemot](#), [Common Eider](#), [Common Tern](#), [FOMCI](#), [Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#), [maine seabirds](#), [MCINWR](#), [Science](#) on June 15, 2020

Hello everyone!

This is Emma updating you from Metinic, where we've been enjoying the plentiful amounts of sunshine over the past week. With increased temperatures comes layers of zinc sunscreen, great laundry weather, and daring plunges into 50-degree Maine waters after long workdays in the sun. The birds also seem to be enjoying the good weather. This past week we set up our productivity plots with help from the Refuge staff. Using these plots, we hope to monitor at least 60 total Arctic and common tern nests throughout the season for different factors of reproductive success, including hatching success, survival, and growth of the chicks over time. Although we don't have chicks yet, we are expecting our first one within the next week!



Recording data in one of our productivity plots.

As the common eider eggs hatch, we continue to see common eider crèches (groups consisting of hens and ducklings) around the island. We have also been monitoring spotted sandpiper and black guillemot nests. The spotted sandpipers nest in low vegetation along the shoreline and in the upland areas. The parents do a great job hiding the nests and it's easy to miss them if you're not looking carefully! The black guillemots nest in burrows along the coastline, which makes for fun but

challenging work trying to locate them. It really puts our rock-climbing abilities to the test. The overall variation in egg size and coloration among species is really fascinating and beautiful to see.



Can you guess who these nests belong to?



The excitement of finding a black guillemot nest!

I enjoy seeing the many flowering plants on the island as the season progresses. Just yesterday we came upon a patch of blooming irises! We also don't mind the wild strawberries that provide a sweet little snack during morning bird walks. We look forward to seeing what the next week brings as we prepare for the annual census that will give us an estimated number of common and Arctic tern nests in the colony this year. It will be interesting to see how the numbers compare to years past.

Happy birding!

Emma

Preparing for PMI's First Chicks!

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on June 13, 2020

Our first tern chicks are due tomorrow here on Petit Manan, and we're psyched to see little cottonballs running around the island. We've been enjoying the phenomenal weather this week, and so have our nesting puffins that can be seen surfing on the waves. Using our burrow-scopes, we'll check out how the alcid nests are coming along and try to sneak in some photos while we're at it. Quite a few common murre have made themselves comfortable on Puffin Point, so we're hoping to see a nest sometime!

This week we continued to identify tern nests based on species and finished our productivity plots, which will be used to keep our highly mobile tern chicks in place while we band and observe them over the coming weeks. In the meantime, resighting bands on puffins and terns is a fun way to pass the time. Watching over the colony from the lighthouse has become a relaxing activity, and an effective way of keeping our seabirds safe. One of these days we're hoping to catch a glimpse of some of the rarer seabirds that visit the coast during our observation stints. The light room also provides a stunning view of Cadillac Mountain, especially on foggy days. After the working day is done, we've made it a routine to watch the sunset over Petit Manan Point with some mugs of hot cocoa. So far it's a wild time on PMI, and we're looking forward to taking hundreds of tern chick photos and sharing them in our next post.



A very photogenic puffin posing for Amanda's camera.



A pair of common terns loafing on the rocks.

The Start of the 2020 Ship Island Season!

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on June 7, 2020

Welcome to Ship Island!

My name is Andy Eckerson, I am from a small town in southeastern Massachusetts and stationed here on Ship Island. I'm a senior at the University of Massachusetts Amherst studying natural resources and conservation with a focus on wildlife ecology. When I am not engulfed in academia/summer positions I enjoy birding, rock climbing, trail running, and essentially anything involving the outdoors.

And I'm Percy Ulsamer! I'm from Connecticut and am currently a junior at Unity College studying Wildlife Biology with a minor in Zoology. I dream of becoming a field ornithologist with a particular focus on researching corvids and endemic island species! When not birding, I'm also a photographer, artist, and gamer. This season, I'm especially excited to learn new skills and help out with seabird research!



Andy (left) and Percy (right) in front of the Ship Island cabin!

Upon arrival, we observed ~150 Common Terns present during the mornings, although, they would disappear by noon. Slowly but surely the number grew up to a current ~350 spending the day and night on Ship Island. We have located and marked 100 Common Tern nests in order to monitor predator activity and eventually tern productivity.

The terns have experienced very little predation so far, although, we expect the Peregrine Falcon visits to increase as the need to feed their young does. On the other hand, the Trumpet Island gull colony has experienced a significant amount of predation attempts from Common Ravens and Bald Eagles. We continue to keep an eye on Ship, the Barges, and Trumpet Island in order to monitor the predator activity.

Since Percy and I are both avid birders we have had the delight of documenting the wide variety of species on Ship, the Barge's, and Trumpet island as well as Blue Hill Bay. So far we have documented 77 species including a great variety of shorebirds and songbirds! Here is the link to the Ship Island eBird hotspot: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L11450199> .



Bay-breasted Warbler taking a rest on our front lawn!



Least Flycatcher

We are both excited for the remainder of the season and especially hatching tern chicks!

Cheers,

Andy and Percy

Greetings from the Petit Manan Island Crew!

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on June 6, 2020



Greetings from beautiful Petit Manan Island!

My name is Joe, and I'm from the little village of Jefferson in Midcoast Maine. I'm currently attending Unity College, where I'm a third-year studying wildlife biology. Being on a seabird colony is truly exciting for me, as it's my first time in the field and I'm an avid birder. Growing up with Maine's wonderful coast makes this experience all the more enjoyable for me! I'm usually out birding, taking photos, and exploring as much of the state as I can in my free time.

At the moment, my favorite thing to do on PMI is stay up to listen to the enigmatic storm-petrels that nest on the island. We haven't seen any due to their nocturnal behavior, but they make the funniest noises that are a joy to hear at night. Only two weeks in, and we've already had some amazing encounters with the local wildlife!

Howdy! My name is Amanda, I come from a small town of Rockport In Midcoast Maine. I currently am a second year at the University of Maine in Orono, studying Wildlife Ecology. My hobbies mainly have connections to the outdoors, including backpacking, attempting to go birding, and fishing.

Living on an island is a completely new experience to me, its not everyday that you get to live in the middle of a seabird colony. Also, pairing that with being my first season of field work, many awesome new things have happened. my favorite thing about PMI is the local Guillemots that nest and surround the island. They are charismatic birds that are truly adorable.

So far we're preparing for the arrival of our first tern chicks by constructing plots to observe nests over the summer, and using burrow scopes to check in on our nesting puffins. We've seen some exciting things like black terns, bald eagles, roseate terns, and many migratory birds, and we're looking forward to seeing more as the season progresses!

Metinic Island Introductions and Update

June 5, 2020 by MCINWR

Hello from Metinic!

My name is Sequoia, I am one of the two technicians on Metinic Island this summer. I am currently going into my third year at the University of Maine, majoring in wildlife ecology.

I grew up in a small town in upstate New York, named Moravia. I am an avid outdoors person. I enjoy birding, hunting, hiking, cross country skiing, horseback riding and herping.

While I might not be a “bird person” I wanted to spend this summer learning more about birds so that I can apply the knowledge in the future. Also who wouldn’t want to spend the summer living on such a beautiful island!

My name is Emma and I am the other technician here on Metinic Island. I am a senior at the University of Rhode Island, finishing up my bachelor’s degree in wildlife and conservation biology. Sequoia and I share similar interests, including hiking and working with horses. I enjoy birding along the coast of Rhode Island, especially when there are shorebirds and seaducks involved. I am thrilled to be spending the summer in such a special place. One of the highlights for me so far was seeing all of the warblers as they passed through during migration. The species diversity on Metinic keeps us on our toes and we never know what we will see next!



Sequoia on the left and Emma on the right.

We have a bit of catching up to do. We started out the season with a two week quarantine. After flipping a coin, Emma ended up camping in the shed. It wasn’t as bad as it may sound. In fact, one of the best parts about sleeping outside is hearing the storm-petrels at night!

During our first week, we rounded up the 120 resident sheep and moved them away from the tern nesting area. More recently, we kept busy counting the 209 gull nests and 36 common eider nests on the north side of the island. We are continuously documenting all of the amazing bird species here and continue to monitor the common and arctic terns as they get settled and start nesting.

Currently we've documented more than 200 tern nests but we'd estimate around 250-300 have been established. Last Sunday we saw the first herring gull chicks hatching and Wednesday we spotted the first ten common eider chicks.

Though we are already three weeks into the season, we will catch you up as we go. So keep checking in to see what Metinic Island has to offer!

Until next time,
Sequoia & Emma



Two Herring Gull chicks around three days old.



One of the gorgeous Arctic Terns on Metinic Island.



A Black Guillemot proudly proclaiming it's property.



The first sighting of Common Eider ducklings this season! The adults stay close to the ducklings to protect them from predators.

Posted in [Metinic 2020](#), [Uncategorized](#) | Tagged [Arctic Tern](#), [Black Guillemot](#), [Common Eider](#), [Common Tern](#), [Herring Gull](#), [Maine](#), [Maine Coastal Islands NWR](#), [Maine Islands](#), [MCINWR](#), [Metinic Island](#), [research](#), [Science](#), [Sheep](#), [Tern Conservation](#), [Terns](#), [Wildlife](#), [wildlife photography](#)

Archive for July, 2020

Farewell Metinic!

Posted in [Metinic 2020](#), [Uncategorized](#), tagged [chicks](#), [conservation](#), [Foraging](#), [Island life](#), [Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#), [MCINWR](#), [rainbows](#), [research](#), [Science](#), [seabirds](#), [Terns](#) on July 27, 2020

The season has come to an end!

I'm writing this as we work on finalizing data and closing up the island. We are scheduled to be picked up on Wednesday the 29th!



Sequoia (left) and Emma (right) the wide-eyed technicians at the start of the season.

Wednesday is going to be bittersweet. We've both worked hard this year and it is remarkable how much we've learned. I still remember when we first explored the island and got whiplash from trying to identify all of the amazing warblers that were on the island. We spent many hours in the woods with our binoculars plastered to our eyes and identification books stuck to our hands. During this time we thought it was amazing to see 300 terns in the morning. Now we are used to waking up to a 1000 or more.

We watched as the terns courted each other with beautiful dances in the sky and the offerings of fish to win each other over. Soon we spotted them making themselves at home scraping with their short legs, small divots in the ground for their precious eggs to be laid. I'd say we were more excited about the first eggs than any tern. Within no time at all we had around a thousand nests scattered about the once vacant point.

We then waited, checking each egg for cracks or pipping and chasing off would-be predators. When I found Eddy (our first tern chick) I was elated. Soon though it seemed as though we "terned" around and time had flown by. The fluff balls weights and pin feathers grew by the day. I spotted "Eddy" one morning flying out of his plot and felt a sense of pride. We did it, we kept the terns protected! Now as we and the terns prepare to leave, and the young fledglings are seen flying around the colony with vigor, we get to watch the fruits of our labor as they fly away over the ocean.



Two Common Terns in copulation position

I'd say our abilities and knowledge of ecology grew just as much as the terns during this time and we can't wait to spread our own wings and find our next new adventure.



Beautiful double rainbow over the colony right after a huge thunderstorm on the island

Thank you for a great season and we hope we brought a bit of our island joy to everyone reading!

Taking to the Sky on PMI

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on July 27, 2020

With only a couple weeks left of the 2020 field season, we're collecting as much data as we can before the tern colony leaves. Nearly all of the chicks on the island have fledged and become independent; and with their jobs finished, the adult terns are starting to leave. Already our population is noticeably smaller and our once-packed nest hotspots have become quiet. Other signs of the colony's departure have started sprouting up as well. We've been noticing changes in their plumage and bill color, signaling that their breeding season is nearly over. The alcids on the other hand are still rearing their fluffy, chunky chicks. Our razorbill chick has undergone rapid growth and is likely a few days from leaving burrow O37. Luckily, we got the chance to band him before he goes out to sea with his parents. We've set up a GoPro near the burrow to see if we can catch the moment he leaves on video. While the terns have slowly stopped delivering food to their independent fledglings, we're still seeing plenty of fish deliveries to puffin and guillemot burrows. It's almost impossible to miss the red flash of a rock gunnel in a guillemot's mouth before it ducks under the boardwalk or into a rock burrow.



Banding our razorbill chick on July 24th; you can see his white eyestripe starting to form!



Curious about the camera.

Speaking of which, the guillemot chicks are growing exponentially and developing their flight feathers. We're continuing to band the larger chicks, but that means we have to catch them first. Catching the boardwalk chicks is a challenge because they aren't confined to a burrow, so we work as a team to corral the frantic chicks to a spot where we can pluck them from the boardwalk.



One of the black guillemot chicks from under the boardwalk.

In other news, we're experiencing a scorching heat wave of 75 degrees! We're taking advantage of the summer heat by resighting arctic terns loafing on the shoreline, too overheated to fly around. So far we've resighted over 70 arctic terns in the last four days, and discovered that one bird was banded in 1999! This upcoming week we'll continue to resight birds, band alcids, and hopefully get the chance to work with some Leach's storm-petrels, whose chuckling calls still liven up the night.



A pectoral sandpiper that's been hanging around for a few days, the last one on PMI was seen in 2015!

Counting Sheep on Metinic

Posted in [Metinic 2020](#), [Uncategorized](#), tagged [conservation](#), [fluffy](#), [FOMCI](#), [Island life](#), [Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#), [Maine Islands](#), [MCINWR](#), [Science](#), [Sheep](#) on July 21, 2020

Ewe wouldn't believe that 120 sheep roam Metinic Island!

From September to May the sheep are free to roam the island, this is beneficial to the terns and the work we do here because they keep the vegetation short. This allows for better tern nesting habitat. In the spring they were rounded up by the owners and pushed to the south side of the island. We then put up a fence that bisects the island to keep them out of the north end.

You may ask, "Why do you keep them out of the north point?" To answer this question, sheep have actually been documented munching on eggs. I know crazy right! They can also accidentally step on eggs or chicks.

The problem we had this summer was that some crafty sheep slipped passed the round up and wanted to come into the colony where the grass is greener. We nicknamed the lead ewe Nancy. She is one of the few black sheep on the island so she was always easy to spot. She had a small group of four ewes and six lambs that followed her everywhere. We also had a smaller group of just two ewes that tended to stay in the forest. For the first month and a half we often had to chase Nancy's group away from the colony.

In June we attempted to do another round up to try to get as many as possible to the south side. It did not go smoothly. After much running, falling, mud wading and changing of plans we only got three ewes and their accompanying lambs to the south.

We currently have four ewes and four lambs still on the north side of the fence. We have accepted them and chased them away from the colony every morning and night. But recently they have figured out that we have to sleep at night and can't chase them so they can easily slip in after we go to bed. They say sheep aren't smart, I'd have to disagree.

Even though the sheep have caused issues, we do not believe they have affected the colony. We've also learned to enjoy our 6:00am and 8:00pm sheep chases, it keeps us on our toes and them on their hooves.





The vicious predators of Metinic Island

Chicks and Comets

Posted in [Ship Island 2020](#), tagged [chicks](#), [comet](#), [Common Tern](#), [Maine Coastal Islands NWR](#), [MCINWR](#), [Milky Way](#), [NEOWISE](#), [Stars](#) on July 20, 2020

We can finally say what we have been hoping for this entire summer: Ship Island has chicks!



A freshly hatched chick and a pipping one!

We first spotted cracks in some eggshells on the 10th and two days later, we found our first hatched Common Terns! With the late season egg laying and colony abandonment, we were relieved to hear the small, raspy peeps from the nests.



"Feed me!"



A worried parent perched on my head while I banded their chicks

Ever since, we've been working non-stop. Already, there are over 70 chicks banded! We have productivity plots set up across the colony that we check every other day. Inside, we keep track of all the eggs in each nest and weigh the chicks every other day to monitor their growth. In just one week, chicks can weigh 6 times heavier than their hatch weight! We also begun provisioning watches to see what food is being brought to the nest, who is being fed, and who is feeding it to them. This data is important to help monitor the health of the colony and what prey species are available in the surrounding ocean.



Comet NEOWISE

When we do have downtime, we have been fascinated by the night sky. As we are several miles from the nearest town, we have little light pollution. Across the northern hemisphere, you might be able to see comet NEOWISE in the northern sky. On the same day we saw our first chicks, Andy and I saw our first comet! The sky was completely clear giving us not only a great view of the spectacle, but also the Milky Way, Jupiter, and Saturn.



The Milky Way, Jupiter (brightest "star"), and Saturn (to the left of Jupiter). Photo by Andy, lights by Percy

As the season continues, we hope to share more excited news with you all!

Percy

Plenty of New Arrivals to PMI

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on July 20, 2020|

During another exciting week on Petit Manan, we grubbed our active puffin burrows to weigh and measure the chicks a second time, this time with the intention of banding any chicks with developed flight feathers. We'll go around next week to band any that we missed this week and maybe find some

new burrows while we're at it. Afterward, we banded the larger guillemot chicks under the boardwalk. One of our active guillemot burrows was occupied by an adult during our banding sweep, so we got the chance to handle and weigh it. Despite their speediness under the boardwalk, an adult guillemot is much calmer than an adult puffin. We resighted its BBL band and discovered that it was banded last year, right here on PMI.



Weighing and measuring an adult black guillemot.

In our productivity plots, many of our plot chicks have successfully fledged, but some fledglings stay close to their nests to be fed by their parents until they are independent. Most of the fledglings congregate on the helipad, like a "teen hangout" of sorts. So far we've banded about 250 tern chicks, but we're still shooting for 300 or more. We're still waiting for our razorbill chick to get a little bigger so we can fit him with a band, but in the meantime we have a new razorbill chick that we recently found in a burrow so confusing that we have to hang upside-down to see into it.



Checking on our first razorbill chick; we'll band him later this week.

The sunny summer weather we've been experiencing has made the lighthouse the perfect place to hang out in our free time. We spend most of our time in the light room looking for pelagic seabirds with the spotting scopes. Northern gannets are regular visitors, flying over the island or diving offshore. We witnessed a flock of nine adults fly low over the *Friendship V* during one of the Bar Harbor Whale Watch tours. Occasionally, we'll also see the erratic pitter-patter of a Wilson's storm-petrel foraging on the horizon. Although the end of the season is drawing closer, we are still seeing a variety of new arrivals to the island. On the 18th, we found our first Leach's storm-petrel after investigating a burrow along the boardwalk. At the same time, we discovered our first laughing gull chick hidden in the tall grass along with its less than enthused parent. As for shorebirds, we managed to sneak up on a juvenile Wilson's phalarope walking along the shoreline at the boathouse; an island first! We've had mammalian visitors offshore as well, including harbor porpoises, grey seals, and many curious people of course. While we patiently wait for the remainder of our plot chicks to fledge, we're taking the time to take copious amounts of photos, chat with the *Friendship V*, and collect more provisioning data before our fledglings leave the colony and go their own way.



A Leach's storm-petrel chick found in a burrow under the boardwalk.

First Tern Fledgling on Metinic!

Posted in [Meticnic 2020](#), [Uncategorized](#), tagged [Arctic Tern](#), [Common Tern](#), [fledgling](#), [FOMCI](#), [Leach's Storm-petrel](#), [Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#), [MCINWR](#) on July 14, 2020

It feels like the field season on Metinic is flying by (just like our chicks!)

This weekend we had our first tern fledglings, including "Eddy", our first Arctic tern chick. As we walk around the colony, we are seeing fewer and fewer fluffy chicks as they trade their down plumage for

body and flight feathers. Once they reach the fledging age, the young terns can make short flights around the colony. However, their juvenile plumage is still not fully developed and they may have lingering tufts of down. Though they are able to fly, they are not completely independent and will still rely on food from their parents. It is always fun to see the young fledglings experimenting with their wings and hovering over us as we walk through the colony, just like their parents!



Cooperative tern chicks help illustrate feather development from down to juvenile plumage (right to left).



A banded Arctic tern fledgling from one of our provisioning nests!

One of my favorite activities on the island is observing the Leach's storm petrels at night. They are a nocturnal seabird species that nest in dug burrows or crevices and we have many nesting in an old stone wall on the island. If we go out in the middle of the night with night-vision binoculars, we can see them flying all around us. It's easy to locate them in their burrows with their distinct chatter and purr call that we attribute to a "guinea pig being tickled". The other night was especially exciting because as we walked along the wall we could see the adults just outside of the openings in the rock. It is amazing how close we can get to observe them!



A Leach's storm-petrel in the stone wall.

We only have a couple of weeks left on Metinic and can't believe how quickly time is passing. Hopefully we will have more pictures of fledglings coming soon!

Until next time,

Emma

Puffin Grubbers for Hire

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on July 11, 2020

This week on Petit Manan Island, we have too much to talk about! Our first tern chick, an arctic tern creatively named "B-chick", successfully fledged and left productivity plot B. Since then, both arctic and common tern fledglings have been taking flight all over the island. Now that the tern chicks are fledging, we are making an effort to sweep the island and band as many chicks as possible. They shouldn't be difficult to spot since they go out of their way to shriek at you when you're passing by.



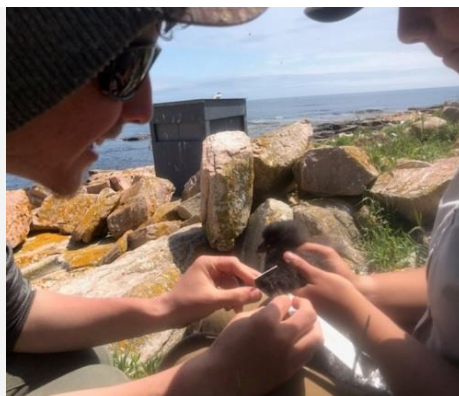
An arctic tern from Amanda's provisioning nests.

Our only obstacle at the moment is the weather, which certainly hasn't let up over the past week. Despite the dreary weather, we have more than enough to keep us busy and entertained. Conducting provisioning stints and birdwatching are some of the ways we stay productive on days where it would be too wet to check on our chicks. Yesterday we had the chance to sneak up on a mixed flock of shorebirds picking through the rockweed at the Green Island sandbar; but they aren't the only new arrivals to the island. Since our first chick fledged, we've moved on to another instant favorite: a newly hatched razorbill chick. We'll be keeping a sharp eye on the chick as it grows, and hopefully we'll get some photos of the parents making fish deliveries!



Taking photos of shorebirds and an eider creche on a foggy day.

In one of the most exciting events of the season, we finally got the chance to grub for puffins along the shoreline. You can't help but laugh when you reach your entire arm into a puffin burrow in an attempt to find a fluffy puffin chick, only to be met with the alligator bite strength of an angry adult puffin. Wrestling with the cantankerous adults to weigh and measure them was challenging, but indescribably fun. Their fuzzy chicks, meanwhile, are like black tennis balls with comically large feet. There's really nothing else quite like wrangling puffins and being rewarded with their adorable chicks and an entertaining story to tell. Still energized from our puffin grubbing experience, we took to the boardwalk and searched for black guillemot chicks in order to weigh and measure them as well. Later this week we will return to the puffin burrows to check up on the chicks, this time with many more photo opportunities.



Measuring the wing chord of a puffin chick on the shoreline.



A very chunky puffin chick.



Marking an angry black guillemot chick with nail polish so we can ID it later.



Amanda with a black guillemot chick.



Puffin grubbing.

Ship in Stormy Weather!

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on July 10, 2020

Hello from Ship Island!

Over the past week or so we have been engulfed by thick fog nearly every morning if not the entire day. Along with the fog we've had some storms pass through the bay as well. On the evening of July 8th, we had a large thunderstorm system pass directly over Blue Hill Bay and Ship Island. The cabin shook as the large storm approached and the loud thunderclap intervals increased rapidly. Percy was able to find a live-time lightning flash/bolt tracker which was fascinating to monitor as the storm progressed. At one point we believe a bolt struck less than 200 yards away from the cabin to the southeast.



Radar mosaic of the storm at 6:30 PM

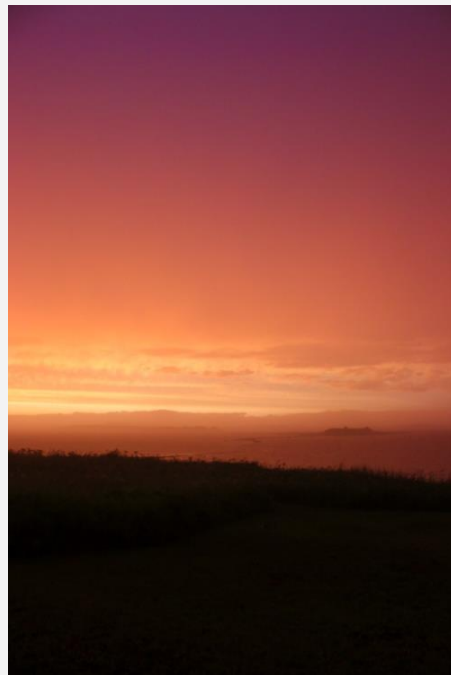
After the main portion of it passed a beautiful sunset unfolded as the sun began to peek out of the horizon clouds. The sunset gave the entire sky a pink and yellow glow which Percy was able to take some fantastic photos of before it disappeared!



Our trusty solar panel with a little added yellow glow!



Looking northwest towards the beach and West Barge Island



Looking northeast towards Trumpet Island

On a less stormy note, yesterday (7/9) morning I was able to capture a fogbow stretching over the island. We have normally seen the fogbow early in the morning when the sun is refracting off the fog to create a bow, much like a rainbow! Unlike a rainbow, though, the fogbow lacks color because the fog droplets are much smaller than normal rain droplets.



Fogbow panorama!

This makes an otherwise colorful rainbow a white fogbow. Prior to this season, I had never seen one so I was ecstatic to observe my first out here on Ship Island!

Cheers,

Andy

Growing Guillemots

Posted in [Metinic 2020](#), [Uncategorized](#), tagged [biology](#), [Black](#)

[Guillemot](#), [chicks](#), [ecology](#), [fluffy](#), [FOMCI](#), [Guillemot](#), [Maine](#), [Maine Coast](#), [Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#), [MCINWR](#), [research](#), [seabird conservation](#), [seabirds](#) on July 6, 2020

Hello from Metinic!

We've been stuck in foggy weather lately so the sunshine today was great!

On Metinic Island we monitor an assortment of birds, one of these is the black guillemot. On July 2nd we found our first guillemot chicks. So lets talk a bit about these charismatic birds.

We monitor around 20 nests every three to four days. This monitoring is no easy task, because the guillemots like to nest on the rocky coasts here. The first thing we have to do is traverse the rocks out to places where we have nests marked, and that's not even the hard part! The next step is to peer into the crevasse where they've nested. Sometimes we peek in and see an adult on eggs, other times we spot one to two eggs and recently we've found chicks!

Sometimes though we can't even see the nest so we muster all the bravery we can and stick our hand shoulder-deep into the rocks and feel around. Frequently we are lucky enough to feel eggs. Other times we might get a quick jab from a parent, which always makes you jump. Once chicks are in the nest we might even end up with our hand in chick poo. The best thing to grab though is a fluffy little chick. Once we get ahold of them we gently extract them from their rocky hole, weigh and measure them. Eventually we will be banding them so that they can be identified in the future.

I honestly think the guillemot chicks are one of the cutest. Pitch black except for when they open their bright red mouth. Once they are adults their feet will also turn bright red and they will develop white wing patches that make them very distinguished.

Check back in next week for more from Metinic!



Black Guillemot egg in nest



Black Guillemot chicks in their nest



"Excuse me! Put me down."



First Guillemot chick found this year



Adult Black Guillemot jumping out of its nest

Amazing Alcids on Petit Manan

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on July 5, 2020

We celebrated Independence Day on PMI by scouring the boardwalk for black guillemot chicks and checking puffin nest boxes. Walking slowly along the boardwalk and looking between the planks, you can see the white flash of an adult guillemot's wing or hear their high-pitched alarm calls. Their speckled white and brown eggshells stick out from the dark soil, and an adult may flush from the boardwalk, giving us a hint as to where their nests are. While we were collecting guillemot eggshells to help with a graduate study, we took the opportunity to snag some quick photos with the chicks; who wouldn't?



A black guillemot chick from a boardwalk nest.

Meanwhile we hopped around the shoreline to inspect our puffin nest boxes. Excitedly but carefully, we opened each box and checked their contents. We could tell which ones were occupied by the low chainsaw-like growl of the puffin parents. The chicks are covered with black downy feathers that give them the look of a black tennis ball with a beak. We're looking forward to handling and banding them later, as well as documenting the experience with plenty of photos.



Another hake delivery from a photogenic puffin parent.



Amanda scouring the shoreline for alcids and eider creches from the lighthouse deck.

In our never-ending search for new bird species to add to our 2020 species list, we searched the Green Island sandbar for shorebirds using our spotting scopes and instead witnessed some chicken-sized great black-backed gull chicks being fed by their massive parents. When the weather is fair we are greeted by the titanic *Friendship V* from the Bar Harbor Whale Watch. We always have time to answer their questions and chat with them from the lighthouse. Our foggier days are spent conducting provisioning watches, which is almost always entertaining. Spending a few hours watching nests gives you the chance to observe some interesting behaviors. We've witnessed chicks removing eggshell fragments from other chicks to assist them in hatching. The highlight of this week was getting to see a larger chick from a neighboring nest brood two smaller chicks in the absence of their parents on a cold, wet day. It's funny

to see that camaraderie when you know that common terns are just about the angriest neighbors you can have!



One of the common terns nesting on the shoreline, quite friendly and inquisitive.

Egg-quiste Eggs

July 4, 2020 by [MCINWR](#)

While walking through Ship Island's colony, I'm always fascinated by the variety of egg shapes and sizes we come across. Out of curiosity, I decided to measure and photograph some of these eggs to see how variable Common Tern eggs can be!

Eggs are developed rather quickly. After copulation, an egg can form and be laid in 24 hours! Typically, an egg can be added to the nest every 1 to 2 days. While most clutches contain 1-3 eggs, this season, we've found some with 4 to 5! The nest starts off as a simple scrape in the sand, gravel, or dirt. As parents spend more time around or in the nest, they'll move twigs, vegetation, seaweed, and other objects around to create a proper nest that will keep their eggs inside.



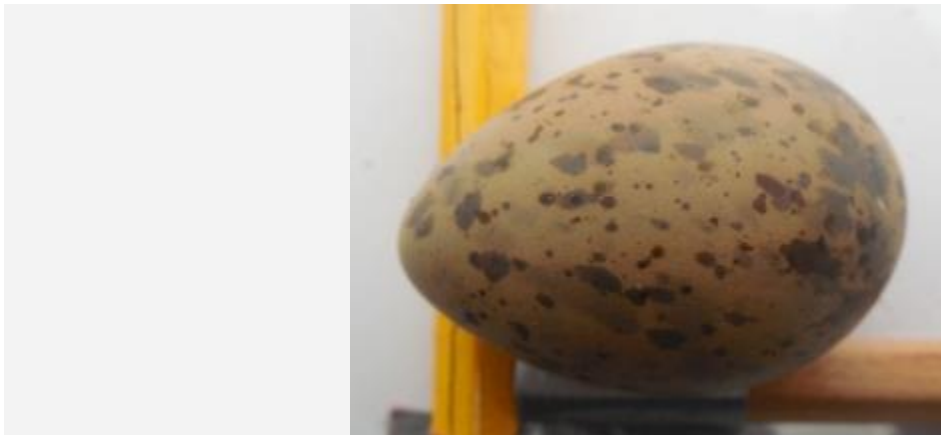
A Common Tern nest with 3 eggs

On average, Common Tern eggs are 42 mm long and 30 mm wide. As always, there are some eggs that do not meet these parameters. I found that lengths vary the most, ranging from 38 to 46 mm! Meanwhile, egg widths stay closer to the average, varying from 28 to 31 mm.



These two differently sized eggs are from the same nest!

Tern eggs are subelliptical meaning they are elongated with tapered rounded ends. The widest point of the egg is off center. Like size, shape varies greatly! Some eggs have the widest point towards the middle, creating an oval shape. Others have the widest point so close to one end, the egg has a long narrow point, like a raindrop.



A typical, subelliptical egg



Almost an oval-shaped egg

Sometimes, the most striking feature about the egg is its color and pattern. In just one clutch, the eggs can look wildly different. The colors can range from cream, tan, light brown, to dark brown. The shells are covered in small to large dark splotches and streaks. These markings can concentrate around the widest point, like a belt, or spread across the egg like freckles. The color and pattern is thought to help camouflage the eggs on the beach. However, we occasionally find some odd eggs that stand out. Some appear almost pure white with faint or no markings at all! Others are so dark brown that the markings are hard to distinguish.



Although Andy and I love finding these eggs, we're hoping that they'll be hatching soon! While there are some eggs which have been freshly laid, there are some which have survived abandonment and could be hatching any day. We look forward to welcoming the first chicks to Ship!

Percy

Posted in [Ship Island 2020](#) | Tagged [Beach](#), [Common Tern](#), [Egg](#), [FOMCI](#), [Maine Coastal Islands](#)
[NWR](#), [MCINWR](#), [nest](#), [seabird](#)

Archive for August, 2020

[Extra Hands for Extra Puffins](#)

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) on August 6, 2020

With two weeks left of the 2020 field season, we are continuing with our alcid work and saying farewell to our terns, who have nearly all left for the season. With more and more terns leaving the colony, we're shifting our focus onto resighting puffins and banding as many alcids as possible. While our puffin blind has been taken down to prepare for some rough weather ahead, we can still sneak up to puffin point with a spotting scope and resight some bands. So far we've resighted a few dozen puffins, some more than 14 years old! We still have one new arrival to PMI this season, Emma from Metinic! Emma will join us for the last two weeks to get some experience with puffin grubbing and banding. With three people, we have many more chances to get great photos of the puffin grubbing experience, especially when wrangling the adults is a team effort!



Emma grubbing an adult puffin.



Banding new puffin chicks.

Earlier this week we GPS tagged all of the nests we previously marked with flags to calculate our species ratio. This allows us to find the ratio of common terns to Arctic terns nesting on the island, and provides us with an estimate of how many breeding pairs of each species there are. GPS tagging the nests also allows us to visualize which parts of the island are the most appealing to either species. This week we also got the chance to explore Green Island and witness the herring and great black-backed gull chicks fledge. Luckily, we arrived at the right time to free a herring gull chick that had become stuck in an old lobster trap. We'll return to Green later this week to clean up some of the trash that has washed ashore, and hopefully plug up some more lobster traps in order to prevent anymore chicks from getting trapped in them. During our chats with the Bar Harbor Whale Watch we're always asked what the public can do to be more involved with conservation, and the best way is to be mindful of how we impact our surroundings; it's important to know where our trash is going and how it affects the local wildlife!



Curious little puffin being weighed.