

SUMMER WITH THE SEABIRDS

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

Archive 2015 – July, June and May

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 July, 2015

PMI still going strong!

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#), tagged [alcid](#)s, [Atlantic Puffin](#), [banded birds](#), [Band](#)ing, [biology](#), [Birding](#), [Black Guillemot](#), [Black Guillemot chicks](#), [burrow checks](#), [chick](#), [chicks](#), [cute chicks](#), [Island](#), [island living](#), [julia gillis](#), [leach's storm petrel chick](#), [Leach's Storm-petrel](#), [lighthouse](#), [Maine](#), [maine birds](#), [Maine Coastal Islands](#), [MCINWR](#), [Petit Manan](#), [Petit Manan Island](#), [Petrel](#), [petrel chick](#), [PMI](#), [PMI2015](#), [puffin](#), [Puffins](#), [razorbill](#), [razorbill chick](#), [refuge](#), [research](#), [seabird](#), [Trapping](#), [USFWS](#), [wayne maccabe](#) on July 29, 2015

While most of the other MCINWR islands are winding down for the season, Petit Manan is still going strong with major alcid trapping, island-wide guillemot and storm petrel checks, Arctic tern re-sighting, and our new-this-year project: Atlantic puffin feeding studies.



Atlantic Puffin with bill load through scope.



Puffin flying to burrow with fish that we have to identify as part of our feeding study

During our alcid checks, we discovered two little surprises in the form of Razorbill chicks! Only five pairs are breeding here on Petit Manan, so each new chick is very special to us. We even managed to capture one of his parents bringing food back to the burrow, an unusual sight here on PMI



Freshly banded Razorbill chick



Razorbill flying with food

Here are a few more snapshots of what else has been going on at PMI.



Black Guillemot chick being weighed every 5 days as part of our productivity checks



Leach's storm-petrel chick



PMI crew banding a puffin chick, minus Julia who took the photo



A puffin undergoing the banding process



Wayne and Julia with their first captured adult Razorbill!

Until next time,

Wayne and Julia

Final week out on Eastern Brothers Island

Posted in [Eastern Brother's Island 2015](#) on July 28, 2015

With only about a week left on The Brothers, Nate and I are taking advantage of our dwindling time here to finish up our work and enjoy this incredible experience. Although the weather recently has not allowed us to do our morning counts of the birds on the island, we have been very busy monitoring the black guillemots chicks. Some of the chicks are well over 300 grams now and many are developing flight

feathers. While there are burrows with chicks growing flight feathers, we also still have eggs that have not hatched yet. In the past couple of weeks we have been monitoring about 70 different burrows, with the majority of them on Eastern Brothers Island.



A black guillemot loafing by a marked burrow

Out of our 2 pairs of Terns that both had 3 chicks hatch, all 3 Terns from the first nest have successfully fledged. The second nest chicks hatched later, however, we believe that the majority of the chicks from the second nest will fledge soon as well. Although we only had to pairs of common terns nest on Eastern Brothers this year, their average clutch size was larger than any other year and the island. Also The Brothers has been mainly predator free this year for the first time. We are confident that this island will someday become a large tern colony as long as it stays predator free. This is has been an awesome experience for the both of us and it's gonna be a sad day leaving the island for the summer, but until then we still have a lot of work to do!



A common tern adult hovering

- James

Lazy Days on Ship

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#), tagged [Blue Hill Bay](#), [Common Tern](#), [island living](#) on July 27, 2015

Greetings and salutations from Ship Island! It is getting down to the last couple of days. The majority of our chicks have fledged; after checking them today, we have only 9 chicks total in our productivity plots (from 73 hatched). We conducted our remaining bird surveys of Trumpet and the Barges and counted lounging harbor seals for the last time. The next few days will consist of taking down empty productivity plots and slowly packing up our gear. I am eating my way through these unhurried days.



One of Ship's first chicks. Going to miss these fluffy babies.



A tern I discovered after Mark casually reminded me to survey the Barges.

The nightly shorebird walks have become a focal point of entertainment. Familiarizing myself with the migrating shorebirds is fun in its own right, but the walks coincide nicely with dusk settling over Blue Hill Bay. When you're working every day, it's surprisingly easy to forget you're living on a beautiful island. I'm making sure to take in everything here for the last time.



Ruddy Turnstones spicing up the shorebird walk

The Common Tern colony on Ship Island increased significantly this year, from 393 nests counted last year in the GOMSWG Census to 673 this year. The productivity rate for our colony (the number of chicks to fledge per nest) has been estimated to be at least 1.27, meaning that more than 850 chicks have successfully fledged this year so far. Hopefully the colony will return in such numbers again next year and for years to come. It's been an incredible process monitoring the terns. This was my first season with seabirds and words can't really describe how much this summer has meant to me. It's hard work and long hours, but it is the most rewarding job I've had. Looking back at Ship Island for the last time will definitely be a somber, reflective moment. But, I'm also looking forward to eating my weight in ice cream.



COTE in flight

That's it for this season! Best of luck to our fledglings!

-Sarah

The Ship has Set Sail

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#), tagged [chick](#), [Common Tern](#), [Egg](#), [Island](#), [PMI](#), [Predation](#), [tern](#), [Tern chick](#) on July 25, 2015



Photo by Wayne MacCabe

This is the Captain, who lives on the walkway in front of the house. What makes him so special to us is he was rescued from freezing rain when he was still inside his egg. One rainy day the area where Captain's nest was got flooded with collecting rain water. The whole nest and the three eggs inside it were completely submerged in the water and were floating around. The parent was hovering over the nest, unsure of what to do. After seeing this I quickly ran outside and scooped up the nest and re-located it to a nearby high-elevated area. Seconds later Captain's mother was back on her nest. I was relieved to see this because terns can be sensitive to any slight change to their nest and can be spooked away if they feel something is wrong. Unfortunately, I still didn't have high hopes for the chick's survival. I didn't know how long the eggs were floating in the cold water, they could have passed away from the cold temperatures or from the water sealing up the pores on the egg which lets the chicks breath oxygen from the air. But, to my surprise about a week later Captain hatched and soon after so did his brother, Sailor. I named the chicks this because the nest was floating around like a ship at sea. Now, both Captain and Sailor are fledging!

We have over 2,000 chicks on the island and just our presence here increases the survival rate for these chicks. This is because we deter predators like greater black back gulls, peregrine falcons, herring gulls, and more which will make a quick meal out of the fledging terns and chicks. Realistically, we can not 100 percent stop predation from these species, but we work hard to keep fatality numbers low. Without us working here on the island these birds would likely take over and would have a devastating blow to the tern population. It made me so happy to see that Captain had made it but I noticed I gained a lot more than just satisfaction from seeing him survive, I gained a new understanding of my time here on the island. This event encouraged me because it really showed how my time and work on the island present on the island.

-Laura Bollert

Puffins in the Fog at Eastern Brothers Island, Jonesport

Posted in [Eastern Brother's Island 2015](#) on July 20, 2015

The past few days have been quite eventful with 2 of the 3 tern chicks in nest 1 fledgling and many guillemots chicks to band and measure, the puffins are around Eastern Brothers almost everyday and more and more shorebirds are passing through on their trips south. Many guillemots are developing pin feathers now, and it will be interesting to watch them slowly give way to true flight feathers. Several are already approaching 280 grams and hopefully we will be here when they fledged. The fog has been in thick the past few days halting our morning counts, but still there is a mysterious beauty to it. Today on Eastern Brothers James and I were greeted by several puffins, one flew quite close and landed within the puffin decoys on a nearby rock. Hopefully these birds will choose to return to the islands next year to breed, starting what may one day e a thriving colony.

Nate Skvorak



Winding Down at Metinic Island

Posted in [Meticinic 2015](#) on July 20, 2015

With the season's end coming up rapidly, the daily duties of monitoring seabirds also become less time consuming as the tern chicks start to take flight and go out on their own. While it might be sad to think about not being able to work with these feisty little birds in the near future, it also brings about a feeling of elation and accomplishment, knowing that we put a huge effort into helping them survive the trials of hatching, growing, and finally fledging.

But less time in the tern colony means more time for birding! And with Metinic Island having quite a few acres of forested area to go along with the vast amount of grassland and coastal habitats, there are plenty of birds to see. We've had a rare Rusty Blackbird show up, an out-of-season Long-tailed Duck, and plenty of other migrants and local birds. We've been able to identify over 80 species of bird out here so far, and there are quite a few others that we haven't quite been able to put our finger on.



Somewhat ironically named Short-billed Dowitchers relax near Metinic's only pond



A Cedar Waxwing picking out which berries to eat



One of four Northern Flickers (yellow shafted) that were as interested in me as I was in them

Metinic Island has been a great place to live and work over the past couple months, and I'm sure we'll be sad to leave it once the field season ends, but we've also been able to see a lot of what the Maine coastal islands has to offer and have learned a lot along the way.

- Derek

Taking flight at Ship Island

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#) on July 19, 2015

With the end of July hurtling towards us and our colony, our tern chicks have transformed from little balls of fluff to fledglings. By this point, the chicks have completed the awkward phase of growing out their downy feathers and now have their sleek adult feathers. The feathers on the upper wings, however, are a patchy gray-brown and the black caps seen on adults are more of a thick ring around the base of the head.



Chick wing with adult feathers coming in

For a week or two now, we've seen them stretching out their wings, hopping as high as they can. Every once in a while we'd see one attempt a feat worthy of praise, only to tumble adorably (and without injury) to the ground. These chicks are tenacious and it serves them well. For what starts as a few moments off the ground turns into a brief aerial journey of a couple feet. Now we're seeing them fly throughout the colony! Although not as graceful as their adult counterparts, they're gaining confidence in their abilities. It's really an amazing process to witness and be a part of every day.



Fledgling in flight! Go lil buddy!

We've attempted "sweeps" of the colony. While Julia was taking care of Ship in our stead, she banded over a hundred chicks in one stint. Mark and I are picking up where Julia left off, chasing down older chicks that have not yet been banded. It's a lot of digging through grass, running and sliding, sometimes

for an already banded chick or a chick that can fly but only chooses to do when you've already sprinted halfway down the beach. While catching your breath and picking the rocks out your shoes, you can't help but smile as you see the little birds flying away.

That's it for this week! See y'all next Sunday!

-Sarah

Terns! The Petit Manan Island Musical

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#) on July 14, 2015

Greetings from Petit Manan!



PMI as seen from Green Island.

There is a lot of work left to do this season, but having just returned from my break I am much more aware of how limited our time out here is, and what an amazing experience living on this island has been.



Supplies and the Ship Island crew getting dropped off.

We are living in a house that was utilized by lighthouse keepers when maintaining a lighthouse was something that you couldn't entrust to a circuit board and a bank of batteries. We depend on regular

deliveries of food and potable water, a solar power system for the limited electricity we do use, and collected rain water for washing up.



Sara Williams wearing the worm hat while doing the nightly chores. Laura approves!

Depending on your perspective that can sound like hardship or luxury, but for me it is a taste of the sweet life. I get some distance from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the world while having most of the comforts of home. There is also the benefit of almost no biting flies. I never thought I would have a summer in Maine where I didn't get any mosquito bites.



Wayne mowing the lawn as terns attempt to drive him off.

We are also living in the middle of a large seabird colony. We have a perspective into the lives of these animals that few people are privileged enough to experience. I have seen adult terns court, nest, lay, incubate, hatch, and now feed their ravenous offspring all within the span of a few weeks. Soon these new lives will begin their first migration to the southern hemisphere for overwintering, and hopefully return here to raise young of their own.



Common tern chicks living on the rocks.

In addition to the Terns we have Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots, Gulls, Petrels and others all involved in the same mad race to pass on their genes.



Wayne working up a Guillemot on Guillemot day!

As amazing as it is to sit in the middle of this genetic maelstrom and watch a new season unfold, the realization that you can extrapolate this madness to a global scale blows me away. It's not as though I have just learned how successive generations are made, but to see it happen in this kind of density has given me a greater appreciation of what an awesome place our planet is.



On a clear night Wayne showed us some planets through the spotting scope. Here Jupiter and three of its moons are visible.

I have also had the good fortune to learn some new (to me) skills from some great biologists and instructors. Prior to this season I had almost no practical field experience and was more than a little nervous at the prospect of hitting the ground running. Wayne, Julia, and other member of the refuge staff have done a fantastic job at ensuring that we (myself and Laura B.) were able to step right in to our roles as seabird technicians.



Julia holds a Common Eider that she hand captured during census while Wayne prepares a band.



Laura measures the wing chord of a Puffin chick.



Wayne and Julia taking measurements of an adult puffin.

I am very excited to get back to work here on PMI, and for now I will try not to think about the coming end of the season. I have my very own backstage pass to a world class concert, and I'm going to enjoy every bit of it while the music keeps playing.



Another beautiful sunset on PMI.

-John Fatula

Trumpet and the Barges Islands, Blue Hill Bay

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#), tagged [Bald Eagle](#), [Ship Island](#), [The Barges](#), [Trumpet Island](#) on July 12, 2015

In addition to our home base of Ship Island, we are tasked with monitoring three surrounding islands: Trumpet Island, East Barge, and West Barge.

Trumpet Island is the biggest of the three surrounding islands, similar in size to Ship itself. At the core of the island is a small hill, covered with low vegetation. Around the hill, a rocky beach extends in all directions, growing much larger at low tide with several prominent spits and sandbars. Common Eiders nest up in the vegetation and can be seen swimming in the surrounding waters as well as resting on the rocks and beaches. Gulls, both Herring and Great Black-backed, have their nests at the top of the rocky beach. Their growing chicks are quite visible from afar, roaming around the beach during our weekly scope surveys.



Trumpet Island as seen from our cabin

East Barge is fairly small, with a central grassy hill protruding above a rocky ledge. Aside from a few nesting Great Black-backed Gulls, we can't see any other nesting species from Ship, although the numerous Black Guillemots nearby suggest that they may be nesting on the opposite side. Common Eiders and dozens of harbor seals haul up on the rocks for a respite from the cool water. In addition to our weekly bird count, we conduct a low-tide count of the seals once every two weeks on both Barges.



East Barge as seen from Gull Blind

West Barge is similar in size to East Barge, little more than a small rock outcrop jutting up out of the bay. Steep, rocky ledges reach up from the surf, forming a plateau beyond the reach of the waves where a few hardy bushes and grasses have gotten a foothold. Along with some nesting Great Black-backed Gulls, there is a colony of Double-crested Cormorants along the edge of the plateau. With more than one hundred nests, this colony occasionally draws in the local Bald Eagles, who can easily pick off a cormorant or cormorant chick for a quick meal. In spite of the predation, the cormorant colony seems to be doing well, with the chicks growing closer to fledging every week.



West Barge as seen from Gull Blind



One of our local Bald Eagles with its lunch

Until next time!

-Mark

Growing Up, Metinic Island

Posted in [Meticinic 2011](#) on July 11, 2015

With summer in full swing, the birds are keeping pace. Eggs are hatching and chicks are being fed, as their busy parents bring in lots of fresh fish to aid them through their growing pains. Guillemot chicks can be seen in the intertidal rock crevices, and eider ducklings are losing their down as they start to look more and more like their mothers that so intently protect them from harm.

The tern chicks are running amok throughout the colony, and some are learning quicker than others what it means to be a seabird. The larger chicks can be seen preening, jumping, and stretching their wings as they begin to imitate their parents' behaviors.



An arctic tern chick mirrors its parent's preening posture.

It's only a matter of time until they start taking their first short flights that will inevitably end in botched landings amongst the tall grass they've hidden in since figuring out how to walk.



A tern chick tests out its wings, but to no avail.

With only a few weeks left in the field season, and much left to do, there will surely be many more highlights packed into the short amount of time remaining. If all continues to go as smoothly as it has thus far, then it looks to be a very successful breeding season out here on Metinic Island.

– Derek

Chicks on Ship Island!

July 5, 2015 by MCINWR

Hello again from Ship Island! Mark and I are back at home base after visiting beautiful Petit Manan Island! While saying goodbye to puffins is not easy, we are excited to come back to a thriving population of Common Tern chicks. These little bundles of fuzzy feathers are just delightful and it's hard to keep a straight face every time you see them scampering around the colony. With chicks, however, comes hard work.



Mark bands our first chick!

Before the chicks began to hatch, we set up productivity plots. Productivity plots are essentially a group of nests that have fences around them. These plots allow us to closely monitor a subset of tern nests, which gives us insight into the success of the colony this season. On Ship we have six plots with a range of 5 to 11 nests in each plot. We visit the plots every day, monitoring nests that have yet to hatch, taking

daily weight measurements of and banding chicks. From time to time, we see eggs that never hatch and chicks that don't make it. While sad, this is part of why these plots are important. Our productivity plots let us know the effects of severe weather or can clue us in to potential predators. With this in mind, we're very happy to report that we have a strong and growing chick population this year on Ship!



Common tern with herring

With so many chicks running around, we're able to begin our provisioning studies here on Ship Island. These provisioning (feeding) studies are set up by designating several nests that are easily seen from the blinds. As the nests hatch, chicks are banded and colored according to nest number and chick order. For example, Nest 1 is green, so the A chick is marked green on its head, the B chick green on its breast and the C chick green on its back. Each nest has its own color and the chicks are marked in the same pattern. Once the provisioning study is under way, we wait for adults to return to their chicks with food in their bills. When they arrive, we record what they're bringing in and who they're feeding it to. Identifying the fish isn't difficult; trying to see what it is before a hungry chick swallows it whole is the hard part! So far we've seen plenty of herring coming in, some hake and sandlance, and the occasional pollock. Again, all good news for the colony and its chicks!



B and C chicks beg for food while A chick gobbles down a herring

That's all for now! Hope you're enjoying the weather and we'll be back next week!

-Sarah

Archive for June, 2015

[From Shore to Shore](#)

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#), tagged [bar harbor](#), [barharbor](#), [bird](#), [Blue Hill Bay](#), [Common Tern](#), [Maine](#), [MDI](#), [seabird](#), [seal cove](#), [Ship Island](#), [tern](#) on June 30, 2015

Greetings from Ship Island! As one of the researchers normally stationed on Petit Manan Island, I had the privilege of island-sitting Ship island for just over a week while the regular crew had their break and visited Petit Manan. Visiting other islands gives us new insights into seabird biology as each colony behaves in their own way slightly different from all the rest. Plus, who wouldn't want to check out the Puffins?! In 2013 I spent the summer here, so when I stepped out onto the warm, sandy shore, it was a bit like visiting an old friend.



Lazy sunset on the beach.

With me came Shelby, a young student just learning the ropes of being a biologist. We had a fun time learning what birds, plants, and insects live on the island. Every morning we went "birding" to conduct the morning bird count, learning where each bird family lived and what their songs sounded like.



Common Yellowthroat with a little morsel for his chicks.



Spotted Sandpiper "defending" his nest as we attempt to find it.

During our time here the chicks started hatching en masse, so Shelby also got to band quite a few birds! Banding is a very delicate process so first we practiced in the house several times, but she did great.



Shelby banding one of her first chicks!

We even got a bonus with this adult Tern I caught out of the air.



Adult Tern caught by hand!

Tomorrow we go back to where we belong – me to Petit Manan, and Shelby to her home on the mainland. It has been a great week on Ship with beautiful weather and many laughs but we are ready for whatever's next!

– Julia



Our favorite sandy-color chick.

Chicks are Popping on PMI

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#) on June 28, 2015

Chicks are popping!

As we say on Petit Manan Island, the season is in full swing and eggs are hatching all over the island. We had our first Arctic tern eggs hatch on 17th of June and the first Common terns hatched on the 19th of June and we've been banding chicks ever since. This year we have set up 9 productivity fences throughout the island containing from 5-11 tern nests and will monitor the chicks as they hatch until they fledge. Arctic terns take about 21-24 days and Common terns take a little longer, around 27-30 days. Every day we go out into the colony (weather permitting) and weigh each banded chick inside each plot until they have fledged. This in turn will give us a better understanding of productivity in the tern colony on PMI this year. We also had our first Atlantic Puffin chick hatch on the 25th of June and found our first Black guillemot chicks on the 27th of June which was actually Guillemot Appreciation day!



John banding a common tern chick while Laura looks for chicks inside a productivity plot.



Common tern nest inside a productivity plot

This is my fourth season working with seabirds and I am amazed every year how cute these chicks can be. Every year I watch my fellow biologists turn into little softies after seeing these little creatures. I don't care who you are, there is no one who could say that this isn't cute.



Freshly banded Arctic chick by W. Maccabe



Arctic tern chick close up

-Wayne

[Living out on The Brothers](#)

Posted in [Eastern Brother's Island 2015](#) on June 26, 2015

Living out on The Brothers island has been quite the awesome experience so far. Now that the end of June is among us, the seabird activity has really begun to accelerate. With the terns beginning to hatch and the number of guillemot burrows rising, Nate and I have had our hands full.

Since arriving to The Brothers in late May we have identified many of the plants that inhabit both Westerns and Eastern Brothers. There are many different plants that are edible and some have been disappointing, however, none compare to Scotch Lovage of the parsley family. This delicious green is always fresh from the island and very nutritious!



Nate with his Scotch Lovage

One of the greatest parts about living out on The Brothers is that almost every night is rewarded by a postcard sunset that will illuminate the sky well into evening. Every night after the sunset we are also greeted by the arrival of the leach's storm petrels, as they use the darkness as cover.



- James

Resident Birds of Ship Island

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#), tagged [Common Yellowthroat](#), [Mallard](#), [Ship Island](#), [Sparrows](#), [Spotted Sandpiper](#) on June 21, 2015

Our efforts on Ship Island focus so heavily on tern monitoring, that we seldom mention the other species that spend their summer on the island. We made an earlier post about migrants, but I'd like to outline some of our everyday, non-tern sightings.

Two species of warbler are our brightest residents, their brilliant colors visible even through the growing foliage. Yellow Warblers, as their name implies, are a fantastic yellow hue throughout, with some red or brown markings on the breast. We have at least one pair in the grove, where the female was gathering nest material earlier in the season. A few Common Yellowthroats' "Wichety-wichety-wichety" can be heard around the island, with them making an occasional feeding foray just outside the cabin window.



Male Common Yellowthroat outside our cabin window

While not as striking as the warblers, three sparrow species make their homes on Ship, with at least two of them breeding here. Our two dozen or so Song Sparrows are one of the most common streaky sparrows found throughout much of the U.S. and Canada. Their reddish caps and tails set them apart from our equally numerous Savannah Sparrows. Savannah Sparrows are smaller and have a bright yellow spot right above their eye. A more recent arrival has been the Nelson's Sparrow, of which we have seen only two. Smaller even than the Savannah, the Nelson's have a strange call somewhere between a hiss and a sigh that we can often hear near the small wetland in the middle of the island.



Nelson's Sparrow calling from atop our solar panel

Terns are often lauded for their aerial acrobatics, but we have at least one pair of nesting Bank Swallows which can match them zig for zag. Much smaller than the terns, the swallows zip around the island gulping up small flying insects and turning on a dime. Their nest is near the top of the bluff, where they have excavated a small hole.

Several shorebird species make use of the island's tideline for foraging, but only one species, the Spotted Sandpiper, nests here. Their peeping call and constant tail-bobbing set them apart from other species. We have found two nests and suspect that there are at least three more, hidden under tufts of grass.



Spotted Sandpiper nest with 4 eggs

No island bird post would be complete without mentioning our Mallards. A well-known and common duck throughout North America, we have at least three females currently roaming the island with clutches of ducklings.



Female Mallard with her ducklings

Until next time!

-Mark

[A Terning Point in the Season](#)

Posted in [Metinic 2015](#) on June 21, 2015

With the remnants of a tropical storm currently passing through, it seems like a good time to reflect on the events of the past week or so out here on Metinic Island. Our focus is shifting from eggs to birds, as more are hatching everyday. We've managed to set up productivity plots to monitor a portion of the tern chicks as they go through their growing-up process from hatchling to fledgeling. We've also conducted the yearly census to find out exactly how many nests we have, and it's a solid 25% increase over last year!

Adding to the good news of nest numbers being higher, we found that the first tern chick hatched on Friday. Over the next couple of weeks the rest of the colony, which consists of both common and arctic terns, will follow suit, with the parents bringing the newborns loads of herring and other fish for them to munch on as they rapidly grow to full size.



A pair of newly hatched arctic terns.

The calm before the (current) storm brought great weather to the area. We took advantage of it and managed to trap 19 terns, all of which received shiny ID bands, if they didn't have them already, and nanotags. These little devices that get attached to the birds' backs will help tell us where they are going to feed and, more importantly, exactly what route they take during their migration halfway around the world to southern Africa and South America.



Attaching a nanotag to a tern.



Releasing a freshly banded and nano tagged arctic tern.

Things are looking good out here, and the season is going about as smoothly as possible. Hopefully over the next month and change things continue to go the terns' way, with lots of plump fish being brought in and lots of tern chicks learning to fly!

- Derek

First Tern Banding at Petit Manan Island

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#), tagged [Arctic Tern](#), [Banding](#), [Common Tern](#), [Petit Manan](#), [Petit Manan Island](#), [tern](#), [Trapping](#) on June 19, 2015

Last week, John and I trapped and banded our first terns! We were thrilled to finally have the opportunity to see and work with these birds up close. But these amazing up close interactions did not come without a lot of hard work and preparation. The process of trapping and banding is very detailed and a complete understanding is needed to keep the terns happy and healthy.

Before we could start banding, Julia and Wayne had us practice on dummy birds. These dummy birds were composed of cardboard toilet paper rolls for bodies, Q-tips for legs, and duct tape for heads. Julia and Wayne informed us of the methods of handling and banding terns when out in the field and with their help we simulated banding on our dummy birds by using old bands. After we felt comfortable with banding we learned how to collect measurements from our birds. When a tern is captured we recorded the weight, wing length, and head and bill length of the tern. We got to see and use all of the tools used



to take these measurements.

In preparation for trapping, we laid out all of our equipment out on the lawn and checked to make sure all of the traps had all their components and were functional. John and I spent some time getting used to setting up the traps and gripping the idea of the little quirks that makes the trapping process run a lot smoother. Once we were quick and efficient with setting up out traps we were ready for the real deal!



Laura & Julia setting up their trap

Our first trapping day was nerve racking and exciting! We had to find a balance when trapping and banding our terns that would enable us to work fast but also be gentle and thoughtful when handling the terns. As much as we wanted to take our time and soak up all the beauty, we had to act quickly and efficiently when banding the terns to minimize the amount of stress placed on the birds. I felt uneasy going into my first banding experience; this wasn't like the dummy birds we practiced on, the terns move around a lot more than the dummies and one wrong pinch on the band could harm the tern. But to my surprise banding my first bird came natural to me and it went smoothly. I got to trap and band many more terns that day and I hope to do some more in the next few days.



John and his tern

So far we have trapped 19 COTE (common terns) and 16 ARTE (arctic terns) our goal is to have a total of 20 COTE and 100 ARTE by next week! Trapping and banding terns is important because it shows site fidelity and survival rates of juveniles and adults.

– Laura Bollert

[Plant Management on Ship Island](#)

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#), tagged [Invasive Plants](#), [Prescribed Burn](#), [Ship Island](#) on June 14, 2015

While monitoring and managing wildlife is the priority of the Fish and Wildlife Service, plant management is an often overlooked facet of the process. Common Terns nest on and just above the narrow gravel beach of Ship Island, eschewing the dense, shrubby vegetation found higher up. In recent years, the colony has been periodically inundated by extreme tides and storms, so there has been a push to get the terns to nest further above the tideline. In addition to the construction of the restoration plots mentioned in last week's Ship Island post, the refuge staff have conducted prescribed burns to deter dense vegetation growing near the beach. The terns seem to be happily building nests in the area that was burned earlier this spring, even with the patchy plants popping up around them.



Area near the beach that was not burned



Burn area near beach

Another plant project on the island is the ongoing battle against invasive plants. Maine Natural History Observatory, along with the refuge staff, has been experimenting with different treatments to remove garlic mustard and garden valerian. Hand-pulling, followed by the application of salt water and concentrated vinegar has been our method for garlic mustard control earlier in the summer. While we managed to eliminate most of the large patches, there is likely some garlic mustard still lurking beneath the waist-high cow parsnip.

A final plant management project is mostly for our benefit. Our trails around the island require plenty of maintenance to prevent them from getting overgrown. As the weather has warmed, the plants have grown ever higher, faster and faster. Regular weekly mowing has allowed us to keep our trails clear, even as the surrounding vegetation has grown up. The trails aren't just for us; mallards, sparrows, and sandpipers also use the cleared trails.



Mallard in the trail

Until next time!

-Mark

[Banded American Oystercatcher Part II](#)

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#), tagged [American Oystercatcher](#), [banded birds](#), [chicks](#), [Green Island](#), [Maine Coastal Islands](#), [Maine birds](#), [Petit Manan Island](#), [PMI](#), [PMI2015](#) on June 9, 2015

In my last blog I mentioned that the Petit Manan crew had resighted a banded American Oystercatcher (AMOY) with its mate on Green Island which is adjacent to PMI and only accessible during low tide. After observing the banded AMOY in mid-May, we submitted our finding to the Bird Banding Lab website and received information about the bird. We discovered that it was born and banded as a chick in 2006 on Nantucket Island, Nantucket, MA. It was last resighted in 2014 in Charleston, South Carolina,



Observing American Oystercatchers on Green Island. Photo by: John Fatula

On our second visit over to Green Island we were combing the north-west side for any sign of Oystercatcher eggs, when we noticed that our 9 year-old banded AMOY, with its mate, were unusually vocal. So, we decided to move out of the area and use a spotting scope to watch from a distance. After about 15 minutes of scanning around we noticed tiny little chick heads in the rocks and sure enough they

were 3 oystercatcher chicks! We all watched through the scope as the adults foraged around and were surprised how quickly the adults can extract the meat from a mussel and feed the chicks (about 3 seconds). AMOY chicks will usually stay with the adults for up to a year to perfect their foraging techniques.

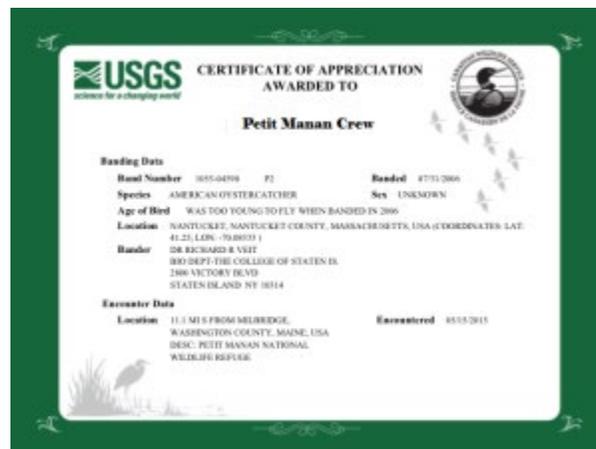


Foraging AMOY with 2 chicks: you can see how camouflaged the chicks are.



Banded AMOY foraging with chick. Photo by: Julia Gillis

After further research by Linda Welch we were informed that these were the first AMOY chicks to be discovered on Green Island since 1997! Not only that, they have now become the most northerly breeding pair within their range. How cool! We always thought that Green Island seemed like a perfect place for AMOYs to nest, and have seen them loafing there in recent years, but never found any eggs or chicks as the adults are very secretive. With just a few alarm calls by the adults, the chicks instinctively hide deep in the rocks of the intertidal zone. Each adult will constantly call and try to lure any predators out of the area. We just hope this pair can keep the prying eyes of the gulls away from discovering their chicks so they can grow up and successfully fledge. And we even received a certificate for our efforts.



Ship Island's Tern Colony!

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#), tagged [blind time](#), [Common Tern](#), [Ship Island](#) on June 7, 2015

While the beginning of June was a little dreary here on Ship Island, we're very excited to share that we have an established Common Tern colony! Our first egg was found last week and the number of nests keeps growing. Today, Mark counted 347 terns within the colony. Between now and the next few weeks, we're hoping to see the colony expand to over 800 terns with more than 400 nests. We still have a little ways to go, but we have plenty of work to do in the meantime!



Common terns flush around Eider Blind

Our daily tern counts are conducted from our two blinds overlooking the colony: Eider Blind and Gull Blind. When we first approach the blinds, the terns rise up and swarm around, clearly agitated by the presence of a potential predator. We count the number of terns located throughout the colony after they have settled, taking note of the number above the high tide line, nest incubation and any courtship behaviors. The location of the nests is important for the ongoing success of the tern colony; any nests located too close to the high tide line are at risk of being washed away during storm events or extreme high tides. The beach is narrow and the amount of suitable nesting substrate is somewhat limited, so the Refuge has built two beach-imitating restoration plots above the beach. During our time in the blinds, we monitor these restoration plots to see if the terns are taking to them (they have and nests have been seen). Should these plots be successful, the colony will have more space to nest and will hopefully expand in the years to come.



One restoration plot from inside Gull Blind, Eider Blind in distance

As seabird technicians on the island, our main goal for the summer is to monitor and maintain the colony. We've mentioned before that we watch for predators constantly, but we simply can't have eyes on the colony 24 hours a day. To make up for this, we marked 50 nests with tongue depressors with the date and number of eggs, which we will check again at a later point. Ideally, there will be the same number of eggs or more in each nest. If not, we will know that there are likely predation events and will have ample time to come up with a solution to further protect the colony. Tern chicks are still several weeks away but it's important to stay on top of monitoring the colony every day. The more we catch potential problems as they arise before the end of the month, the smoother it will be once the madness of chick season arrives.



A Common Tern incubates its nest

That's all from us here on Ship! Until next time!

-Sarah

[A Cold but Optimistic Start to June](#)

Posted in [Metinic 2015](#) on June 6, 2015

It was a wet start to June, with the first few days being complete washouts. The rain, along with unseasonably cool temperatures, has made for a slow week on the island; not that that's a bad thing. Sitting by the wood stove with a good book (The Sibley Guide to Birds) or watching a movie (The Big Year) makes for a relaxing change of pace to get our minds off of work for a while.



A dreary day on Metinic

After a late start to the season, the terns here on Metinic Island are finally settling in, with the first eggs being laid about a week ago. Since then, nests have been popping up all over the place, and birds are still finding their way to the island for the season, which means there are still many more nests to be made!



The first tern egg of the season!

It seems that some of the common eiders, a species of sea duck that can be found nesting on many New England islands, got around to laying their eggs early, as ducklings have already been seen following their mother around in the island's coves.



Newborn eider ducklings stick close to mom.

While terns, gulls, guillemots and eiders are the main inhabitants on Metinic, there are many other birds nesting out here as well, including sandpipers, storm petrels, and even a pair of bald eagles! We've noticed the little sandpipers like to tuck their eggs under tufts of grass along the shoreline near the tern colony, presumably to let the terns do all the work fending off hungry gulls for them, whereas the eagles have made their huge six-foot-wide home in the most inaccessible treetops of the forest.



A spotted sandpiper nest tucked safely away under some grass.

With the wide variety of bird life on the island, there's a seemingly endless supply of species to see. It's a good thing it's still early on in the field season, as there's still lots of exploring to do.

- Derek

Gully Conscience

June 4, 2015 by [MCINWR](#)

Bummer.

That was what I thought the first time I saw a gull swoop down and steal a tern egg here on Petit Manan. I know that the gulls are not evil. They are just following their biological imperatives like any other animal. A protein-packed meal that can't run or fight back? It's a no-brainer from the gull's point of view. They might get harassed by the terns, but for a three-and-a-half pound Greater Black Backed Gull the little four-ounce terns would need a miracle to do any serious damage. I am certain that if the terns didn't possess a secret weapon the gulls would eat every egg on the ground and drive away the entire tern colony in short order. What allows the tern colony to remain extant in the face of such an effective predator?

Us.

The presence of the researchers on this island is what keeps these gulls in check. They know that if they try and hang out too close to the colony we won't give them a moment's peace until they leave. The gulls are smart, smarter than I ever gave them credit for. They know when they can get away with sneaking in a little closer to see what's available so they can swoop down and grab an egg when the time is right. If it's foggy or wet we will stay inside to avoid disturbing the terns, and the gulls will push in a little closer. If it's nice and we maintain more of a presence outside they tend to keep a respectful distance.



Gull sizing up the colony.

Photo by J.Fatula

It is unfortunate that the terns must rely on this unnatural service to make it through each season, but it is important to remember that it was also humans who created the unnaturally high numbers of gulls. While some make a comfortable living at the town dump or the parking lot of your local fast food restaurant, there are many others who would love to eat as many tern eggs as possible. The continued presence of researchers on Petit Manan ensures that these incredible animals can continue to be enjoyed for generations to come.



Gull chicks with pipping egg.

Photo by: W.MacCabe

I said before that I know the gulls aren't evil, but they seem to be the most constant threat to the terns out here, so it is easy to see them as the villains. The gulls are just trying to make a living and raise a family, and it's important to maintain respect for their lives, even if we are constantly at odds.

-John Fatula

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#)

Archive for May, 2015

[Life on Ship Island](#)

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#), tagged [Birding](#), [island living](#), [Ship Island](#) on May 31, 2015

Hello again from Ship Island!

Summer is almost here and the terns are sticking around more and more every day. We've noticed the number of terns visiting the colony is increasing as well, so hopefully within the next week the colony will be formed and full of nesting Common terns. In the meantime, Mark found our first tern egg! The colony is on its way!



Common Tern Egg

Many of you may be wondering what life is like when you're living on a seabird island. Our days here start early; at 7 AM we conduct daily surveys of any and all birds on the island. These surveys typically include songbirds, waterfowl, and any marine birds. We get new avian visitors to the islands almost every day so these surveys are a fun and interesting way to start the day.



Female American Redstart

The rest of the day is weather dependent. Aside from the important and almost constant roles of monitoring general movements of the tern colony and keeping an eye out for any predators visiting both Ship and Trumpet Islands, some tasks cannot be completed in rain or dense fog. Days when we are stuck

inside (such as today- rain and wind gusts up to 30 mph!) typically include lots of reading, card games, checking up on emails and listening to the radio. We will venture outside for a quick survey of shorebirds at high tide and dusk, but the day is low key and relaxing. When the weather is cooperative, one of us will spend some time in the blinds observing the terns. The rest of the day is filled with completing projects for the Refuge staff. These can range from trail maintenance to removing invasive plant species to marking the 30 meter grid plot around the whole island. Once our main goals for the day have been accomplished, we take the time to enjoy the day. Exploring the different fauna on the island is always fun and there is usually time to squeeze in some beach chair lounging. It's always great to spend an hour or two sitting outside, listening to all the birds calling, watching the harbor seals play and observing butterflies as they go about their days.



Red Admiral Butterfly

Starting the day at 6:30 AM means we're usually done with dinner and looking to get settled down for the night at around 8:30. Doing the dishes and sweeping are mundane activities typically, but there's usually a beautiful island sunset to accompany you. This is my first time living on a seabird island and it is a beautiful, interesting and tiring experience all in one. I'm learning new things every day and looking forward to the round the clock work that goes into monitoring a seabird colony!

Until next time!

-Sarah



East Barge on a Beautiful Day!

Sunset on PMI

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#), tagged [Arctic Tern](#), [Common Terns](#), [Sunset](#) on May 30, 2015

Little white and silver flecks moving through the sky like leaves dancing in the wind. Twisting and turning, colliding and winding, at first glance they disappear with the dark blue of the water. But with a simple turn, the setting sun light reveals them, and they emerge from the dark backdrop of the water and glow a bright silvery-white. These little silvery-white flecks were terns flocking over the ocean the other night. We were lucky enough to have witness this as we were up on the light house enjoying the sunset. This event went on for about five minutes and almost every tern on the island was participating. It was a foreign feeling to have the island quiet of terns. But the ocean was a roar with the commotion they were making. This flock was the most terns we saw on PMI so far this spring. As we predicted, more terns came to PMI that day and were flocking to strengthen the colony and welcome the new arrivals. We hope to have more arrivals like this as spring progresses.

-Laura Bollert



Photo by Wayne MacCabe

Nesting Season is in Full Swing on Metinic

Posted in [Metic 2015](#), [Uncategorized](#) on May 26, 2015

Nesting season is in full swing here on Metinic, and we are excited to share what we are seeing!

During these last few weeks of May, we have been conducting nest surveys for many of the seabird species on the island, including Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls, Common Eiders, and Black Guillemots. These surveys are conducted by walking the island searching for nests. When a nest is found, it is marked and the clutch size is recorded. These surveys will provide accurate estimates on the number of seabirds nesting on the island and where their nests are located. For some seabird species, like the Black Guillemot, we will monitor the nests found during the survey throughout the rest of the season in order to determine the success of the nest based on the hatching and fledgling rates.

We conducted our initial gull nest survey earlier this week, finding a total of 23 Herring Gull nests, each of which had 1-3 eggs, however many were still in the process of building their nests, and a second census will have to be done soon.



Herring Gull nest with 3 eggs. (Photo: Meaghan Hall)



GBBG nest with 3 eggs, one of which is blue! (Photo: Meaghan Hall)

While walking the island we also located several Common Eider nests, all with 4-5 eggs. We will have a better estimate on the total number of eider nests by the end of the week when we conduct the eider census.



Common Eider use their down feathers to create a nest bowl. (Photo: Meaghan Hall)

We have also been busy conducting Black Guillemot nest searches. So far we have only located 3 active burrows, however, we were excited to find our first Black Guillemot egg!



Black Guillemot egg in a burrow (Photo: Meaghan Hall)

Lastly, we have been seeing more and more migrants on the island. We have observed over 50 different species of bird so far, and the list is growing everyday! We have continued conducting morning bird count surveys and are happy to see that the Common and Arctic Terns are finally starting to settle into the colony. Just today we located the first scrapes, and hope to find tern eggs within the next few days!

Until next time,

-Meaghan

We've Got Eggs!!

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#), tagged [alcids](#), [American Oystercatcher](#), [Arctic Tern](#), [Arctic Terns](#), [Atlantic Puffin](#), [biology](#), [Birding](#), [Black Guillemot](#), [Black Guillemot](#), [burrow checks](#), [Common Tern](#), [Cryptic camouflage](#), [Egg](#), [grill](#), [lighthouse](#), [Maine](#), [Maine Coastal Islands](#), [memorial day](#), [nature](#), [Oystercatcher](#), [PMI](#), [puffin](#), [razorbill](#), [research](#) on May 26, 2015



Common Tern on flagpole

Another year on PMI! After two weeks of cold weather and high winds the terns have finally started to nest. Maybe not in the numbers that we are used to but it's still early enough for more terns to arrive and settle in for the nesting season. The Alcids on PMI don't seem to waste any time, Atlantic Puffins and Razorbills have already laid eggs at least 3 days ago and hundreds of Black Guillimots are still prospecting all over the island.



Arctic Tern egg

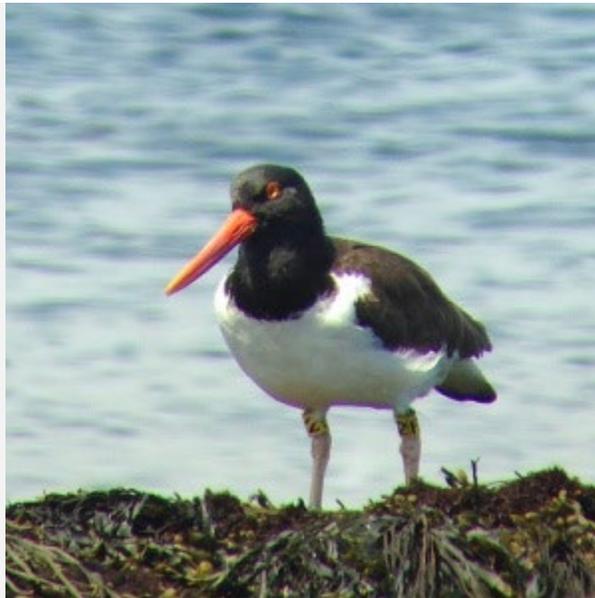


Atlantic Puffin egg



Razorbill egg

Tern eggs are made to blend in with beach materials such as sand, pebbles, and seashells but nesting up and away from the beach can be risky as some tern eggs can stand out against the vegetation and island dirt. Puffin and Razorbill eggs don't need to be camouflaged as most Alcids nest in deep, dark burrows away from the eyes of arial predators. Puffin eggs are all white and a little smaller than the Razorbill's bigger, speckled egg.



Banded American Oystercatcher resighted on Green Island

Last week while over on Green Island, which is adjacent to PMI and only accessible at low tide, we resighted an American Oystercatcher! We know they try to nest there every year, but haven't yet been able to resight one yet. Now with the numbers on his bands we can find out who he is.



Memorial Day cookout on PMI

Thanks to MCINWR we have a grill this year! Until next time....

Wayne and Julia

Passing Through

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#), tagged [Migration](#), [Ship Island](#), [Warblers](#) on May 24, 2015

Many bird species migrate south every autumn to escape the frigid winters of northern North America. As the snow melts and the plants begin to green in the spring, millions of birds flow back to their summer breeding grounds. While Common Terns and a few other species will breed here, other birds only make a short stopover on or around Ship Island before resuming their northward flight. We've had the pleasure of catching a glimpse of a few of these passersby.

Common Loons, Long-tailed Ducks, and Black Scoters overwinter on saltwater. Loons breed on inland wooded lakes during the summer, while the ducks nest in northern Canada. Some of these waterbirds around Ship may have spent the winter in Blue Hill Bay, but others are probably working their way up the coast from further south.

Shorebirds, such as Black-bellied Plovers, Least Sandpipers, and Short-billed Dowitchers spend the colder months along the southeastern and Mid-Atlantic coast. Foraging along the tideline of Ship Island, these birds can refuel for the rest of their trip to their Canadian breeding grounds.



A small group of our 57 visiting Short-billed Dowitchers

Bird watchers throughout the country revel in the annual springtime flurry of songbirds, especially the colorful warblers. We on Ship are no different, chasing half a dozen warbler species around our small grove. Several Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroats will remain for the summer, but others are on their way to breeding grounds in mainland Maine. Magnolia, Blackpoll, and Chestnut-sided Warblers, along with a Northern Parula have all visited the island, gleaning small insects from the cherry trees.



Magnolia Warbler in the grove



Chestnut-sided Warbler checking out the camera

No migration post would be complete without making mention of the Snowy Owl that visited the island before the summer crew arrived. Two volunteer island-sitters were lucky enough to spot this Arctic predator flying around the island before its northward departure. As wonderful a sight as it would have been, it is probably for the best that it continued its journey before the arrival of most of the owl-meal-sized terns.

Until next time!

-Mark

Petit Manan Season Start

Posted in [Petit Manan 2015](#), tagged [Arctic Tern](#), [Atlantic Puffin](#), [bird blind](#), [Black Guillemot](#), [Cabin](#), [Common Eider](#), [Common Tern](#), [lighthouse](#), [Maine](#), [Maine Coastal Islands](#), [Petit Manan](#), [razorbill](#), [seabird](#), [Spring migration](#) on May 23, 2015

The seabird season has begun! Wayne and I are back for another year on Petit Manan Island near Milbridge, Maine. Two more researchers will be joining us next week, but until then we are getting the island set up and ready for the season!

It's a pretty big process to get all your gear and groceries and research equipment to the island, especially when the water temperature is still in the 40's. To get here we exchanged our regular float coats for the safer and much bulkier Survival Suits.



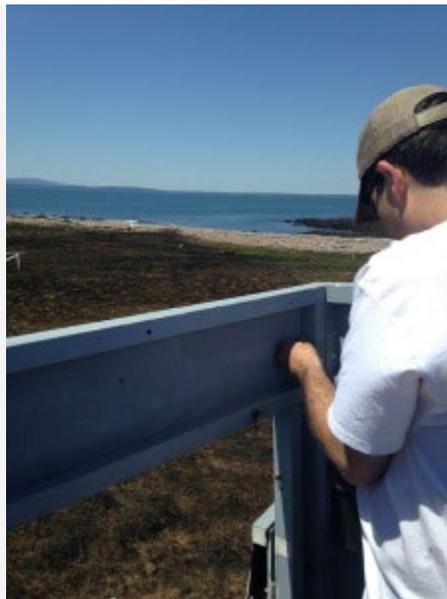
Wayne sporting his stylish and essential survival suit.

Once here with all our belongings, we spent the first week getting reacquainted with the island. The vegetation was burned a few weeks ago in an effort to create more suitable seabird nesting habitat. Green grass is already growing through the burn rapidly, but when we first arrived it looked almost other-worldly.



View of the burnt island and our home from the top of the light tower where we conduct our twice-daily bird counts.

Other early season tasks include setting up the remainder of the observation blinds. They are built as four separate walls and roof and need to be assembled and disassembled every season. They are held together with bolts and have folding windows on each side for observation.



Wayne putting bolts into an observation blind before the roof is attached.

We have been keeping an eye out for migration visitors and have been looking through scopes to observe behaviors and find rafts of ducks on the water. So far we have seen 73 species of birds! For the past

week we have had extreme wind which seems to have slowed down migration. When we woke this morning the wind was blowing at an average of 23 mph with gusts as high as 37mph!



Julia observing Harlequin Ducks through a scope.

Right now we are anxiously awaiting the permanent arrival of Terns and the first eggs of the Puffins, as well as the arrival of our two additional researchers! More to come later!

Julia & Wayne

[The Start of a Fresh Season on Metinic!](#)

Posted in [Metic 2015](#), tagged [Arctic Terns](#), [Birding](#), [Black Guillemot](#), [Common Eider](#), [Common Terns](#), [Maine](#), [seabirds](#) on May 19, 2015

Hi there!

I'm Meaghan. I'm a fourth year wildlife ecology major at the University of Maine at Orono. This is my first summer living and working on a seabird island, and I am very excited to be able to do so! Last summer I worked as an intern at the MCINWR visitor center in Rockland. While there, I had the opportunity to visit several of the seabird islands and very quickly 'caught the bug' for island life and could not wait to get out here myself.

Working as my supervisor is Derek. He is a fourth year environmental geography major at Central Connecticut State University. He is a Rhode Island native who has a lot of experience living and working on seabird islands in Massachusetts. However, this is his first year working with MCINWR on a Maine seabird island.



Our home for the summer (Picture: Meaghan Hall)

Our first week on the island was a lot of fun!

The first couple days were spent settling into our new home and familiarizing ourselves with the island. We conducted a sheep round up in order to move the sheep, that graze across the island during the off-season, off of MCINWR land so they do not disturb the seabirds during the nesting season. We have also been walking the island checking for and collecting garter snakes. In previous years these snakes have been observed preying on tern eggs and chicks, so we are trying to exclude them from the seabird nesting area. Lastly, we have been conducting morning bird counts. So far we have observed 31 different species of birds, including some migrants along with Common Eiders, Black Guillemots, Double-Crested Cormorants, and Spotted Sandpipers. The flock of Arctic and Common Terns that nest here annually have been observed visiting the colony in the morning hours and leaving around noon – presumably to look for nutritious fish. We were also pleasantly surprised to observe two Rosette Terns visiting our island! We are hoping that the terns will settle in the colony within the next week and lay their first eggs shortly after that.



Common Eider (Picture: Meaghan Hall)



Black Guillemot. (Picture: Meaghan)

We are very excited to be working as the technicians on Metinic this year and are more than happy to keep you updated on all things seabirds throughout the season!

-Meaghan and Derek

Greetings from Ship Island 2015

Posted in [Ship Island 2015](#), tagged [Common Tern](#), [Maine](#), [Ship Island](#) on May 18, 2015

Greetings from Ship Island, Maine! Situated in Blue Hill Bay to the west of Mount Desert Island (home of Acadia National Park), this small island belongs to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The island hosts a full-time, two-person crew during the breeding season to monitor nesting seabirds, most prominently Common Terns.



Common Terns on the beach

Sarah and I arrived on the island late last week to clear skies and warm temperatures. Two long days of training at the office had us raring to get outside. After setting up camp and reviewing protocols, we got a chance to explore the island. At only about a quarter mile long, Ship Island has a surprising diversity of habitats for its resident species. While the terns prefer to nest on the gravelly beach, the island has large

areas of grass and shrubs to support dozens of sparrows, a grove of small cherry trees teeming with warblers, and a bluff along the southern side popular with bank swallows.

To the north, across a low tide exposed sandbar, is Trumpet Island. Common Eiders, as well as Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls, make their homes on Trumpet, feeding in the water between the islands. To the south and west are two rocky islets known as the Barges. East Barge is a favorite spot for seals to haul up at low tide, while West Barge hosts a small colony of Double-crested Cormorants. Black Guillemots are frequent visitors to the waters around the island.

The warm, sunny weather lasted for our entire first two days, with dense fog limiting our view yesterday morning. Both of us are new to working in coastal Maine, but we're excited to spend the summer, fog and all, working outside with the island's birds. We're looking forward to more fine days, plentiful birds, and a wonderful summer. Until next time!

-Mark



Our first sunset from Ship Island