

The UK hosts globally important breeding populations of seabirds, such as 90% of the world's Manx shearwaters, 60% of northern gannets, and 10% of Atlantic puffins. Puffins are one of the UK's most charismatic birds, yet like many seabird species, are suffering large population declines and, shockingly, are threatened with global extinction. Puffins face multiple threats, including: the impacts of climate change on food availability, meaning puffins have to fly further for food; fisheries activity; and invasive species predating on chicks and adults at their nesting sites. Whilst there is evidence suggesting that failing food resources play a key role in driving seabird declines, there are few long-term datasets examining seabird diet, and those that do exist generally focus on one colony.



This is where the Project Puffin comes in - an exciting citizen science project that began in 2017, that is providing some of this crucial data. Project Puffin asks the public to join the Puffarazzi and submit photos of Puffins carrying food in their bills, that the birds are bringing back for the chicks tucked away in the burrows. An amazing team of trained volunteers then identifies and counts the fish carried in each photo. All this data is combined together, creating a fantastic dataset spanning the whole of the UK, to give a unique picture of Puffin diet at multiple colonies. The photos that the public submitted in 2017 allowed the RSPB to identify differences between colonies in what adults are managing to feed their chicks to get them ready to successfully fledge – some kinds of fish, such as sandeels, have a higher nutritional content than others, and are key prey species to feed to chicks.

But now we're asking a different question – how has the diet changed over time? Climate change and over-fishing both impact prey availability, and understanding differences in Puffin populations in the context of these changing environmental factors is a crucial part of the fight to ensure that Puffins continue to brighten up our coastlines in the future.

So this year we're continuing to ask for photos from any year that people have of Puffins carrying food – in fact, we are particularly asking for older photos, as we would really like to build up a long-term dataset that will allow us to get a better idea of how diet is changing over time. If you have any photos of puffins carrying prey in their bills, and you know where and when they were taken (year will suffice) please submit them to the Puffarazzi!

There are several ways to do this:

- 1) Upload digital copies to the project website: rspb.org.uk/projectpuffin
- 2) Hard copies of photographs can be scanned or photographed, and uploaded to the website in the same way.
- 3) There are gadgets for digitising slides, but alternatively try projecting them onto a wall and photographing them! You can then upload the photographs to the website.

The deadline for submissions is the 31st August 2020.

Or, please get in touch with the Project Puffin team at projectpuffin@rspb.org.uk to discuss other options.

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