THE NEIGHBOURS FROM HELL: ADULT-CHICK AGGRESSION IN COMMON GUILLEMOTS

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We report for the first time the adverse effect of conspecific aggression on chick survival during periods of poor food resources in a colonial breeder, the common guillemot (*Uria aalge*). During the poor conditions experienced in 2007, parents were forced to forage simultaneously, leaving many chicks unattended. Unexpectedly, these chicks were frequently attacked by conspecifics at neighbouring nest sites, often with fatal consequences. The combination of poor food supply and the changing social environment experienced by chicks resulted in the highest chick mortality recorded at this site since records began in 1983. Our work highlights this previously unsuspected trade-off between provisioning chicks and guarding them against attacks from neighbouring breeders, and that understanding how environmental conditions affect social dynamics is crucial to interpreting costs and benefits of colonial breeding.