

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DECLINE IN POPULATIONS AND REPRODUCTIVE SUCCESS OF SEABIRDS ON RATHLIN ISLAND, COUNTY ANTRIM, NORTHERN IRELAND

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In recent decades, seabird colonies across the Northeast Atlantic, including the UK, have shown dramatic declines in numbers and productivity. Seabirds are useful indicators and their decline may point to problems in the wider marine environment. At Rathlin Island, Northern Ireland, whole colony surveys indicate that numbers of seabirds decreased between 1999 and 2007. Three monitoring plots of breeding seabirds have also been monitored by the RSPB on Rathlin since 1979. Data from these show that despite recent declines, guillemot *Uria aalge* and razorbill *Alca torda* numbers are still within previously recorded ranges but kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* numbers are lower than those recorded previously. Moreover, complete breeding failures have been noted in a number of years since 2005. A detailed study on breeding guillemots, razorbills and kittiwakes was initiated in 2008. Guillemot breeding success was high in 2008 but razorbill breeding success was low because of predation by gulls. Kittiwake breeding success was higher than in recent years but still very low, depredation and starvation being the main causes of breeding failure. Low food availability, high predation rates and low reproductive success may explain declines in seabirds.

Reference

Chivers L.S. 2008. Breeding seabirds on Rathlin Island: a cause for concern? Irish Birds 8:359-362.