

Britain's nature networks provide hope for birds threatened by climate change

Title

New research provides strong evidence that internationally important British bird populations are being affected by climate change, which will threaten their long-term conservation status. The paper, published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* and led by researchers at the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), examined the impact of climate change upon breeding seabirds such as Puffins and gulls, and wintering waterbirds such as ducks and wading birds, at sites across the UK that are internationally designated as *Special Protection Areas* (SPAs).

The research, which brought together a team of scientists from around Europe, calculates that under a scenario of 4°C of mean global warming, more than half of these species populations in the UK will decrease by more than 25%. Importantly, although there may be some change in the range of species that individual SPAs currently support, the study projected that these sites will continue to hold internationally important bird populations in the future. The SPA network may not stop some species from declining, but it will provide an increasingly important refuge for our birds. The UK's existing SPA network provides a strong foundation, which can be managed to keep pace with population changes of individual species, so that we can give our birds the best chance possible of coping with the future stresses that climate change will impose.

Dr Ali Johnston of the BTO, the paper's lead author, said: "Here we show that many recent changes to UK bird populations have been driven by climate and that these impacts are set to continue into the future, leading to some large population declines for several species. However, there is also a positive message; we found that the measures we already have in place to conserve our seabirds and waterbirds are 'future-proofed' for a changing climate, and will also protect important populations in the future."

Dr Richard Bradbury, one of the RSPB authors on the paper, said: "These results add to the increasing evidence that the changing climate is already affecting a wide range of UK wildlife. Birds such as Kittiwakes and Arctic Terns are struggling to find food as ecosystems change, and this will be exacerbated as the climate warms. We need to bring down our carbon emissions, but we also need to help species adapt to the changes ahead."

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