

From Fiji to US Project Puffin ? Blog by Sialesi Rasalato

Title In March this year, I was delighted to be awarded the Josephine Daneman Herz International Seabird Fellowship 2012. The fellowship allowed me to be part of a group of young biologists conducting seabird conservation studies whilst living on remote American islands off the Atlantic coast. The islands which I was to call home for three months are located in the Gulf of Maine, along the north-east coast of America. I was to be part of the Seabird Island Restoration Program (SRP) - widely known as 'Project Puffin' which was started in 1973 by the National Audubon Society to restore the Atlantic Puffin populations to islands in the Gulf of Maine. The National Audubon Society is our BirdLife Partner in America. Flying from Fiji to Maine, and then onward to the islands, was not a simple task. But it was worth it! Stepping on to these islands for the first time was an experience like no other. It's a busy place and everywhere you look there are birds, on the ground, in the sky and on the water surrounding you. The thunderous smashing of waves provides a chorus of natural noises that creates a real assault on the senses. It is amazing to see the sheer number of seabirds that nest along the Gulf of Maine and that any of these species can exist in the frigid waters surrounding these small islands. It was a far cry from Fiji and a testament to the abilities of animals to adapt to such harsh environments. Some breeding seabird species that I had a chance to share my summer with included Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, Black Guillemots, Leach's Storm Petrels, Arctic Terns, Common Terns, Laughing Gulls, Common Eiders, Manx Shearwaters, Roseate Terns, Least Terns. The list goes on, and it reminded me that these cold Atlantic seas can produce immense volumes of food for animals and people alike, if they stay healthy.

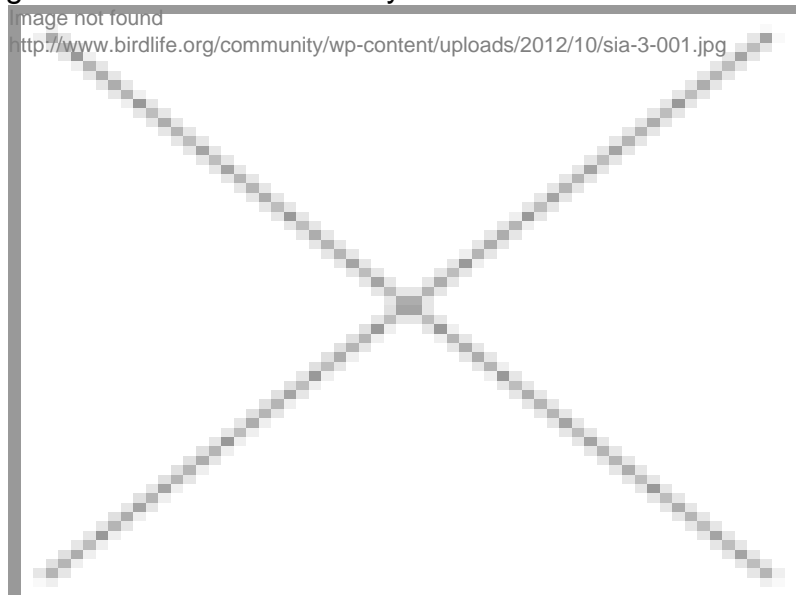


Sia conducted seabird conservation studies whilst living on remote American islands off the Atlantic coast.

A typical day on the island usually began at 4 am and finished at 10 pm. Getting involved in all the work allowed me to make the most of my fellowship. These tasks included:

- *Morning Species Count* ? counts were taken for all resident species from a vantage point.
- *Diet Studies* ? One sits in a blind (hide) for three hours to monitor and record the adult feeding patterns for their chicks.
- *Productivity for Puffins, Razorbills and Guillemots* - this is where acrobatics skills came in handy as one was required to climb and look for active crevices to pull out chicks to be weighed and features measured.
- *Tern Productivity*- Tern chicks were weighed and features measured on designated plots for resident tern species.
- *Banding (ringing)* ? putting bands on Terns, Razorbill and Puffin chicks and other species. This makes it possible to then ?re-sight? the bird in the future, thus providing useful information such as how long they can live, and where they have travelled during a span of time.
- *Band Re-sighting* - sighting bird bands using a telescope/and or binoculars. Species that were often re-sighted included Puffins ?and Tern species.
- *Weed Control* ? removing pockets of invasive weeds that have been established on the island.
- *Data Entry* - Most important of all-keeping up with the database provided for each species.
- *Restoration tactics* - Employing decoys, recorded bird calls, cameras and so on.

The Seabird Island Restoration research has already unravelled mysteries whose answers will inform the preservation of this remarkable denizen of the Atlantic Seas. However, there?s so much still to learn about these fascinating species. For example, many of the birds? seasonal movements remain uncharted. Some sightings suggest they may overwinter in the North Atlantic, enduring weather unlike almost any other seabird. I wish them all the very best



in their amazing work.

I wish to

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