

Key Site 39: Northern Labrador, Newfoundland and Labrador

Location: 59°20'46"N, 63°32'54"W

Size: 108 km²

Description: The Northern Labrador key habitat site is located along the Atlantic coast of Nunatsiavut, Labrador, in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. The key site is along the northernmost coast of Labrador, which provides important habitat for several species of sea ducks, bird Species at Risk, and concentrations of colonial sea birds encompassing 15 Important Bird Areas (IBAs; Bird Studies Canada 2015).

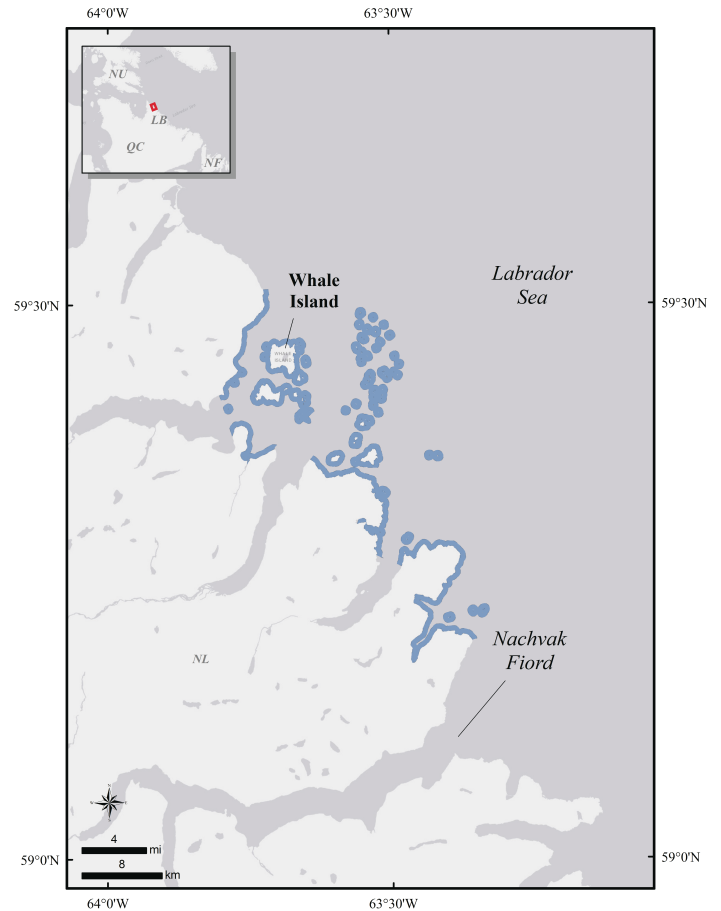
The Northern Labrador key site encompasses coastal and offshore areas extending from coastal areas near Whale Island in Seven Islands Bay to Nachvak Fiord. It is fed by numerous rivers flowing eastward from the Torngat Mountains. The coast-line of MBU 10 is composed of estuaries, islands, bare rocky areas, mudflats, rocky shoreline, and sandflats (Environment Canada 2013). The key site consists of an extensive network of islands that form a classical skerry coast along a deep fjord system that extends seaward for about 25 km (Gilbert et al. 1984). Protected coastlines consist of broad areas of intertidal flats strewn with large boulders, whereas more exposed outer coasts consist of mostly steeply sloped bedrock. Water temperatures are cold, with maximum values of about 4.7°C in August (Gustajtis 1979) although they may reach as high as 6.5 to 7.0°C in shallow waters (Gilbert et al. 1984). The mean tidal amplitude is about 1.7 m.

Precision and Correction of Abundance

Estimates Presented: Abundance estimates presented for this key habitat site have not been adjusted to account for incomplete detection or other biases. Abundance estimates should, therefore, be treated as minimum estimates.

Biological Value: This site is most important to Eastern Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) in June, breeding Northern Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima borealis*) between June and late August, and molting Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*) in mid-August.

Harlequin Duck can be found along the majority of the Labrador coast from June to September, and the



northern coast of Labrador appears to be an important staging area for birds that are moving between eastern Canada and Greenland (see Brodeur et al. 2002). Two hundred and fifteen pre-molting adult males were detected in the Seven Islands Bay area on July 2, 1994 (Gilliland et al. 2002). This was the largest known concentration of Harlequin Ducks in eastern North America, representing approximately 5.4% of the eastern North America population (NAWMP 2012). Surf Scoters occur in the site (Lock 1986) but numbers are uncertain.

Within the Northern Labrador key site, Common Eider nest on many of the offshore islands (a maximum of 452 male Common Eiders were detected in June 1994 (S. Gilliland unpublished data); accounting for undetected females, the total abundance of eiders using the site at this time is closer to 904. Numbers drop off rapidly by September, with a total of 121 birds detected in September 1980 (A. Lock unpublished data), suggesting that this region is not an important molting area for Common Eider. A maximum of 802 scoters were detected at the key site in September 1980, with counts of 662 Surf Scoter

and 140 White-winged Scoter (Canadian Wildlife Service unpublished data).

Sensitivities: Sea ducks are sensitive to degradation of their staging, molting, and foraging areas. Human disturbance can have negative effects on birds, particularly while foraging or during the molting period when birds are flightless. Preliminary observations suggest sea ducks may be sensitive to disturbances during molt (Frimer 1994, O’Conner 2008) and that sea ducks may be particularly sensitive to marine vessel and aircraft traffic. Scoters are ranked second among Anatidae on the oil vulnerability index (King and Sanger 1979, Daigle and Darveau 1995). Scoters are also vulnerable to heavy metals contamination (Savard et al. 1998).

Potential Conflicts: During the establishment of the Torngat National Park, two properties containing rich deposits of garnet sands at the Iron Stand, located 6 km north of the key site, and a third property located at Seven Islands Bay, which is within the key site, were excluded from the park. There are no current plans to develop the sites, but they have a rich source of garnets, which are used in industrial abrasives.

With the establishment of the Torngat National Park, and increased cruise ship activity in the Arctic (Lasserre and Têtu 2015), there may be new sources of anthropogenic disturbances in this region that may have negative impacts on molting sea ducks. Chronic or major oil spills could have large impacts on birds and habitat here (Bird Studies Canada 2015) and oil spills are considered a growing threat with increased oil and gas exploration in MBU 10. There is a continued risk of fishing gear entanglement (Environment Canada 2013). Inuit hunting and egg collecting on the islands within the key site has an unknown but likely minimal impact on birds and their habitat.

Status: This key site is part of Bird Conservation Region 3 (Arctic Plains and Mountains), as well as Marine Biogeographical Unit (MBU) 10 (Newfoundland-Labrador Shelves). The Seven Islands Bay Important Bird Area encompasses the key site and extends along the Labrador coast from Kangardluaksuk Bay to Nachvak Fiord (Bird Studies Canada 2015). The site also intersects the Torngat Mountains National Park, which includes the coastline and intertidal areas of the mainland and islands

down to the mean low-low tide level. The key site also falls within the Labrador Inuit Settlement area, and as of 2019 the marine component of the settlement area is being considered as an Indigenous marine protected area by the Nunatsiavut and Canadian governments.

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Surf Scoters. Photo: Tim Bowman.