

Key Site 46: Cape Bonavista, Newfoundland

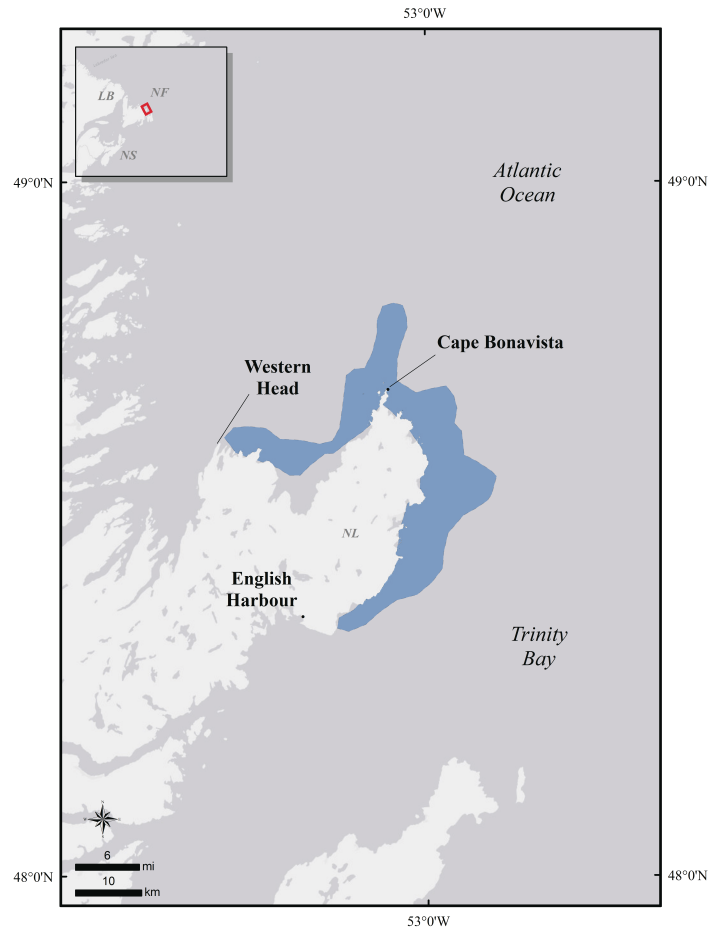
Location: 48°39'52"N, 53°0'17"W

Size: 504 km²

Description: This key habitat site is located around the northern end of the Bonavista Peninsula in eastern Newfoundland. The Newfoundland coast provides important habitat for numerous congregatory bird species and bird species at risk and includes several Important Bird Areas. The key site begins east of the town of English Harbour and continues around the peninsula, ending past the town of Keels near Western Head. Bonavista Bay lies to the north-west of Cape Bonavista, and the open Atlantic Ocean lies to the north and to the east. The area contains open sea, coastal cliffs, rocky shores, coves, shoals, and islands.

Precision and Correction of Abundance Estimates Presented: Abundance estimates presented for this key habitat site have been adjusted to account for observer error in flock size estimation following methods developed by Bordage et al. (1998).

Biological Value: This key site is primarily important for migrating and wintering Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) from late fall through April. In this region, fall migration occurs in October and November and sea ducks reach peak abundance by mid-December (Goudie et al. 2000). Winter surveys conducted in this area by the Canadian Wildlife Service produced estimates ranging from 2507 individuals in 2012 to 44,180 individuals in 2015. Use of the site is affected by sea ice, and over six years of winter survey data (2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018) an average of 16,815 individuals were estimated in this area (Canadian Wildlife Service Waterfowl Committee 2020). About 90% of the eiders that over-winter in this area are Northern Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima borealis*), with the remainder being American Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima dresseri*) and small numbers of King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*; Gilliland and Robertson 2009). This represents about 7.2% of the continental population of Northern Common Eiders (NAWMP 2012). During winter, eiders congregate in areas of open water that can change over space and time. Eiders forage primarily on benthic invertebrates, including intertidal and subtidal mollusks



(especially blue mussels *Mytilus edulis*), crustaceans, and echinoderms (Goudie et al. 2000).

Other sea duck species that use this area include Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*), and Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) (eBird 2020).

Sensitivities: Waterfowl can be sensitive to disturbance from small vessel and ship traffic. Wintering eiders aggregate in dense flocks, and, depending on sea ice conditions, hunting pressure can be intense in this area (Gilliland and Robertson 2009, Gilliland et al 2009). Unintentional introduction of invasive species in this area could influence food resource availability and quality.

Potential Conflicts: Nearby areas have a history of poaching, though in recent years it is believed that illegal hunting has decreased (NF013; IBA Canada Website). Boat traffic in the area may cause disturbance and increase the risk of oil spills. Vessels navigating at night in the sea ice in this area use

high intensity lighting and operators have reported collisions with eiders, which have damaged vessels and killed eiders. Any future increase in commercial fishing quotas may increase boat traffic, and potentially disturbance, in the area.

Status: The site lies adjacent to Dungeon Provincial Park. No Important Bird Areas intersect the site.

Literature Cited

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