

Key Site 47: Northeast Avalon, Newfoundland

Location: 47°45'21"N, 52°40'16"W

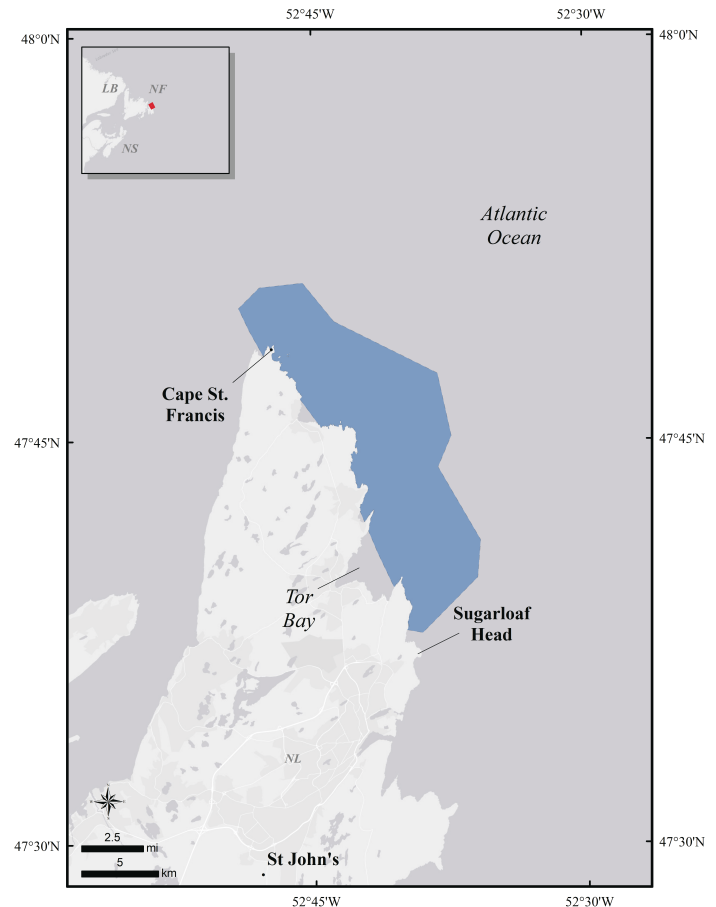
Size: 157 km²

Description: This key site is located at the northern end and eastern side of the Avalon Peninsula in southeast Newfoundland. The southern edge of the key area begins near the coast at Logy Bay (approximately 25 km north of the capital city of St. John's) and continues north and northwest to Cape St. Francis at the northern tip of the peninsula. Conception Bay lies to the west and the open Atlantic Ocean to the east. The area has numerous coves, shoals, and offshore rocks, and sea ice is present during most winters. The area is part of the Northern Grand Banks marine ecoregion where cold waters of the Labrador Current mix with warm waters of the Gulf Stream. The Grand Banks are one of the richest fishing grounds in the world (Park and Mercier 2014).

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 area is primarily important for wintering Common Eiders (*Somateria mollissima*). Winter surveys conducted in this area by the Canadian Wildlife Service produced estimates ranging from 3589 individuals in 2012 to 41,189 individuals in 2015 (Canadian Wildlife Service Waterfowl Committee 2020). Over six years of winter survey data (surveys were conducted in 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018), an average of 15,557 individuals were estimated in this area (Canadian Wildlife Service Waterfowl Committee 2020).

Historical data suggest that about 75% of the eiders wintering in this area are Northern Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima borealis*) with the remaining being American Common Eiders (*Somateria mollissima dresseri*) and small numbers of King Eiders (*Somateria spectabilis*; Gilliland and Robertson 2009). This represents about 5.6% of the continental population of Northern Common Eiders (NAWMP 2012). Flocks of up to 5000 eiders (approximately 1.7% of the *borealis* subspecies) have been observed



in the waters off Cape St. Francis prior to spring migration (Russell and Fifield 2001).

Other sea duck species that use this area include Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*), 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 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. Oil spills, both catastrophic and chronic, can have severe impacts on sea ducks. There is historical documentation of oil spills affecting Common Eiders and other water bird species in the nearshore waters of southeastern Newfoundland (Wiese and Ryan 2003, Robertson et al. 2014).

Potential Conflicts: Heavy shipping traffic into St. John's Harbor may increase the risk of disturbance and oil spills, and bird collisions with vessels in this area.

Status: There is one Important Bird Area (IBA) in this key area: Cape St. Francis IBA (IBA Canada 2021). This IBA is considered continentally significant for congregatory species including Common Eider.

Literature Cited

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