

Key Site 49: St. Pierre and Miquelon to Cape St. Mary's, Newfoundland

Location: 47°2'39"N, 55°5'42"W

Size: 2408 km²

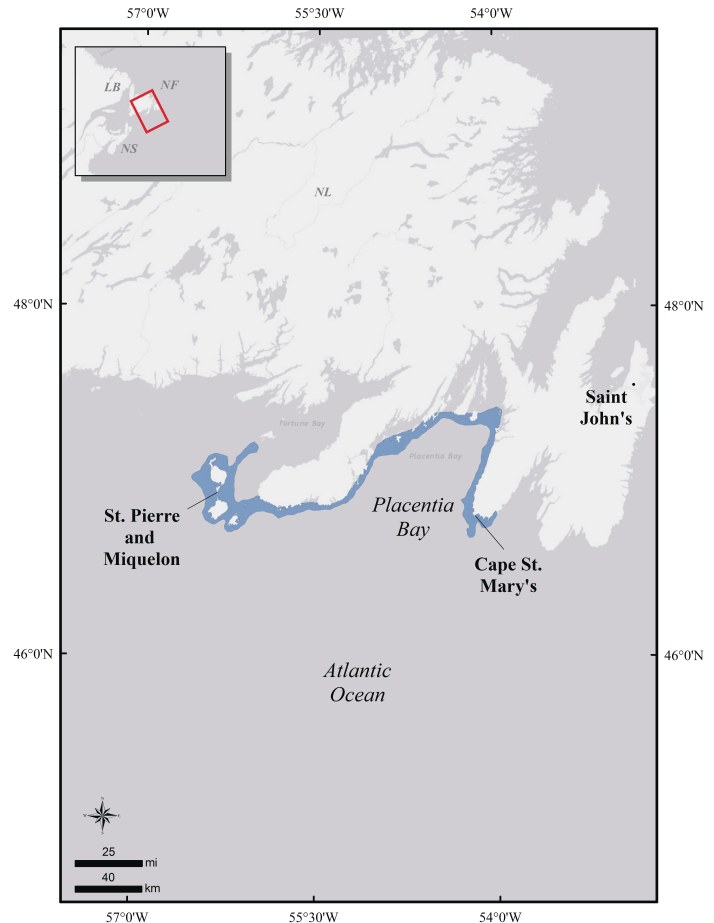
Description: This key area is located along the south coast of Newfoundland. The western edge of the area begins at the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, France, continues east-northeast along the southeast coast of the Burin Peninsula toward Rock Harbor, encompasses Jude Island and a portion of Placentia Bay, then continues south along the west coast of the Avalon Peninsula, ending beyond Point Lance. This area has numerous coves, harbors, islands, and islets with adjacent open ocean. Land cover on the islands ranges from rocky and nonvegetated to grassy with low shrubs.

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 important for migrating and wintering Common Eiders (*Somateria mollissima*) and Harlequin Ducks (*Histrionicus histrionicus*). Winter surveys conducted in this area by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) produced estimates ranging from 23,698 eiders in 2006 to 7107 eiders in 2009 (CWS unpublished data). Over six years of winter survey data (2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018), an average of 15,705 individuals were estimated in this area (CWS Waterfowl Committee 2020). About 90% of the eiders that overwinter in this area are Northern Common Eiders (*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 4% of the continental population of Northern Common Eiders (NAWMP 2012). During winter, eiders congregate in areas of open water, which can change over space and time. Adults forage primarily on benthic invertebrates, including intertidal and subtidal mollusks (especially blue mussels, *Mytilus edulis*), crustaceans, and echinoderms (Goudie et al. 2000).

The Cape St. Mary's/Point Lance area is one of the most important sites in North America for overwin-



tering Eastern Harlequin Ducks, supporting up to 4% of the eastern North America population (a maximum of 156 birds estimated in February 8–14, 2007; CWS unpublished data). Black Scoters (*Melanitta americana*) and Long-tailed Ducks (*Clangula hyemalis*) also use the Cape St. Mary's area during spring and fall migration (Goudie and Ankney 1988).

Other sea duck species that use this area include Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*), White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta deglandi*), 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 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 waterbird species in the inshore waters of southeastern Newfoundland (Wiese and Ryan 2003, Robertson et al. 2014). Sea ducks can be susceptible to vessel strikes, particularly in poor weather conditions.

Potential Conflicts: Placentia Bay is a busy shipping route and has year-round oil-tanker traffic to and from an oil refinery at Come by Chance. A nickel processing plant in Long Harbour and associated ship traffic in the area are potential sources of pollution (NF028; IBA Canada 2021). Oil spills, illegal oil discharge, and pollution are risks in this area. Commercial fishing vessels operate in much of the coastal area (Russell and Fifield 2001).

Status: There are seven Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in this key area; Miquelon Island (northeast coast) IBA, Grand Columbiar Island IBA, Green Island IBA, Middle Lawn Island IBA, Corbin Island IBA, Placentia Bay IBA, and Cape St. Mary's IBA (IBA Canada 2021). There is also a Provincial Ecological Reserve at Cape St. Mary's. St. Pierre and Miquelon and Grand Columbiar Island are in French territory but are included in the Canadian IBA program due to close proximity to Canadian territory and lack of coverage by other IBA programs (NF034; IBA Canada 2021).

Literature Cited

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