



NATIONAL AQUARIUM IN BALTIMORE.

Conservation Education Department
Pier 3, 501 East Pratt Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Fast Facts

- ◆ Most seabirds spend much of their life at sea and rest in colonies. They have special adaptations so they can survive living away from land.
- ◆ Atlantic Puffins have brightly colored bills, use body language and growls to communicate to each other, and are not related to penguins.
- ◆ Project Puffin has brought breeding colonies back to areas in Maine where they had been eliminated because of pet infestation, overhunting, and pollution.

Key Terms

Colony - A group of the same kind of animal living together.

Incubate - Eggs have to be kept at a certain temperature to hatch. Birds usually sit on their eggs to maintain temperature.

Oil Spill - A type of pollution where oil from a boat or pipe is accidentally released into the water and usually hurts a lot of plants and animals.

Ask the Aquarium

Fact Sheets from the
Conservation Education Depart-

Seabirds

Usually, birds are thought of as living in trees and on land, but seabirds adapted long ago to a life out at sea. In order to survive in this environment, most seabirds live longer and breed later with fewer young than most land birds. They spend much more time with their young than land birds do, usually resting by the sea side in colonies. These colonies can range from several dozen birds to millions of birds at a time in one location. Most seabirds spend much of their life at sea away from the shore, or along a coast at the sea side. Seabirds usually have webbed feet to help with swimming, and a very dense layer of feathers, which are waterproof on the outer layer. These feathers help to protect the bird from the cold weather and water in their environment. Seabirds tend to be colored in shades of black and white, shading which helps them hide from both predators and prey. Historically, seabirds have been hunted for food and used by fishermen and sailors to find fish and the shore.

Seabirds at the National Aquarium in Baltimore

The Sea Cliffs exhibit has been at the Aquarium since its opening in 1981. There are three species of seabirds which live in the exhibit: the Atlantic Puffin, Black Guillemot, and Razorbill. The National Aquarium in Baltimore is the only U.S. institution that has Black Guillemots on display. The exhibit was designed to look like the rocky coast of Iceland, which is where



Puffins, often mistaken for penguins, can fly and spend most of their life at sea. Puffins are nicknamed "clown of the sea" or "sea parrot" because of their

many of the birds were collected from in the wild. In the exhibit are nesting burrows for the birds that are opened between early April and late August or early September each year to encourage breeding. The birds are fed foods like krill to give them bright colors on their bills and feet.

Black Guillemots and Razorbills

Black Guillemots (*Cepphus grylle*) are black birds with white patches on their wings in the summer. In the winter, the upper part of their body turns grey and their lower body turns white to blend in. They have a thin black bill and red feet, and lay their eggs on rocky shores near the water. Black Guillemots do not travel far south in migration, but live primarily in the Northern Atlantic along the coasts of North America and Europe.

Razorbills (*Alca torda*) are larger

than Black Guillemots and have a very distinctive looking bill. They are black colored on their upper parts and white on their bellies. The bill is thick with a rounded end and is colored black with a white band around the end. In the winter, the Razorbill's face and throat turn white. Their eggs are laid on bare rocks or on the ground. In 2002, the National Aquarium in Baltimore successfully hatched a Razorbill chick from the birds on exhibit.

Atlantic Puffins

The Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) is sometimes called "clown of the sea" or "sea parrot" because of its brightly colored bill and body coloration. They are the only type of Puffin that lives in the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic Puffin's upper parts are black and its belly is white. The bill is large and shaped like a triangle, and is bright orange and yellow in the breeding season. The Atlantic Puffin's legs are also colored bright orange. In the winter, the Atlantic Puffin becomes more dully colored, the bright bill colors are shed and the feathers on their face turn grey.

Some people confuse Puffins with Penguins because they look similar, but they are not related. Puffins live in the northern hemisphere, while Penguins live in the southern hemisphere. Puffins can fly, but the small wings of the penguin are only used for swimming. Penguins also do not have the

brightly colored bills that Puffins do. Atlantic Puffins eat small fishes, mollusks, and crustaceans, which it dives underwater to catch. When bringing food back to the nest, the Atlantic Puffin can carry over a dozen fishes at one time in its bill. The bill has small serrations which help it hold onto the fish while it is catching more fish and flying. Atlantic Puffins nest in burrows on sea cliffs and lay one egg at a time, which the parents take turns incubating. Nesting is the only time that Puffins spend on land during the year. In 2006, the first Atlantic Puffin chick was born at the Aquarium.

Puffin Talk

Atlantic Puffins use body language and growls to communicate with each other. When they are out at sea, Atlantic Puffins are most silent. While flying, they sometimes make a "purring" noise. During the breeding season in the colonies, Atlantic Puffins will occasionally growl at each other and use different gestures and postures to "talk" to each other. While visiting the Sea Cliffs exhibit at the National Aquarium in Baltimore, you can hear the sound of Puffin growls and maybe even see some body language.

Project Puffin

In the 1800's, Puffins were widely hunted for their meat and eggs. The islands that Puffins nested on became infested with rats, dogs, and cats that were introduced by humans, and these animals ate Puffin eggs. In modern times, environmental disasters like oil spills have poisoned Puffins that have eaten or inhaled toxins while swimming and fishing in polluted areas. Atlantic Puffin populations in New England became very