

Ile aux Perroquets: Part I
Scientific Report

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1.1 Introduction

More than 500 years of exploitation have resulted in greatly diminished populations of seabirds in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Colonial-breeding seabirds have long been hunted for meat, feathers and oil, and their eggs collected as a fresh source of protein. Consequently, there are fewer seabird colonies in existence today than 500 years ago, and those that remain are more vulnerable to oil spills, disease, starvation, natural disasters, and continued exploitation for meat.

Efforts to restore historic seabird colonies have been undertaken by the National Audubon Society in United States. Using decoys and CD recordings of seabird colony sounds, the Audubon Society has succeeded in reintroducing breeding pairs of Common Murres, Common Terns and Atlantic Puffins (National Audubon Society Seabird Restoration Program 1996).

In June, 1997, the Quebec Labrador Foundation, in collaboration with the National Audubon Society and Mingan Island Cetacean Study, commenced a project to restore a historic North Atlantic gannet colony on Ile aux Perroquets, of the Mingan Archipelago. The gannet colony had disappeared by the 1880's, though only a few decades earlier, from 1857-1859, Comeau (1909, as cited in Chapdelaine and Bourget 1981) had described '2 immense colonies of gannets on the Perroquet Islands'. Egg-harvesting, the use of flesh for fish bait, and disturbance caused by the construction of a lighthouse were all contributing factors to the decline, and eventual extinction of this colony.

The objectives of the gannet restoration project were manifold:

1. To re-establish an historic North Atlantic gannet colony
2. To do a daily count of the birds feeding, resting and/or nesting on and around Ile aux Perroquets.
3. To protect the nesting birds from human disturbance
4. To greet tourists who came to the island, to oversee their activities, and to lead interpretative walks.
5. To cultivate good relations with the community of Longue-Pointe, and with the local tour operators.
6. To gain an understanding of the best means of managing the island 1) protect the birds; and 2) allow for controlled use of the island by tourists and/or researchers

1.2 Site description

The Mingan islands are located off the Middle North Shore of the St. Lawrence River, north of Anticosti Island, and in the Jacques Cartier Strait. The local climate is strongly influenced by the Labrador Current, and a combination of upwelling and large rivers has created an environment rich in nutrients, harbouring a great diversity of marine plants and animals.

Ile aux Perroquets ('Perroquet Island') is at the extreme west of the Mingan Archipelago, and is located 4.8 km from the coast. The perimeter of the island is 0.9-km, and the surface area 0.03 km² (3 hectares). The island is surrounded by 6-8-m high cliffs on

