

USFWS Alaska Region
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Updated: September 14, 2020

What's Happening?

In May 2020, the USFWS began receiving reports of dead and dying seabirds from the Bering Strait Region, with small die-off events continuing through September. The majority of species were puffins and murres, but also included shearwaters, kittiwakes and auklets. Birds examined from St. Lawrence Island were emaciated, however, the cause of death was also associated with a non-petroleum oil (vegetable, fish, or cooking oil) which was in the bird's esophagus and lungs and on their feathers.

Historically, seabird die-offs are not uncommon in Alaska, but were not reported from the Bering Strait Region. Since 2017, these events have occurred every year in the northern Bering and southern Chukchi Seas. In addition to frequency, these die-offs are unusual due to the number and variety of dead birds, broad geographic area affected, and the duration of the series of events over a summer.

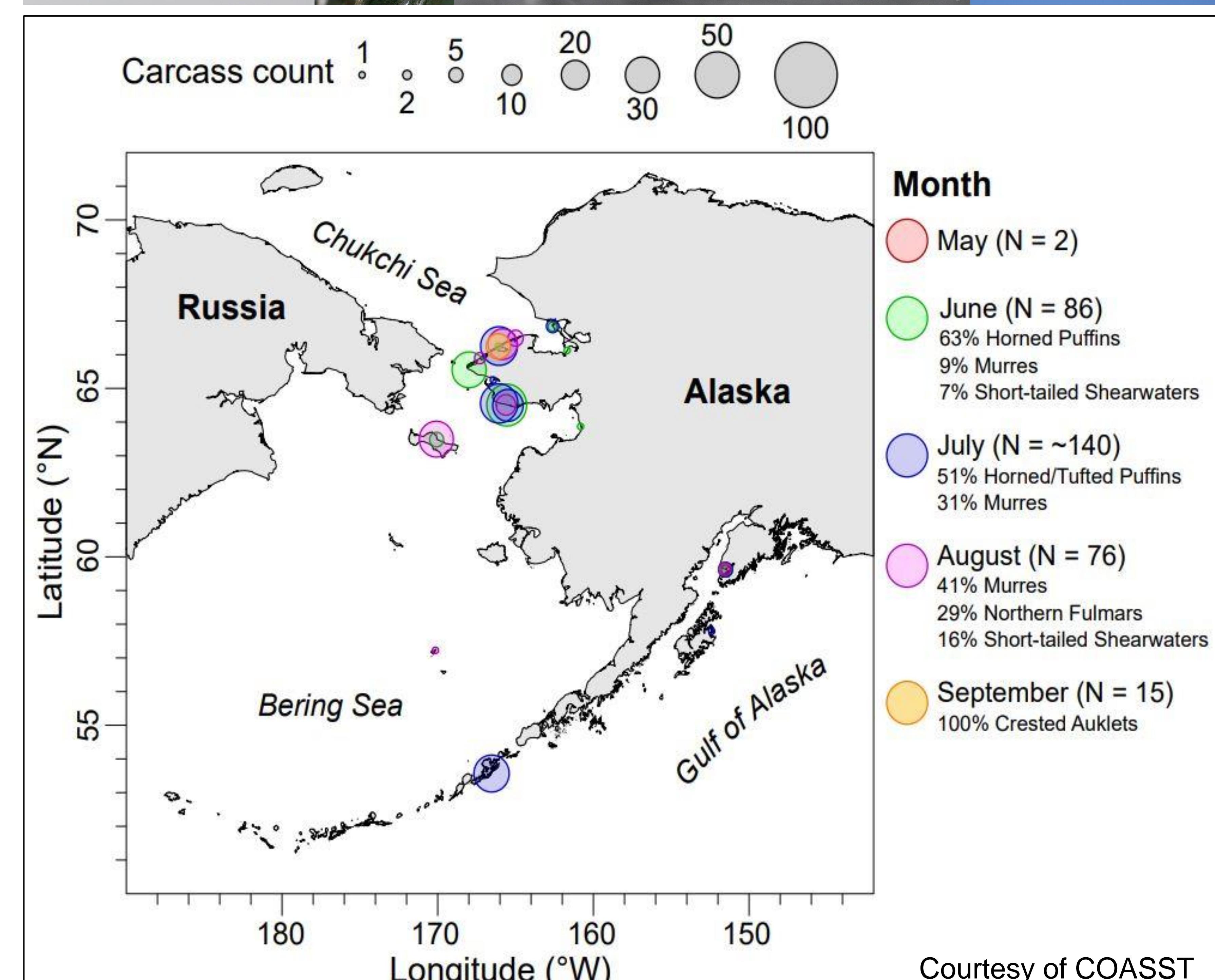
To date, 320 seabird carcasses have been reported in 2020, which is lower than numbers reported in summers of 2017-2019. While the number of dead birds is comparatively low, it remains a concern for rural communities that rely on the marine ecosystem for subsistence.

What's Being Done?

The USFWS is coordinating with federal, state, tribal governments, and community members to report observations and collect carcasses for examination by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center. Of the 15 carcasses submitted, 12 were examined and all were emaciated and tested negative for Avian Influenza. Tissues collected during examinations will be analyzed for harmful algal bloom toxins by the USGS Alaska Science Center. Results of those analyses will be shared when they are available.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

2020 Alaska Seabird Die-off Update



Courtesy of COASST

What Can I Do?

Report sick or dead birds to regional partners:

- North Slope:** Taqulik Hepa (907) 852-0350
- Northwest Arctic:** Cyrus Harris (907) 442-7914
- Bering Strait region:** Brandon Ahmasuk (907) 443-4265 or Gay Sheffield (907) 434-1149
- Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta:** Jennifer Hooper (907) 543-7470
- Bristol Bay:** Gayla Hoseth (907) 842-6252
- Pribilof Islands:** Lauren Divine (907) 891-3031
- Aleutians:** Karen Pletnikoff (907) 222-4286
- Or report by phone or email to the USFWS:**
1-866-527-3358 or AK_MBM@FWS.GOV

Participate in monitoring efforts on your local beaches:

COASST provides training. Visit www.coasst.org.

Information to report includes:

- Location, Time & Date observed
- Size of area observed (e.g., length of beach walked)
- Type & number of birds (count or estimate)
- Photos of sick/dead birds
- Videos of any unusual behaviors (approachable, drooping head and/or wings)

