



Comprehension Activity

Why have Puffins numbers declined on Burhou?

The population of Puffins breeding on Burhou and the North West French coast declined from tens of thousands to just 200 – 300 pairs between 1920 and 1980.

Recent studies suggest two reasons for this decline. First, oil spills from large tankers like the Torrey Canyon in 1968 and the Amoco Cadiz in 1978 that covered the beaches and rocks with thick tar, and second the rapid increase in the size of the Gull populations.

Ecologists believe the greatest threat to Puffin numbers in the area is presented by the population of Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Frequently these birds will choose to nest less than 50 metres from the Puffin burrows. Close to the entrance they are able to remove unguarded eggs and intercept the adult Puffins when they return from the sea with their catch of fish (the latter is known as kleptoparasitism).

To protect the Puffins on Burhou the Alderney Wildlife Trust has taken the following actions: close to the Puffins burrows the ground has been cleared (plants and bushes removed) to prevent gulls nesting, and removing gull nests that are being built before the eggs can be laid.

How successful have these actions been?

Since 2000 the number of Puffins on Burhou has steadily increased. In 2012 one hundred and seventy six pairs of Puffins bred on the island. However, despite these actions Ecologists doubt that Puffin numbers will ever match pre 1980 figures as the large resident Gull population, and the shortage of available space, limit any future increase.





Activities

- How many Puffins visited Burhou and the North French Coast each year in 1920?
- Give 2 reasons why Puffin numbers have declined since 1980?
- Why do Gulls choose to nest just 50 metres from the Puffin burrows?
- What is kleptoparasitism?
- What actions have members of the Alderney Wildlife Trust taken to protect the Puffin population on Burhou?
- Do you think the Puffin population will ever increase and match the pre 1980's numbers? (Give reasons to support your answer.)

Research

- Can you think of any other reasons that limit Puffin numbers on Burhou?



Web links:

Daily Telegraph – Food chain fears may end industrial fishing in the North Sea

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1491644/Food-chain-fears-may-end-industrial-fishing-in-North-Sea.html>

BBC - Food fears for UK Sea birds

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4081234.stm>

