




NEWS
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Scotland's seabirds face extinction as fish fight intensifies

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RSPB Scotland have warned the country's population of Arctic skuas could die out as fishing catches increase

COMPETING with the fishing industry for food has pushed seabirds to the brink, biologists claim.

Biologists claim competition for key prey species is costing communities of seabirds, making them more at-risk than their land-dwelling counterparts.

The claim comes from a global analysis published yesterday.

Aberdeen University experts joined colleagues from Canada's University of British Columbia and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (National Centre for Scientific Research) in Paris on a massive project comparing the catches of birds and fishing boats.

Focusing on the periods 1970-1989 and 1990-2010, the teams studied the species most sought-after by birds and fishermen.

These include anchovies, sardines, mackerel, squid and crustaceans.

According to their estimates, the amount of fish eaten by seabirds plummeted from 70 million to 57m tonnes between the two periods. Conversely, the volume landed by the fishing industry shot up from 59m to 65m.

The figures are based on the annual consumption of almost 1500 groups of around 300 seabird species and fisheries data from the Canada-based Sea Around Us research initiative.

The team is now calling for tighter regulations to prevent human activity from killing off bird numbers.

Study co-leader Dr Aurore Ponchon, from the [School](#) of Biological Sciences at Aberdeen University, stated: “Our research shows, that despite the decline of the world seabird community between 1970-1989 and 1990-2010, competition with fisheries remained sustained.

“This competition was even enhanced in almost half the oceans.”

Ponchon went on: “This enhanced competition, in addition to other factors such as pollution, predation by invasive species on chicks, the destruction and changes in their habitat by human activities and environmental changes caused by climate change, puts seabirds at risk, making them the most threatened bird group, with a 70% decline over the past seven decades.

“This study calls for an improved management of the world’s fisheries to alleviate competition pressure on seabird populations.”

In August, RSPB [Scotland](#) suggested the country’s population of Arctic skuas could die out as numbers fall.

As few as 500 pairs are thought to remain – a drop of 80% since 1992.

Steep declines in kittiwakes, guillemots, puffins and Arctic terns have also been recorded.

Dr Allan Perkins, senior conservation scientist at RSPB Scotland, has said that plummeting sandeel numbers could be to blame.

He stated: “Lack of food has been the biggest pressure for these birds and shows just how vulnerable our seabirds and marine life are.

“As sandeel numbers have declined around these key north-east areas in Scotland the whole food chain is impacted.”

Link: <https://www.thenational.scot/news/17281926.scotlands-seabirds-face-extinction-as-fish-fight-intensifies/>