

EMBARGOED UNTIL AUG. 16, 2019 4 PM

Nature Trust's Big Win for the Birds Seal Island Protected

Aug. 16, 2019 (Clark's Harbour, NS)—A conservation achievement by the Nova Scotia Nature Trust brings good news for birds and bird lovers. Tonight they announced protection of 650 acres on Seal Island, off the southwestern tip of Nova Scotia. One of the region's most important sites for migratory birds, the remote island is renowned for its vast numbers of birds, variety of species and rarities. Its protection is welcome news amidst plummeting migratory bird populations across the planet.

The news was celebrated at a community event in Clark's Harbour on Cape Sable Island—a traditional jumping-off point for reaching remote Seal Island.

The 650 acre Seal Island Conservation Lands, encompassing nearly 80 per cent of the island, had been threatened by private development, which would have devastated the natural habitats and the birds they support, and ended traditional use of much of the island. Thanks to the Nature Trust, birds will thrive, and people can continue enjoy what has been called the 'wondrous foggy isle' as they always have.

The Nature Trust's Executive Director, Bonnie Sutherland noted, "Protecting Seal Island, one of the most important islands for migratory birds in Atlantic Canada, is a major win for bird conservation and recovery."

One of Nova Scotia's largest and most remote islands, located 32 km off the coast, Seal Island features a diversity of habitats, from stunted, mossy forest, salt marsh, bog and barachois pond, to rocky shore, sandy beach and grass dunes. This diversity, its isolation from the mainland and major human impacts, and location in the flight path of countless migratory birds all contribute to its significance for birds and bird conservation.

Over 330 species have been recorded on Seal Island, using it for breeding, overwintering, migration or storm shelter. Recorded species include over 20 nationally and provincially-designated bird species at risk such as Roseate Tern, Harlequin Duck, Canada Warbler, Rusty Blackbird, Red Knot, and Barn Swallow. Other birds of conservation concern have been sighted on the island, including Common Eider, Leach's Storm-petrel, and Atlantic Puffin.

Located strategically on a major migration path called the Atlantic Flyway, the island acts like a migrant trap, drawing in birds from across a vast swath of ocean, and providing a critical refuge for birds to refuel and replenish on their long migratory journeys.

Astounding numbers of birds have been recorded, including single day reports of 5000 American Robins, 1100 White-throated Sparrows, 1000 Palm Warblers and 500 raptors. Seal Island also provides refuge for rarely seen visitors to Nova Scotia, exotic birds blown far off course during storms.

Protecting this unparalleled migratory hotspot and large, ecologically rich island is not only significant for bird conservation. It is also significant in addressing biodiversity loss, and conservation of over 20 species at risk in Canada and many other species of increasing concern for conservation.

Eric Mills, a passionate birder who has been visiting Seal Island with his bird-loving family and friends almost every year since 1967, was delighted with the news.

“The Nature Trust’s protection of Seal Island is an important step forward for migratory bird populations” Mills said. He noted that migratory birds face the continuing loss of food and shelter across many parts of eastern North America. “Ensuring these necessities, especially at Seal Island—the critical beginning or ending point of their long migrations—is a highly significant,” he added.

Protecting the island from private development also preserves its rich history and culture. Although year-round habitation ended in the 1990s, it is still used seasonally by fishermen, birders, and many local families who have been connected to the island for generations.

Seal Island was acquired with the financial support of the Government of Canada through the federal department of Environment and Climate Change, the Nova Scotia Crown Share Land Legacy Trust, and many generous families and individuals.

The island adds to a growing network of protected islands in the area including the Nature Trust’s nearby Outer Bald Group and Bon Portage Island Conservation Lands, conserved in partnership with the Nova Scotia Bird Society and Acadia University, respectively.

But according to the Nature Trust, with 96% of coastal islands in the area privately-owned and very few (about 6%) formally protected, more island conservation is critical in protecting coastal biodiversity and recovering and sustaining bird populations. The Nature Trust is already working to secure its next island win for birds. They have also begun collaborative planning for long-term restoration, monitoring, and management of Seal and surrounding islands, in partnership with community members and other research and conservation partners.

Sutherland noted, “People keen to make a difference for birds can join in the conservation action. Charitable donations are critical to help protect more coastal islands and to ensure their long-term stewardship.”

To donate, volunteer, or find out more, visit nsnt.ca or telephone the Nature Trust at 1 (877) 434-LAND.

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Backgrounder, photos and map available—www.nsnt.ca/media

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