

Atlantic Puffin

Macareux moine

Fratercula arctica

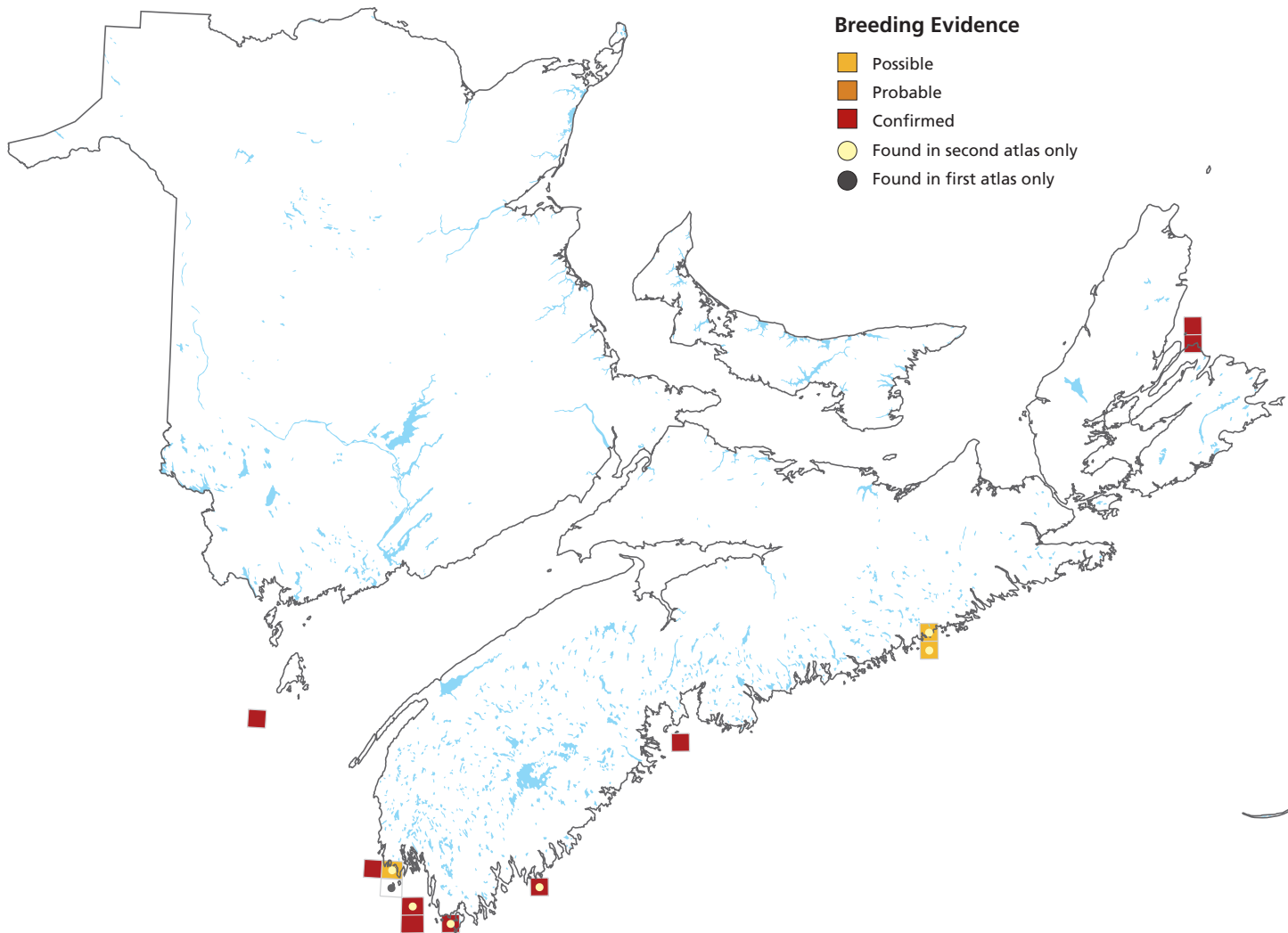


Denis Doucet

Easily recognized with its brightly coloured bill and comical upright stance, the Atlantic Puffin nests in burrows under turf and boulders in only a few scattered coastal locations. Colonies in the Maritimes are generally smaller than those in the Newfoundland core of the species' western Atlantic range, which extends from several small colonies in the northern Gulf of Maine to the low Arctic.

The Atlantic Puffin excavates and reuses burrows tunnelled into boulder scree or grassy slopes of island colonies, often among concentrations of other colonial seabirds. The species was recorded in a number of coastal squares, most at known traditional nesting sites. These include Machias Seal Island in NB, Pearl and Ram islands and Green Rock off NS's southwestern shore, and the Bird Islands in Cape Breton. Possible nesting was also recorded on small islands on the eastern shore of NS.

These locations have not changed appreciably between atlases, suggesting that availability of undisturbed nest sites or food, especially herring, may limit puffin distribution in the Maritimes. The presence of large gulls that harass adults, steal food intended for chicks, and prey on eggs and young fledglings is the major deterrent in most areas.



Regular monitoring of the Atlantic Puffin on Machias Seal Island, by researchers at the University of NB, confirms that this colony continues as the stronghold within the wider group of nesting islands in the Gulf of Maine. Repeated counts since 2000 consistently found over 10,000 burrows, 68–80% of which are occupied by nesting puffins each year.

—Richard D. Elliot



Tony Enfield