# Puffin numbers rise 15% on Farne Islands despite wider seabird declines



The puffin population on the Farne Islands in Northumberland has been declared stable after an encouraging census conducted by the National Trust, the first of its kind in five years. This significant survey, which took place amidst concerns over avian influenza and the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed approximately 50,000 breeding pairs, representing a 15% increase from the almost 44,000 pairs estimated in 2019. Rangers have noted that this uptick in numbers is indicative of the species' remarkable resilience.

Historically, puffins have faced numerous challenges, including severe declines due to disease, fluctuating food sources, and habitat changes. The recent count, however, signalled no evidence of avian influenza, which had previously devastated seabird populations across the UK. This absence of disease, coupled with an increase in puffin numbers, provides a rare note of optimism amidst the ecological tumult that has characterised recent years.

The census also highlighted a notable shift in nesting patterns, with a larger number of puffins opting to settle on Inner Farne as opposed to outer islands. This behaviour is believed to be influenced by the seasonal dynamics of seal pupping, which affects the availability of burrows necessary for nesting. Such changes are critical as they reflect an adaptive response to shifting environmental conditions.

While the puffins appear to be faring well, the broader seabird community is experiencing troubling declines. The latest analyses have raised alarms regarding other species, such as shags and guillemots, whose populations have plummeted by 75% and 37%, respectively, on the Inner group of islands. These trends are being attributed to extreme weather events and the lingering impacts of avian influenza, underscoring the precarious state of seabird health in the region.

The findings from this comprehensive survey not only underscore the success of puffin conservation efforts but also highlight the need for continued monitoring and intervention for other vulnerable seabird species. Rangers and conservationists remain vigilant, recognising that while the puffin population shows promise, the overall challenges facing marine life on the Farne Islands demand sustained attention and action.

As we reflect on these developments, it becomes clear that the balance of our coastal ecosystems is delicate and requires a nuanced approach that prioritises both the protection of thriving species such as puffins and the urgent need to understand and address the declining populations of their seabird counterparts.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: (1), (2)
2. Paragraph 2: (2), (3), (5)
3. Paragraph 3: (3), (4), (6)
4. Paragraph 4: (4)
5. Paragraph 5: (6)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/gallery/2025/may/16/week-in-wildlife-hitchhiking-cygnets-a-criminal-duck-and-hopping-hares> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/services/media/puffin-population-declared-stable-on-the-farne-islands-as-results-of-first-full-count-for-five-years-are-confirmed> - In September 2024, the National Trust announced that puffin numbers on the Farne Islands, Northumberland, had increased by 15%, with approximately 50,000 breeding pairs recorded. This marked the first full count since 2019, following disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic and avian influenza outbreaks in 2022 and 2023. The count revealed no signs of bird flu, suggesting the species' resilience. Rangers noted a shift in nesting patterns, with more puffins on Inner Farne, possibly due to seal pupping affecting burrow availability on outer islands.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr7rpmyjk7mo> - In September 2024, BBC News reported that the puffin population on the Farne Islands had been declared 'stable' after a 15% increase since 2019, with 50,000 breeding pairs estimated. The first full count in five years found no signs of avian influenza, indicating the species' resilience. Rangers observed that puffins' 'self-isolating' behaviors may have helped them weather the bird flu outbreak. The count also noted a shift in nesting patterns, with more puffins on Inner Farne.
4. <https://www.northumberlandgazette.co.uk/news/environment/puffin-population-declared-stable-on-the-farne-islands-but-concern-for-shags-and-guillemots-4771785> - In September 2024, the Northumberland Gazette reported that puffin numbers on the Farne Islands had increased by 15%, with the population declared 'stable' after the first full count since 2019. The count revealed no signs of avian influenza, suggesting the species' resilience. However, concerns were raised about declines in other seabird species, including shags and guillemots, with numbers down by 75% and 37% respectively on the Inner group of islands, possibly due to extreme weather and the impact of bird flu.
5. <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/uk-news/2024/09/06/puffin-population-declared-stable-on-farne-islands-after-bird-flu-outbreak/> - In September 2024, the Shropshire Star reported that the puffin population on the Farne Islands had been declared 'stable' after a devastating bird flu outbreak. The National Trust's team of rangers conducted the first full count since 2019, finding populations flourishing and avian influenza absent. The count revealed a 15% increase in puffin numbers since 2019, with 50,000 breeding pairs estimated. Rangers noted a shift in nesting patterns, with more puffins on Inner Farne, possibly due to seal pupping affecting burrow availability on outer islands.
6. <https://mrcvs.co.uk/en/news/23812/Farne-Islands-puffin-numbers-stable-after-avian-flu> - In September 2024, MRCVSonline reported that puffin numbers on the Farne Islands were stable after avian flu outbreaks in 2022 and 2023. The National Trust's team of 11 rangers estimated the population to be around 50,000 pairs, a 15% increase from nearly 44,000 pairs in 2019. The count revealed no signs of avian flu, suggesting the species' resilience. Rangers observed a shift in nesting patterns, with more puffins on Inner Farne, possibly due to seal pupping affecting burrow availability on outer islands.