

Proposed Recovery Strategy for the Ivory Gull Summary

This is a summary of the information provided in the proposed recovery strategy for the Ivory Gull. The Ivory Gull was listed as a species of Special Concern under the *Species at Risk Act* in 2003. It was re-assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in 2006 and following public consultations across Canada, Ivory Gull was re-listed under the *Species at Risk Act* as Endangered in March 2009.

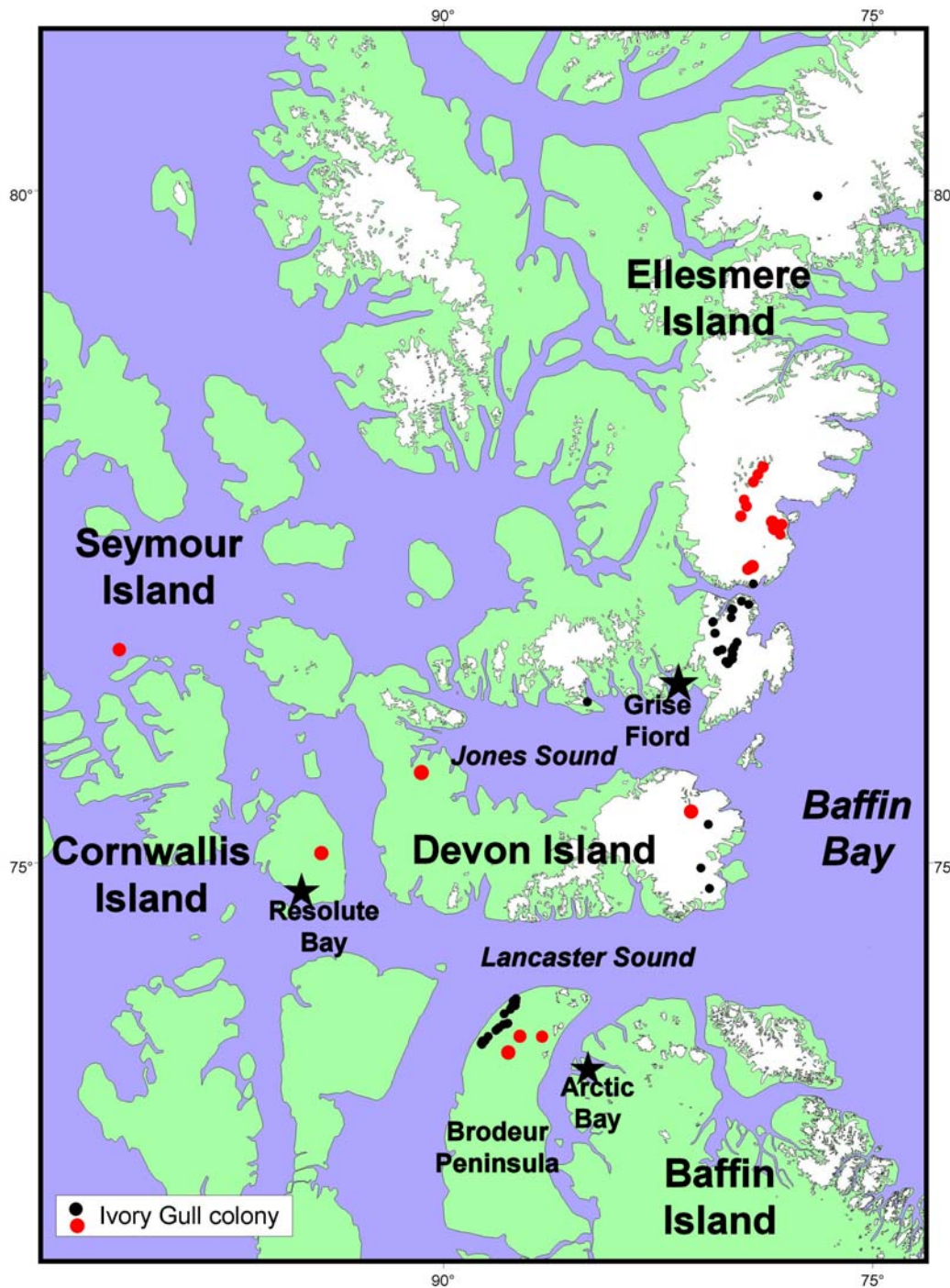
SUMMARY OF COSEWIC ASSESSMENT

COSEWIC Status: Endangered

Reason for Designation: Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and intensive breeding colony surveys over the last four years indicate that the Canadian breeding population of this long-lived seabird has declined by 80% over the last 20 years. This bird feeds along ice-edge habitats in the high Arctic and breeds in very remote locations. Threats include contaminants in food chain, continued hunting in Greenland, possible disturbance by mineral exploration at some breeding locations, and degradation of ice-related foraging habitats as a result of climate change.

Canadian Occurrence: Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Newfoundland-Labrador

COSEWIC status history: In 1979, the Ivory Gull was designated a species of Special Concern. In 1996 and 2001, their status was re-examined and remained the same until 2006 when they were designated Endangered.



This is Figure 3 from the proposed recovery strategy. It shows where we know Ivory Gull nesting colonies are in Canada. The red dots (larger dots) are where Ivory Gull colonies have been seen since 2005, and the black dots (smaller dots) show where colonies used to be but are not there anymore.

The proposed recovery strategy is a detailed plan that outlines the short-term objectives and long-term goals for protecting and recovering Ivory Gull populations in Canada. This proposed recovery strategy indicates that the recovery of Ivory Gull populations in Canada is possible.

This summary is based on the information in the full English version of the Ivory Gull recovery strategy.

The original English copy of the proposed recovery strategy has been provided to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board for reference.

Information about Ivory Gulls (pages 2-7)

This section of the proposed recovery strategy for Ivory Gulls provides some information about Ivory Gulls such as what they look like, their nesting biology, their population and distribution within Canada, and their habitat needs:

- Ivory Gulls are a medium-sized gull with all white feathers and black legs. They lay 1-3 eggs in nests on remote islands, plateaus or cliffs.
- Both parents look after the nest and it takes 24 to 26 days for the eggs to hatch.
- Ivory Gulls live throughout the circumpolar north and are found breeding in Russia, Norway, eastern Greenland and Canada.
- Ivory Gulls are known to nest only in five places in Nunavut: Ellesmere Island, Devon Island, Cornwallis Island, Seymour Island and the Brodeur Peninsula of northern Baffin Island.
- In 2006, there were approximately 842 Ivory Gulls in Canada. This number is approximately 80% less than the number of Ivory Gulls seen in Canada in the 1980s.
- *Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit* from Nunavut shows that Ivory Gulls are not found in great numbers around communities like they used to be and that local residents see fewer now than they did in the past.

- Ivory Gulls need to nest in areas that are safe from ground predators such as the Arctic Fox but nearby to open water for feeding.
- Ivory Gulls are scavengers and predators.
- Sea ice is very important to Ivory Gulls because it provides them with feeding and lookouts for finding new feeding areas.

Threats to Ivory Gulls (pages 7-10)

This section of the proposed Ivory Gull recovery strategy describes the things that might cause Ivory Gull numbers to drop, or stop them from increasing.

There are two big threats to Ivory Gull populations:

- **Illegal shooting** in Greenland is the biggest threat to Ivory Gulls. Ivory Gulls from Canada are being shot in Greenland even though they have been protected in Greenland since 1977.
- **Predation.** Ivory gulls like to nest in areas where there are few predators. Polar Bears, Arctic foxes and Common Ravens are predators of Ivory Gulls and can destroy entire colonies in a single season.

Other things that might hurt Ivory Gull populations are:

- Industrial activities – disturb colonies, attract predators
- Contaminants in their food may make them unhealthy
- Visits to colonies by researchers during the nesting season
- Climate change – warmer temperatures may affect where sea ice is, when it forms, when it breaks up and how much of it there is. Sea ice provides Ivory Gulls with feeding and lookouts for locating food.
- Oil pollution – many marine birds are killed by oil pollution every year

Goals to protect Ivory Gull populations (pages 10-11)

The long-term goal is to increase the Canadian population of Ivory Gulls to more than 1000 birds. This section describes the four population and distribution

objectives that will help to maintain current populations and distribution, but also help to reach our long-term goal. The four objectives are:

- Carry on the number and distribution of Ivory Gulls found on eastern Ellesmere Island in 2009 over a five-year average. Approximately 700 Ivory Gulls were found north of Makinson Inlet in 2006 and again in 2009.
- Keep the Seymour Island colony at 100 or more individuals annually. This has been the largest known colony of Ivory Gulls in Canada.
- Carry on the presence of breeding Ivory Gulls on Baffin Island, Cornwallis Island, and Devon Island. Small colonies of Ivory Gulls are present on these islands.
- Carry on the presence of wintering Ivory Gulls that breed in Canada and Europe. A large portion of the world's population of Ivory Gulls may depend on ice-covered water in Canada.

How to recover Ivory Gull populations (pages 11-14)

This section describes things that have already been done, are being done and need to be done to protect Ivory Gull populations.

These things have been done to help protect Ivory Gull populations:

- The Seymour Island Migratory Bird Sanctuary was made to protect this breeding site for Ivory Gulls.
- Local ecological knowledge interviews were done to determine where Ivory Gull populations are declining and by how much.
- Aerial surveys of all known Ivory Gull colonies were conducted, which showed fewer colonies and fewer birds but also found some new colonies.

Some of the things that can be done to help stop Ivory Gull populations from declining in Canada are:

- Monitoring Ivory Gulls in the nesting areas;
- protecting their habitat; and

- communicating with the public

It is possible to recover the Ivory Gull population in Canada but it is difficult because they are found in very remote places. Also, threats that affect Ivory Gulls such as illegal harvesting in Greenland are difficult to stop since people in Greenland do not have to follow the laws that protect birds in North America.

Critical Habitat for Ivory Gulls (pages 14-16)

Under the *Species at Risk Act*, habitat that must be protected in order for a species to survive and recover is called 'critical habitat. Once an area is identified as critical habitat, the federal government is legally responsible to make sure that the habitat is properly protected, and this could be through federal legislation, provincial or territorial legislation or stewardship agreements with land owners.

This section describes how the proposed critical habitat for Ivory Gulls has been identified so far and how we will identify more:

- In order for a location to be determined as critical habitat, at least one Ivory Gull had to be seen nesting at least one time at that place between the years 2002 and 2009.
- 39 places have been identified in the Canadian High Arctic as critical habitat for Ivory Gulls. All of these places are breeding colonies.
- The habitat within a 2 kilometres circle around each colony has been identified as critical habitat. Studies suggest that disturbance within a 2 kilometre circle around the colony may disrupt Ivory Gull nesting.
- Other locations where Ivory Gulls were found were not determined as critical habitat because they did not meet the requirements to be determined as critical habitat.

- From 2012 to 2014, additional studies will be conducted to find more critical habitat, and to identify what Ivory Gulls require from the habitat for breeding.

Destruction of Ivory Gull critical habitat is any change made to the breeding colony that makes the critical habitat (2 km radius) no longer useable. Some activities may not destroy critical habitat right away but may do so over time.

How we will know if things are working (page 16)

If we are meeting our goals in keeping Ivory Gull populations the same or increasing them:

- The distribution and abundance of Ivory Gulls on eastern Ellesmere Island will have stayed the same or increased;
- Every year there is a minimum of 100 Ivory Gulls present on Seymour Island;
- The current distribution of Ivory Gull colonies on Baffin Island, Cornwallis Island and Devon Island will continue.

Action Plan (page 17)

An action plan is created after a recovery strategy has been completed. It is a summary of the projects and activities that will be done in order to meet the objectives and goals described in the recovery strategy. It includes:

- An identification of the critical habitat and examples of what activities might affect it;
- A suggestion of methods that could be used to protect the critical habitat;
- An identification of any critical habitat that has not been protected;
- A list of steps that should be followed to make the recovery strategy happen and dates for when each step should take place;

- A summary of the socio-economic costs of the action plan and the benefits of making the action plan happen.

An action plan for the recovery of Ivory Gulls will be completed by 2014.