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Evidence for increased ingestion of plastics by northern fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*) in the Canadian Arctic

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Marine plastic debris floating in the oceans is a worldwide problem. When ingested by seabirds it may cause starvation and reduced growth, as well as more subtle effects that can be difficult to detect, including reduced dietary efficiency and increased levels of PCBs and other organochlorine assimilation (van Franeker, 1985; Dickerman

and Goelet, 1987; Ryan, 1988; Ryan et al., 1988). Globally, the incidence of plastics in seabirds has increased since it was first reported in 1960 (Harper and Fowler, 1987; Moser and Lee, 1992; Petry et al., 2007). By 2008, ingested plastic debris has been reported in more than 200 seabird species (Moore, 2008), and is a problem even in isolated and remote colonies (Van Franeker and Bell, 1988).

The northern fulmar, *Fulmarus glacialis*, a medium-sized petrel with a circumpolar distribution, is particularly vulnerable to

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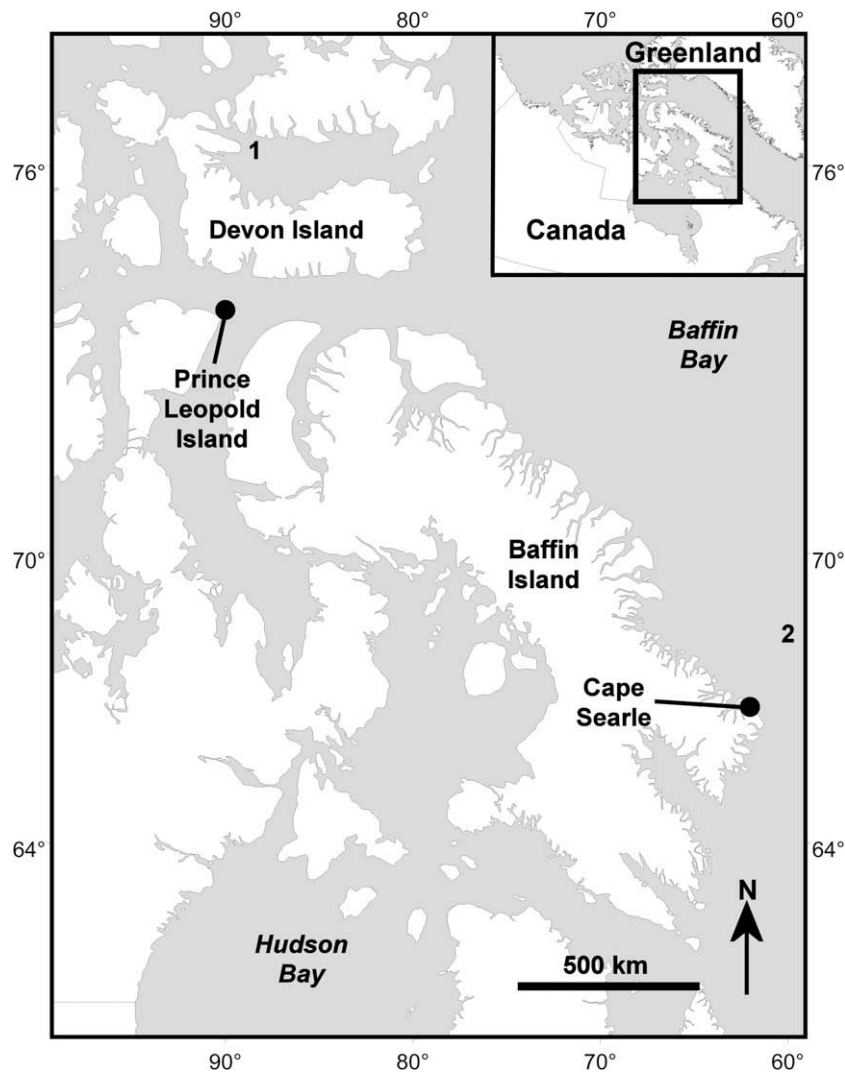


Fig. 1. Northern fulmars were collected at two colonies in the Canadian Arctic: Prince Leopold Island, and Cape Searle. Sites where previous studies have documented plastic ingestion by fulmars are noted as “1” (Cape Vera; Mallory, 2008) and “2” (Davis Strait; Mallory et al., 2006).

ingesting marine plastic debris and was one of the first species in which a high incidence of plastic ingestion was reported among North Atlantic seabirds (Baltz and Morejohn, 1976; Bourne, 1976; Furness, 1985). Because they ingest and retain a wide variety of plastic debris (van Franeker and Meijboom, 2006), fulmars are useful indicators of trends in marine debris in offshore areas. The incidence of plastics in their stomachs has been used as an indicator of marine debris in the North Sea since the 1980s (van Franeker et al., 2005). Unlike Europe's North Sea, the Canadian Arctic is remote from industrial centres and major shipping lanes. In the 1970s, Bradstreet (1976) collected Arctic fulmars for dietary analysis and reported no ingested plastic, despite the contemporary occurrence of debris in seabirds elsewhere (Baltz and Morejohn, 1976; Harper and Fowler, 1987; Moser and Lee, 1992). The first evidence of ingested plastic in breeding fulmars in the Canadian Arctic was recorded in 2003 by Mallory (2008) who sampled northern fulmars from Cape Vera, a breeding colony in the High Arctic.

In this study, we collected fulmars for dietary analysis and contaminant studies at two different colonies in the Canadian Arctic (Fig. 1). Our collections were made at colonies >250 km south of Cape Vera, where Mallory (2008) first reported ingested plastics

in breeding fulmars, and thus our collections were closer to shipping traffic and with a longer open water season. Previous studies have shown that incidence of plastic pieces in fulmars is lower at higher latitudes (van Franeker, 1985; Mallory, 2008), however, the sites we sampled were still in Arctic environments constrained by sea ice, and thereby with limited sea traffic and with no industrial activity nearby.

In August 2008, 15 fulmars were shot at sea with a shotgun within 5 km of the fulmar colony at Cape Searle, Nunavut (67°15'N, 62°35'W). Farther north, 10 breeding adults with eggs or chicks were captured on their nest sites with a noose pole on the cliffs at Prince Leopold Island, Nunavut (PLI) (74°N, 90°W), and were immediately euthanized. Each carcass was kept cool until it could be placed in a freezer (within 24 h) and shipped to the laboratory. In November 2008, the carcasses were thawed, measured (standard metrics including body mass), and dissected. The gastrointestinal tracts were removed intact, refrozen, and sent to the University of Victoria for processing and sorting, while the remains of the birds were processed and entered into the National Tissue Bank at the National Wildlife Research Centre in Ottawa for other analyses. Each gastrointestinal tract was later thawed, slit along their entire length, flushed with ethanol to remove all items present,

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