

Cape St. Mary's Gannet Parental Abandonment 2018

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On 17 August 2018, Naturalists Edna White and Kyran Power noted a massive abandonment of parental gannets from the Bird Rock and adjacent mainland areas and took photographs to document this. On 20 August 2018, Bill Montevecchi made a count of chicks attended by parents, unattended chicks, and dead chicks at four sites:

Parental Abandonment Cape St. Mary's

Date	Site	Parental Attending	No Parent	Dead Chicks
20-08-18	Mainld East	6	14	1
20-08-18	Mainld West	10	14	
20-08-18	Top Bird Rock	29	54	2
20-08-18	Bird Rock Wall	11	4	
20-08-18	Totoals	56	86	3

Totals to 61 % unattended chicks. The Cape Staff (Edna, Kyran, Wanda and Chris) all consider that the situation is improving. If so, this event seems to represent another transient parental abandonment presumably associated with lack of food availability as occurred in 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017. In 2012, Paul Regular suggested that we use the 16°C isotherm as the SST threshold for hot water, and his plots for the 2012 mass abandonment appeared to have good explanatory power. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the SST recorded by the smart bouy in Placentia Bay hit 16°C and the wind peaked over 20 knots/h on 16 August 2018 – the day before the mass parental abandonment on 17 August. These transient parental abandonments occur during the first three weeks in August when the SST rises rapidly, this could possibly be related to Gulf Stream activity. The hot SST presumably makes the gannets' pelagic fish prey at this time of year [capelin, Atlantic saury, mackerel, squid] unavailable to foraging parents. Below is a shot of the top of the stack taken on 20 August 2018 in which there are many unattended chicks, some attended chicks, and individual and paired adults on empty nests. The

Cape Naturalists - Edna, Kyran, Wanda and Chris are monitoring the situation carefully.

