

Diet of kittiwakes may be key to decline

A change in the diet of seabirds may be making them less intelligent and lowering their chances of survival, say University of Alaska researchers.

Alexander Kitaysky said he used lab experiments to mimic changes observed in the diets of kittiwakes in the Bering Sea, changes probably caused by a warming ocean, reported the BBC Friday.

The population of the red-legged kittiwakes on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, off the coast of Alaska has roughly halved over the last two decades.

"Ecosystems started to change; one of the most pronounced changes was that high-lipid fish such as capelin declined, and were replaced in the kittiwake diet by species such as juvenile pollock, which are poor in lipids," Kitaysky told the BBC.

The cause of the dietary changes may be related to climate change, with rising temperatures documented in the Bering Sea at that period perhaps driving the movements of fish populations, Kitaysky said.

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