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Regarding the Birds of Bird Islands In 1925, Ivan A. Bayley of. North Sydney published an article in the Canadian Field Naturalist, pointing out that the Bird Islands had apparently escaped the attention of ornithologists. He went on to list and give some details regarding the birds he and the lighthouse keepers had seen there. We took that article to Dan Banks and Dave Harris, Biologists with Nova Scotia Lands and Forests, the evening after their most recent visit to Bird Islands (June 4, 1980), They had gone out that morning to make a count. They make the count each year, and in the same manner: that is, from a boat, slowly circling each island. This gives them a fairly rigorous method for determining the changes from one year to the next. It should be remembered that Bayley went out for a number of visits, different times of the year. Dan Banks and Dave Harris are not actually counting all the birds--only certain species, and only those they see using a particular, repeat- able method--circling the islands. We went through Bayley's report with them and discussed it in terms of what they've been seeing in recent years. Dave Harris: Bird Islands is one of the closest areas to a larger mass of land that has deep-ocean birds breeding, anywhere in Nova Scotia. You have the Auks and Puffins--pretty well ocean birds. They are birds that spend most of their life at sea and just come inland enough to breed. They usually breed on islands set further out at sea. Dan Banks: The Bird Islands are important. The Kittiwake colony there • which apparently started last year--that's the second one we know of in the province. And they are the southernmost colonies in North America--Bird Islands and Green Rock off Gabarus, And to Nova Scotia, it's unique habitat there--high flat-topped islands, cliffs with the burrows for the Puffins and the Murres, And the Auks, (Bayley thinks the Auks and Puffins make those burrows, actually hollow them out "by dint of diligent pecking and scratching.") Dan: I wouldn't say that. Most of those burrows are just dissolved coal, basically. They are tree trunks that dissolved before the surrounding rock did-- fell out or washed out. Dave: If you walk along the Black Rock area (mainland of Cape Breton across from Bird Islands), there are a lot of fossils in all of that area--and you can walk along there and see every year the erosion and you'll see where there are fossilized logs in there. They fall out, leaving holes. And it's very similar rock formation to what is the Bird Islands. Dan: I won't say that Bayley is wrong. I will say that the majority of the burrows are natural cavities. Now up toward the top, I don't know but what some of the burrows may have been dug by birds. (Bayley does add that: "Puffins...occasionally excavate burrows along the edge of the soft turf covering the top of the islands." And he continues: "Puffins arrive at these islands during the last week of April or in early May and leave towards the last of August and, although the islands are only 6 miles from the mainland, these birds rarely visit the mainland.") Dave: When he says the Puffins come in April to May--last year, we counted 46 on Hertford and 42 on Ciboux. This year, being two weeks earlier, we only counted 13 on Hertford and 8 on Ciboux. It could be that they've started breeding and the females are staying back in the nest, at the



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