

LETTER

Copping, J. P. et al. 2018. Alderney's Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* population; Counts on Les Etacs and Ortac. *Seabird* 31: 28–35.

There is a minor error in this interesting paper; in the Introduction, the authors describe the breeding range of Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* (hereafter 'Gannet') in the west Atlantic as "north to Labrador". However, in the West Atlantic the northernmost colony is Funk Island off the island of Newfoundland (49°45'N 53°11'W) (Nelson 2002).

There are several possible reasons for this error. In one sense — the political one — the statement could be considered correct because Funk Island is in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, so a revised statement of "north to Newfoundland and Labrador" would be accurate (if not helpful since that province extends over 14 degrees of latitude). However, the use of the term Labrador alone suggests this is not the sense in which it is being used. 'Labrador' used alone is a valid geographic term separate from its use in the political unit 'Newfoundland and Labrador', and if it is being used in its geographic sense it is not correct because there are no Gannet colonies on or off the mainland of Labrador, which lies entirely north of the island of Newfoundland.

The authors were perhaps misled by the existence of an archipelago called the 'Gannet Islands' off the coast of Labrador, at about 54°N, 480 km north of Funk Island. These islands are rich in breeding seabirds and their name implies the presence of nesting Gannets, but

there are no records of Gannets nesting there, even in the 18th century when they were first noted by Michael Lane in 1771 on his survey for the British Admiralty (Birkhead 1993). Despite diligent searching of archival sources, Birkhead (*op. cit.*) was unable to find a cogent reason for the islands' name, but did establish that a widely-believed reason — that it commemorates another British survey vessel of the same name — cannot be true because *HMS Gannet* visited the islands in 1867, 96 years after Lane's survey first used the name. Gannets are sometimes seen around the islands in summer, but there is no record of them breeding there, and Nelson (1978, in Birkhead 1993) described the temperature there as much too cold for them. So, the default explanation for the name must be that one or more Gannets were seen around the Gannet Islands when they were first named in or before 1771.

Whatever the reason for the error of Copping *et al.* (2018), the breeding range of Gannets in the West Atlantic is north to Funk Island, Newfoundland.

References

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- Nelson, J. B. 2002.** *The Atlantic Gannet*. Second edition. Fenix, Great Yarmouth.

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