

Murres

DISTRIBUTION IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC

Murres breed around the circumpolar Arctic, often in large colonies. They are important in the marine ecosystem as they are relatively large and very numerous. Murres attract tourists to the Arctic and are an important food source for some arctic peoples. The locations of the Atlantic murre colonies are relatively well known. In winter, populations mix, and international co-operation is needed for an effective conservation.

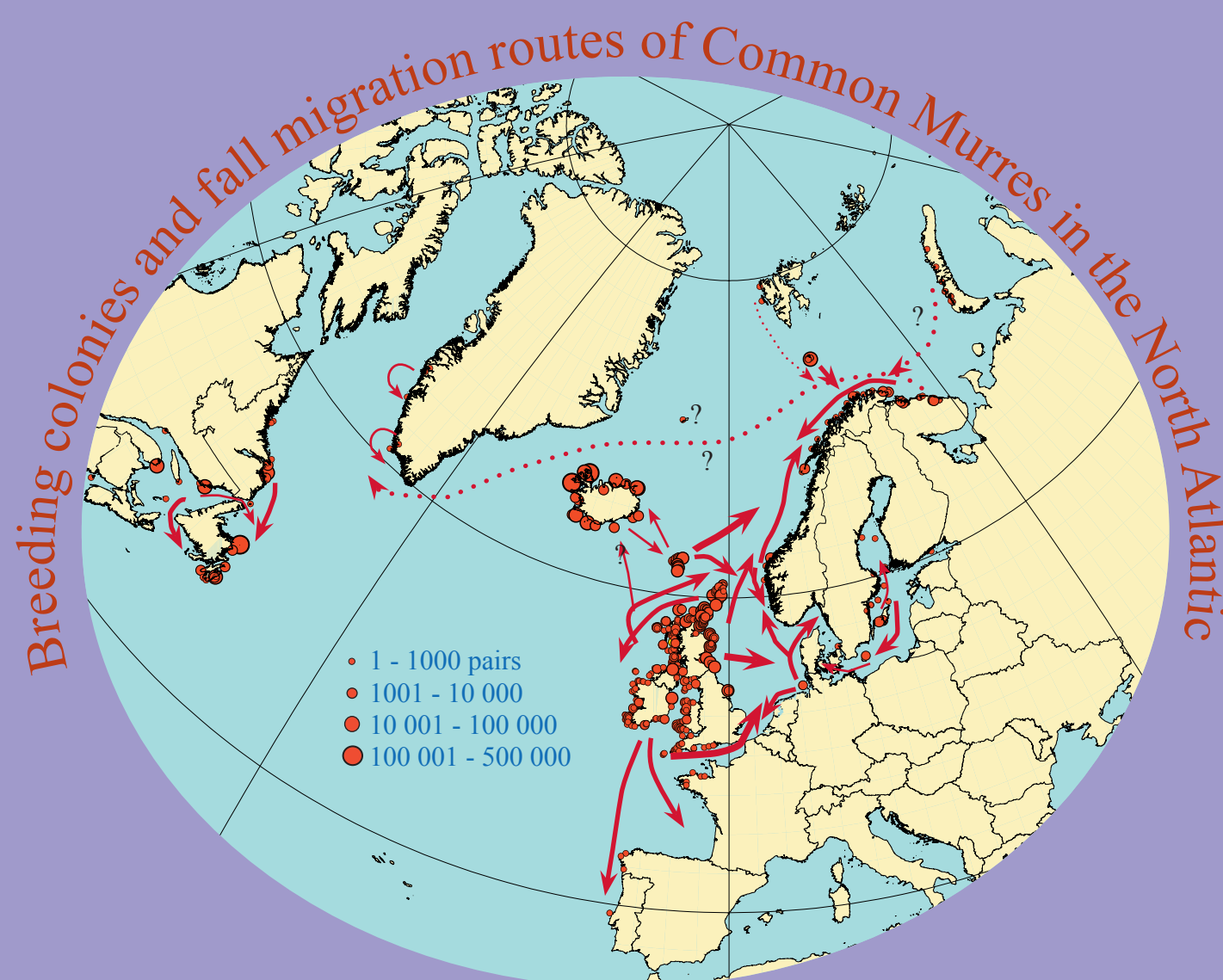
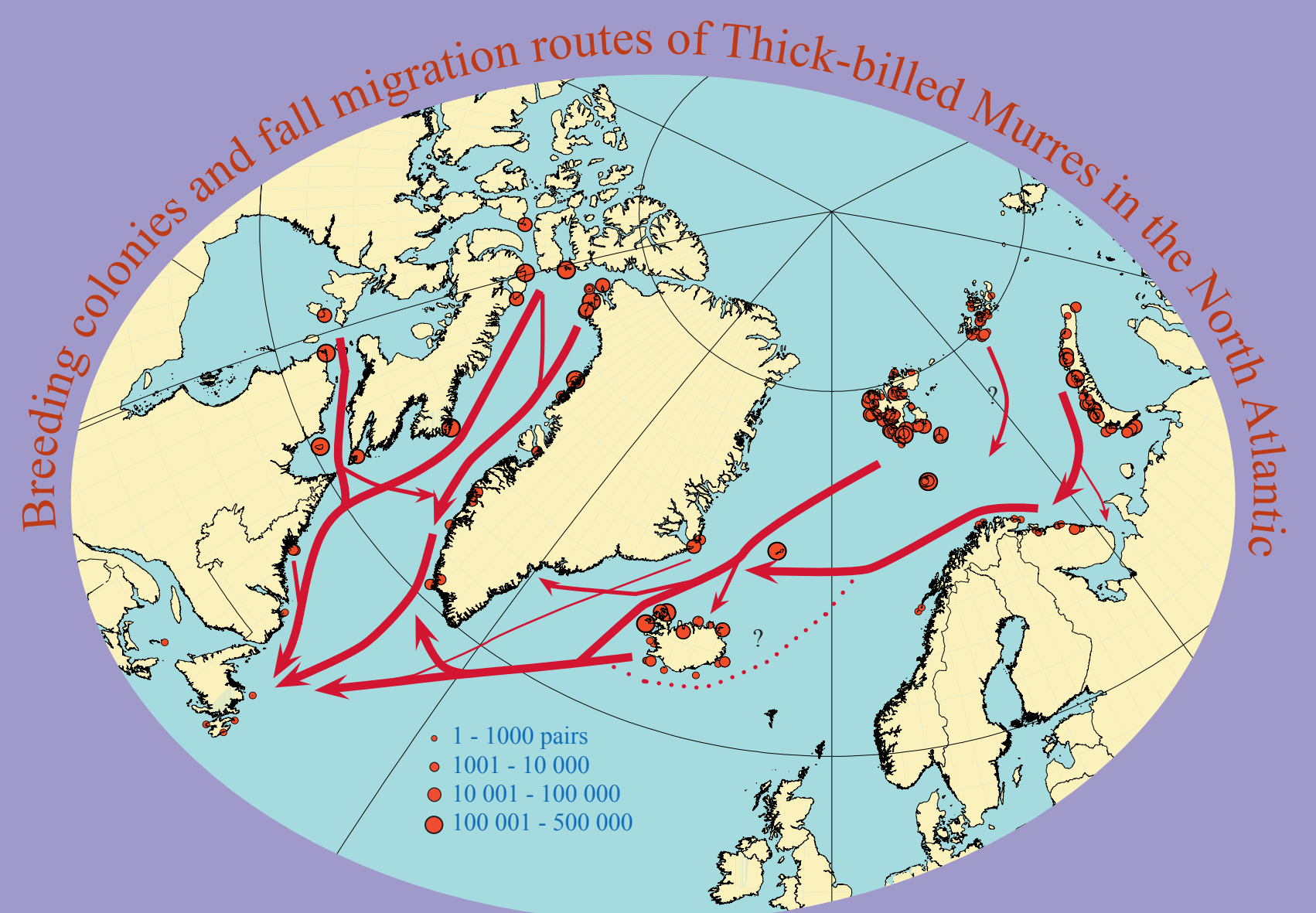
The dispersal routes shown on the maps are based on banding recoveries. Ship and aerial surveys have shown that murres have a more offshore distribution during the winter than is indicated by banding returns.



Thick-billed Murres or Brünnich's Guillemots (left) generally breed further north than Common Murres or Common Guillemots (of which the bridled form is shown in the picture). In spite of their similar appearances, they are quite different in their diet, migration patterns and behavior.

The total population of Thick-billed Murre in the North Atlantic is estimated at 10-15 million breeding birds. Population trends vary between regions and colonies.

Thick-billed Murres regularly migrate across the Atlantic. Portions of populations breeding in the eastern Atlantic migrate westwards in autumn to coastal waters off south-western Greenland and around Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. A large proportion of these birds are immatures. Another segment of the population stays in the Barents Sea or in other parts of the eastern Atlantic. Populations in arctic Canada and west Greenland migrate southwards in winter to the areas around Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and the south-western coast of Greenland, where they mix with birds from the eastern Atlantic. Birds breeding in the western Atlantic do not show any tendency to migrate eastwards. Icelandic birds winter off western Greenland and Newfoundland. They are replaced by birds from the Northeast Atlantic in winter.



The total population of Common Murres in the North Atlantic is estimated at 6-9 million breeding birds. Population trends vary between populations.

Common Murres do not disperse as far from their breeding colonies as do the Thick-billed Murres. Populations in the eastern Atlantic mix in the winter, especially in the Norwegian Sea and North Sea. Birds from the western part of the UK migrate furthest south. The Baltic Sea population is mainly stationary. Similarly the Icelandic population remains local all year, but mixes with birds from the UK during late winter. Birds from the Greenland and Canadian populations have only been recovered near their breeding colonies and do not seem to mix with birds from the eastern Atlantic.

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