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# Sharing wintering grounds does not synchronize annual survival in a high

## Arctic seabird, the little auk

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Running page head: Little auk winter distribution and survival

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26 **ABSTRACT**

27 Sharing the same wintering grounds by avian populations breeding in various areas may  
28 synchronize fluctuations in vital rates, which could increase the risk of extinction. Here, by  
29 combining multi-colony tracking with long-term capture-recapture data, we studied the winter  
30 distribution and annual survival of the most numerous Arctic seabird, the little auk *Alle alle*. We  
31 assessed whether or not little auks from different breeding populations in Svalbard and Franz Josef  
32 Land use the same wintering grounds and if this leads to synchronized survival. Our results indicate  
33 that birds from the Svalbard colonies shared similar wintering grounds, though differences existed  
34 in the proportion of birds from each colony using the different areas. Little auks from Franz Josef  
35 Land generally spent the winter in a separate area but some individuals wintered in the Iceland Sea  
36 with Svalbard populations. Survival data from three Svalbard colonies collected in 2005-2018  
37 indicated that sharing wintering grounds did not synchronize little auk annual survival rates.  
38 However, it is clear that the Iceland Sea is an important wintering area for little auks and  
39 environmental changes in this area could have widespread impacts on many populations.

40

41 Key-words: migration, synchrony, *Alle alle*, non-breeding distribution, geolocator, capture-mark-  
42 recapture

## 43        **1. INTRODUCTION**

44        Knowledge about the migratory connectivity, i.e. the link between breeding and non-breeding areas,  
45        (Taylor & Norris, 2010), is required to understand the degree of dependency among populations on  
46        a specific environment or geographic area, and their sensitivity to environmental changes occurring  
47        in this area. Sharing the same environment during winter may synchronize fluctuations of distant  
48        populations through a so-called Moran effect. This effect corresponds to the synchronization in the  
49        dynamics of populations by density-independent factors (like climate) that are correlated across  
50        wide regions (Moran 1953, Bjørnstad et al. 1999). and which may increase the risk of extinction  
51        (Heino et al. 1997, Palmqvist & Lundberg 1998, Engen et al. 2005). Moreover, knowledge of  
52        migratory connectivity, and more specifically inter-population mixing in the wintering grounds, will  
53        help to define appropriate conservation or management units (Webster et al. 2002, Runge et al.  
54        2015). Protecting a specific wintering area will have different effects in the case of low or high  
55        inter-population mixing, i.e. if it is used by individuals from only one or from several breeding  
56        populations (Finch et al. 2017).

57               To assess such migratory connectivity and its potential importance for population or species  
58        dynamics, it is necessary to (i) assess the winter distribution of several populations of the same  
59        species, and (ii) determine whether or not sharing this wintering ground synchronizes the  
60        populations' trajectories. Many migratory species are long-lived and their population dynamics and  
61        viability are particularly sensitive to changes in adult survival (Saether & Bakke 2000) and to  
62        changes that occur during the non-breeding season (e.g., Gaston 2003, Descamps et al. 2013,  
63        Reiertsen et al. 2014). It is therefore especially important to understand the potential relationships  
64        between conditions in the wintering grounds and adult survival. Mapping the winter distribution of  
65        migratory species has, until recently, been extremely challenging, especially for small species that  
66        cannot be equipped with large telemetry devices (Ropert-Coudert & Wilson 2005). However, the

67 development of new technologies in the last three decades and the miniaturization of data loggers  
68 and transmitters has led to a large increase in our understanding of migratory species movements  
69 (Ropert-Coudert & Wilson 2005). To link these movements and migratory behaviours to population  
70 dynamics, long-term monitoring data of population size and/or vital rates are needed. These data are  
71 particularly valuable for Arctic species experiencing rapid and large scale environmental changes  
72 (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2013, AMAP 2017, Descamps et al. 2017), and for  
73 whom long-term data are challenging to collect. (Mallory et al. 2018).

74 Here, we studied the annual survival of the most numerous Arctic seabird, the little auk *Alle*  
75 *alle*, in relation to its winter distribution. More specifically, using individual tracking data, we  
76 mapped the winter distribution of little auks breeding in five Arctic colonies to assess whether or  
77 not individuals from different breeding populations use the same wintering grounds. Using long-  
78 term (2005-2018) Capture-Mark-Resighting (CMR) data from three of these colonies, we tested the  
79 hypothesis that sharing the same wintering ground leads to synchronized survival rates.

80

## 81 **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### 82 ***2.1. Study sites and little auk life history***

83 The little auk is a seabird with a single-egg clutch and strong mate and nest fidelity (Stempniewicz  
84 2001). It adopts a life-history strategy typical of long-lived species with a population dynamic  
85 highly sensitive to changes in adult survival. As with most seabirds, little auks have a delayed age  
86 of first reproduction and do not start breeding before the age of three (unpubl. results). The little auk  
87 is zooplanktivorous and during the summer, preferentially forages on high-lipid copepods  
88 associated with Arctic waters. *Calanus glacialis* generally represents the main prey in Svalbard  
89 (Węśławski et al. 1999, Harding et al. 2009, Kwasniewski et al. 2010, Jakubas et al. 2012, Hovinen  
90 et al. 2014b) while both *C. hyperboreus* and *C. glacialis* are the main prey species in Franz Josef

91 Land (Wesławski et al. 1994, Gremillet et al. 2015). During the non-breeding season, the diet of the  
92 little auk is less known but may be based on krill spp., *Themisto* spp. and capelin *Mallotus villosus*  
93 at least in some parts of its wintering range (Rosing-Asvid et al. 2013a).

94 We collected tracking data (details below) from five colonies: Kongsfjorden (Svalbard,  
95 78°00'N, 12°24'E), Isfjorden (Svalbard, 78°14'N, 15°19'E), Bjørnøya (Svalbard, 74°31'N, 19°01'E),  
96 Hornsund (Svalbard, 77°00'N, 15°33'E) and Franz Josef Land (Russia, 80°20'N, 52°49'E ; Fig.1).  
97 Kongsfjorden and Isfjorden are located in the middle of the west Spitsbergen coast, which is  
98 influenced by the warm West Spitsbergen Current (WSC), while Bjørnøya is located in the Barents  
99 Sea between the north Norwegian coast and Svalbard. Little auks from these three colonies thus  
100 forage in an environment with low Arctic conditions. The Hornsund area is characterized by high  
101 Arctic conditions and is typically surrounded by water masses colder than Isfjorden and  
102 Kongsfjorden due to the influence of the coastal Sørkapp Current, carrying cold, less saline Arctic-  
103 type water from the northeast Barents Sea (Swerpel 1985, Jakubas et al. 2013). Franz Josef Land is  
104 also characterized by high Arctic environmental conditions (Wesławski et al. 1994).

105 We collected CMR data in three Svalbard colonies: Kongsfjorden, Isfjorden, and Bjørnøya  
106 from 2005 (Isfjorden and Bjørnøya) or 2006 (Kongsfjorden) to 2018.

107

## 108 ***2.2. Identification of the wintering grounds***

109 We identified wintering grounds by deploying light-level geolocators on the little auks (Wilson et  
110 al. 1992, Fort et al. 2013). Raw positions obtained by geolocation have a relative high average error,  
111 which is usually ~200 km (Phillips et al. 2004, Lisovski et al. 2012). As such, they are appropriate  
112 to answer research questions about large-scale movements and distribution (Lisovski et al., 2012,  
113 2019). The geolocators were mounted on a plastic leg band on tarsus. During the period 2010 to  
114 2017 we deployed more than 524 geolocators in the five study colonies, of which 242 geolocators

115 were retrieved between 2011 and 2018 (Table SM1). The available tracking data resulted in 248  
116 annual tracks from 188 individuals (tracking data were not obtained in the same years for all  
117 colonies; see details in Table SM1). We used several geolocator models (mk18l from British  
118 Antarctic Survey, mk4093 from Biotrack, c65 from Migrate Technology, all from Cambridge, UK),  
119 and different light thresholds were used in subsequent processing of the light data (1-16, in arbitrary  
120 units or lux). After calibration, we assigned appropriate sun elevation angles ( $-2.5^{\circ}$  -  $-4.5^{\circ}$ ) to the  
121 different light thresholds and geolocator models. The tracking data for 2010/11 is part of the study  
122 by Fort et al. (2013), and we applied the same calibration process as Fort et al. (2013) for the  
123 geolocators retrieved in period 2010-2014. This method is based on plotting estimated latitudes  
124 over time using a range of sun elevation angles and selecting the angle that minimized the variance  
125 of latitudes around the equinox periods. Geolocators retrieved after 2014 were part of the  
126 SEATRACK project (<http://www.seapop.no/en/seatrack/>) and were calibrated using a slightly  
127 different approach (Strøm et al. 2019) that followed the same general principles as described above.  
128 When using the approach by Fort et al. (2013) most geolocators were assigned with the same sun  
129 elevation angle (representing the best average), while in the latter approach we allowed individual  
130 angles for each geolocator/track. This inconsistency has only a limited potential effect on the  
131 estimated latitudes and does not affect the conclusions of this study.

132 In order to reduce the influence of inaccurate positions, we used the double smoothing  
133 procedure described by Hanssen et al. (2016). Latitudes obtained by geolocation are unreliable  
134 around the equinoxes, when day length is constant at all latitudes. In this study, we used positions  
135 from winter only, defined as December and January, which are not affected by equinox.

136

### 137 ***2.3. Statistical analyses***

#### 138 *2.3.1. Little auk wintering areas*

139 We performed kernel analysis to determine high-density aggregations of little auks during winter,  
140 defined as December and January, when birds are assumed to occupy their main wintering range  
141 (Fort et al. 2012). To estimate colony-specific little auk distributions during the winter, we  
142 calculated individual kernel utilization distributions (UD) for tracked birds on a 25x25 km grid in  
143 an azimuthal equidistant projection centered on 66°N and 4°W. We used the package AdehabitatHR  
144 (Calenge 2006) from R version 4.0.0 software (R Development Core Team 2016) and a constant  
145 smoothing parameter of 50 km. For individuals with more than one year of tracking data, a random  
146 year was selected for further analyses to avoid pseudo-replication. We extracted the 75% kernel  
147 contour for each individual, rasterized them (with a value of 1) on the same 25x25 km grid and  
148 combined all of these individual raster layers to establish colony-specific winter aggregations. To  
149 estimate overall little auk wintering areas across colonies, we summed up all colony-specific raster  
150 layers. As sample size differed between colonies (table SM1), we rescaled all rasterized winter  
151 distributions to 1 before combining them. Finally, we defined the area of highest-density  
152 aggregation of little auks from all investigated colonies as the area encompassed by the 90%  
153 quantile. We calculated the proportional use of this area by each colony as the number of individual  
154 75% kernel contours of tracked birds overlapping with this area compared to the total number of  
155 tracked individuals, while taking into account the fraction of individuals without positional data due  
156 to a lack of twilight events during polar night. We quantified inter-colony overlap in winter  
157 distribution using Bhattacharyya's affinity (Fieberg & Kochanny 2005), which we estimated  
158 between colony-specific kernel UDs of all tracked individuals (same parameters as above).

159

### 160 *2.3.2. Little auk survival modeling*

161 We captured, marked and re-sighted little auks in specific study plots in three colonies  
162 (Kongsfjorden, Isfjorden and Bjørnøya), with slightly different methods. We ringed birds with both



163 steel and plastic color bands, which allowed identification at a distance. We only included in this  
164 study those birds captured for the first time as adults (of unknown age). In all three colonies, we  
165 carried out fieldwork from approximately mid-June (incubation) to late July (chick-rearing). In  
166 Kongsfjorden and Isfjorden, we captured birds using nylon loops deployed on top of random rocks  
167 within the study plots, while at Bjørnøya, we captured birds by various methods, including nets at  
168 nest entrance and remote snare traps. In total, 781, 592 and 972 adult little auks were ringed in  
169 Kongsfjorden, Isfjorden and Bjørnøya, respectively, in the period 2005-2018 (average of 71 new  
170 rings/year, range [6, 336] in Kongsfjorden, of 46 new rings/year, range [8, 108] in Isfjorden, and of  
171 75 new rings/year, range [28, 132] on Bjørnøya). We used the software E-Surge (Choquet et al.  
172 2009) to model CMR data to estimate survival rates (Lebreton et al. 1992a), with data from the  
173 three colonies combined and defined as three different groups. The method cannot separate  
174 permanent emigration from mortality and only estimates apparent survival. However, little auks  
175 show a very high colony and nest fidelity (Stempniewicz 2001) and the assumption that apparent  
176 survival reflects true survival is robust. We considered both males and females together to estimate  
177 little auk adult survival as preliminary analyses indicated no sex-difference in survival. Details  
178 about the CMR modelling, model selection procedure and goodness-of-fit tests are given in  
179 supplementary material Text SM1.

180         To assess the synchrony among colonies in little auk survival rate fluctuations, we used two  
181 different approaches. First, we compared additive and interactive time-dependent models.  
182 Synchronous variation in survival should lead to survival varying in parallel through time among  
183 colonies, so that a model with an additive time effect (model  $\phi(g+t)$  where  $\phi$  represents the survival,  
184  $g$  the group or colony and  $t$  the time) should be preferred over a model where each colony shows  
185 different interannual variation (model  $\phi(g,t)$ ). Second, we considered the survival rates of each  
186 colony (of the non-transient group, see details in Text SM1) estimated from time-dependent models

187  $\phi(g,t)$  and calculated the mean cross-correlation (which quantifies the synchrony) and associated  
188 bootstrap confidence intervals using the mSynch function in the ncf package (Bjørnstad et al. 1999,  
189 Bjørnstad 2009) in R software (R Development Core Team 2016).

190

### 191 **3. RESULTS**

#### 192 ***3.1. Little auk wintering distribution***

193 During the winter months (December-January), little auks from Svalbard and Franz Josef Land  
194 dispersed to the area between eastern Canada and the Barents Sea (Fig. 1). Birds from Kongsfjorden  
195 and Isfjorden were mostly distributed in eastern Canada (Labrador Sea), south Greenland and in the  
196 Iceland Sea (Fig1). Kongsfjorden birds, however, migrated to the mouth of Hudson Strait and fewer  
197 Kongsfjorden birds than Isfjorden ones went to southeast Greenland (Fig. 1). Birds from Hornsund  
198 and Bjørnøya were mostly present in the Iceland Sea and around the southern tip of Greenland (Fig.  
199 1). Birds from Franz Josef Land stayed mainly in the Barents Sea and in the Iceland Sea (Fig. 1).  
200 Despite some differences among colonies in their winter distribution, the area in the Iceland Sea  
201 was used by birds from all study sites in December and January (Fig. 2a). Approximately half of the  
202 tracked birds from Hornsund and Bjørnøya and 20-30% of those from Kongsfjorden and Isfjorden  
203 spent the winter in this area (Fig. 2b). The proportion of Franz Josef Land birds wintering in the  
204 Iceland Sea was lower (approximately 10%, Fig. 2b). Most of the Franz Josef Land population  
205 wintered in the Barents Sea and/or at high latitudes above the Arctic circle. Indeed, the majority of  
206 the light data from Franz Josef land little auks did not include any twilight events (Fig. 2c) which  
207 implies that the birds were staying at high latitudes where night was permanent. The proportion of  
208 birds using the Iceland Sea throughout the winter followed a similar trajectory for all colonies. The  
209 number of birds there increased until late November, was the highest in December/January and then  
210 decreased from late January onwards, when birds most likely started their spring migration (Fig. 2b  
211 and Fig. SM2).

212 When considering the entire winter distribution for each colony (as colony-specific kernel UD  
213 in December/January), we found that the overlap was high among all Svalbard colonies (i.e.  
214 Bhattacharyya's affinity  $> 0.6$ ) and not a function of the distance between these colonies (Table 1).  
215 This overlap was smaller between Franz Josef Land and Svalbard colonies (Bhattacharyya's affinity  
216  $< 0.6$ ; Table 1). Given that the majority of tracked individuals from Franz Josef Land spent the  
217 winter where there is continuous polar night and thus where birds' positions cannot be estimated  
218 (Fig. SM1), the overlap between Svalbard colonies and Franz Josef Land is likely overestimated.

219

### 220 **3.2. Synchrony in survival fluctuations**

221 The average survival of little auks was different among colonies (model  $\phi_{g+t}$  was preferred over  
222 model  $\phi_t$ ; Table 2), being slightly higher in Isfjorden. (Isfjorden: 0.80, 95% CI: [0.77, 0.83];  
223 Kongsfjorden: 0.85, 95% CI: [0.82, 0.88] and 0Bjørnøya: 0.81, 95% CI: [0.79, 0.83]). Little auk  
224 survival showed significant inter-annual fluctuations (Fig. 1; Table SM2) and a model constraining  
225 survival to vary in parallel among colonies was preferred (i.e. lower AIC for the additive model  
226  $\phi_{g+t}$  than for model  $\phi_{g,t}$ ; Table 2). However, this mostly reflects the rather large confidence  
227 intervals around survival estimates, rather than the variation in their means (which are not parallel,  
228 especially for Kongsfjorden). This result also seems mostly driven by Isfjorden and Bjørnøya,  
229 which have more similar inter-annual variations as compared to Kongsfjorden (Fig. 2). This is  
230 supported by the fact that a model constraining only Isfjorden and Bjørnøya survival to vary in  
231 parallel (i.e. model  $\phi_{g(1).t+g(2,3)+t}$ ) had a better fit than models constraining only Kongsfjorden and  
232 Bjørnøya, or Kongsfjorden and Isfjorden to vary in parallel (Table 2).

233 The cross-correlation coefficient between the annual survival from these three colonies  
234 (survival rates estimated from model  $\phi_{g,t}$ ) indicates that the overall synchrony was weak and non-  
235 significant (cross-correlation = 0.10, 95% CI: [-0.25, 0.30]). This coefficient is not taking the

236 uncertainty around the means (i.e. confidence intervals) into account and only reflects the lack of  
237 synchrony in the variations of the mean annual survival rates (Fig.2).

238

#### 239 **4. DISCUSSION**

240 By tracking little auks from five different colonies in the European Arctic, we found that birds  
241 breeding in Svalbard had a similar winter distribution, though some differences exist (Fig. SM1).  
242 Birds from Franz Josef Land differed more markedly and mostly stayed in the Barents Sea during  
243 winter. The Barents Sea is rapidly changing and has become increasingly suitable habitat for  
244 wintering little auks (Clairbaux et al. 2019). However the area used by Franz Josef Land little auks  
245 has been mostly ice-free in winter, for at least the last 150 years (Shapiro et al. 2006). Therefore,  
246 the current winter distribution of little auks in the Barents Sea may not represent contemporary  
247 changes in the recent rapid loss of sea-ice (e.g. Parkinson et al. 1999, Li et al. 2017). Despite these  
248 differences among colonies in their winter distribution, we identified a key wintering area in the  
249 Iceland Sea, where some birds from all of Svalbard and Franz Josef Land colonies spent the winter  
250 months. These results confirm that little auks from the European Arctic share, to varying degrees,  
251 their wintering grounds. The proportion of tracked birds spending the winter north of Iceland varied  
252 among colonies but was as high as 50-60% for birds breeding in Bjørnøya and Hornsund. Svalbard  
253 and Franz Josef Land host more than 1.5 million breeding pairs of little auks (Keslinka et al. 2019),  
254 indicating that a huge number of little auks likely spend the winter months in this area (though this  
255 still represents a small proportion of the entire Atlantic population estimated at several 10s of  
256 million pairs, del Hoyo et al. 1996). The importance of the Iceland Sea during winter for little auks  
257 breeding in Svalbard and East Greenland had already been suggested (Fort et al. 2013). Our results  
258 corroborate this finding by showing that even little auks from the Franz Josef Land population  
259 utilize this area. The number of birds from Svalbard and Russia wintering there was highest in

260 December-January, and then gradually decreased from February onwards. Other Arctic seabirds  
261 spend the winter in this region as well, such as Brünnich's guillemots *Uria lomvia* from Bjørnøya  
262 (Frederiksen et al. 2016) and other alcid species breeding in Iceland (Linnebjerg et al. 2018). The  
263 Iceland Sea can therefore be considered as a hotspot for wintering Arctic seabirds, with hotspot  
264 defined as “an area where high abundances of species overlap in space and time” (Davoren 2007).

265 This hotspot is located between Jan Mayen and Iceland over the Jan Mayen ridge and is  
266 characterized by complex oceanic currents (Astthorsson et al. 2007, Mork et al. 2014). This ridge  
267 separates the warm Atlantic waters in the Norwegian Sea from the cold Arctic ones in the Iceland  
268 Sea. As with most oceanic front systems, it is associated with high marine productivity and  
269 densities of zooplankton (e.g. Wiborg 1955, Trudnowska et al. 2012) and thus potentially high prey  
270 availability for little auks. The winter diet of little auks is poorly known but krill (*Euphausiacea*)  
271 may represent an important prey in parts of the wintering range (Fort et al. 2010, Rosing-Asvid et  
272 al. 2013b). Recent studies have also suggested that the winter distribution of little auks is linked to  
273 the distribution of the copepod *Calanus finnmarchicus* (Fort et al. 2012, Amélineau et al. 2018).  
274 These species are among the most abundant zooplankton in the Iceland Sea, though the overall  
275 plankton abundance declines in winter (Gislason & Silva 2012). However, despite such a seasonal  
276 decline, zooplankton biomass in the core wintering areas of little auks, remains relatively high, at  
277 least in some years (Fig. SM3).

278 Capture-recapture data were available from three of the five study colonies to determine the  
279 level of synchrony in their survival rates. The average survival in the three colonies was similar  
280 (approx. 0.80), though slightly higher in Isfjorden. This is also comparable with the survival of  
281 Greenlandic little auks (Amélineau et al. 2019) and with other alcids of similar size and life-history  
282 (i.e. single-egg layers)(e.g., average adult survival of 0.83 for the Marbled murrelet *Brachyramphus*  
283 *marmoratus*, Cam et al. 2003, of 0.80 for the Kittlitz's murrelet *Brachyramphus brevirostris*,

284 Kissling et al. 2015). The survival of Svalbard little auks showed high inter-annual fluctuations, as  
285 observed in previous studies both in Svalbard and Greenland (Hovinen et al. 2014a, Amélineau et  
286 al. 2019). The magnitude of these fluctuations is surprising (and thus far unexplained) for a species  
287 in which adult survival has the largest influence on the population growth rate (Stearns & Kawecki  
288 1994). However, such large inter-annual fluctuations in survival seem to be common in alcids and  
289 have been observed in Ancient Murrelets *Synthliboramphus antiquus* (Gaston & Descamps 2011),  
290 least auklets *Aethia pusilla* (Jones et al. 2002), Brünnich's guillemots *Uria lomvia* (Fluhr et al.  
291 2017) and Atlantic puffins *Fratercula arctica* (Sandvik et al. 2005).

292         Two of the Svalbard little auk colonies (Kongsfjorden and Isfjorden) had a very similar  
293 winter distribution. The third Svalbard colony (Bjørnøya) differed slightly with the majority of  
294 birds staying north of Iceland or around the southern tip of Greenland and with very few birds  
295 wintering along the Labrador coast. The synchrony in survival rates did not reflect these patterns in  
296 wintering areas. Indeed, Bjørnøya and Isfjorden had more similar survival fluctuations throughout  
297 the study period while survival fluctuations from Kongsfjorden differed markedly. Even if a model  
298 with parallel survival for the three colonies was preferred, this was likely driven by the large  
299 confidence intervals around the mean survival rates and overall, the synchrony in these mean  
300 survival rates was very low. This shows that sharing part of the same wintering grounds was  
301 insufficient to synchronize little auks' average annual survival rates. Several non-exclusive  
302 explanations can be proposed. First, the survival of little auks may have been more affected by what  
303 happened outside of the winter period (see for example Schaub et al. 2005 where survival of white  
304 storks was mostly determined by conditions at one staging area used in the autumn). For instance,  
305 little auks may be particularly vulnerable to environmental constraints during their flightless post-  
306 breeding moulting period, for which contrasting distributions between Svalbard colonies were  
307 suggested (Fort et al. 2013). It has also been shown, though based on a very short time-series, that

308 an increase in the summer sea surface temperature resulted in a decrease in survival rates of adult  
309 little auks at some Svalbard colonies, probably through impaired nutritional status during the  
310 breeding season (Hovinen et al. 2014a). A study performed in one Greenland colony during a  
311 breeding season with relatively poor foraging conditions (reflected in elevated levels of  
312 corticosterone) found that little auk parents ended the reproductive season with low body mass and  
313 suffered increased post-breeding mortality (Harding et al. 2011). These results stress the importance  
314 of conditions experienced during the summer (i.e. breeding) period in driving little auk survival.  
315 Assessing the overlap in little auk distribution outside the winter period (i.e. during the breeding  
316 season, molting period and migration) would be needed but presents important challenges. In  
317 particular, constant darkness and/or daylight for part of the year at high latitudes combined with the  
318 difficulty of estimating bird positions around the equinoxes prevent the use of light data to map  
319 little auk distribution during a large part of their annual cycle. Using different tracking devices  
320 and/or supplementing the light data with other sources of information (see details in Merkel et al.  
321 2016 for example) would be necessary. Second, even if little auks shared the same space on a large  
322 scale during winter, birds from different breeding grounds may segregate at a finer scale (temporal  
323 or spatial) and use different environments and potentially food sources. To test this hypothesis, fine-  
324 scale tracking data, potentially combined with diet information from wintering little auks, would be  
325 necessary.

### 326 *Conclusion*

327 Our study identified a common wintering ground used by little auks from both Svalbard and Franz  
328 Josef Land (Russian Arctic). This result has important management and conservation implications.  
329 Even though sharing part of the wintering grounds did not lead to synchronized annual survival  
330 during our study, what happens at these wintering grounds, and in particular in this common area  
331 north of Iceland, may still have an effect on their population dynamics. Indeed, by using the same

332 wintering grounds, populations of little auks are likely to experience similar environmental  
333 conditions during this season and are thus, to some extent, subject to the same environmental  
334 drivers of population change. Any change in this region, like an increase in shipping or drilling  
335 activities, modifications to resource availability or climate conditions, could thus have a widespread  
336 effect on little auks breeding throughout the European Arctic.

337



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345

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528

529 **Table 1.** *Overlap in the winter distribution of Svalbard and Franz Josef Land little auks. The distribution for*  
530 *each colony is based on the months of December and January and was assessed as kernel UD. The overlap*  
531 *was calculated using the Bhattacharyya's affinity index (from 0 = no overlap to 1 = identical distribution;*  
532 *see Methods for details). Distances between colonies (in km) are indicated in the lower part of the table*  
533 *(gray area).*

534

| Colony                  | Franz Josef Land | Kongsfjorden | Isfjorden | Hornsund | Bjørnøya |
|-------------------------|------------------|--------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| <b>Franz Josef Land</b> | -                | 0.32         | 0.35      | 0.51     | 0.48     |
| <b>Kongsfjorden</b>     | 795              | -            | 0.72      | 0.66     | 0.65     |
| <b>Isfjorden</b>        | 769              | 103          | -         | 0.80     | 0.73     |
| <b>Hornsund</b>         | 851              | 227          | 140       | -        | 0.90     |
| <b>Bjørnøya</b>         | 993              | 523          | 430       | 296      | -        |

535

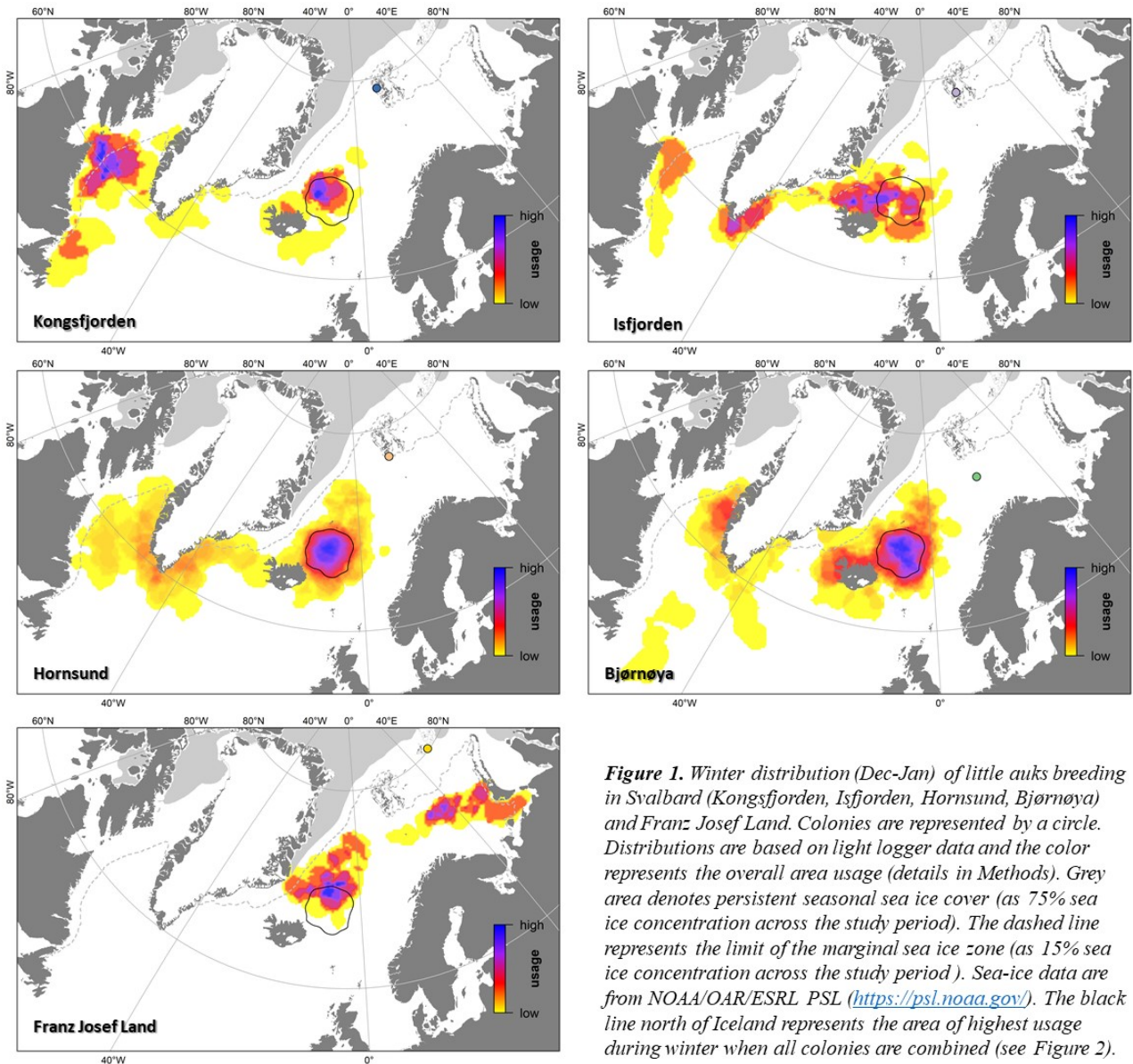
536

537 **Table 2.** Synchrony in the survival of little auks breeding at Isfjorden, Kongsfjorden and Bjørnøya. Subscript  
538 “g” represents the colony (i.e. g(1) represents Kongsfjorden, g(2) Isfjorden and g(3) Bjørnøya) and “t” the  
539 time dependence. The QAIC values have been calculated using an overdispersion parameter  $\hat{c} = 1.84$ .  
540  $\Delta QAIC$  corresponds to the difference between the QAIC of a given model and the lowest QAIC among the  
541 different models considered.  $N_p$  represents the number of identifiable parameters and Dev the deviance. The  
542 survival  $\phi$  represents the survival of the non-transient birds (age-class 2). Survival of age class 1 has been  
543 modeled as time-dependent with a multiplicative colony/group effect (see Table SMI). Recapture rates have  
544 been modelled as colony- and time-dependent with an additive trap-dependence (see table SMI and  
545 methods).

546

| <i>Model</i>               | <i>N<sub>p</sub></i> | <i>Dev</i>       | <i>QAIC</i>    | <i>ΔQAIC</i> |
|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------|
| $\phi_{g,t}$               | 110                  | 13231.72         | 7411.15        | 17.73        |
| $\phi_{g+t}$               | <b>92</b>            | <b>13265.336</b> | <b>7393.42</b> | <b>0.00</b>  |
| $\phi_t$                   | 90                   | 13281.75         | 7398.34        | 4.92         |
| $\phi_g$                   | 81                   | 13335.76         | 7409.70        | 16.28        |
| $\phi_i$                   | 79                   | 13347.02         | 7411.82        | 18.40        |
| $\phi_{g(1).t+[g(2,3)+t]}$ | 101                  | 13243.11         | 7399.34        | 5.92         |
| $\phi_{g(2).t+[g(1,3)+t]}$ | 102                  | 13252.83         | 7406.63        | 13.21        |
| $\phi_{g(3).t+[g(1,2)+t]}$ | 101                  | 13247.98         | 7403.99        | 10.57        |

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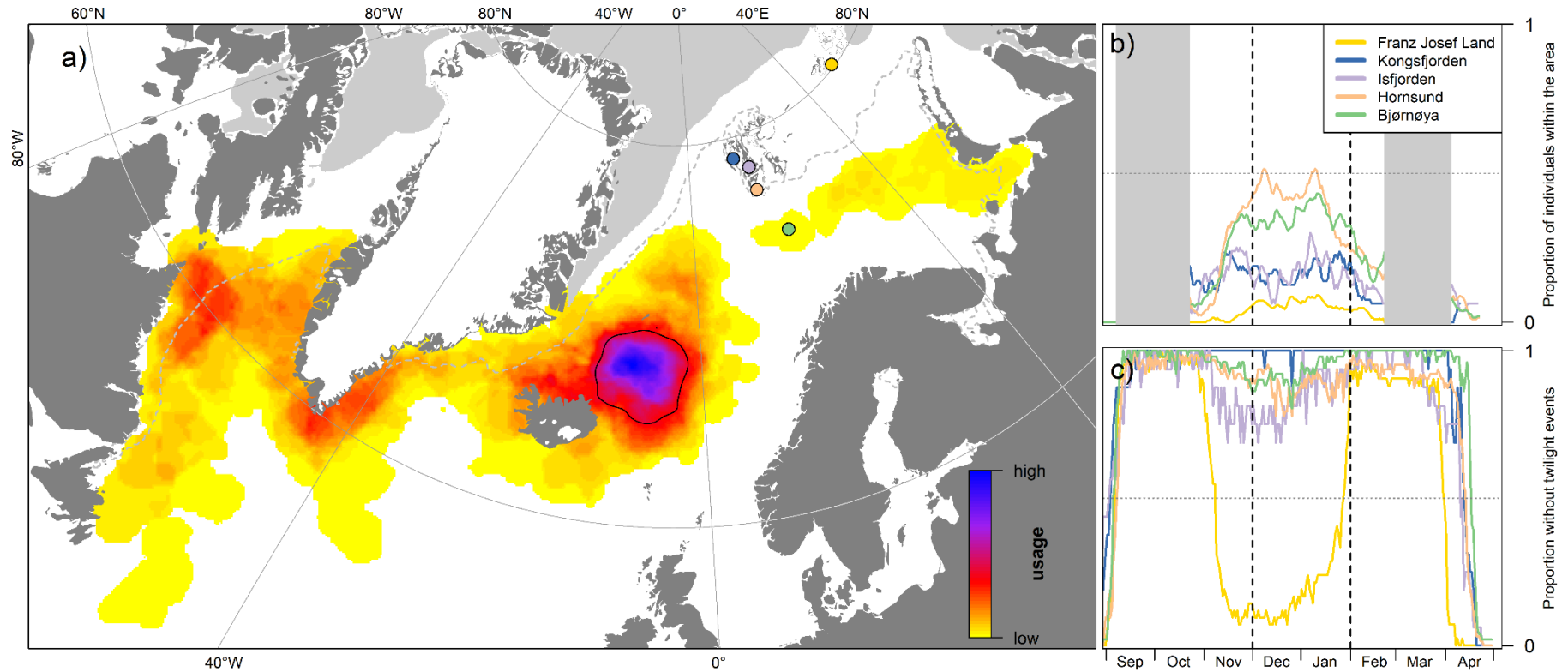


*Figure 1. Winter distribution (Dec-Jan) of little auks breeding in Svalbard (Kongsfjorden, Isfjorden, Hornsund, Bjørnøya) and Franz Josef Land. Colonies are represented by a circle. Distributions are based on light logger data and the color represents the overall area usage (details in Methods). Grey area denotes persistent seasonal sea ice cover (as 75% sea ice concentration across the study period). The dashed line represents the limit of the marginal sea ice zone (as 15% sea ice concentration across the study period). Sea-ice data are from NOAA/OAR/ESRL PSL (<https://psl.noaa.gov/>). The black line north of Iceland represents the area of highest usage during winter when all colonies are combined (see Figure 2).*

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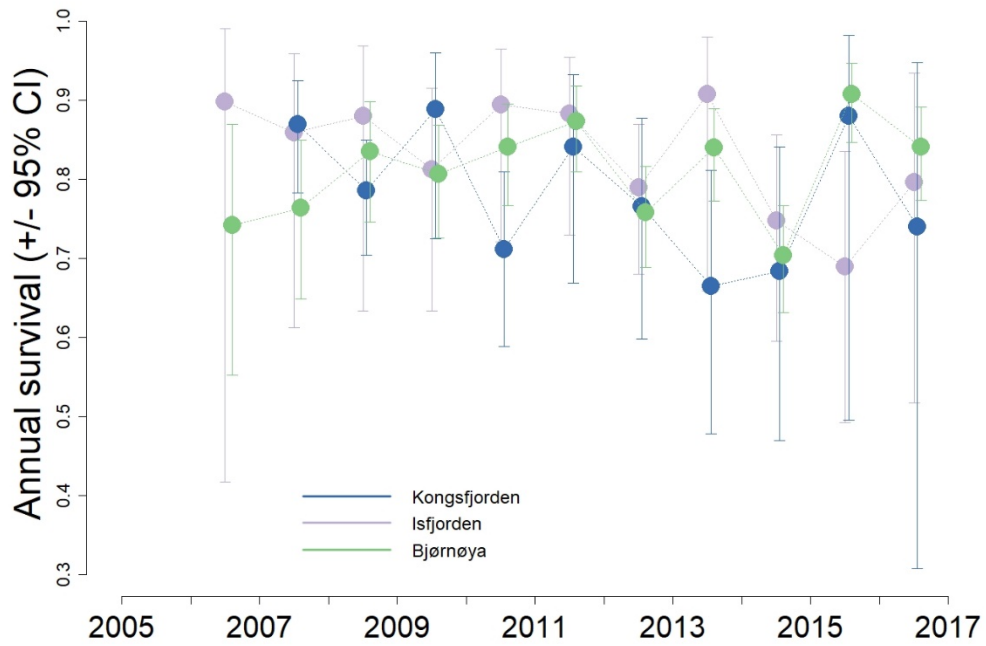






551

552 **Figure 2.** Winter distribution of little auks breeding in Svalbard (Kongsfjorden, blue circle; Isfjorden, purple circle; Hornsund, orange circle; Bjørnøya, green circle)  
 553 and Franz Josef Land (yellow circle). Distribution is based on 188 little auks tracked throughout the year with light loggers (details in Methods). Panel (a) represents the  
 554 winter distribution of little auks in Dec-Jan. The colour represents the overall area usage (details in Methods). Grey area denotes persistent seasonal sea ice cover (as  
 555 75% sea ice concentration across the study period). The dashed line represents the limit of the marginal sea ice zone (as 15% sea ice concentration across the study  
 556 period). Sea-ice data are from NOAA/OAR/ESRL PSL (<https://psl.noaa.gov/>). Panel (b) shows the proportion of individuals from each colony present in the area of  
 557 highest usage north of Iceland during winter (area delineated with a black line in panel (a)); grey areas in the graph represent equinox periods. Panel (c) shows the  
 558 proportion of individuals from each colony that experienced conditions without twilight events (i.e., polar night and midnight sun) throughout the year. Dotted lines in (b)  
 559 and (c) indicate the winter period used for analyses (Dec-Jan; area delineated with a black line in panel (a)).



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**Figure 3.** Annual survival ( $\pm 95\%$  confidence intervals) of little auks breeding in Svalbard. Only the non-transient groups have been considered (see details in Methods) and each survival estimate represents the survival between two consecutive breeding seasons. Survival in the last year (2017-2018) cannot be estimated separately from the recapture rate (Lebreton et al. 1992b).