

Gulf of Maine census surprises scientists

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The first census of marine life in the Gulf of Maine uncovered more than 3,317 different species -- 50 percent more than was previously thought.

The results of the count, conducted by the Gulf of Maine Program of the Census of Marine Life, are now part of the new Gulf of Maine Register of Marine Species, the first register of its kind for the region.

"The register serves as a baseline for understanding the biodiversity of this renowned and heavily exploited region of the Atlantic Ocean," said project director Evan Richert.

Among the species are 652 kinds of fish, 184 species of birds, and 32 species of mammals. Microscopic plants, including algae, account for more than one of every five species in the region.

Researchers say the next step is to understand how these species interact with each other and their surroundings to make the ecosystem work.

The searchable register for the Gulf of Maine and neighboring deep sea waters was prepared by the Huntsman Marine Science Center as part of a larger register covering the northwest Atlantic, from the Arctic to Cape Hatteras, N.C.

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