

Seabird deaths worry scientists

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The mass starvation of seabirds along the U.S. west coast that is causing concern among environmental scientists.

Weather and ocean conditions play a key role in the survival of various animals and, for an undetermined reason, winds and currents crucial to the marine food supply didn't occur last year.

Researchers who met this month in Seattle are concerned, questioning whether the deaths last year of thousands of seabirds were the prelude to global warming. Last year marked the third year of above average ocean temperatures.

Researchers also reported low catches of juvenile salmon and rockfish during 2005, along with sightings of emaciated gray whales, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported. And seabird breeding failures during the summer were preceded by the bodies of tens of thousands of birds that washed ashore along beaches in Washington, Oregon and California.

John McGowan of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, Calif., told the newspaper: "It's all the way up and down the coast. ... There's a lot of evidence there are important changes going on in the Pacific coast system."

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