

Image: Coloring the sea around the Pribilof Islands

January 12 2015



Credit: NASA/Landsat 8

The Operational Land Imager (OLI) on Landsat 8 captured this view of a phytoplankton bloom near Alaska's Pribilof Islands on Sept. 22, 2014.

The Pribilofs are surrounded by nutrient-rich waters in the Bering Sea. The milky green and light blue shading of the water indicates the

presence of vast populations of microscopic phytoplankton—mostly coccolithophores, which have calcite scales that appear white in satellite images. Such phytoplankton form the foundation of a tremendously productive habitat for fish and birds.

Blooms in the Bering Sea increase significantly in springtime, after winter ice cover retreats and nutrients and freshened water are abundant near the ocean surface.

Phytoplankton populations plummet in summertime as the water warms, surface nutrients are depleted by blooms, and the plant-like organisms are depleted by grazing fish, zooplankton, and other marine life.

By autumn, storms can stir [nutrients](#) back to the surface and cooler waters make better bloom conditions.

Provided by NASA

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