

Gulf of Maine census finds additional species

■ A total of 3,317 are listed, about 1,300 more than scientists previously thought.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORTLAND, Maine - The Gulf of Maine is the home to more than 3,300 marine species, or roughly 1,300 more than scientists thought less than a decade ago, according to a new study.

The Gulf of Maine Register of Marine Species, a census of marine life across the body of water that stretches from Cape Cod to Nova Scotia, lists 3,317 marine species.

The study, released this week, identifies 733 microscopic plants, 652 kinds of fish, 184 bird species, 32 species of mammals and 14 types of deepwater coral.

The overall count is 65 percent higher than previous estimates.

The species range from microscopic algae to whales living in waters from intertidal zones to the deep sea.

The census, which was compiled by researchers from Canada and the University of Southern Maine, aims to document the biodiversity of the Gulf of Maine to better understand the effects of environmental change.

Scientists will use the census

to conduct studies on how species interact and gauge changes that are occurring from climate change or other events.

"We regard this as a step toward being able to manage the Gulf of Maine on an ecosystem basis. Each increment of knowledge will enable policy makers to make better decisions," said Evan Richert, director of the USM's Gulf of Maine Area Program.

The grant-funded census is a collaboration between USM and the Huntsman Marine Science Center in New Brunswick. It is part of the international Census of Marine Life, which has brought together researchers from 70 nations to study ocean life.

CCTIMES 1/6/02