

General Biology

Seabirds spend most of their lives at sea, returning to land only to nest. The ocean environment in which they live is dynamic and unpredictable. They have adapted many morphological and behavioral strategies in order to ensure survival in such harsh conditions.

Nesting: Most seabirds nest in high density colonies. Nesting sites include rocky ledges, burrows, cracks in the rock face, on flat ground, or between rubble and boulders.

Feeding: Seabirds rely on several different food sources including small fish, squid, shellfish, and crustaceans.

Some seabirds will dive deep down for their food, while others remain at the surface to forage. Birds that dive have developed specialized wings (puffins), or feet (cormorants) for swimming. Efficiency in flying and walking is often sacrificed for these feeding advantages.

Cool Stuff:

Tubenoses

Albatrosses, Fulmars, Shearwaters, and Petrels belong to a collective group called the tubenoses. These birds have developed salt glands that enable them to drink salt water.

Seeing Spots

Many gulls have a red spot on their lower mandible, which is used for feeding offspring. The young will peck at the red spot with their bill, causing the parent to regurgitate the food they have just brought back to the nest.

Special Importance



Michael G Shepard

The case of The Marbled Murrelet:

The Marbled Murrelet has become one of the most mysterious birds of the west coast. For many years people could not find the nesting spots of these birds. Unlike other seabirds, Marbled Murrelets make their nests out of moss in the tops of old growth trees.

The Marbled Murrelet is listed by COSEWIC as a threatened species in Canada. The future of this bird is particularly threatened by logging practices along the coast as the old growth habitat for these birds has been decimated. These birds also have a low reproductive rate laying only one egg per brood, making it difficult for these birds to recover from population decline.

First Nations:

Many people of the Nuu-chah-nulth who live in Clayoquot Sound



have for generations harvested gull eggs from the colonies where these birds breed. These include the Glaucous-Winged Gull.

Gull egg harvesting can be sustainable if done properly. Gulls have the ability to lay more eggs after others have been taken from their nest. This is an important adaptation perhaps to the risk of predation or other hindrances on successful reproduction.

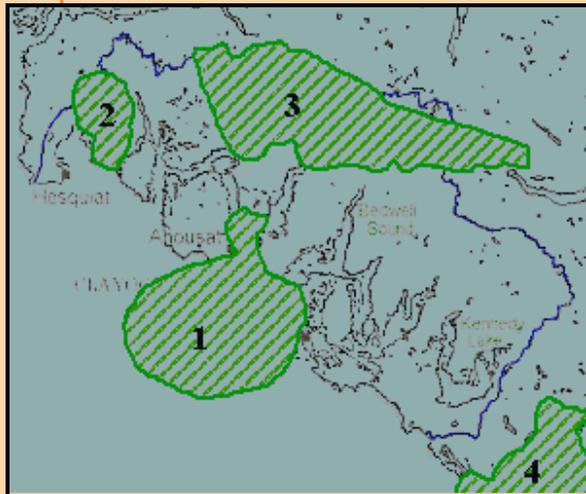


The oceans are extremely dynamic and are constantly making the lives of seabirds extremely difficult. Seabirds have exceedingly high metabolic rates and so must be in constant search of food. On top of day today struggles, seabirds are forced to deal with additional pressures caused by human activities. Historically, many seabirds have been exploited because of their high density nesting habits, and because they nest on exposed islands which are generally inhospitable to humans. The tragedy of the Great Auk is our most well known example. Here is a list of a few challenges facing seabirds today:

- 1. Oil spills/discharges** – This includes illegal discharge of large ships. Seabirds are often the first indication that there has been illegal discharging of oil, as no oil spills are reported.
- 2. Fisheries Bycatch** – Gill nets and Long-line fisheries are an increasing concern leading to deaths of tens of thousands of seabirds in the North Pacific alone.
- 3. Introduction of Predators** – Rats, cats, dogs, and raccoons are examples of introduced predators to seabird colonies.
- 4. Tourism/Recreation** – Seabirds are extremely sensitive to human disturbance. It is best to observe from a distance.

The west coast of British Columbia is home to many millions of seabirds including albatrosses, shearwaters, petrels, cormorants, jaegers, gulls, terns, murre, auks, and puffins.

There are several regions in and around Clayoquot Sound that have been recognized as Important Bird Areas (IBA's), which are defined as essential habitat for many breeding and non-breeding birds. The following map indicates those areas that are important for seabirds and is accompanied by a list of the individual species for which these areas are of importance.



1. **Cleland Island & Southeast Clayoquot Sound:** Important for Glaucous-winged gulls, Pigeon Guillemots, Leach's Storm Petrels, Marbled Murrelets, Cassin's Auklet, Rhinoceros Auklet, Tufted Puffin, Fork-tailed Storm Petrel.
2. **Hesquiat Lake Area:** Important for Marbled Murrelets.
3. **Megin, Moyeha, Watta and Pretty Girl Watersheds:** Important for the marbled murrelet.
4. **Barkley Sound:** Important habitat for Marbled Murrelets, Mew Gulls, Brandt's Cormorant, Glaucous-winged gull.

Seabird Checklist

Albatrosses:

- Laysan Albatross
- Black-Footed Albatross

Shearwaters & Petrels:

- Northern Fulmar
- Pink-footed Shearwater
- Flesh-Footed Shearwater
- Buller's Shearwater
- Sooty Shearwater
- Short-tailed Shearwater
- Black-vented Shearwater

Storm-Petrels:

- Fork-Tailed Storm-Petrel
- Leach's Storm-Petrel

Cormorants:

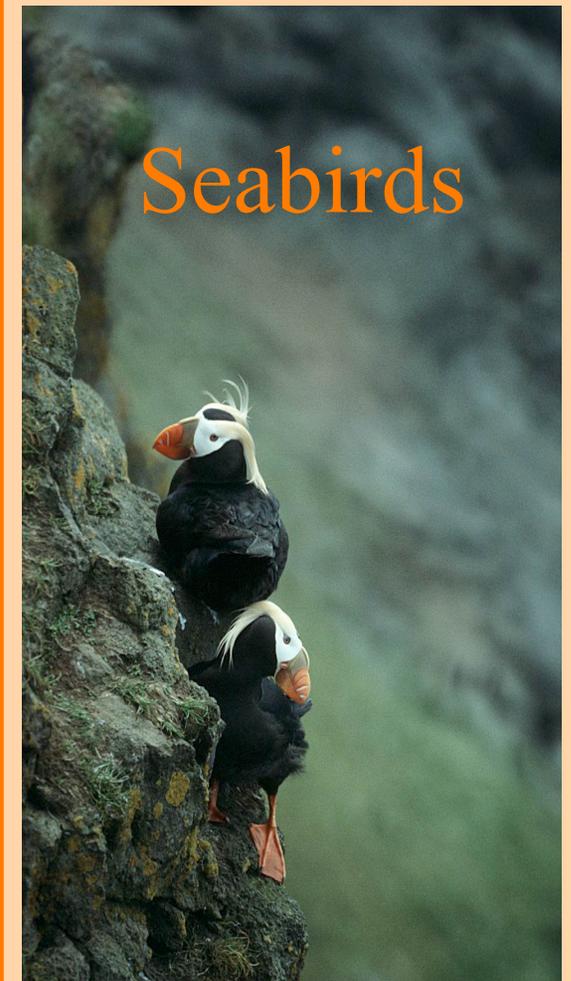
- Brandt's Cormorant
- Double-Crested Cormorant
- Pelagic Cormorant

Jaegers, Gulls, & Terns:

- South Polar Skua
- Pomarine Jaeger
- Parasitic Jaeger
- Long-tailed Jaeger
- Franklin's Gull
- Bonaparte's Gull
- Heerman's Gull
- Mew Gull
- Ring-billed Gull
- California Gull
- Herring Gull
- Thayer's Gull
- Western Gull
- Glaucous-winged Gull
- Glaucous Gull
- Sabine's Gull
- Black-legged Kittiwake
- Caspian Tern
- Common Tern
- Arctic Tern

Murres, Auks, & Puffins:

- Common Murre
- Thick-billed Murre
- Pigeon Guillemot
- Marbled Murrelet
- Ancient Murrelet
- Cassin's Auklet
- Parakeet Auklet
- Rhinoceros Auklet
- Tufted Puffin
- Horned Puffin



Seabirds

A look at Clayoquot Sound