

ECOLOGICAL RESERVES COLLECTION  
GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
VICTORIA, B. C.  
V8V 1X4

ECOLOGICAL RESERVES AND BRITISH COLUMBIA'S NESTING SEABIRDS

(111)

ECOLOGICAL RESERVES  
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VICTORIA, B.C. V8W 1V7

Byers/Conroy/Harvey/Sinnett Islands

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Thirteen species of true seabirds nest in British Columbia.

These include two Storm-Petrels, three cormorants, a gull and seven auks. The total breeding population is estimated at 550,000 pairs, about 80 percent of which can be found on ten islands (or groups of islands). Fortunately, in British Columbia, some of our largest seabird colonies have been protected by ecological reserves, namely Triangle Island, Solander Island and Cleland Island. Along with smaller colonies about one quarter of the total breeding seabird population is now under jurisdiction of ecological reserves. As well significant portions of species populations are protected. These include virtually all of the Common Murres, about 85 percent of Tufted Puffins, 50 percent of Cassin's Auklets and 20 percent of Rhinoceros Auklets.

I would like proposed three more groups of islands as ecological reserves for nesting seabirds. These support significant populations of seabirds, some of which presently are afforded little protection.

The first proposal takes in a group of forested islands in Queen Charlotte Strait off the northeast coast of Vancouver Island. The reserve would include Pine Island, Storm Island, Tree Islets, and the Buckle Group. Together these islands support at least 100,000 pairs of nesting seabirds, which represents the third largest aggregation in the province. Substantial numbers of Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels (ca 15,000 pairs), Leach's Storm-petrel (ca 35,000 pairs) and Rhinoceros Auklets (ca 55,000 pairs) probably represent the largest species aggregations along the west coast of North America. Smaller numbers of Pelagic Cormorants, Glaucous-winged Gulls, Cassin's Auklets and Pigeon Guillemots also breed here.

As well the area is an important feeding and resting area for marine birds and mammals. Fast moving tidal channels, lines of convergence and cold water upwelling provide the necessary food base in the form of plankton and other invertebrate life. Therefore the ecological reserve should encompass all associated rocky islets and adjacent waters.

The second proposal includes four large forested islands (and associated rocky islets) off Aristazabul Island along the northern mainland coast. This complex has never previously been visited by biologists and is presently an undisturbed natural assemblage of plants and animals. Significant numbers of Fork-tailed and Leach's Storm-Petrels, Glaucous-winged Gulls, Pigeon Guillemots, Cassin's Auklets and Rhinoceros Auklets breed here. A small, but thriving colony, of Tufted Puffins, the only such colony along the mainland coast, is located on grassy slopes here.

At least two pairs of Peregrine Falcons breed in Bald Eagle nests, the only such recorded behaviour in North America. Up to six pairs of Bald Eagles also nest in the area of the proposed reserve.

The area is also used for pupping by Harbour Seals, which represent a new breeding locality for the Province.

The final proposal, Thomas Island, is a small wooded island south of Checleset Bay, off the central west coast of Vancouver Island. The uniqueness of this proposal is that the island supports an undisturbed nesting population of Leach's Storm-petrels (ca. 1500 pairs). Their chief predators, Mink, River Otter and Glaucous-winged Gulls are absent from the area. Also, because of reproductive failures in storm-petrels in the south of their range, and some unexplained declines in the north, we should endeavor to protect storm-petrel colonies in British Columbia.

With existing reserves, and these proposed areas, nearly 60 percent of the total seabird nesting population in British Columbia will be safeguarded. Significant portions of species populations, such as Fork-tailed and Leach's Storm-petrel, Tufted Puffin, Rhinoceros Auklet and Cassin's Auklet, will also be protected.

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