

THE FIRST BREEDING RECORD FOR THICK-BILLED MURRES (URIA LOMVIA)

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

1981

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The Thick-billed Murre (Uria lomvia) is an arctic and subarctic alcid, breeding in the North Pacific, North Atlantic, and Arctic Oceans (Tuck 1960). In the Atlantic it is known to breed as far south as Cape St. Mary's, Nfld., $46^{\circ}48' N$, $54^{\circ}12' W$ (Brown, et al. 1975), but has never been found breeding on the Pacific coast of Canada. In this region, Thick-billed Murres have been reported nesting only as far south as St. Lazaria Is., $56^{\circ}59' N$, $135^{\circ}43' W$, near Sitka, Alaska, where a colony of 2000 birds was discovered in 1981 (A. SOWLS, pers. comm). There are two breeding season records of Thick-billed Murres in British Columbia: four were seen off the east side of Langara Island, Queen Charlotte Islands on June 1970 (S. G. Sealy, pers. comm.), and George Sirk photographed a bird in breeding plumage on the eastern side of Houston-Stewart Channel at the south end of the Queen Charlotte Islands on 16 July 1980 (B. C. Prov. Mus. Photoduplicate File (BCPM PDF)#664).

In this note, we report the existence of a small (19+ pairs) colony of Thick-billed Murres on Triangle Island, British Columbia.

Triangle Island, $50^{\circ}52' N$, $129^{\circ}05' W$, is a small, treeless island 46 km W of Cape Scott, at the northern tip of Vancouver Island. It harbours the largest breeding seabird population of any site in British Columbia, including Cassin's Auklets, Ptychoramphus

aleuticus (360,000 pairs), Tufted Puffins, Lunda cirrhata (25,000 pairs), Rhinoceros Auklets, Cerorhinca monocerata (15,000 pairs), and Common Murres, Uria aalge (3,000 pairs) (Vermeer et al. 1976, 1979; Vermeer 1979). The topography, climate, and habitats of Triangle Island have been described in detail by Carl et al. (1951) and Vermeer et al. (1979).

Thick-billed Murres were first seen on the island on 5 July 1980 when AV photographed two in the Common Murre colony. These birds were not seen again that year, ~~although~~ although no extensive searches of the murre colony were made.

On 19 June 1981, AV saw five Thick-billed Murres on a different ledge in the murre colony, and on 18 and 21 August RC photographed two other birds with eggs. On 27 August, AV and Robin Cohen photographed seven adults with chicks. Copies of these slides are on file at the BCFM (PDF# 666). A search of the Common Murre colony yielded 19 pairs of Thick-billed Murres on 27 August, but several suitable areas of difficult access were not censused, and the lower cliffs visible from above were only scanned through a 20X telescope from distances of about 200 m. Thick-billed Murres were still present on 29 August, but AV could not find any on 5 September, although quite a few Common Murres were still present. We assume therefore, that the chicks seen on 29 August had fledged successfully before 5 September.

It seems likely that these sightings indicate a recent arrival for Thick-billed Murres on Triangle Island, since the murre colony there has been censused thoroughly as recently as 1976 (K. Summers, K. Vermeer, Pers. comm.). To the north, Thick-billed Murres were

not breeding on St. Lazaria Island in 1912 (Sowls et al. 1978), so a colony of 2000 birds there in 1981 would seem to indicate a major range expansion during the intervening years. Until that colony was discovered, the southernmost known breeding site was Middleton Island, Alaska, $59^{\circ}26'N$ $146^{\circ}21'W$, 625 km NW of St. Lazaria (Sowls, et al. 1975) Island. Δ Triangle Island is almost 800 km SE of St. Lazaria.

Thick-billed Murres, therefore, seem to be extending their breeding range southward in the eastern Pacific, as at least two other seabird species, the Northern Fulmar, Fulmarus glacialis, and the Horned Puffin, Fratercula corniculata seem to be doing as well. These two species have also been sighted on Triangle Island in the last few years and may breed there in very small numbers (K. Vermeer, pers. comm., pers. obs.).

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