

Tufted Puffins

on the Salish Sea

September 15, 2024



The Salish Sea

SCHOOL

Our Mission

The Salish Sea School is incredibly passionate about teaching the community about the magnificent wildlife that depends on the Salish Sea in a way that inspires its preservation and conservation.

Our Impact

Because of your support, we have provided over 4,000 participants with not just knowledge about the amazing Salish Sea marine life but also empowered them to take actions at home to help! We hand out between \$15,000-\$20,000 in scholarships per year.

Our Gratitude

Many kids in our community lack access to this incredible natural resource, limiting their exposure to the wonders of the sea and the importance of conservation. These fundraiser trips help support our programs and provide us with the ability to bring all young learners, from all backgrounds, on beaches to explore the unique and awe-inspiring marine environment of the Salish Sea, broadening their horizons and igniting a passion for science and conservation.

By investing in these kids, you're investing in the future of our planet. We are enormously grateful for the support of our village. Your generosity changes student lives and helps our oceans. On behalf of the future student leaders in marine conservation, thank you!





This fun and incredible journey wouldn't have been possible without the collective efforts and dedication of several individuals and organizations. We extend our deepest gratitude to [Skagit Audubon Society](#), Eric Ellingson ([check out his Flickr!!](#)), Paraclete Charters, and all of YOU who participated in this memorable event.

Your unwavering support not only helps us organize these trips but also allows us to ***provide crucial scholarships***, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to explore and learn about the fascinating marine life in our local ecosystems.

For many students, these experiences mark their first time stepping onto a beach or boarding a boat. We believe these immersive encounters with nature can ignite a lifelong passion for the preservation and protection of the Salish Sea.

Thank you for being a part of this journey. We hope to continue inspiring future generations of environmental stewards through our shared love and appreciation of these remarkable habitats and creatures!



KOINONIA

Thank you for joining us on a fun and beautiful journey on the Salish Sea aboard the beautiful Koinonia!

September 15, 2024 - Trip route and species report:

- Harlequin Duck 20
- Surf Scoter 70
- White-winged Scoter 30
- Red-necked Grebe 5
- Black Oystercatcher 5
- Sanderling 15 See photos
- Western Sandpiper 3
- Rhinoceros Auklet 200
- Tufted Puffin 8 See photos
- Marbled Murrelet 38
- Pigeon Guillemot 50
- Common Murre 250
- Glaucous-winged Gull 500
- Brandt's Cormorant 3
- Pelagic Cormorant 300 All over
- Williamson Rocks
- Double-crested Cormorant 100
- Great Blue Heron 1
- Belted Kingfisher 1
- Barn Swallow 20


Puffin Observations

Minor Island, Harbor Seals, Shorebirds, & Cormorants!

Marbled Murrelets!

Williamson Rocks

20 Total Bird Species!

A large group of Pelagic cormorants is perched on a rocky cliffside. The birds are of two different development stages: adults, which are dark in color, and juveniles, which are light gray. The cliff is composed of large, light-colored rocks with some yellowish-green lichen or moss. The birds are scattered across the cliff, some standing on top of rocks and others in crevices. One adult cormorant is in the bottom left corner, with its wings spread as if it has just landed or is about to take flight.

A very cool shot showing two different development stages of Pelagic cormorants. The darker ones are adults and the light gray ones are juveniles!

Photo by Eric Ellingson



Photo by Eric Ellingson

Eric, we are incredibly grateful to you for spotting our first puffin of the trip! Your keen observation allowed us all to enjoy the awe-inspiring sight of this beautiful seabird in its transitional state between breeding and non-breeding plumage. Here we were able to notice the fascinating transformation of its bill, a process often overlooked by many. You'll see a light brown piece behind the vibrant orange bill, which is gradually shedding to reveal a different appearance as the seasons change.



Photo by Eric Ellingson

Comparing the bill of this individual to the one above provides an excellent opportunity to understand and appreciate their annual molting cycle.





Photo by Eric Ellingson

Puffins typically molt their primary flight feathers once a year, usually during the late summer or early fall. This molting process, known as the "post-breeding molt," coincides with the end of their breeding season. After raising their young, puffins undergo this annual molt, shedding their old feathers and growing new ones to ensure they're in prime condition for the following year's breeding and migration.

During this time, puffins may temporarily lose their flight capabilities, making them more vulnerable to predators. As a result, they tend to gather in large groups on isolated islands or rocky cliffs to minimize the risk of predation. It's a fascinating cycle that highlights their incredible adaptability and resilience in the face of environmental challenges.



Here you can see a single primary flight feather on each wing. Primary flight feathers play a crucial role in a bird's ability to fly efficiently. They are the longest and strongest feathers found on a bird's wing, situated at the outermost part. These feathers generate lift and thrust, helping birds maintain control and maneuverability during flight.

The primary flight feathers are attached to the "hand" part of a bird's wing, which corresponds to the human hand. The number of primary feathers varies among different bird species, but most have between 9 and 11 on each wing.

Additionally, these feathers are essential for birds' long-distance migrations, enabling them to travel vast distances in search of food, nesting sites, or warmer climates. Without their primary flight feathers, birds like puffins would be unable to navigate the skies and migrate to their wintering grounds.





Photo by Eric Ellingson



Photo by Eric Ellingson

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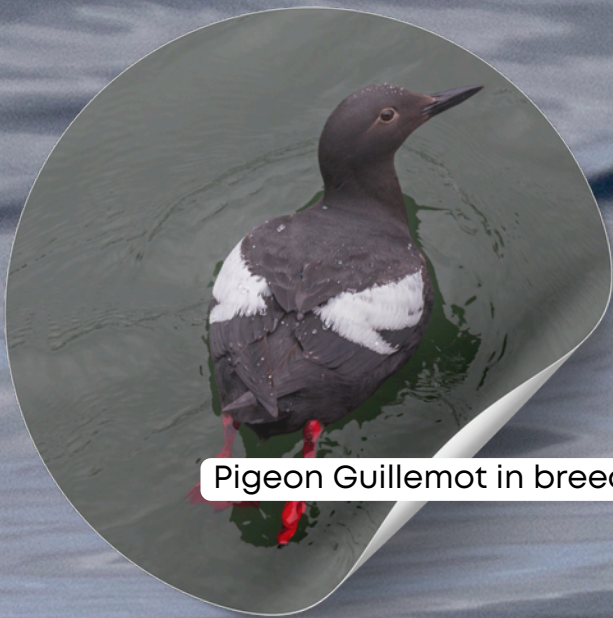


Male White-winged Scoter



Female White-winged Scoter

Photo by Eric Ellingson



Pigeon Guillemot in breeding plumage



Pigeon Guillemot transitioning to winter breeding plumage

Photo by Eric Ellingson



Wow! We don't usually see bands on birds so this was very exciting! Great capture. Eric!

Photo by Eric Ellingson

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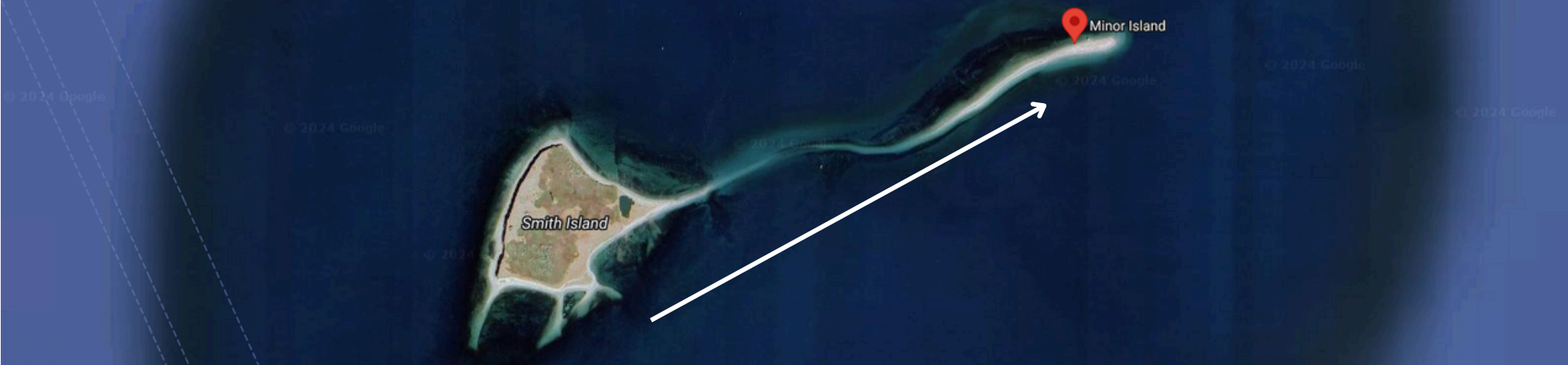


Another spectacular shot - an adult and juvenile Rhinoceros Auklet! What a fun time to be on the water!

Photo by Eric Ellingson

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After seeing the Tufted Puffins, we rounded the corner and headed towards Minor Island.



Love these adorable sleeping harbor seals!



Photo by Eric Ellingson



Male surf scoter

Female

Red-necked Grebe!!

Photo by Eric Ellingson



If you look very closely you can see a black tip on this Oyster Catcher, another juvenile! It was like a bird nursery out there!

Photo by Eric Ellingson

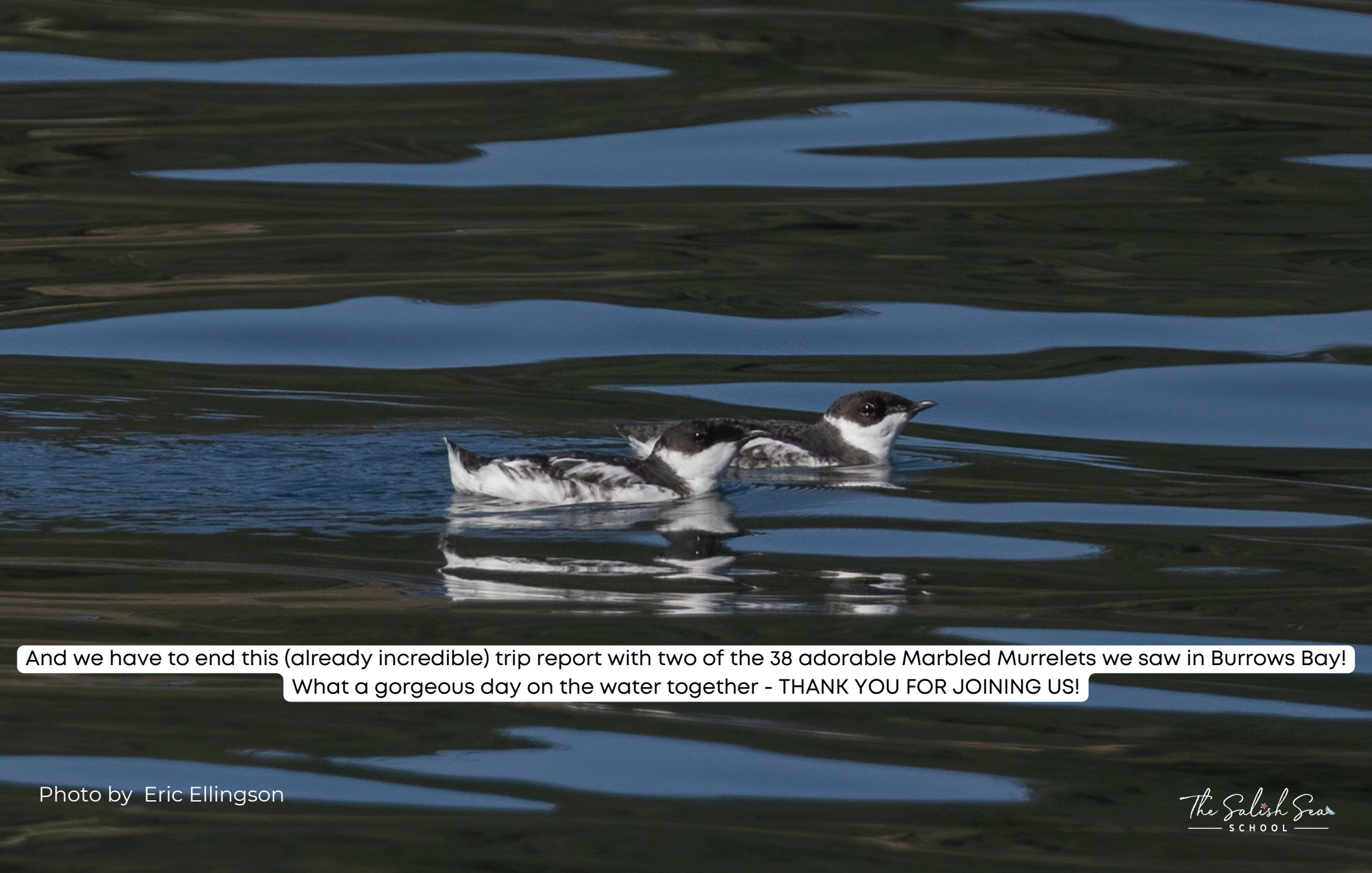


Photo by Eric Ellingson



Sanderling coming in for a landing.

Photo by Eric Ellingson



And we have to end this (already incredible) trip report with two of the 38 adorable Marbled Murrelets we saw in Burrows Bay!

What a gorgeous day on the water together - THANK YOU FOR JOINING US!

Photo by Eric Ellingson