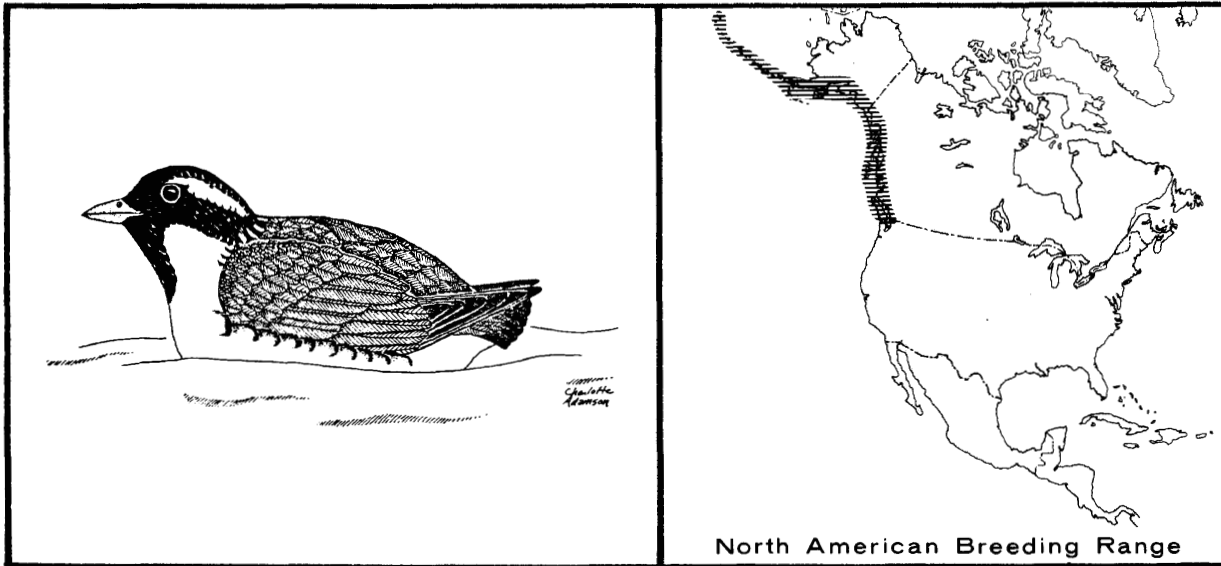


## Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*)



The Ancient Murrelets are an abundant and widespread species breeding north from the Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia around the northern North Pacific Ocean. They are numerous in offshore habitats in Washington during the winter, but they may be the rarest breeding seabird in the State, if indeed they nest here at all.

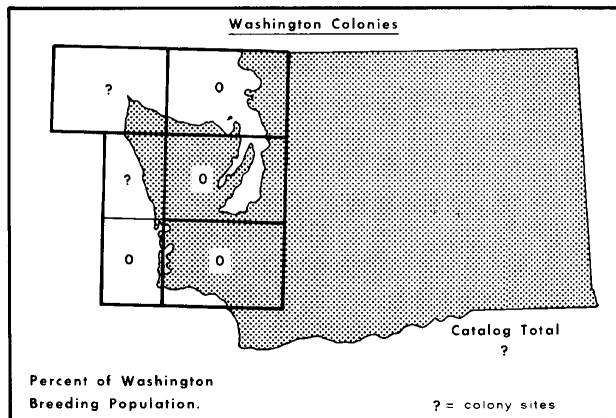
This cleanly marked species nests in colonies on coastal islands, in burrows or crevices, beneath stones, roots, or fallen logs on grassy or wooded slopes. Clutch size is usually two eggs, often elongate in shape and large for the size of the bird, variable in color from bluish-white through cream or buff, marked with different shades of brown and bluish-grays. Young birds leave the nest when very small, unlike many other alcids, perhaps when only one to two days old and

follow the calls from adults leading them to water at night.

Ancient Murrelets are more pelagic than Marbled Murrelets, being found farther at sea, and are more gregarious, with flocks of up to 30 birds not uncommon in winter in Washington. Birds often plunge directly from flight to pursue prey underwater in areas of tidal fronts and strong currents. Like other alcids, Ancient Murrelets feed on small fish and marine invertebrates.

### WASHINGTON COLONIES

The breeding distribution of this species in Washington has apparently always been limited. It was breeding 9 May 1924 on Carroll Island (Hoffman 1924), and this represents the only certain record. In 1978, 12 adults were observed near LaPush,



that small numbers of Ancient Murrelets may nest in Washington.

#### HISTORICAL STATUS AND VULNERABILITY

There is no certain breeding record for Ancient Murrelets in Washington since 1924. Sightings of birds during the breeding season are few enough that the breeding population would have to be very localized, small, and difficult to locate.

and a fledgling was seen near Alexander Island (Speich and Pitman, pers. obs.). There are sightings of birds off the Washington coast during the summer from at least the area of Grays Canyon (Wahl, pers. obs.) north, though these could be stragglers from colonies much farther north. However, the evidence suggests

Like many marine birds, Ancient Murrelets are vulnerable to loss of breeding habitat, contamination by oiling, and disruption of food webs. Oiling would seem to be a greater hazard during winter when the environmental stress is greater, but the population of Ancient Murrelets wintering in Washington undoubtedly consists of birds breeding elsewhere.