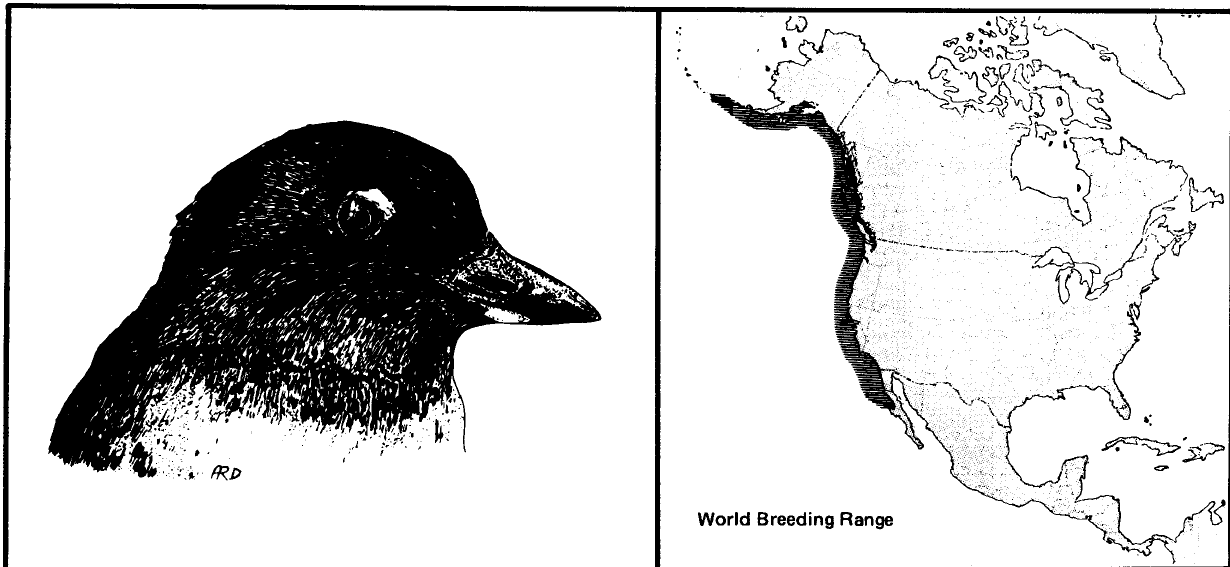


Cassin's Auklet (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*)



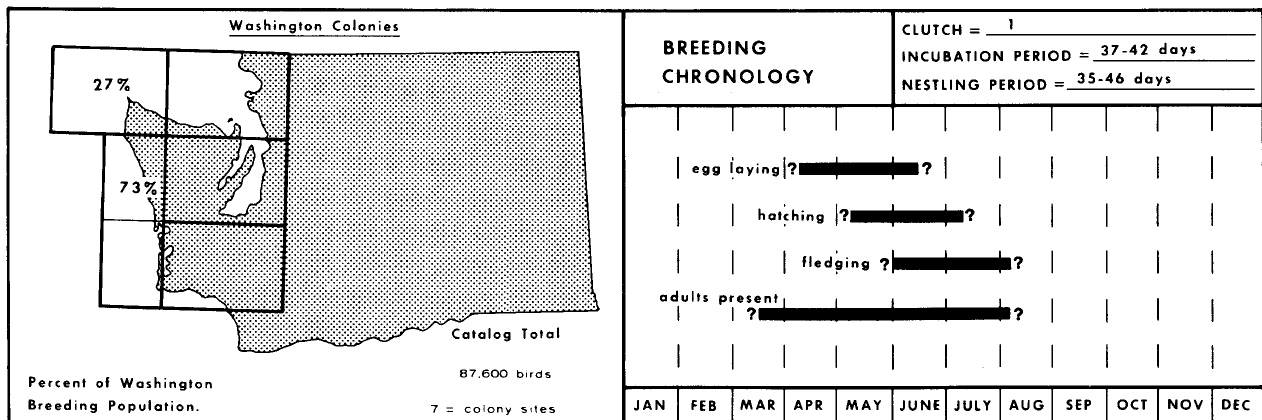
The Cassin's Auklet is one of the most widespread members of the family Alcidae in the North Pacific. Cassin's Auklets build their nests in burrows on offshore islands that have a sufficient mantle of soil. These tiny alcids are nocturnal at their breeding colonies and are likely to be among the most pelagic of alcids at that season when they are found well offshore at the outer edge of the continental shelf and the shelf edge (Wahl 1975).

Throughout their range, Cassin's Auklets usually nest in burrows but may also use rock crevices, debris piles, cracks under buildings, and large caves (Thoreson 1964). In Washington they are known to nest in burrows under trees and open salal and salmonberry shrub areas. Each female lays a single, creamy-white egg, but may lay a second egg if the first is destroyed (Manuwal

1974a). Adult Cassin's Auklets develop two incubation patches on the body, one beneath each wing (Manuwal 1974a). These incubation patches are found only among several species of alcids, including Xantus' Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets, and Tufted Puffins. Cassin's Auklets also develop a gular pouch used to store food for young that are fed by regurgitation at night (Speich and Manuwal 1974). Small fish and pelagic crustaceans form the mainstay of the diet of Cassin's Auklets (Manuwal 1974a; Hunt et al. 1979).

WASHINGTON COLONIES

Cassin's Auklets are the most numerous breeding seabirds in Washington, though they are seldom seen near shore because they visit colonies nocturnally and forage well offshore. The species nests



in just eight known locations, though some additional sites are likely. The largest colony is on Alexander Island where approximately 55,000 are estimated to nest. Jagged Island, Carroll Island, and the Bodeltehs have large colonies which make up most of the rest of the known population. We feel it is possible that as many as 20,000 additional birds could be nesting in Washington on other sites.

HISTORICAL STATUS AND VULNERABILITY

This species was recorded at several sites in 1906 and 1907 (Dawson 1908b), including Alexander and Carroll Islands and was apparently as common on those colonies as it is today. It is not known if Cassin's Auklets were nesting on Tatoosh Island in 1906-07, but it is now.

In California, Western Gulls prey heavily on Cassin's Auklets

at colony sites (Thoreson 1964). Chicks are pulled from shallow burrows by gulls, and adults are killed at night when they unfortunately land at the feet of roosting gulls (Thoreson 1964).

Cassin's Auklets are vulnerable to disturbance and to the depredations of introduced predators like cats. Cassin's Auklets may desert their nests if disturbed during incubation, and their burrows can easily be caved in by unwary visitors to their colonies. Fortunately, Washington colonies are protected by refuge status.

Cassin's Auklets feed from the ocean surface in flocks, concentrating in areas where their food is abundant but where they are susceptible to contamination by oil (Hunt et al. 1979). In Washington, Cassin's Auklets are vulnerable especially near nesting colonies and on foraging areas over the outer continental shelf.