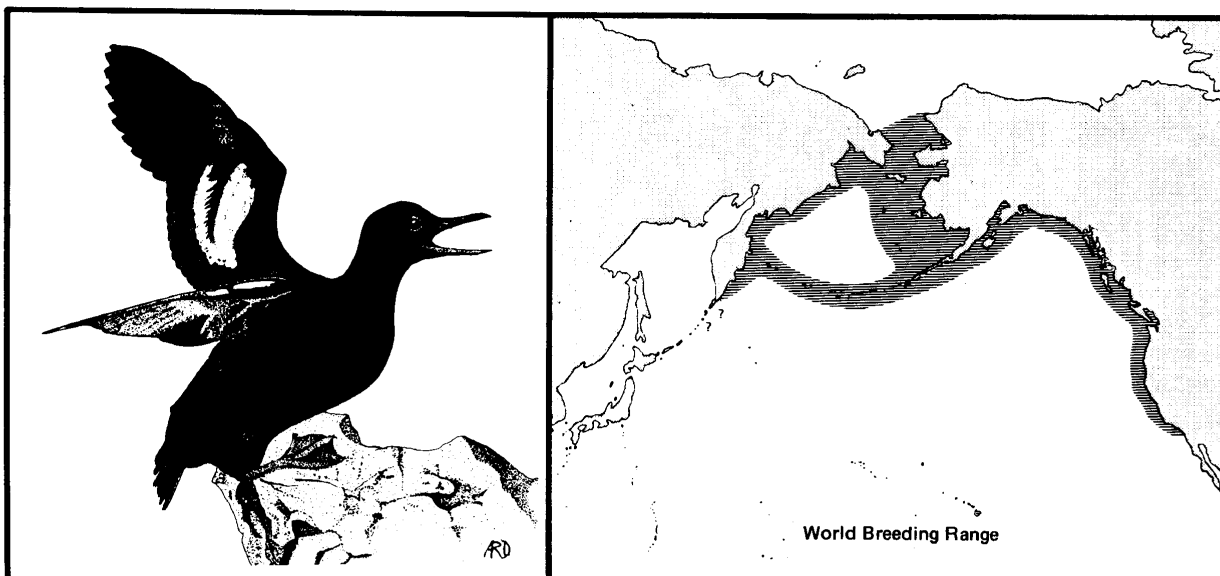


## Pigeon Guillemot (*Cepphus columba*)

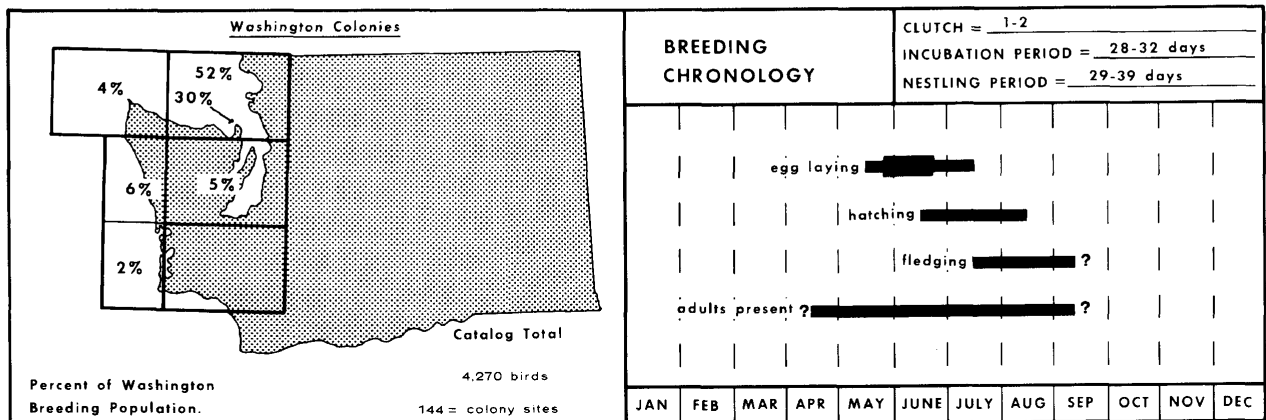


Pigeon Guillemots inhabit the relatively shallow nearshore zone and are usually found along stretches of rocky shoreline. They are most easily observed in the early morning, before the egg laying season, when both members of each pair frequent waters adjacent to their colonies.

This species usually nests in natural rock crevices, talus, and boulder beaches (Thoreson and Booth 1958; Drent 1965). In the inland marine waters of Washington, birds also frequently nest under drift logs on beaches that are relatively undisturbed and free from land predators. They also use burrows dug into loose conglomerate bluffs and artificial structures such as wharf timbers and drain pipes. On one island formerly used for practice bombing, they have nested in spent bomb casings.

The Pigeon Guillemot is one of the few alcids which regularly lays two eggs (Bent 1946; Thoreson and Booth 1958; Drent 1965). Eggs are laid on bare rock, soil, or sometimes on a bed of pebbles and shell fragments. Guillemots usually feed close to shore, and the proximity of the feeding grounds to the colonies may explain their ability to sometimes raise two chicks. Pigeon Guillemots, like all members of the family Alcidae, dive for food by using their wings for propulsion. Fish are the principal food of guillemots.

Following breeding, Pigeon Guillemots apparently move away from some areas where they are common during the summer. Winter distribution is presently uncertainly known, and determination of the seasonal range of this important breeding species is highly desirable.



**WASHINGTON COLONIES**

In Washington, Pigeon Guillemots are perhaps the most widespread nesting seabird. While they are absent from shallow estuaries and sandy beaches, they are opportunistic and take advantage of suitable nesting possibilities like crevices in the jetties at the Grays Harbor entrance. While there are sizeable breeding "colonies" or aggregations at well-known sites like Protection Island and Sucia Island, many guillemots nest in scattered locations and often in small numbers. Delimiting concentrations for much of Washington's coastline is difficult; while we have described this species' sub-surface nesting locations as precisely as possible, we have also given breeding-season population size and location by subregions (bays or stretches of coastline) without reference to precise nesting locations in order to show relative abundance and estimate total breeding populations (see Appendix C for estimates derived from two surveys conducted in inland waters).

The catalog total for this species in Washington is 4,270.

While given censuses or subregion totals may be high or low, we feel the overall total is conservative because of birds missed during censusing. Censusing Pigeon Guillemots is an inexact science at best and is complicated by many factors (see Methods). We have used the best recent estimates here, though we feel there may be about 33% more nesting in the inland waters, particularly in the San Juan's and adjacent areas, and perhaps 50%-75% more nesting along the outer coast than are listed here. There may be about 6,000 Pigeon Guillemots breeding in Washington.

**HISTORICAL STATUS AND VULNERABILITY**

While there are many records for many sites over many years describing Pigeon Guillemot breeding populations--the first nesting observations date to May 1792 (Menzies 1792)--it is difficult to determine actual population trends because of problems involved in field censusing, timing, geographic coverage, and access.

Compared to other seabirds such as murres and cormorants, Pigeon

Guillemot populations are not highly prone to disturbance, primarily because of their comparatively low nesting densities and inaccessible nest sites. However, individual pairs will readily desert their nests if disturbed during nesting or brooding.

Like murre and other alcids, Pigeon Guillemots are very

vulnerable to oil pollution. Guillemots spend large amounts of time on the water, usually close to shorelines and in shallow waters where oil development, transfer, and processing take place. While local populations could be severely impacted, the wide distribution of the species would likely mean impacts would be less than in the case of some other species.

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**FIELD NOTES**

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**The authors would appreciate copies of your field notes for updates**

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