

Welcome the Puffins Fundraiser Boat Tour

I first want to take a moment to say a BIG **THANK YOU** for joining us for our annual “Welcome the Puffins” fundraising event! Friday’s weather made for a beautiful evening out on the water, and we were stoked to also have our (TSSS) first potential Tufted Puffin sighting for this year right along with you all! Pushing off from Skyline Marina, the excitement buzzing through the group set the evening’s tone. I couldn’t wait to see what the trip would bring us. Below you will find the route that Outer Island’s Blackfish IV embarked upon during the duration of our trip, with call out areas and corresponding silhouetted species (I’ll dive into details throughout!).



Smith Island – Tufted Puffins & Alcid Friends

Beginning our trip, we stopped briefly along the east side of Burrow's island looking for a Peregrine Falcon. Not all of us (including myself) successfully spotted this bird during this attempt, but I made it a point to ask that we stop back by on the way back in so the whole group could potentially catch a glimpse. While the Peregrine was surely a superb find, I wanted to make sure we'd be able to spend as much time as possible looking for, and experiencing, our tufted friends. So, off we continued to Smith Island in some wonderful conditions as we headed for open water, though we all enjoyed the tideline ride in Rosario that runs parallel to the south end of Lopez Island.

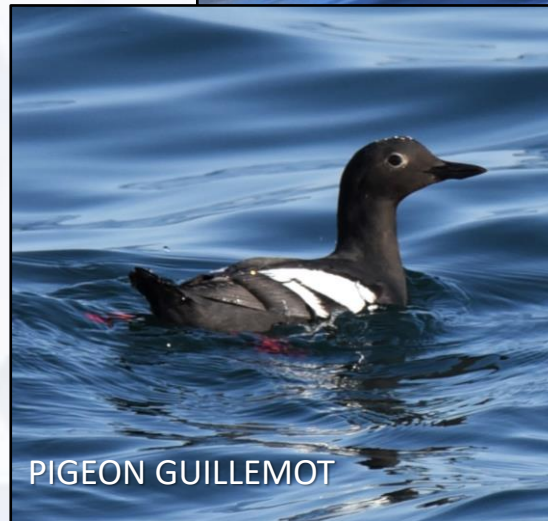
It wasn't long before Captain Matt found us our first individual Tufted Puffin on the northwest side of Smith, to the delight of everyone on board. We had to pick through some Surf Scoters, Pigeon Guillemots, and Rhinoceros Auklets to find said individual, but your crew could now breathe a collective sigh of relief ☺! WE FOUND ONE!

A continuous scan revealed several more, and to our surprise, one bird became roughly 9-11, mostly paired up, throughout our time near Smith! A sign that breeding season was in full swing for these handsome little alcids.

TUFTED PUFFIN



The Salish Sea
SCHOOL



PIGEON GUILLEMOT



RHINOCEROS AUKLET

Smith Island – Tufted Puffins & the View

It was hard to know where to look on such a gorgeous evening. The snow-capped Olympic mountains were visible to the southwest; Smith, itself, looked like an emerald isle reminiscent of Ireland (it does NOT stay beautifully green year-round!). And I think the Tufted Puffins wanted to make sure they were donning their best breeding plumage for their mates, as I saw several preening their feathers and ‘bathing’ by splashing and shaking the water off themselves.



- Cascadia from the Salish Sea -

Speaking of not really knowing where to look, Mount Baker (Koma Kulshan) was also giving us spectacular views this evening when looking east toward the Cascades.



Minor Island & the Cormorant Snow Globe

The Salish Sea
SCHOOL



Captain Matt, after thoroughly surveying our Tufted Puffin prospects on the west side of Smith Island, began to circle back north toward Rosario. We encountered more alcids (Pigeon Guillemots, Rhinoceros Auklets), more Scoters (both Surf and a pair of White-winged, heard a Caspian Tern with its raspy screech above our heads, and a few of us on top/up front caught a Pacific Loon taking flight, heading southeast. We were going to trace Minor Island (somewhat connected to Smith), to see what else we might turn up.

Now, I have to admit to you all, while Puffins are **always** a delight, and I typically enjoy wildlife watching much more than people watching, my favorite thing happened with you all on this trip, this evening, and it did NOT include finding Puffins; I got to watch all of YOU experience wildlife in a magical way that left a lot of you in awe. Listening to your descriptions and watching you experience all the cormorants that began taking flight and circling the boat, as if we were in a cormorant snow globe, makes my heart absolutely burst with joy. It's these moments we get to witness, in these beautiful conditions, that begin to foster the greatest connection to this place we call home and all the living things found here. **I am so GLAD we all had this amazing experience.**

Minor Island & the Cormorant Snow Globe, Cont.

Brandt's Cormorants

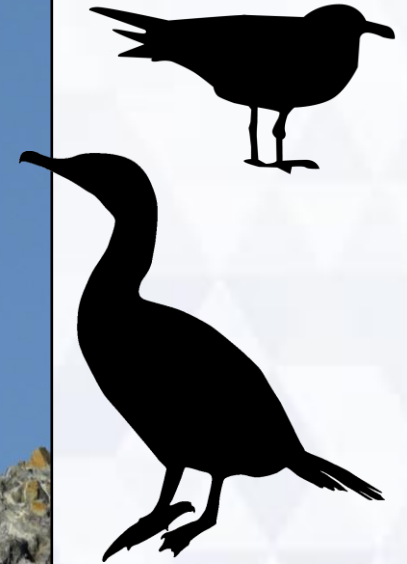


The other side of the Cormorant Snow Globe (mostly the Brandt's variety).

Bird Rocks, Williamson Rocks, and Peregrines



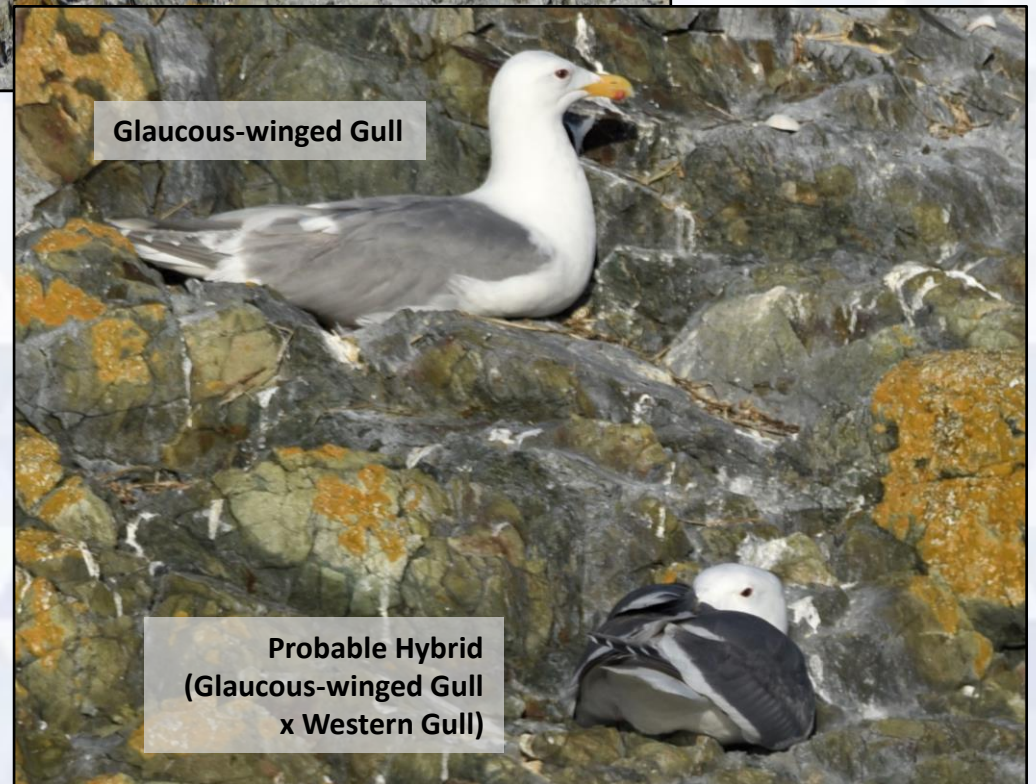
Double-crested Cormorants



The Salish Sea
SCHOOL

A few other rocky outcroppings that we always like to skirt by are Bird Rocks and Williamson Rocks. Both locations are designated wildlife refuges, meaning you cannot set foot on this land, and they make for great bird watching and seal spotting stops. Sometimes we even get lucky with some sea lions!

Tonight, we had Double-crested Cormorants donning the head tufts they're name for (breeding plumage), and a few of you had asked me about what type of Gull is most common in our area. Which is a bit of a loaded question! We have had a lot of hybridization between Glaucous-winged and Western gulls, which often makes being able to accurately tell them apart, challenging. I did, however, feel like I found a good example to illustrate what a Glaucous-wing Gull would look like in breeding season (lighter gray on the mantle (back) and wingtips), versus a probable hybrid that is taking on the slate-gray plumage reminiscent of a Western Gull. True Westerns have black wingtips and a bright yellow ring around their eye, neither of which I see present on the individual on the right. Moral of this story? Gulls are tricky!



Glaucous-winged Gull

Probable Hybrid
(Glaucous-winged Gull
x Western Gull)

Bird Rocks, Williamson Rocks, and Peregrines

A very nice comparative look at Pelagic versus Double-crested Cormorants. Take a look at the green iridescent sheen and white hip patches on the smaller Pelagics, versus the bright yellow face and throat and black tufts of the Double-crested (Williamson Rocks).



Bird Rocks, Williamson Rocks, and Peregrines

We encountered quite a few “flipper-footed” friends at both Bird Rocks and Williamson Rocks. These are harbor seals and they come in an assortment of camouflaging colors and speckled patterns to help them blend into kelp forests, rocky outcroppings, and shorelines. We had individuals with gray fur and black spots, brown and blonde fur with lighter spots, and at least one very dark (almost black) individual with silver spots.



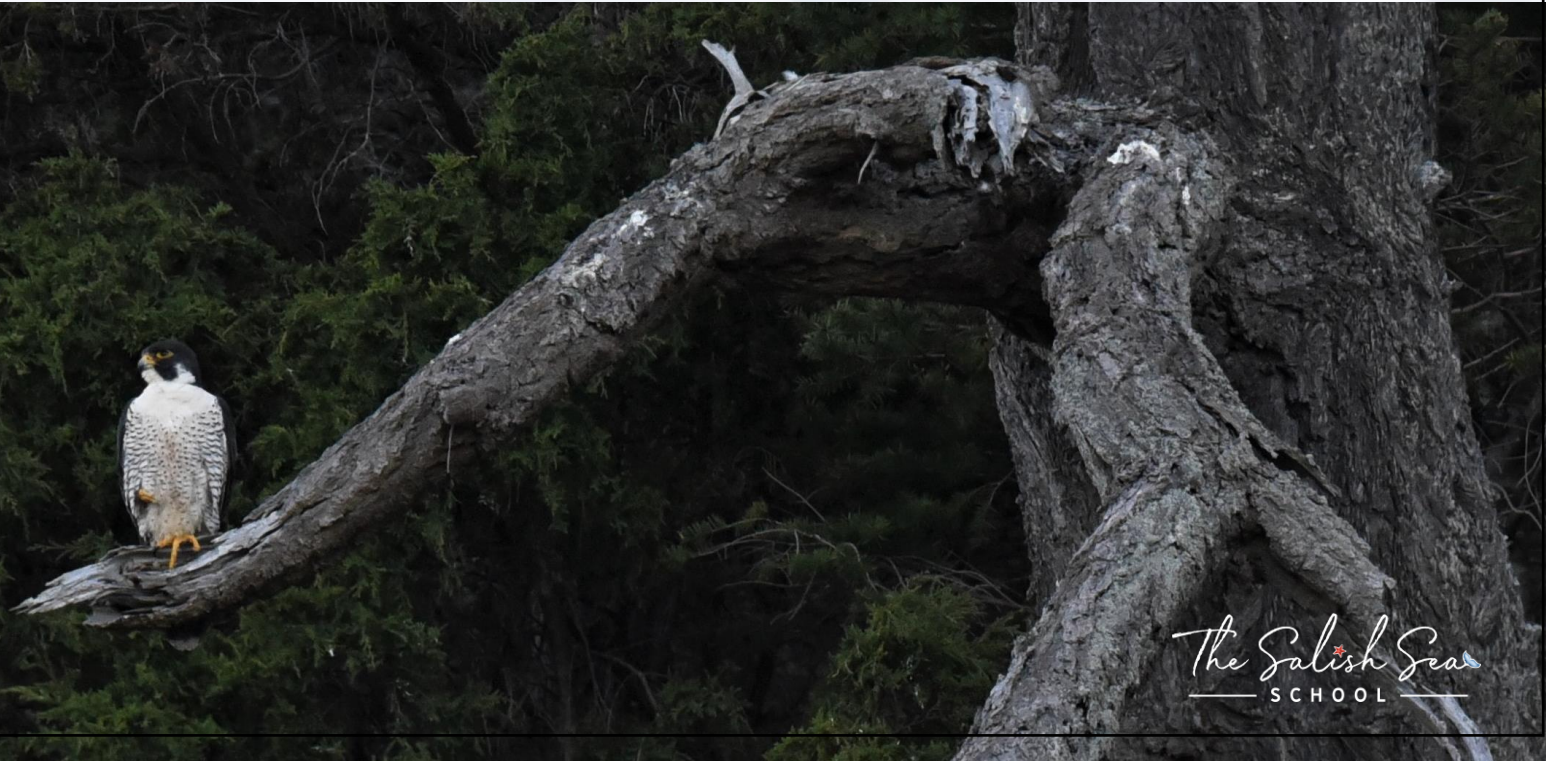
Though these marine mammals have a thick blubber layer to help keep them warm in the cold water, they must also come out of the water to thermoregulate (warm up). Since seals have fused hips and are unable to walk on land as a result, they swim up onto the rocks at low tide. Typically, they wait until the next high tide cycle to return to the water. It was a treat to see them lounging and swimming near these two haul outs. They are the only animals I know that can make snoozing on barnacles look comfortable!

Bird Rocks, Williamson Rocks, and Peregrines



Leaving Williamson Rocks and heading north back toward the Peregrine Falcon nesting site, we relocated one bird sitting on the nest, and another in a nearby bare tree! We were losing daylight and on the shaded side of Burrows Island, so my photos are a bit out of focus and grainy, but I just love the rocky cliff and environment around the nest site, so I wanted to include these, as well.

I'm glad we had success on our second stop back by so that everyone on the boat got to view these beautiful birds of prey. They were a wonderful bookend to a successful "Welcome the Puffins" trip!



We could not have asked for a better puffin trip to kick-off our season on the water—especially amongst you all, the community that supports our initiatives! We hope you all had a great time on the water with us and the TUPUs! Let's share some more time adventuring out in the beautiful Salish Sea soon!

With sincere gratitude,

Amy Eberling & Amanda Colbert
and the Outer Island Crew

SPECIES LIST FOR OUR TRIP

birds

- Harlequin Duck
- Red-necked Grebe
- Black Oystercatcher
- Common Murre
- Pigeon Guillemot
- Rhinoceros Auklet
- **Tufted Puffin (9-11!)**
- Glaucous-winged Gull
- Glaucous-winged x Western hybrid gull
- Caspian Tern
- Pacific Loon
- Brandt's Cormorant
- Pelagic Cormorant
- Double-crested Cormorant
- Bald Eagle
- Peregrine Falcon

pinnipeds

- Harbor seal

cetaceans

- Harbor porpoise

other

- Bull kelp
- Rockweed

PAIR OF TUFTED PUFFINS

Our dedicated team of staff and volunteer educators **THANKS YOU** for contributing to our FUNdraising event. Your ticket purchase for the “Welcome the Puffins” Tour helps to ensure we can continue expanding our student programming, create new curriculum, and enables us to educate everyone we can about the Salish Sea and the wonderful wildlife found in and around it!

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!



OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2022



We believe in the power of **experience** to create an ocean advocate

IN 2022, WE PROVIDED...

5,202 hours of outdoor education

225 days of outdoor classes

66 hours of work on environmental service projects

1,101

participants with outdoor education

observations of over

100 marine species

88 students with field research practice

50+ Salish Sea advocacy letters

80

FREE native plants for backyards

125 students with hikes in the San Juan Islands

800+ learned how to protect the Salish Sea bioregion

\$20,000+ in scholarships thus far



STUDENT ADVENTURES



Barnacle Buddies Pre-K | Art-Ventures 5-8yos | SEA Club 6-8yos | Guardians of the Sea – Middle & High School | Junior Marine Naturalist Adventures – Middle School | Orca Superheroes; Puffin Protectors; Kraken Kamp - Elementary | Mindfulness in Nature – all ages | Birding Courses – all ages | Students Training as Research Scientists (STaRS) – Middle, High School, & Adults | Community Service Projects | In-School Lessons | Field Trips | Adult Programs -18+ | Family Hikes | Custom Classes & More!

ADULT PROGRAMMING, TOO!



- **THE PULSE** – *VIRTUAL* CONTINUED LEARNING – SALISH SEA TOPICS VARY MONTH TO MONTH
- MINDFULNESS COURSES
- SEASONAL BIRDING TRIPS
- ISLAND VISITS
- INTERTIDAL EXPLORATION
- TUFTED PUFFIN SPRING & FALL FUNDRAISER
- BOAT TOURS
- ORCAS OF THE SALISH SEA WITH TRIP TO FRIDAY HARBOR/ORCA SURVEY CENTER
- **NEW 2023! ADULT ORCA STaRS!**
- **NEW 2023! ADULT GOS – ABRIDGED VERISON**