

TRIP REPORT

Sunday August 27th, 2023

Farewell to Puffins Fundraiser Boat Tour



Prepared by: Amanda Colbert
*all photos provided are TSSS & A. Colbert's property
(unless otherwise noted)



Vessel, Captain, and
Crew provided by:

CAPTAIN: Brock
DECKHANDS: Tiffany and Ben

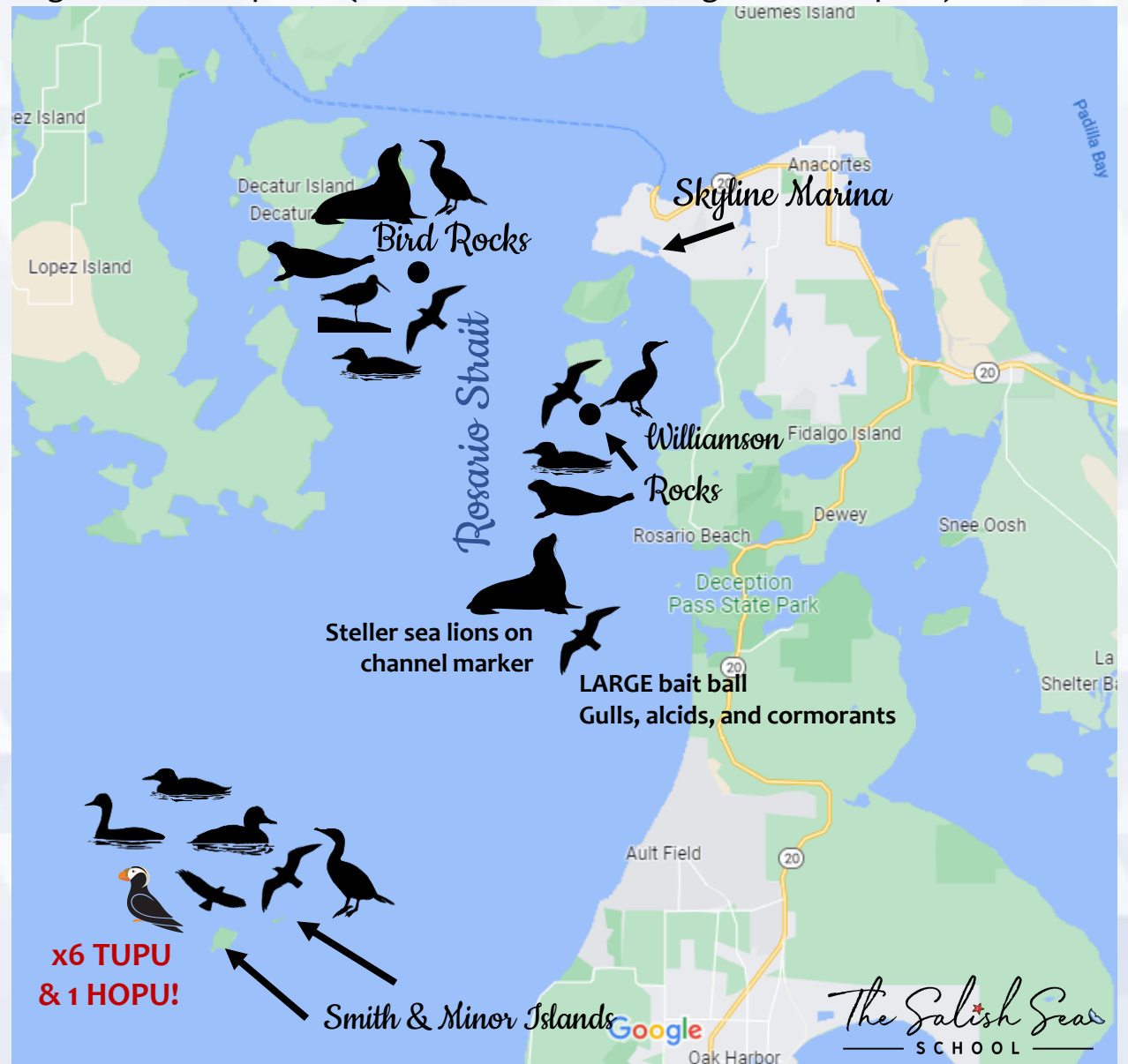
The Salish Sea
SCHOOL



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Amy Eberling
TSSS EDUCATION TEAM: Amanda Colbert

Farewell to the Puffins Fundraiser Boat Tour - 2023

I first want to take a moment to say a BIG **THANK YOU** for embarking on our annual “Farewell to the Puffins” fundraising event with us! It was so nice to see the skies a bit clearer after the recent haze the smoke from nearby wildfires had brought us. Though we had some rolling, rougher waters out near Smith, it was a beautiful evening on the water. Pushing out of Skyline Marina, the group’s excitement was palpable and set a tone of excitement for the evening. 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 our trip, with call out areas and corresponding silhouetted species (I’ll dive into details throughout the report!).



Beginning the Evening – Williamson Rocks, Cormorants, & Channel Marker Pinnipeds

California Gull



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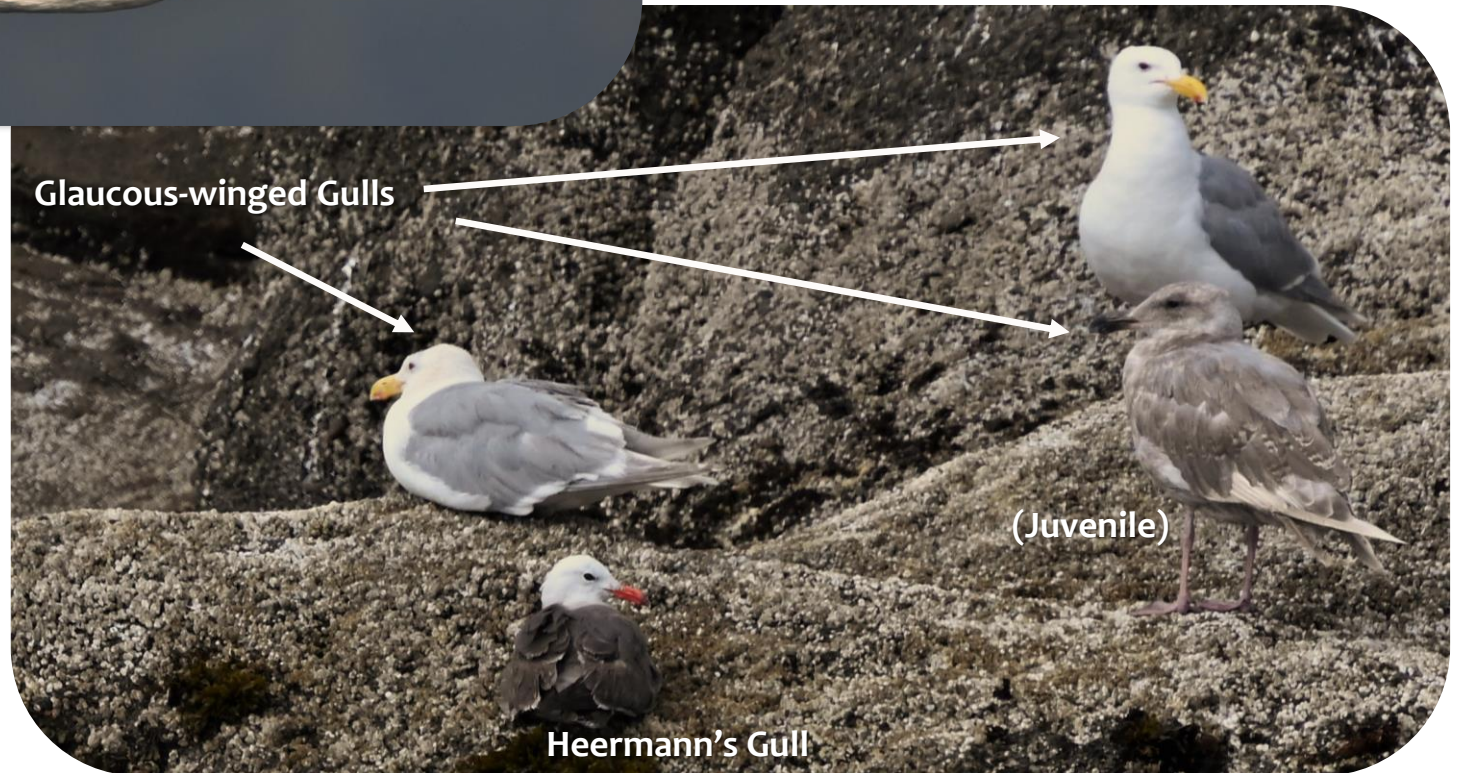


Harbor seal

We had our heading (Smith Island), aimed to find Tufted Puffins, but there is always other wildlife to be seen along the way.

Williamson Rocks is a great spot to stop when heading south from Skyline and typically yields gulls, seabirds, and the most common pinniped in the Salish Sea: the harbor seal. Here, we have a small sampling of what we saw as we slowly slipped by.

Glaucous-winged Gulls



(Juvenile)

Heermann's Gull

Beginning the Evening – Williamson Rocks, Cormorants, & Channel Marker Pinnipeds

The lighting in the evenings in late August can be absolute magic and we witnessed it on this trip. The almost golden cast makes for lovely photos, but also for spotting the details on our feathered friends that we may not always be able to see in stark/contrasting sunlight or on “gray days.”

Between Williamson Rocks and the red channel marker to the south, we easily picked up this region’s 3 cormorant species. Some pelagic cormorant chicks can be seen in this photo.

Double-crested Cormorant



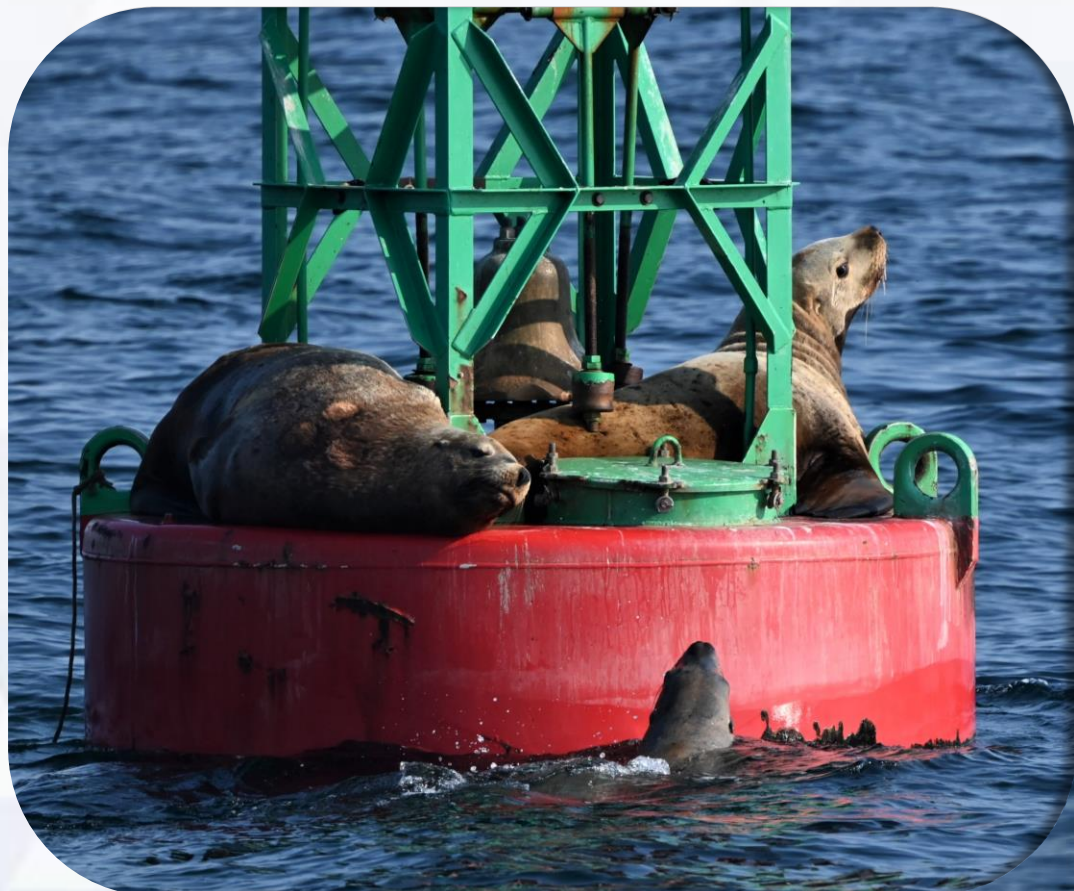
Brandt's Cormorant



Pelagic Cormorants

Beginning the Evening – Williamson Rocks, Cormorants, & Channel Marker Pinnipeds

We also spotted our second marine mammal species for the evening—Steller sea lions. When Stellers are on channel markers, there is often competition for who is allowed to rest on the marker. We all witnessed a sea lion in the water trying hard to find a spot—but one of the young males kept playing goalie. This continued as we moved away, getting closer to Smith Island.



Smith Island - Tufted Puffins & Alcid Friends

Stopping by a bait ball that was largely a mixed flock of gulls, we were all getting anxious. Just a few more miles and our search for the coveted, football-sized alcids really picked up. Skirting around Minor Island so we could make the turn back north on the southwest side of Smith, Captain Brock was positioning the boat to put the sun behind us, giving us the best chances of picking up the bold white and orange on the tufted puffins' faces. And low and behold, after some decent scanning effort, we finally found our first puffin of the evening!

Not long after, we also spotted the rare Horned Puffin! I'm so excited that s/he was out there—I know that was a "life bird" (first time seeing this species) for a lot of people onboard!

Again, the lighting was just magnificent. Denim blue water, and the golden highlights on these birds was nothing shy of swoon-worthy.



Tufted Puffin



Horned Puffin!

Smith Island: Tufted Puffins & Alcid Friends

We kept motoring slowly and successfully found another couple puffins. The individual, below, had already starting transitioning to nonbreeding plumage. Their tufts were really thinned out, the beak was also peeling near the base, and it wouldn't be long before the white feathers around their face would fall out and be replaced by black ones. This led me to think that the nesting season is very likely over, and it probably won't be long before they leave for a winter over open ocean. It truly felt like a "farewell," seeing these changes.

Tufted Puffin



Horned Puffin



Common Murre

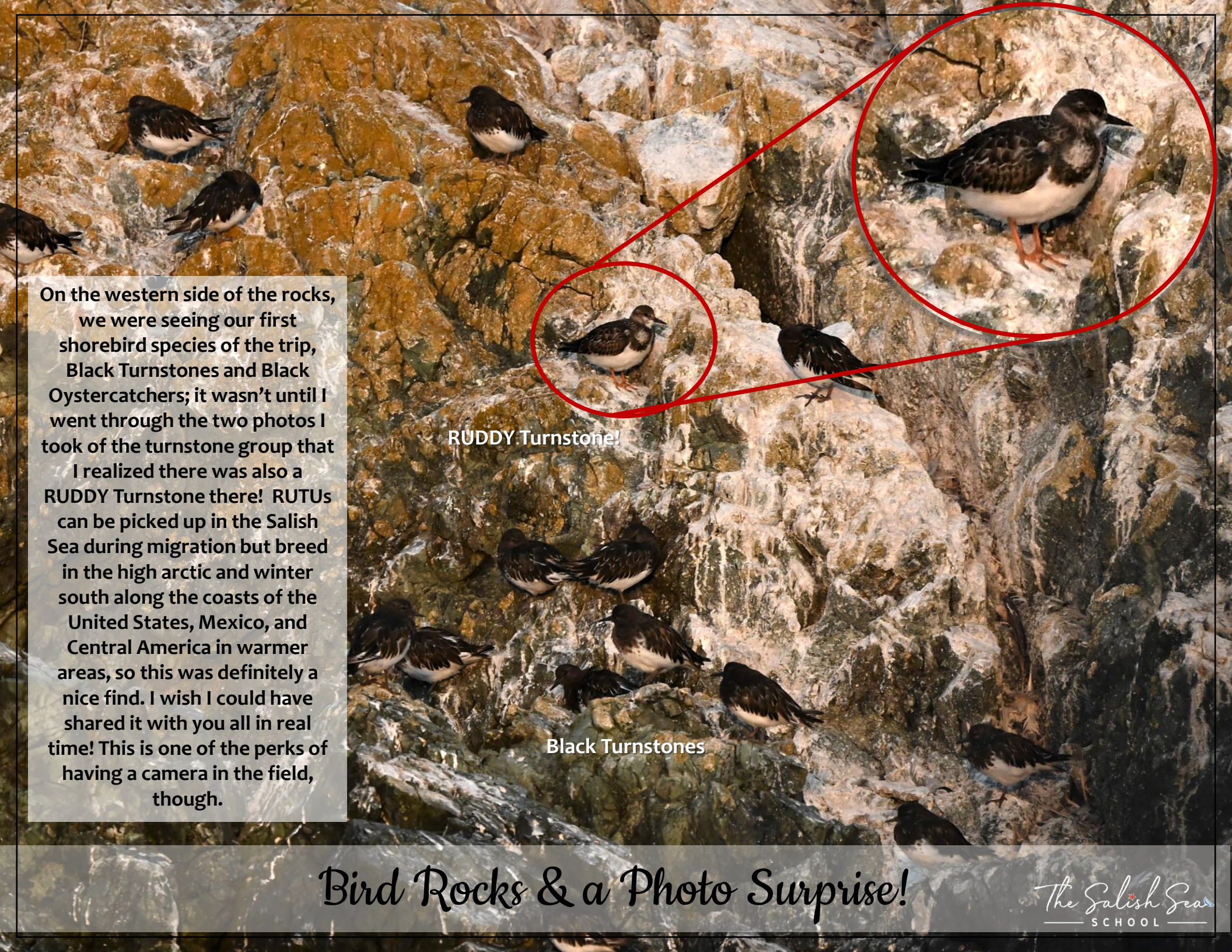


Summer visitors in the Salish Sea

I snagged a photo of another “summer notable” species before we pushed away from Smith to head north back into Rosario Strait. Heermann’s Gulls will also be taking off to head south soon, only visiting the Salish Sea in the summertime.



As always, we breathe a sigh of relief when we have located Tufted Puffins on this tour—with the cherry-on-top being the rare Horned Puffin. Making our way back north, and along the east side of Lopez island, there was one last rocky outcropping to visit—Bird Rocks. Aptly named, there was a snow globe of activity there, as well as a few surprises! One surprise which I didn't even realize we had “seen” until I looked through my photos!



On the western side of the rocks, we were seeing our first shorebird species of the trip, Black Turnstones and Black Oystercatchers; it wasn't until I went through the two photos I took of the turnstone group that I realized there was also a RUDDY Turnstone there! RUTUs can be picked up in the Salish Sea during migration but breed in the high arctic and winter south along the coasts of the United States, Mexico, and Central America in warmer areas, so this was definitely a nice find. I wish I could have shared it with you all in real time! This is one of the perks of having a camera in the field, though.

RUDDY Turnstone!

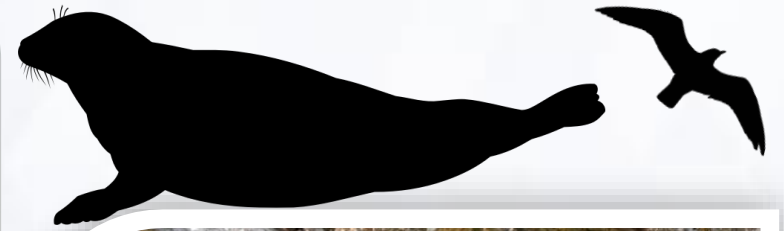
Black Turnstones

Bird Rocks & a Photo Surprise!

Double-crested Cormorants



I couldn't have been the only person that struggled with where to look and what to take photos of while at Bird Rocks—probably why I didn't wind up scrutinizing the turnstone flock better! So here are another few captures—Double-crested cormorants taking to the air, their faces showing that iconic, bright yellow; black oystercatchers with their long orange bills tucked into their wings; silvery seals watching us back; more Heermann's gulls. And have I mentioned the lighting yet, on this trip? 😊



Black
Oystercatchers

Harbor seals

Bird Rocks

Cormorant and gull snow globe as
the light was disappearing

Our last few looks of the evening...



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Bird Rocks

Sleepy Steller seal lions

Our last few looks of the evening...



Bird Rocks

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Bird Rocks



SPECIES LIST FOR THIS TRIP:

Crossing the strait to head into the marina, I turned around to find this gorgeous sunset. This FUNdraiser trip was such a wonderful way to wind down our summer season on the water—especially amongst you all, the community that supports our initiatives! We hope you had a great experience—let's share some more time adventuring out on the beautiful Salish Sea, soon!

With sincere gratitude,

Amy Eberling & Amanda Colbert

and the Outer Island Crew

birds

- Harlequin Duck
- Red-necked Grebe
- Black Oystercatcher
- Common Murre
- Pigeon Guillemot
- Rhinoceros Auklet
- **Tufted Puffin (6!)**
- **Horned Puffin (rare!)**
- Glaucous-winged Gull
- Heermann's Gull
- California Gull
- Black Turnstone
- **Ruddy Turnstone (rare!)**
- Brandt's Cormorant
- Pelagic Cormorant
- Double-crested Cormorant
- Bald Eagle

pinnipeds

- Harbor seal
- Steller sea lion

cetaceans

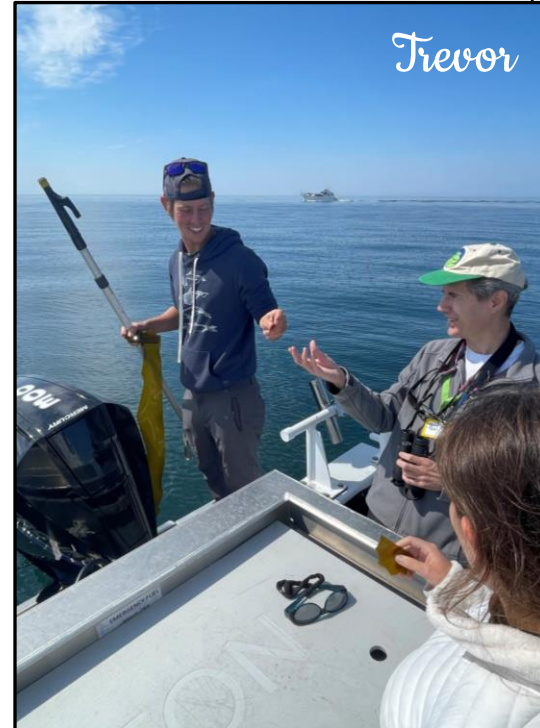
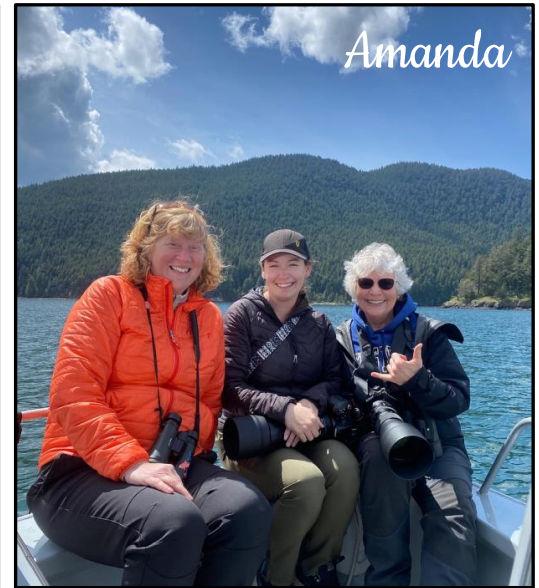
- Harbor porpoise

other

- Bull kelp
- Rockweed

Bird Rocks looking west from mid Rosario Strait (Lopez Island in the background)

Our dedicated team of staff and volunteer educators **THANKS YOU** for contributing to our FUNdraising event. Your ticket purchase for the “Farewell to 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!

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

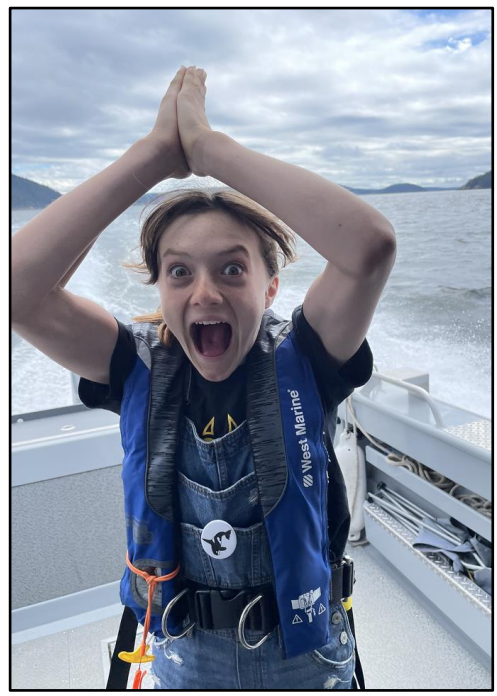
\$20,000+ in scholarships thus far



STUDENT ADVENTURES



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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**