

Keystone Spit's Pigeon Guillemots

Seabirds are like the canary in the coal mine, telling us we need to focus on the marine environment.

– John Bower, Western Washington University



Watch for Red Feet, White Wing Patches

Every spring and summer, Keystone Jetty and the dilapidated pier just offshore are among the best places to observe Pigeon Guillemots. These black birds have red feet and white wing patches. They are the only seabird to commonly nest on Whidbey Island.



Guillemot eggs have pointed ends. If they roll, the shape makes them likelier to roll in a circle rather than off a cliff or high ledge.



Nest in the Old Pier

Guillemots court in May and lay one or two eggs in June. Here at Keystone they raise their young in crevices of the old pier. Elsewhere on the island they nest in burrows high on the face of sea bluffs. Listen for their high-pitched trills and watch for their water dances and aerial antics. After the chicks hatch in July, watch for adult birds to catch and deliver small fish to the nest. Nestlings fledge during August, after which most of the Guillemots move far offshore for the rest of the year. Fewer can be seen in the waters around Whidbey Island in winter. Watch for them in their mottled white-and-black winter plumage.

Why We Study Them

For several years volunteers from Whidbey Audubon and the Marine Resources Committee have faithfully counted the number of active nesting burrows on the island, tracking populations and breeding success. Because Guillemots are high on the food chain their population trends provide an early warning to changes in Puget Sound's health. You can help them by cleaning beaches of plastics, fish hooks and fish line. Give them space when hiking and boating. Keep oil and other toxics from marine waters. Please keep dogs away from nesting sites and don't let dogs chase or disturb birds. To learn more, visit www.pigeonguillemot.org.



Winter Plumage

Pigeon Guillemots



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