



The
SeaDoc
Society

October 2005 Update

A Marine Ecosystem Health Program

Dear SeaDoc Society Supporter:

In addition to killer whales, rockfish, and other well-known marine mammals and fish of the Puget Sound region, dozens of bird species depend on our saltwater ecosystem. Some of these birds, like the Western Grebe, winter here and fly farther north to nest in the summer. Others, like the Rhinoceros Auklet, summer here and then move to the open ocean for the winter. And then there are species like the Black Oystercatcher that call this area home year-round.

In response to growing evidence that many of these sea bird populations are declining, the SeaDoc Society recently convened a meeting to evaluate causes for these declines and to determine how we could use science to help these wildlife survive and thrive. On September 29th, regional bird experts and managers met at the Tulalip Reservation to discuss this topic. The consensus among these experts was compelling:

Numerous populations of seabirds and seaducks are in decline. Meeting participants identified 16 species (approximately 50% of the species found in the region) for which there were concerns about the status of the population.

- Synergistic factors are probably contributing to these declines, ranging from changes in prey availability and destruction of sensitive breeding habitat, to fisheries by-catch and human disturbance.
- Management organizations like the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife need to improve collaborative efforts for species recovery.
- Some restoration actions are being held up by a lack of basic biological information, such as what are birds eating, and when and where.
- Seabirds are long-lived, slowly reproducing, top-level predators and are therefore good indicators of the health of our marine ecosystem, yet the massive declines we're seeing in these populations are not as well recognized as are declines in other species, such as killer whales.

Fortunately, meeting participants resolved to immediately acquire critical new information, enact some restoration efforts, increase collaboration, and begin a public education campaign. To read meeting notes from the September 29th seabird and seaduck research meeting, please visit www.seadocsociety.org

While there are many organizations in the region working towards marine conservation, there are no groups charged with convening meetings such as this. The SeaDoc Society is uniquely positioned to leverage private funds to convene regional conservation initiatives, and get people working together on a common issue; the result being much greater than the sum of its parts. Projects like this would not be possible without private investment by people who care about the future of fish and wildlife populations in the region. Thank you again for all your support.

Sincerely,

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