

Cavity nesting birds are busy across Limestone Island

Ancient Murrelets:

Ancient murrelet work has finished up for the season, the last chick being captured on June 3. The total number of chicks captured this year was 129 (125 in funnels 5-8, and 4 outside funnels or after 2:30 am). The total for funnels 5&6 was 92, down from 103 in 2007. Funnels have been taken down and put away until next season.

Cassin's auklets appear to be doing well again this year. We continue to check nests at the 'East Coast' site, where approximately 20 burrows are active. There are also several very smelly burrows at Lookout Point, indicating that the chicks inside are alive and well. Fork-tailed Storm Petrels also seem quite active this year compared with the past.

Wildlife Trees:

Cavity nesting birds are busy all over the island and the field staff is monitoring 12 active trees. Three new nests have been identified in the past two weeks: Red-breasted sapsuckers in tree #86, Chestnut-backed Chickadees in #107 (in addition to sapsuckers lower on the trunk!), and a new tree #118 which is active with Red-breasted Sapsuckers. Hairy woodpecker and Red-breasted Sapsucker chicks are becoming increasingly noisy and insistent as they beg for food and the adult birds are spending every daylight hour bringing them food.

Two eagle chicks in the nest at Cassin's tower are growing larger by the day. The Peregrines on the South side of the island are still heard frequently as they chase and harass the eagles. Young ravens have left their nest and the whole family is now noisily touring the island.

On the Water:

We finished our first complete near-shore sea-survey on May 31. Along the transects we spotted many of the familiar bird species including Ancient Murrelets, Marbled Murrelets, Pigeon Guillemots and Pelagic Cormorants. Notable sightings included a foraging aggregation of 800 Pacific Loons and 150 Rhinoceros Auklets off Cumshewa Island, and several Long-tailed ducks, which we don't generally see at this time of year. A total of 12 Humpbacks were also seen feeding during the course of the survey.

The first Orcas of the season were spotted as we were eating breakfast on June 7. The weather was good so we followed the group of five whales in the boat as they made their way toward the Skedans Islands. Attempts at taking ID photographs were initially thwarted by their erratic behaviour and long dives. On two separate occasions the group joined with humpbacks that were foraging in the area and swam with them for intervals of 10 min or more. It was hard to tell whether the Orcas were playing with the Humpbacks or perhaps feeding on fish attracted to the krill swarms. The Orcas also made several passes by the sealion haulout at the Skedans Islands, causing some alarm among the sealions. They continued towards Cumshewa rocks and we were able to get some good ID photos. We will have to wait until our film is developed at the end of the season to get the final word on who we saw.



Black Oystercatchers

We visited the eight oystercatcher territories of South Low Island on June 8. Only three of the territories are active: Two with empty scrapes and one with two eggs.

Flowering Plants

Recent additions to our list of flowering plants include Common Harebell (*Campanula latispala*), Northern Rice-root (*Fritillaria camschatcensis occidentalis*) and Northwestern Twayblade (*Listera caurina*). Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) and Saskatoon berry (*Amelanchier florida*) have also been found in areas out of reach of the deer. Our recent visit to South Low Island again highlighted the impact the deer are having on wildflower and shrub communities on Limestone. The dense understory of huckleberry, thimbleberry, salal, snowberry and carpets of strawberry, rice-root, monkey flower, and columbine (to name but a few) are in stark contrast to the carpet of moss that is the norm on Limestone, and most other deer impacted areas of Haida Gwaii.

Volunteers

Many thanks to the hard working volunteers of the past two weeks: Christine Pansino (Tlell), Stijn Van Holm (Bruges, Belgium), Michelle Lee (Sydney, Australia), and Michelle Jenyns (Queensland, Australia). Hope to see you again in the years to come!



Black Oystercatchers

This year LBCS conducted Black Oystercatcher breeding surveys for Parks Canada. We visited sites on the east side of Moresby Island, extending as far south as Ramsay I. There were many nests containing hatching eggs and recently hatched chicks marking a slightly earlier breeding season compared to previous years. We re-visited sites that were monitored in 2004 - 06 and will do a follow-up survey in a few weeks time to determine overall breeding success for this year's nests. Volunteer Kelly Runion, made a gps map of the nest sites; LBCS staff on the trip included: field staff Jen Rock and Jake Pattison and LBCS executive director, Lisa McKnight-Yeates.

Whales

Throughout the Gwaii Haanas trip we were treated to regular entertainment provided by foraging humpbacks – as many as 14 whales were seen at a given time and as we crossed Juan Perez Sound one evening a single whale jumped clear out of the water, four times in a row! It was remarkable to see such a large creature suspended momentarily in mid air!

Life on Limestone

The field crew is spending as much time as possible on the water these days doing boat work, but there is still a lot being done on the East Limestone Island as well.

There was an exodus of cavity nesting birds between the 18th and 20th of June with more than half of the fledglings from fourteen active nests departing between these dates. At this point all of the nests LBCS was monitoring have fledged marking the end of wildlife tree visits for another year.

Staff and volunteers are putting in a concerted effort to locate and catalogue the locations of rare plants that have previously been identified on Limestone. The limestone substrate that occurs is relatively unique within the archipelago resulting in conditions that support a handful of plant species that are generally rare in Haida Gwaii. Rare plants that are currently blooming or are near blooming on ELI include: Showy Jacob's Ladder *Polemonium pulcherrimum*, Richardson's Geranium *Geranium richardsonii*, Menzie's pipsissewa *Chimaphila menziesii* and Few-flowered shooting star *Dodecatheon pulchellum*.

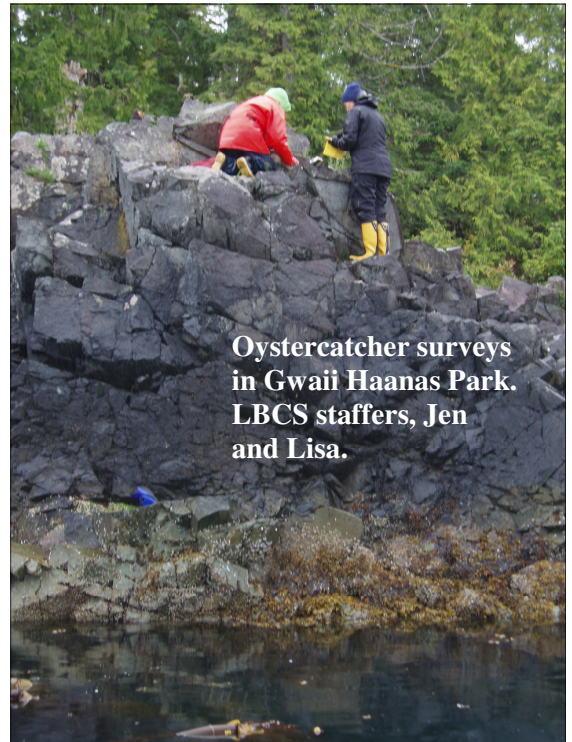
River otters appear to be doing well on ELI, on June 24th Jake and Jen spotted seven large river otters cruising the ELI shore, apparently returning from a fishing trip; the most otters anyone has reported seeing at one time in recent years here.

Notable mention

In the middle of the night on June 23rd Jake heard the familiar sound of an Ancient Murrelet chick calling out to its' parents from the colony on East Limestone! Jake distinctly heard the chick and parent exchange calls before they disappeared, off to sea. Our last chick departures at our Cabin funnels were on June 3rd meaning that the timing of this recent family was far later than the average nest.

Volunteers

LBCS is grateful to all of the volunteers that have assisted us over the last two weeks including: Kelly Runion (San Francisco), Carrie McKellar (N. Vancouver), Moritz Noster (Hardegsen, Germany) and Jan Oord (Tlell). Thank you!



Oystercatcher surveys in Gwaii Haanas Park. LBCS staffers, Jen and Lisa.