

First Record of Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*) for British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin and Peter Hamel.

Introduction and Distribution

The Black Guillemot (*Cepphus grylle*) is a small species of alcid that is found both in the Old World and the New World (Gaston and Jones 1998). In overall range the Black Guillemot is a circumpolar species that is found right around the Arctic Ocean with populations in the North Atlantic, into the Baltic Sea, and in Siberia extending into the Bering Sea and Beaufort Seas (Gaston and Jones 1998). This species is resident throughout much of its range, but does move out during the winter months from high Arctic areas that freeze over (Gaston and Jones 1998). There are five subspecies globally of the Black Guillemot of which two are found in North America (Clements *et al.* 2015). On the east coast of North America, the Black Guillemot subspecies (*Cepphus grylle arcticus*) is found in the subarctic regions as a year round resident from Great Britain, Scandinavia, southern Greenland, Newfoundland and Labrador, south along the Atlantic coast through the Maritimes, Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts (Dunn and Alderfer 2011, Clements *et al.* 2015). This subspecies wanders regularly as far south as Long Island, New York, but is casual as far south as the Carolinas (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The other subspecies of Black Guillemot found in North America is (*Cepphus grylle mandtii*) which is found in the high Canadian Arctic from northern Quebec, Hudson's Bay, James Bay, along the eastern shores of Nunavut, areas of the eastern part of the Northwest Passage, north through Baffin Island, to the high Arctic Islands of Canada, and the far north-western shoreline of Greenland (Dunn and Alderfer 2011, Clements *et al.* 2015). This subspecies is found in local populations along the Arctic coast of Russia to the Chukotka Peninsula in Russia and Wrangel Island (Gaston and Jones 1998, Brazil 2009). The Alaskan population of the Black Guillemot is an uncommon breeder and summer visitor to the Chukchi and Bering Sea areas (West 2008). This species is overall an uncommon to rare visitor throughout the year on the Chukchi and Bering Seas (West 2008). The Black Guillemot is an uncommon winter visitor in the southern Bering Sea region and depends on the overall southern limit of the pack-ice (West 2008). This species range extends along the North Slope of Alaska to the shoreline of the Yukon (Gaston and Jones 1998, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Black Guillemot is accidental inland in Alaska near Paxton (West 2008). This species is also accidental in the southeastern region of Alaska with at least one record photographed as far south as Ketchikan from December 13-17, 2012 (Heinl and Piston 2013). The other three subspecies of Black Guillemot are found in northern Europe and involve populations that occur around Iceland (*Cepphus grylle islandicus*), the Faeroe Islands (*Cepphus grylle faeroeensis*) and birds found in the Baltic Sea (*Cepphus grylle grylle*) (Clements *et al.* 2015).

On the west coast south of Alaska, the Black Guillemot is accidental with a recent 2015 sighting from the Queen Charlotte Islands (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). There are no records for Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2014), Oregon (OFO 2012), or California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Black Guillemot is covered in all standard North American field guides. The Black Guillemot is slightly smaller than the similar Pigeon Guillemot (*Cepphus columba*) (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Black Guillemot measure 33 cm in length, with a wingspan of 53 cm, and weighs 430 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Pigeon Guillemot measures 34 cm in length, with a wingspan of 58 cm, and weighs 490 grams (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In all plumages, the Black Guillemot has white axillaries and white wing linings that distinguish this species from the similar looking Pigeon Guillemot (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The white patch on the upperwing is solid and lacks any black wedge in it that is found on Pigeon Guillemot (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). With good views this field mark should help identify the two species if the Black Guillemot is encountered in British Columbia.

Adults hold this plumage from February to September (Sibley 2000). Adults in breeding plumage complete black overall from the head, down the chest, on the back, vent and tail (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The bill is long, thin and black with red on the inside lining of the bill (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The eyes are black and the feet and legs are bright red (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The wings are black with a large white oval patch on the upperwing (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The underside of the wing has a black secondary edge and leading edge to the wing and bright white axillaries (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Adult birds hold this plumage from October to March (Sibley 2000). Adults in winter plumage are extremely white (Brazil 2009). The head, neck, throat and underparts down to the vent are white (Brazil 2009). The eyes and bill are black (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The back is white with light dark streaks on the lower neck and back area (Brazil 2009). The middle back down to the rump is white (Gaston and Jones 1998). The tail is short and black (Sibley 2000). The wings are very white with dark edges to the tertials and the primaries with a dark bar on the cutting across the white patch on the upperwing (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). In flight the wings are the same as in breeding adult (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

First winter birds resemble adults in winter plumage (Brazil 2009). Birds in this plumage have dusky streaking on the crown and back and have some dark streaks on the wing (Brazil 2009). Otherwise look the same as the adults in winter plumage (Brazil 2009).

Juvenile birds hold this plumage from August to May (Sibley 2000). Juveniles have a brown head and neck-sides, with barred black on the neck and underparts (Brazil 2009). The white on the upper wing has dark spots (Brazil 2009). The underside of the wing is the same as on adult birds (Brazil 2009).

The Black Guillemot makes high pitched screaming and whistles on the breeding grounds (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Black Guillemot is an accidental vagrant to British Columbia with a recent record of an adult in full breeding plumage seen on July 22, 2015, by Peter Hamel flying beside a breeding plumaged Pigeon Guillemot at point blank range on the Skidegate Ferry (P. Hamel Pers. Comm.). This is the first record south of Alaska along the west coast of North America. Careful scrutiny should be given to all Pigeon Guillemots as this species might well be found at any time of year in British Columbia. This Black Guillemot was found in an area that has over 1000 nesting Pigeon Guillemots and is likely the reason why the Black Guillemot was in the area (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The Dovekie (*Alle alle*) has a very similar range in Alaska and it was recently added to the avifauna of British Columbia with an adult found and photographed by Luke Halpin and Megan Willie off Campania Island, Southeast of Banks Island along North Coast on August 21, 2013 (Halpin and Willie 2014). Though the Black Guillemot isn't overly migratory within its western range, birds will wander south and keen observers should be on the lookout for future records.

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