



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet

Pigeon Guillemot (*Cepphus columba*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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Pigeon Guillemot (Cepphus Columba)

 tourism.oregonstate.edu/pigeon-guillemot-cepphus-columba/

By colliiek2

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This plump 13-inch, pigeon-shaped seabird is full of surprises. Let's start with hanging upside down above the seafloor probing for prey.

Is the Guillemot doing this just to impress us? Hardly. This guy is just a really strong swimmer and diver and dives to hunt for fish and invertebrates.



Pigeon Guillemot during breeding season (photo courtesy of ODFW)

Diving Alone

The Guillemot often dives alone and sometimes in smaller groups. When diving, it prefers depths from 50 to 70 feet. Dives can last over two minutes with short intermissions between dives.

Unlike most other diving birds, this one uses both its feet and wings which beat at a rate of 2.1/s for propulsion. They have been recorded traveling 246 feet horizontally and as much as 150 feet below.

Big Eaters

This bird is known to forage before dawn and after sunset, particularly if they are feeding nestlings.

The adult Guillemot requires about 20 percent of its weight in food each day (about 90 grams). They eat primarily fish, but will also consume seafloor creatures such as mollusks, crustaceans, crabs, shrimp, and worms.

Even the nestlings are big eaters. Parents bring the young an average of 16 food loads each day (a load may be just a single fish).

Dressing for Love

During breeding season this bird gets dressed up with striking red feet, legs, and around the mouth (almost like lips). They also sport large white patches that contrast with their black iridescent feathers.

Non-breeding foliage mottled grey and black on top with white on the under areas. Non-breeding juveniles will look the same.

Bonding

These birds not only get dressed up for breeding season but they also know how to turn up the romance. Breeding pairs will play chase “water games” and trill in a romantic duet.

They form long-term breeding bonds that last over years, with a few that occasionally divorce. Kind of makes one wonder how this occurs and if there is an underwater divorce court.

Guillemots are very vocal even outside of the breeding season. They use several whistle-like calls. Some of which include head, wing, and tail wagging displays.

Unmated males will also call for females, pairs will also communicate, during nesting, and birds will scream when predators are near.

Predators

Guillemots breed on rocky shore areas, islands, and cliffs typically close to shallower water common on the Oregon coast. This habitat provides some protection from predators.

The most common cause of egg loss is through other birds such as crows, gulls, eagles, owls. Raccoons and other mammalian predators can also be a problem.

In the water there have been reports that these birds have been taken by orca and giant Pacific Octopi.

Habitat

Pigeon Guillemots are found from California up through Siberia. They overwinter along the Pacific coast north.

In some areas they are considered indicator species and the populations are monitored. To learn more about this breeding survey in Washington see: Salish Sea Guillemot Network, Pigeon Guillemot Breeding Survey (<http://www.pigeonguillemot.org/>).

#2 photo free download <https://pnommensen.com/>

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