



Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet

Tufted Puffin (*Fratercula cirrhata*)



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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Tufted Puffin (*Fratercula cirrhata*)

 tourism.oregonstate.edu/tufted-puffin-fratercula-cirrhata/

By colliiek2

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‘Small Axe’

The tufted puffin is a familiar bird on the Russian and U.S. Pacific coasts. In Russia it is known as ‘*toporok*’ meaning “**small axe**.”

Not only is this a nod to the shape of the bill but also to one of the main breeding sites, *Kamen Toporkov* (“Tufted Puffin Rock”) which is an islet offshore Bering Island.



Mature, breeding adult Tufted Puffin
(royalty free Unsplash)

Local Finds

We don’t have to go to Russia to see them as they are also found in our backyards (so to speak). This recognizable seabird nests on Oregon headland such as Cape Mears, Cape Lookout, Cape Foulweather, Yaquina Head, and further north at Three Arch Rocks.

Recognizing

The large triangular red-orange bill is definitely unique and is most visible on breeding adults during the summer reproductive season. The birds also develop a distinct white face with long cream-colored facial plumes and red feet.

The colorful breeding plumage and bill plates molt-off in the winter as the bird moves offshore to feed. The bird appears predominantly black similar to immature or non-breeding puffins. The body length is approximately 15-inches.

Nesting

Puffins, murres, and auklets are oceanic birds that live predominantly in the water. They only come to land to nest. Puffins gather on in dense breeding colonies often on treeless islands far out in the ocean.

They prefer offshore treeless islands and steep cliffs offer protection from mammal predators and may choose islands that are not in sight of land.

The ideal nesting site would be close to food, have relatively soft soil and grass to dig and build nesting burrows, and have a high enough elevation and steep drop offs that help the bird take flight.



Puffin in burrow (royalty free from Unsplash)

Breeding Range and Habitat

The Puffin breeding range extends from British Columbia throughout the southeastern Alaska, Aleutian Islands, Kuri Island, and Japan. Puffins will also breed on Russia's Kamchatka peninsula which has some of the world's largest brown and rainbow trout.

Nesting can occur as far south as the northern Channel Islands, off southern California (sightings have not occurred since 1997).

Flight and Forage

The wings are relatively short (a span of about 25-inches) and adapted for diving and swimming. These birds cannot glide but can fly long and fast using strong breast muscles and a strenuous wing-beat cadence.

Wings are used to 'fly' through the water, tail spread to steer, streamlined body with feet back make the puffin a formidable underwater hunter. The puffin often forages by surface diving and rapid swimming through schools of small fish and marine invertebrates.

The large axe-like bill can catch large quantities of food at one time. The bills also facilitate transporting food back to chicks.

Diet

Diet will vary greatly by age, location, and availability. Colony nestlings are more dependent on invertebrates. Adult birds also depend on invertebrates such as squid and krill. Puffins also feed, to some extent, on ocean floor species.

Predators

Tufted puffin avian predators include Snowy owl, Bald eagles, and Peregrine falcons; gulls and ravens will scavenge eggs. Arctic foxes prefer puffins over other birds.

A mass puffin die-off, attributed to climate change, occurred on St. Paul Island, Alaska between October 2016 and January 2017.

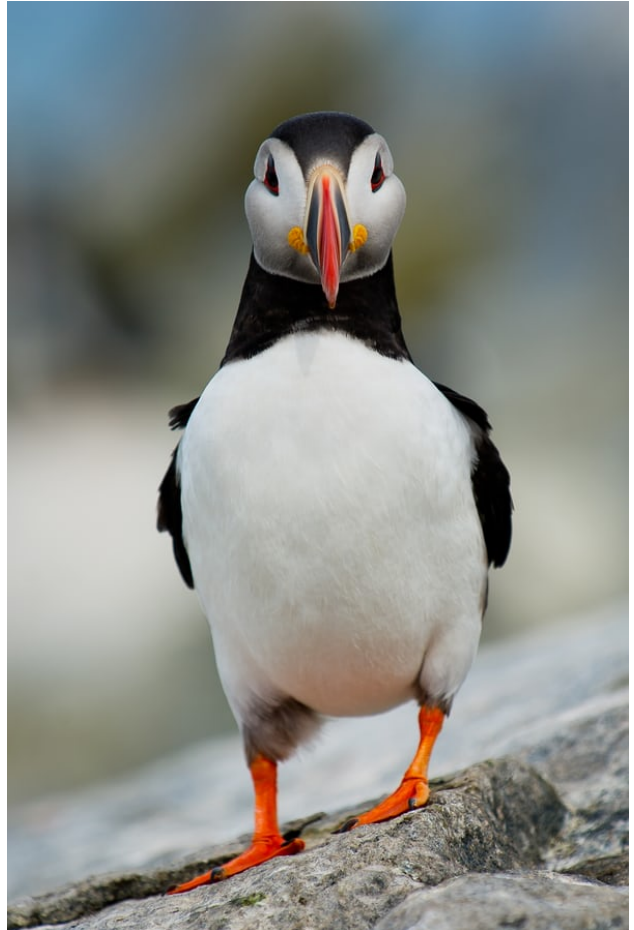
In the past, the Aleut and Ainu people hunted the Tufted Puffin for food and feathers. They used the skins to make parkas, and the feathers in ornamental work. Harvesting of tufted puffins is illegal or discouraged today.

REFERENCES:

–Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Murres, Auklets and Puffins

(<https://myodfw.com/wildlife-viewing/species/murres-auklets-and-puffins>)

–All About Birds, Puffins



Mature breeding adult, showing white belly feathers (royalty free from Unsplash)

(https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Tufted_Puffin/id)

–Wikipedia, Tufted Puffins (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tufted_puffin)

–Audubon Field Guide (<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/tufted-puffin>)