PIGEON GUILLEMOTS BREEDING ON A MOVING VESSEL

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The Pigeon Guillemot (*Cepphus columba*) is a seabird of the North Pacific Ocean and in the eastern part of its range breeds along the coast from Alaska to California (Ewins 1993). It is a cavity and crevice-nesting species that utilizes a wide variety of natural substrates including rock cliffs, boulder rubble, tree roots, disused rabbit burrows, caves, and piles of large driftwood cast ashore (Ewins 1993). It may also excavate its own burrow under dense shrubs and in soft soils below tree roots on cliff faces (Hatter and Stordeur 1978, Campbell et al. 1990). In British Columbia, as elsewhere, stationary human-made structures are also utilized for nesting. These may include wharves (Campbell 1977), piers, bridges, light beacons, drain pipes, beached ship hulls, and log pilings (Campbell et al. 1990).

While on a visit to the Queen Charlotte Islands, BC on 21 July 2007 I had to travel between two of the largest islands by a small ferry. The ferry, the *Kwuna*, runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, between the village of Skidegate on Graham Island and Alliford Bay on Moresby Island (Figure 1). The length of the trip is 6.5 km (3.5 mi) and takes about 20 minutes. The ferry goes in opposite directions every half hour. The speed of the ferry is estimated between 18 and 20 km/h.

After the vehicles were parked I got out and started looking at the birds on the water. There were a few gulls quite far away, several Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) could be seen in trees along the coastline and on the water, quite close to the ferry, were numerous Pigeon Guillemots. They did not seem to be afraid of the ferry and were quite comfortable around it. Once the ferry got moving the guillemots took to the wing and flew straight to the ferry to clumsily land on the loading ramp.

There were up to 10 guillemots on the ramp at a time (Figure 2). I noticed that two birds landed on one of the front structural pillars that housed the
I also saw a bird flying by with something that looked like a small eel, about 10 cm long, in its bill. The bird tried to land on the left hydraulic pillar but seemed to be unsuccessful. It was only with the third effort directly from the front that the bird disappeared inside the pillar.

I realized that the bird must be feeding chicks inside the pillar (Figure 3), but I was quite skeptical since I have never heard of birds breeding on a moving vessel. The birds fed the chicks three times during the 20 minute ride, and often landed in the water in front of the ferry until we passed and would then fly up and go inside the pillar.

When we landed at the dock I inspected the hole where the birds went into and was actually surprised to see how small the slit was between the mounted light and the steelwork. I could not see inside the pillar but decided to stick the lens of a small pocket digital camera through the slit between the hydraulic piston and the steel pillar. I took two photographs and was quite surprised to see that there were two big

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**Figure 1.** The small ferry, the *Kwuna*, operates daily throughout the year between the two largest islands on the Queen Charlotte Islands and during the summer months Pigeon Guillemots breed in structural openings on the vessel. Skidegate Inlet, BC. 21 July 2007 (Samuel de Beer). BC Photo 3577a.

**Figure 2.** Shortly after the ferry *Kwuna* left its berth for the 6.5 km trip across Skidegate Inlet, BC, Pigeon Guillemots flew and landed on the boarding ramp. 21 July 2007 (Samuel de Beer). BC Photo 35677b.
chicks in the “nest” (Figure 4).

During the voyage over the strait, two other birds were inspecting the pillar on the opposite side of the ramp. They would attempt to land on the pillar directly from the sea but with the ferry being a small moving target and with the strong crosswinds, the birds were seldom successful. They would often land on the loading ramp and then take a short flight up to the top of the ramp where they would shuffle around and disappear and re-appear from behind the structure. They seemed to be quite territorial around it and would defend it from other guillemots trying to land by outstretching their necks, opening their bills, and opening their wings.

In British Columbia, Glaucous-winged Gulls (Larus glaucescens) and Barn Swallows (Hirundo rustica) have been reported successfully nesting on moving barges, ferries, and ships (Campbell et al. 1990, 1997) but I cannot find any reference to an alcid nesting on a moving vessel.

Literature Cited


About the Author

Sam was born in South Africa and as a boy was encouraged by his parents to spend time outside in nature. While in South Africa he spent most of his spare time birdwatching. Sam was editor of a bird club magazine, wrote a book on the distribution of birds over a 150-year period in his hometown, co-authored the handbook for South African bird
ringers [banders], and co-authored several papers. Professionally he worked as a geologist, soil scientist, and consultant in South Africa, Northwest Territories, Alberta, and British Columbia. Although a Master Bander his travels have prevented him from getting involved again with his life-long passion of ringing.

FIRST RECORDS OF BROWN PELICAN IN THE INTERIOR OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Brown Pelican (Pelecanus occidentalis) is a large aquatic bird primarily associated with saltwater habitats throughout the year. In western North America, the species nests only in California, but during the non-breeding season birds regularly wander north to coastal Oregon, Washington, and southern British Columbia (Shields 2002). Prior to 2007, there were no confirmed reports of this species in the British Columbia interior (Godfrey 1986, Campbell et al. 1990, R.W. Campbell pers. comm.).

On 8 July 2007, I saw a bird that I believed could be a Brown Pelican at Kokanee Creek Park, approximately 20 km northeast of Nelson, British Columbia. The bird was flapping low over the surface of the West Arm of Kootenay Lake, heading toward Balfour. Because it was angling almost directly away from me, I could not see its head well enough to confirm it was a pelican. However, I could think of no other species that would fit its size, colour, and behaviour. The park was busy with campers and beach-goers and it appeared to me that the bird must have flown directly over the beach. In fact, my 11-year-old daughter, Bethany, who was further along the shore from me, saw the bird and overheard someone exclaim, "Did you see that pelican?"

Knowing how unusual this sighting was and not having obtained a satisfactory look at the bird myself, I was reluctant to report it as a Brown Pelican. However, that evening, I mentioned the possibility of a Brown Pelican present in the area on the Yahoo Groups listserv "wkbirds". I was surprised the following day to find a response from Ursula and Terry Lowrey, who saw the Brown Pelican that morning as it flew past Kokanee Creek Park in the opposite direction than I had observed the previous day.

Over the next couple of days there were no sightings, but considerable discussion, speculation and excitement were apparent. Better evidence was still needed in order to confirm this record as the first for the British Columbia interior. Then, on 11 July, Holley Rubinsky posted photos taken that day of a Brown Pelican at Kaslo on the North Arm of Kootenay Lake, approximately 50 km northeast of Kokanee Creek Park. The bird had been reported to Dirk Pidcock by local resident Beatrice Massara. Beatrice reported the bird was first observed flying with Great Blue Herons (Ardea herodias), then sitting on the shore, appearing rock-like. Dirk and Holley searched the area, unsuccessfully at first, but Holley later rediscovered the bird, an immature, on a raft in Kaslo Bay (Figure 1).

The pelican was observed in the Kaslo area several times and by various people over the following week. The last recorded observation was by an angler on 19 July, who provided an intriguing report that the bird appeared to be feeding among a large school of Kokanee (Oncorhynchus nerka) fry at the mouth of the bay. Attempts to relocate the bird...