

STATUS AND ECOLOGY OF THE MARBLED MURRELET

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Marbled Murrelets (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) are small, non-migratory diving seabirds that occur along the Pacific coast of North America. They forage for schooling fish or invertebrates in sheltered marine waters, generally within 5 km of shore. These secretive alcids breed primarily in older-aged coastal forests from Alaska to central California and fly long distances inland (up to 80 km) where nests are notoriously difficult to locate because of their cryptic nesting behavior. Murrelet populations have declined over much of their range due primarily to current and historic loss and fragmentation of their forest breeding habitat. Despite being listed as threatened in California, Oregon, and Washington in 1992 and implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan in 1994, populations have continued to decline or stay at low levels in these states. Murrelets are listed as threatened in British Columbia where habitat has been greatly reduced and populations in some regions are declining. In Alaska their recent status is uncertain, but declines may have leveled off in the early 2000s during a period of cooler ocean climate. While issues at sea, such as changes in prey populations and gill net mortality, are likely impacting murrelet populations, population size in southern areas is more closely related to amount of nearby quality nesting habitat than ocean conditions. Maintaining and increasing existing high-quality nesting habitat, and decreasing habitat fragmentation and predation are needed in order to promote recovery of murrelet populations. The effects of climate change, both at sea and in nesting habitat, remain unclear and are potentially serious. (Talk)



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