

# Laskeek Bay

CONSERVATION SOCIETY

## Gawga Kwaan Gawga

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### Comings and Goings

This month, LBCS welcomed a new intern, Robin Glover, who will be staying with us until July 7. Four volunteers also joined the ELI crew. Troy Moth volunteered during the first week of June to help with the Black Oystercatcher (BLOY) surveys in Gwaii Haanas. Ceitlynn Epnors (former LBCS biologist and board member!) and her daughter, Emily Fleming, along with recent BCIT Ecological Restoration graduate Brian Michels volunteered during the second week to help with Laskeek Bay BLOY surveys, at-sea transects, vegetation and wildlife monitoring around ELI. Tyler Hinchcliffe also volunteered her time from June 2-5 to help with BLOY surveys in Laskeek Bay.



Volunteer Emily Fleming counting Ancient Murrelets during an evening Gathering Ground count with LBCS Biologist, Rian Dickson.

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### **Laskeek Bay Black Oystercatcher Surveys**

The Limestone crew continued BLOY surveys around Laskeek Bay this month. We have now completed surveying 69 territories across ten islands, including three new territories at the Skedans Islands, Kingsway Rock, and South Low Island. At each territory, we recorded the number of eggs in each nest as well as the weight and dimensions of each egg. We spotted 27 banded adult oystercatchers at 22 of the territories. While most of the eggs had still yet to hatch, we did see a chick at one territory and two eggs were beginning to pip at another. In addition to BLOY sightings, some other observation highlights during the surveys include lots of seal pups, Glaucous-winged Gull nests, and many beautiful wildflowers (Nootka Rose, Red Columbine, Northern Rice Root, Monkey Flower, and Shore Blue-eyed Grass).



Volunteer Emily Fleming supervises while LBCS Biologist Rian Dickson measures a Black Oystercatcher egg and intern Robin Glover records data.

### **Gwaii Haanas Black Oystercatcher Surveys**

On June 3<sup>rd</sup> Rian Dickson (LBCS biologist), Jake Pattison (contractor), Troy Moth (volunteer), and Max Nishima (field assistant) ventured to Gwaii Haanas for the first Gwaii Haanas Black Oystercatcher survey of the season! LBCS will be conducting two BLOY surveys in Gwaii Haanas this season. The goal of the first survey is to gather data on the oystercatchers and their eggs before the chicks have hatched. During the second survey, in early July, later nesting pairs will be located and active territories will be visited to see how many chicks are present. In June, most of the active scrapes still held eggs, but a few had newly hatched chicks. Along the shorelines of many islands, large and small, the team managed to visit over 170 territories during their six-day visit, discovering 13 previously unknown territories! The days were jam-packed with productive observations and data recording, but moody sea lions, breaching humpbacks, remarkable weather, and seafood dinners were icing on the cake.



Black Oystercatcher scrape with an egg and freshly hatched chick!



Gorgeous cumulus clouds over the San Christoval Mountains of Moresby Island make evening dishwashing less of a chore.

We have been seeing lots of Harbour Porpoises, both from East Limestone Island and on the water but we also had an exciting sighting of some Dall's Porpoises. We were in the boat on the way to Kingsway Rock to do a Black Oystercatcher Survey when we saw a splash. Suddenly beside the boat were Dall's Porpoises. The boat was still going and they easily kept up with us. They would quickly swim under and reappear at the other side of the boat. It was very incredible to have something so powerful and fast so close. We had slowed down quite a bit and then very quickly they left. It was a really cool experience and it sparked questions and thoughts about why they had come so close to the boat, why they left and got some of us just thinking about cetaceans in general.



Using the anchor buddy system to retrieve our trusty research vessel (aka the Reef Boat) after the BLOY survey at Kingsway Rock. Don't worry - it's not as steep as it looks!

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We have continued to monitor wildlife trees over the past two weeks. So far, out of the 21 trees that have been active this year, four are no longer active - the chicks have fledged! The Northern Saw-whet Owl chicks fledged earlier in May and the Hairy Woodpecker chicks fledged sometime between the 24<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of May. One Red-breasted Sapsucker nest fledged between June 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> and the other between June 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. We recently discovered a new wildlife tree bringing the total count of all wildlife trees found on East Limestone Island through the years to 202 (though some trees have fallen down or cracked off in the past year). Overall most of the remaining active wildlife trees are home to Red-breasted Sapsuckers but there is at least one Tree Swallow nest this year as well as two Chestnut-backed Chickadee nests. The parents have been busy bringing food back to their begging chicks. We will continue to monitor the trees regularly so we know when each nest has fledged.



Mixed-age forests such as those found on East Limestone Island have a variety of 'snags' or dead and decaying trees, in addition to mature trees and younger

Some species, like woodpeckers, will excavate their own cavities while other birds search for a suitable hole that someone else has already made!

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### **Limestone Visitors**

We were very excited to host the Living and Learning School from Daajing Giids in mid-June. They camped on Louise Island and came over to ELI for a tour of the island, some training in BLOY survey techniques, and a sea-watch from the Lookout Point blind. Haawa to all the teachers and parents who helped make the trip happen, and thanks to the students for being such intrepid explorers!



L&L students using the spotting scope in the Lookout Point Blind.

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Research Assistant Max showing a L&L student how to measure a Black Oystercatcher egg - note this is a painted wooden egg used as a lesson aid.

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Biologist Rian Dickson showing students burrow used by nesting Cassin's Aukets.

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Max explaining what Black Oystercatcher scrapes (nests) look like.

## Songbird Surveys

During the field season, we do point count surveys to document the terrestrial birds that make their homes on Limestone Island. We have 11 locations scattered throughout the island, in different habitat types - shoreline, alder forest, cedar forest, spruce/hemlock forest, and the blowdown. We do these counts every two weeks, waking early to get out while the birds are active in the morning. When we reach our chosen spots, we sit quietly, and record all the birds that we see or hear during a five-minute period. Sometimes we will glimpse a Pacific Wren darting amongst the underbrush or be graced by a Tree Swallow swooping overhead. But most often these birds are the opposite of old-fashioned children - they are heard and not seen! The burbling trill of the Swainson's Thrush tells us that summer is really beginning while the ubiquitous Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Townsend's Warblers twitter and chirp in the canopy far above our heads.



You have to wake up pretty early to see the sunrise in Haida Gwaii in June!

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## Camp Life

We have a well-equipped kitchen in the cabin on Limestone, with a four-burner propane stove and running water (cold only, but it's a much-appreciated amenity in a field camp!). Unfortunately, the oven on our stove stopped working last summer and we have not been able to figure out the solution yet. However, LBCS staff and volunteers tend to be a resourceful bunch. We have been roasting vegetables on a beach fire, and Matt even managed to bake a couple of cakes (it was Georgia's birthday, so it had to be done!). Max has recently taken things to another level, by building a stone oven on the beach. The inaugural attempt produced an amazing peach upside-down cake. Inspired, Max enlisted some assistants and built a bigger oven - more cakes, nachos, and focaccia bread soon followed!



Max and Robin unveil their delicious peach upside-down cake!



Volunteer Brian Michaels puts the finishing touches on the EasyBake 2.0.

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We continued our daily haikus throughout the week. This one by Emily was inspired by our BLOY

Black Oystercatcher  
Bright beak, singing squeak, pink feet  
Small beautiful eggs

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*Trivia Answer to last issue's Humpback Whale I.D. Photos question, see below:*



**Figure 1 X Whale** <30% white



**Figure 2 Y Whale** 30-70% white



**Figure Z Whale** > 70% white

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*Can you spot the Black Oystercatcher in this photo?*



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