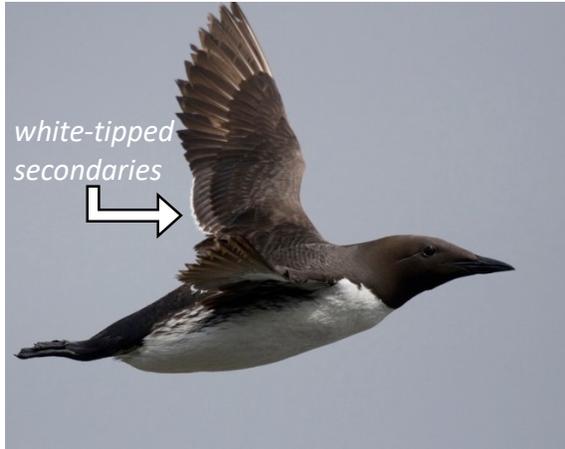


May 2019 Northern California Common Murre Mortality Fact Sheet

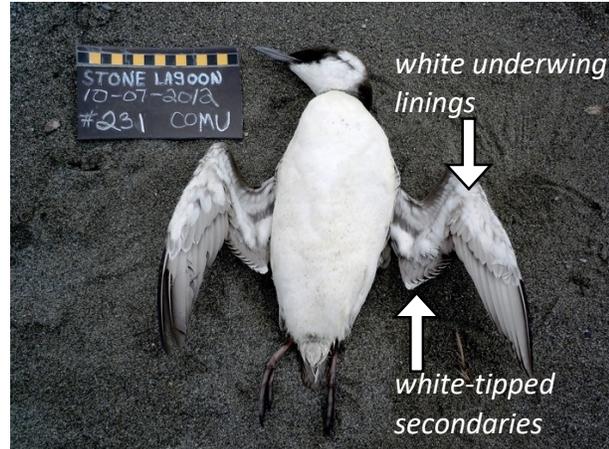
Version 1.0 last updated June 6, 2019

Who:

The Common Murre, *Uria aalge*, is a medium-sized (800-1100g/28-40 oz) seabird that feeds mostly on fish but also on small invertebrates, which it hunts by diving.



breeding – dark head



non-breeding – white face

On the Pacific Coast of North America, Common Murres breed from Monterey County, California to Cape Lisburne, Alaska. Resembling penguins, this species is generally black above and white below, the head transitioning from black in the breeding season to white with a black eye-line in the winter. The black bill is smooth, straight, and pointed. As beached birds, murres are often identified by their white-tipped secondary feathers and white underwing linings.

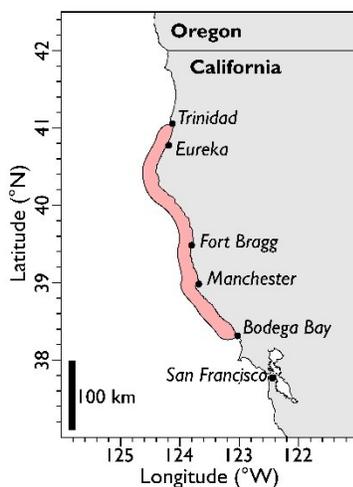
Population Size: ~13-20 million worldwide, ~4-8 million in western North America.

Upwards of 1.5 million murres breed in the "Lower 48," centered in Oregon.

Longevity: up to 25 years.

Clutch Size: 1 egg annually; can sometimes lay a replacement egg if the first is lost early on.

Conservation Status: Abundant population, listed as "Least Concern" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.



What, Where and How Many:

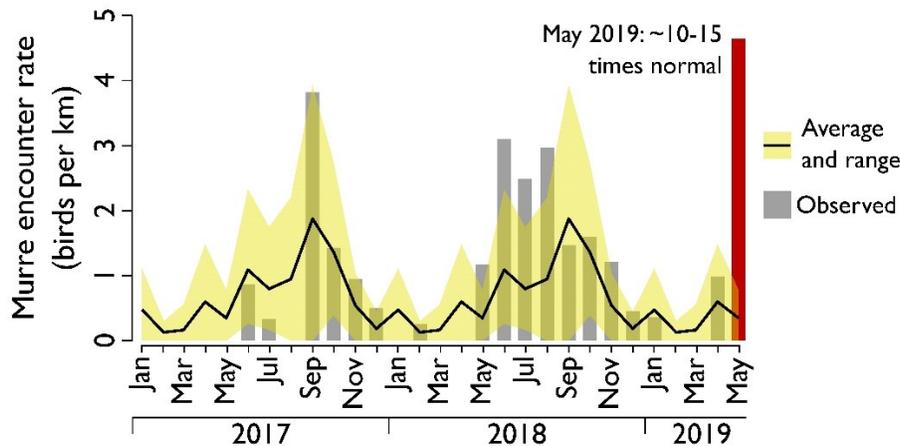
Starting in late May 2019, beachgoers began reporting unusual numbers of Common Murres washing ashore from Sonoma County north to Humboldt County, with most reports centered in the Fort Bragg area. Reports of floating dead murres have also been forthcoming. Over 500 murre carcasses have been reported to COAST through June 3rd.

May 2019 Northern California Common Murre Mortality Fact Sheet

Version 1.0 last updated June 6, 2019

Data for Northern California suggest that:

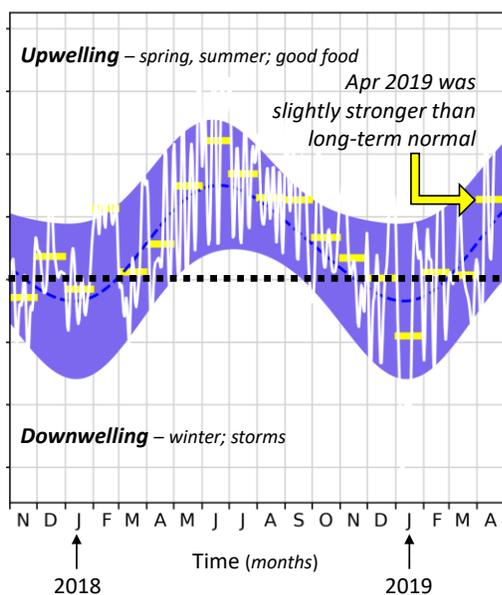
In the Mendocino region (Westport to Elk) of Northern California the “peak season” for beached Common Murres is June - October. During normal peak months, an average of 2 murres wash ashore per km of coastline (see the black line peak in Sep in the graphs below).



May is not normally a peak month, but in May 2019, COASST surveys in the Mendocino region reported encounter rates ~10-15 times the normal baseline (see the red bar in May in the right-hand graph above). Similar rates (10x normal) have been reported from Sonoma County via the Beach Watch program.

Why? Potential Causes:

Fresh carcasses have been collected and shipped to the USGS National Wildlife Health Center and California Department of Fish and Wildlife diagnostic for examination, including analysis for disease, toxins from harmful algal blooms, and/or severe emaciation leading to starvation.



Each of these causes have been associated with mass mortality events of seabirds along the West Coast over the past 5 years.

The ocean habitat in northern California does not appear to be unusually warm, a condition which can be associated with shifts towards poorer food sources.

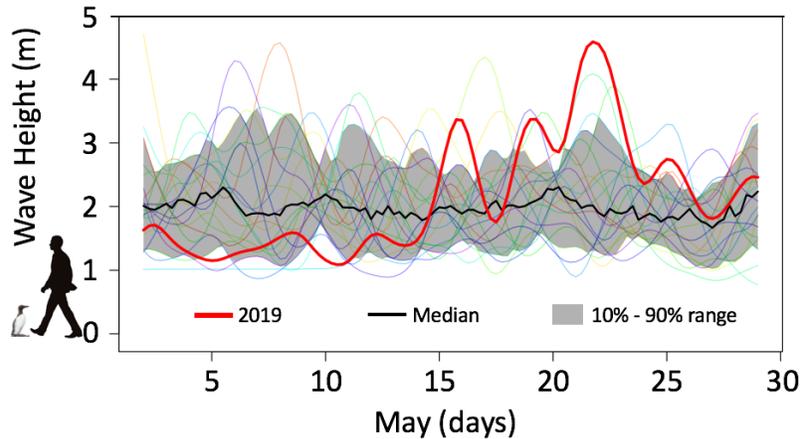
Along the West Coast of the U.S., seasonal upwelling brings cold, nutrient-rich water to the surface fueling a “turbo-boost” to the nearshore ecosystem. Murres depend on this annual phenomenon to support rich stores of krill and forage fish. In April 2019, the

May 2019 Northern California Common Murre Mortality Fact Sheet

Version 1.0 last updated June 6, 2019

upwelling index was actually slightly above the long-term normal signal (the yellow monthly bars sits above the blue dashed line).

On the other hand, wave height data (in meters) from the buoy at Bodega Head (1998-2019, each colored line is a year) does indicate that May 2019 was plagued with particularly bad storms, leading to sustained 4.5 meter waves (thick red line). Normal wave heights (thick black line – the long-term signal) hover around 2 meters (just taller than the average man). The “one-two punch” of unusual storminess (15-May to 17-May, and then again from 19-May to 24-May) could have played a role.



What You Can Do:

- From Elk northward, you can report dead or moribund bird sightings to COASST at coasst@uw.edu. Please include date, time, number, species and condition of birds (moribund; fresh, decayed), and photographs along a measured (or approximated) length of beach. *Please don't touch or collect sick or dead birds unless you possess the appropriate permits and training.* Birds tagged with colored ties or with wing-tips clipped (see photo) are part of ongoing monitoring, and have already been reported. Visit www.coasst.org to learn more.
- In Fort Bragg – Mendocino, the [Noyo Center for Marine Science](#) is a source of information about the coastal marine environment.
- In California, additional information about beached bird surveys can be obtained for specific areas as follows:
 - Redwood National Park lands, Keith Bensen, keith_bensen@nps.gov 707-465-7777
 - South of Mendocino ([Beach Watch](#)) Jan Roletto, Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, 415-530-5364 or Kirsten Lindquist, Greater Farrallones Association, 415-530-5358.
 - Santa Cruz to Los Angeles counties ([BeachCOMBERS](#)), Erica Donnelly-Greenan beachcombersmb@gmail.com 831-771-4422.



May 2019 Northern California Common Murre Mortality Fact Sheet

Version 1.0 last updated June 6, 2019

Data and Image Sources:

Map and murre encounter rates: COASST; more data available at [Explore Data](#) – select Data Visuals/Trends in Time, and use the lefthand dropdown to choose the geographic region, species of interest, and range of time.

Upwelling Index: NOAA; [this graph and other graphs](#) from locations north and south of Mendocino are available.

Wave Height: created by COASST from [Bodega Bay NDBC data](#) provided by NOAA. Human outline from [getdrawings.com](#); murre drawing from National Bird Project – Canadian Geographic.

Photographs: Flying murre; beachcast murre: COASST; Murre wing-clip: Sarah Grimes, Noyo Center and COASST.