

The Seabird Survival Program



How You Can Make a Difference.

Important Bird Areas

The seabirds we share the oceans with live their lives as they have since the last glacial retreat, about 11,000 years ago. They have survived the hazards of fierce storms and efficient predators, and yet maintained healthy breeding populations. In just the last three hundred years, however, the human population of coastal BC has increased more than 30 times, putting ever-increasing pressure on seabirds. We take over nesting colonies for our own settlements, compete for food, introduce alien predators like rats, and disturb the daily lives of seabirds with our commercial and recreational activities.

Some areas where there are significant concentrations of seabirds are now designated as Important Bird Areas, under the IBA program of BirdLife International. An IBA site may be significant for one species of bird, or many, and it may be significant nationally, continentally, or globally.

The **Seabird Survival Program** is an initiative of the Federation of BC Naturalists, to help minimize human disturbance of seabirds, at IBAs and elsewhere in the southern Strait of Georgia. The project proposes voluntary viewing guidelines which recreational boaters and beachwalkers can use to view seabirds responsibly.



Pigeon Guillemot

Snake Island IBA

Part of Hudson Rocks Ecological Reserve.

Breeding colony

Porlier Pass IBA

Seabird feeding area

Active Pass IBA

Seabird feeding area

Sidney Channel IBA

Includes part of Gulf Islands National Park Reserve on Sidney Island. Breeding and wintering area

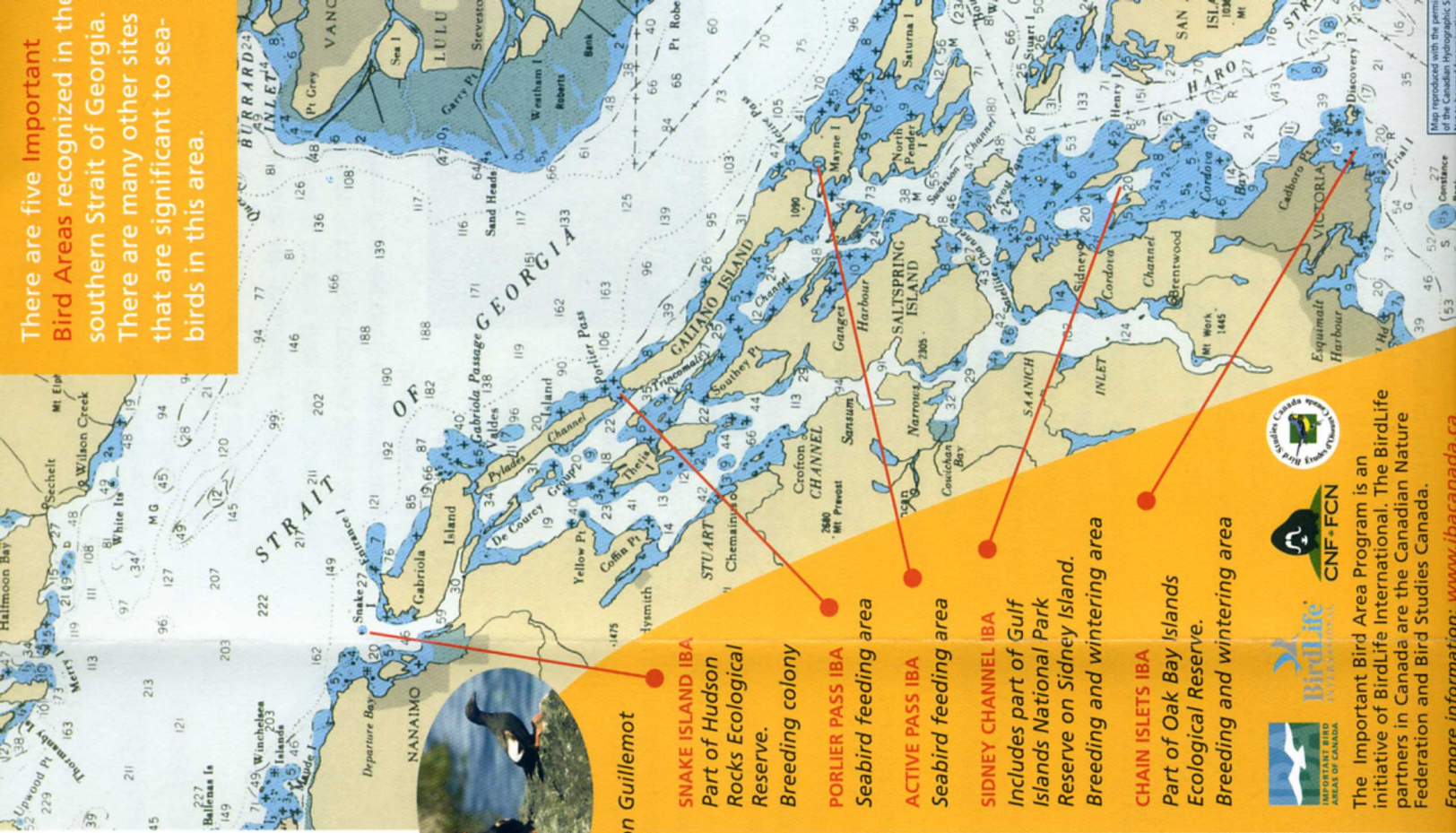
Chain Islets IBA

Part of Oak Bay Islands Ecological Reserve. Breeding and wintering area



The Important Bird Area Program is an initiative of BirdLife International. The BirdLife partners in Canada are the Canadian Nature Federation and Bird Studies Canada.

For more information: www.ibacanada.ca



There are five Important Bird Areas recognized in the southern Strait of Georgia. There are many other sites that are significant to seabirds in this area.

Map reproduced with the permission of the Canadian Hydrographic Service.

What is disturbance?

Birds at ease exhibit behaviour such as preening, singing, nest building, sleeping, or "loafing". Birds stop doing these things, their daily activities are interrupted, and that is disturbance.

When nesting seabirds are disturbed, adults may leave their nests to save their own lives. They usually will return to their nests as soon as it is safe, but by then their exposed eggs or young may have been taken by predators such as gulls, eagles, crows, or mammals like otters and mink.

Young nestlings may also perish if exposed too long to extremes of heat or cold. Seabirds usually raise only one or two young each year and if a chick is lost because of predation or abandonment, the entire breeding season's production for that year is lost.

Seabirds, like Rhinoceros Auklets, spend long hours in feeding areas like Sidney Channel. They must leave their young in nest burrows only once a day, as dusk falls. If repeatedly disturbed when hunting for prey, the auklets may not succeed in catching sufficient fish to keep their young alive for the next 24 hours.

Migrating birds must feed regularly too, to restore depleted fat reserves, and they must rest before leaving on the next leg of their journey. Birds that are disturbed during these times may become weakened, and succumb to the elements or to predators.

How can you tell when birds are disturbed?

Birds that walk away, take flight or dive are obviously disturbed. But if you watch more closely, you may see other early warning signals.



Rhinoceros Auklets will first paddle away from an approaching boat. As they become more concerned, they will lower their heads towards the water. Shortly after that, if the perceived threat does not move away, the auklets will dive.

Rhinoceros Auklets

Cormorants extend their necks and assume a more erect posture when stressed.

The cormorants below are showing signs of disturbance as they stretch their necks, move into the water, or take flight. The Harbour Seal is also alert.



Double-crested Cormorants on nests



Black Oystercatcher

If they are disturbed, gulls give harsh alarm cries and become agitated.

These gulls at their nesting colony are alert – an early sign of disturbance.



Glaucus-winged Gulls

