

# Marine Matters Ecological Almanac

## A Limestone Experience

by Cole Murdaugh and Eryn Sinclair  
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Humpback whales, porpoises, black bears, jellyfish, deer, woodpeckers, eagles, ancient murrelets. These are just a few of the creatures we encountered this year during our 'School in the Bush' journey. Each spring, the students of the Living and Learning School embark on a wilderness leadership, environmental science experience. This year we chose once again to visit Limestone Island and the ancient murrelet colony that is carefully monitored by volunteers and scientists associated with the Laskeek Bay Conservation Society.

One of the most powerful ways for children to become enthralled as caretakers and appreciators of the natural world is for them to become immersed in it. When they have the opportunity to positively interact with nature and to learn to live lightly with the earth, they gain skills and wisdom that can last a lifetime.

This year, one student's keen interest caught the attention of staff at Limestone and he was invited to stay on as a volunteer. The following is a piece of writing by this student, reflecting some of what he learned and experienced:

My name's Cole Murdaugh, age 12, and I volunteered as one of the younger volunteers on East Limestone Island (ELI.) A normal duration for a volunteer lasts about a week. For transportation reasons my time at ELI lasted six days.

During my time there, we were mainly studying the Ancient Murrelet bird colony. The Ancient Murrelet is a threatened bird living in only small colonies in Alaska, Russia, Japan and of course the Queen Charlotte Islands. *The special thing about the Ancient Murrelet colony on Haida Gwaii is that we have over 70% of the world's Ancient Murrelet population.*

To monitor the Ancient Murrelet population on ELI, researchers have set up plastic funnel fences going down a slope towards the ocean. Because of the Ancient Murrelet's many predators, these birds move into action at night. Between 10:00 PM and 2:30 AM volunteers trekked to North Cove where the funnels were. Then we waited until a chick came stumbling down the funnel.

The way that this works is that the parents of the Ancient Murrelet chicks will teach their offspring their call and specific pitch. The parents then fly down to the ocean where they will wait and make their call for the chicks to follow. Then the chicks have to fend for themselves, stumbling out of their burrow and making their way down towards the light. At this pitch dark time of night, the reflection on the water is the strongest source of light around. If the chicks successfully make it into the ocean they will follow their parents call, hopefully meet up with them and move to safer water.

Let's get back to if you catch a chick in a funnel. First you will be given some bird bags to put the chicks in. While you're waiting at the bottom of the funnel, you will hear a little bit of rustling on the plastic. Next you turn on your light to see if there are any chicks. If so, you bend over and carefully put the chick in bag. Pull the bag tight so they don't try and pop out! Then take the chick over to the banding shelter. This is where the banding, weighing, checking their webbed feet and all the data entry happens. Once all the data is recorded, you take them back to their home funnel, take them out on the beach and find a good slope for them to follow. Then turn off your light, open your bag and listen to the clinking band and the motoring feet in the water.

It is truly a unique experience! I am very thankful for the opportunity.