



# **Active Pass IBA**

## **Annual Report 2010**

**January 31, 2011**

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**Caretakers**

**[www.activepassIBA.ca](http://www.activepassIBA.ca)**



## **Introduction**

2010 was the first full year of the volunteer stewards' reporting on bird activities within the Active Pass IBA. Over the reporting year 8 stewards, plus co-caretaker Michael Dunn, observed 35 species using the IBA with a cumulative total of 31,333 birds for the Mayne Island side of Active Pass. For the Georgeson Bay portion of the IBA on Galiano Island, 17 species were observed with a cumulative total of one-day monthly maximums of 12,623 over the reporting year.

## **Qualifying Species**

This year was a tremendous year for spring Bonaparte's Gull staging. In all, 13,189 Bonaparte's were tallied with peak numbers of over 10,000 in April 2010. The highest daily maximums were recorded in April with 6,000 for Mayne at Miners Bay and 3,000 for Galiano at Georgeson Bay. On May 9 and 10, 2010 the last flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls left the IBA for breeding grounds to the north. Pacific Loon numbers totaled only 623 based on the volunteer observer records, far below qualifying thresholds for this species. Brandt's Cormorants observed in Active Pass for 2010 were 23 birds. This is an extremely low number and is much below historical reporting. The Christmas Bird Count, which includes Mayne, the Penders and Saturna islands held December 18, 2010 only tallied 15 Brandt's for this larger marine region. Based on these observations, the 2010 numbers for two of the qualifying species appear to be well below the expected range. Bonaparte's Gull numbers, however, were above previous reporting for monthly totals. There are no discernible reasons within the IBA for this apparent variation.

## **Conservation Threats**

No new conservation threats were observed over 2010 including no discernible increase in boating traffic.

## **Habitat Quality**

There continues to be ongoing changes to the shoreline and intertidal portions of the IBA. Soft shorelines continue to erode causing slumping and slope failure of the backshore. The soft shore erosion is due to a combination of ship wake, high water levels and storm surges. The eelgrass mapping program of the Mayne Island Conservancy detected an almost complete loss of the intertidal portion of Miners Bay eelgrass beds between 2008 and 2010 summer extents. Reasons for this annual change are not specifically known, but it is expected that extreme weather during maximum low tides may have been a factor as well as excessive Canada Goose browsing. The impact of the reduction of this prime marine ecosystem to the overall health of the IBA is not known at this time. The marine feeding areas used by the vast majority of birds (tidal upwelling, fronts and rapids) continue to be used heavily and appear to provide optimum feeding opportunities for these species.



*Miners Bay 2008*



*Miners Bay 2009*

## **Other Conservation Opportunities**

The Mayne Island Conservancy completed mapping of eelgrass within the IBA (see attached map). The second year of Sandlance spawning habitat inventories were completed. No Sandlance were detected within the IBA, but were elsewhere on Mayne Island. In addition, a first full year of surf smelt inventories was also carried out. The kelp bed mapping begun in 2009 was completed for all of Mayne Island including the Active Pass IBA. The next step will be to design and implement an ongoing monitoring program to assess changes in this important ecosystem. Again in 2010, the Mayne Island Conservancy and Mayne Island Recycling Society hosted a community beach cleanup for Earth Day (April 22). The Mayne School children cleaned the main beach at Miners Bay while members of the community cleaned other beaches of the IBA. In total there were 35 students plus 8 staff and parents who participated. For the IBA 200 kg of marine debris was collected, plastic of all kinds made up the bulk of this material. This amount was down from the previous year.



Over the last 4 years, a site for the Western Purple Martin Recovery Program has been operating within the IBA at Miners Bay. This bird species was almost completely extirpated from southwestern BC before the extensive nestbox program was initiated. This program uses pilings and specifically designed nest boxes to attract breeding pairs to the region. The boxes placed in Miners Bay attracted nesting pairs the first year they were installed. There have been successful broods every year since. This past year there was a funding shortfall for the nest monitoring/banding and migration monitoring (using geo-locators) components of the program. An appeal went out to all conservancies and other interested groups within the Salish Sea region where the recovery program operates. The Mayne Island Conservancy canvassed its membership and was able to raise about \$1000 toward these monitoring programs. Because of this and other donations the critical time series data record was preserved.

### Outreach Activities

In addition to the work being done for the Stewardship Program noted above, updates on IBA activities have gone in to Mayne Island's local newspaper. Presentations on the IBA and the stewardship program have been made at the all islands Conservancies annual meeting on Mayne Island. A poster was designed and used for display at the summer Farmers Market on Mayne Island. An Active Pass brochure was designed and printed this year.



# Active Pass Important Bird Area



## What is an Important Bird Area?

The Important Bird Area (IBA) program is an international effort to identify, conserve and monitor marine, freshwater and terrestrial sites that are key habitat for breeding, wintering and migrating birds. Since the 1980's over 100 countries have joined. Canada has identified 597 IBAs so far, including over 80 in British Columbia.



## How is an IBA chosen?

IBAs are designated using criteria related to the at-risk status of a species, a restricted breeding range, a site of general conservation interest, and/or a site of significant bird concentrations at any time of the year. Most Canadian IBAs fall under this latter category, reflecting the large percentage of our birds that migrate beyond our borders.

## How is the Active Pass IBA Important?

Active Pass was designated an IBA because it supports significant numbers of Pacific Loon and Brandt's Cormorant over winter as well as, Bonaparte's Gull during fall and spring migration. Up to ten pairs of Bald Eagles nest along the shores of the IBA, and up to 100 eagles have been seen foraging here in the winter. In all, 40 species of marine and marine associated birds regularly use Active Pass at some time during the year.

The rich tidal waters of Active Pass also provides key habitat for marine mammals and both migratory and resident fish species. For thousands of years, indigenous peoples have used these waters for shellfish gathering, reef fishing and waterfowl netting. Today's uses include fishing, beachcombing, scuba diving, kayaking and nature watching.



## The Key Species of Active Pass IBA

### Pacific Loon

The overall population of Pacific Loons is poorly known but 2 - 6,000 regularly winter in the pass - about 2% of the estimated total Pacific coast wintering population. Pacific Loons replace their wing feathers in late winter. This renders them flightless for a portion of the time as they re-grow new feathers. Their food here are fish but while breeding on tundra lakes, they also eat freshwater crustaceans, shellfish, and frogs. They build floating nests made of aquatic vegetation.

### Brandt's Cormorant

About 4,000 wintering Brandt's Cormorants have been recorded in Active Pass, which may be 3% of the total world population. While some nest along the outer BC coast most nest further south, especially along the California coast. They form breeding colonies on gently sloping islands and use seaweed for nests. Brandt's Cormorants tend to fly low over the water in distinct "V's" and can sometimes be seen foraging in large flocks near shore.

### Bonaparte's Gull

Bonaparte's Gulls use Active Pass as a feeding stop during migration, with about 10,000 being present during fall (4% of the estimated world's population), and between 7,000 and 15,000 during spring migration. It winters along the coast from Washington to Mexico with rare sightings in Active Pass. The Bonaparte's Gull nests in trees near lakes and marshes in northern evergreen forests. While on breeding grounds they feed on insects over freshwater bodies, but in Active Pass, they pluck small fish and crustaceans off the surface along tidal rips and upwelling areas. Their large flocks wheel and turn in the air much like shorebirds.

## Community Stewardship of the Active Pass IBA

The Mayne Island Conservancy Society and the Galliano Conservancy Association are joint caretakers of the Active Pass IBA. Sponsored by BC Nature, the caretakers provide community stewardship opportunities, undertake monitoring and reporting on the health of the IBA, provide public education and with other IBA caretakers, advocate conservation of the IBA sites.

Local volunteer stewards have been regularly reporting to the caretakers on bird and marine mammal observations and state of the marine habitat.

## Partners

Funding and logistical support gratefully acknowledged from:  
Vancity EnviroFund  
Mayne Island Conservancy Society  
Galliano Conservancy Association  
Mayne Island Parks and Recreation Commission  
Galliano Island Parks and Recreation Commission  
BC Nature.

Want to Learn More? For the IBA program, visit: [www.ibacanada.ca](http://www.ibacanada.ca)

For the Active Pass IBA, contact: Mayne Island Conservancy Society, Box 31, Mayne Island, BC V0N 2J0, ph:250-539-5745

Galliano Conservancy Association, RR#1 Sturdies Bay Road, Galliano Island, BC V0N 1P0 ph: 250-539-2424



With the Mayne Island Parks and Recreation Commission, the first two beach access signs were installed identifying the IBA. The signs have also been installed at beach accesses on Galiano Island.



*Michael Dunn, IBA co-caretaker (left) and Peter Askin, Chair, Mayne Island Parks and Recreation Commission.*

With respect to the larger information signs to be placed within Bellhouse Provincial Park on Galiano Island and within Georgina Point Lighthouse Heritage Park on Mayne Island, both signs at time of this report are completed. The Galiano Island is an original artwork that will be converted into a sign. The Mayne Island signage has been completed and the mounting frame fabricated. Both are awaiting final installation at each of these parks.

In early December 2010 Michael Dunn held a winter bird identification course for interested people, this included some of the IBA stewards. The course included a focus on the overwintering marine birds found around Mayne Island, particularly Active Pass. The course was followed with a field component that included some birding of the Active Pass IBA at Miners Bay.



*Active Pass IBA at Miners Bay, bird identification workshop participants. Michael Dunn photo*

## **Volunteer Time**

It is estimated that volunteers contributed over 230 hours of time toward the Active Pass IBA and its ecosystems. This includes the work of the caretakers, the stewards, the Mayne Island Conservancy, and the park commission and the Mayne School children. This represents 60 volunteers over the 2010 year.

## **Additional Comments**

Part of the stewardship program was to record observations of marine mammal activity and any strandings of birds or marine mammals. The field monitoring form designed for the IBA include fields to record marine mammal movements and unexpected events. Attached are the 2010 results of this monitoring component.

This year we had several observations of beached organisms. Significantly, there was one Humboldt Squid washed up in August. As well, one Common Loon and one Canada Goose were washed up in September. As for marine mammals, one adult Harbour Seal carcass was found in early August.



**QUALIFYING SPECIES INFORMATION**

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	Jan	Feb	Mar 1900	Apr 10845	May 400	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov 44	Dec	Total 13189
<b>Bonaparte's Gull</b>													
<b>Pacific Loon</b>	115	6		77							126	292	616
<b>Brandt's Cormorant</b>		10		2									12
<b>Unident. Corm.</b>				3								8	11
<b>OTHER SPECIES</b>													
<b>Canada Goose</b>			2						1	3			6
<b>Harlequin Duck</b>											4	16	20
<b>Surf Scoter</b>				1							21	21	43
<b>White-winged Scoter</b>			1	8							15	42	65
<b>Black Scoter</b>													
<b>Bufflehead</b>	26	8		37							135	50	256
<b>Common Goldeneye</b>	2	6										7	15
<b>Barrow's Goldeneye</b>	28	18		30							66	282	424
<b>Common Merganser</b>											4		4
<b>Red-breasted Merganser</b>	12			7								31	50
<b>Double-crested Cormorant</b>	20	2		2						5	34	17	80
<b>Pelagic Cormorant</b>	2	2	10								2	8	24
<b>Great Blue Cormorant</b>	3										1	1	5

Heron										
Northern Harrier							1			1
Osprey										
Bald Eagle	6	1	2				2		12	23
Black Oystercatcher	3							16	13	32
Black Turnstone								2		2
Surfbirds									100	100
Mew Gull	120	550		110		900	1500	14	61	3255
California Gull						50				50
Herring Gull	12									12
Thayer's Gull							40	3	3	46
Western Gull						50		2		52
Glaucous-winged Gull		6						25	11	42
Gull species		120	325	8520	50	500	3000	212	104	12831
Pigeon		1	1	2				1	2	7
Guillemot										
Northwestern Crow				4						4
Common Raven				2						2
Turkey Vulture						19				19
Belted Kingfisher						1			3	4
Red-necked Phalarope						10				10
Common Loon							1			1
Loon species								25		25
Marbled Murrelet								3		3



