

FIRST RECORD OF THE ANCIENT MURRELET AT KELOWNA, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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The Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) is a small seabird that breeds on islands around the north Pacific Ocean from China to British Columbia but is most numerous in Alaska and British Columbia (Gaston 1992). In British Columbia, it breeds only on the Queen Charlotte Islands. After completing its nesting activities, families generally disperse southward, from July to September, arriving as far south as California in late October

(Gaston 1994). Highest numbers in winter in the province occur near areas of upwelling off southern Vancouver Island and throughout the Juan de Fuca Strait (Campbell et al. 1990).

The Ancient Murrelet is the only North American alcid that is regularly reported at inland locations, and some have been recorded as far away as Quebec and Pennsylvania (Gaston 1994). Verbeek (1966) suggested that the vagrant occurrences were associated with storms on the Pacific coast that coincide with migratory movements of the species.

On 17 August 1945, while hiking along the shore of Okanagan Lake at Manhattan Point, Kelowna, British Columbia, I found a dead Ancient Murrelet washed ashore (Figure 1). Field notes recorded at the time were as follows:

“The bird was in its summer colours; black throat, white area over eye to back of head, bill yellow, and back area grey black. A small bird of 8 to 10 inches. A bird not to be expected in the area. This bird had not been dead long as it was in good shape. I placed the bird in the sand and covered it up. Birds of Canada by P. A. Taverner (1934) said nothing about this bird in the area of the Okanagan. Just that it is found on the seacoast from Alaska to California.”

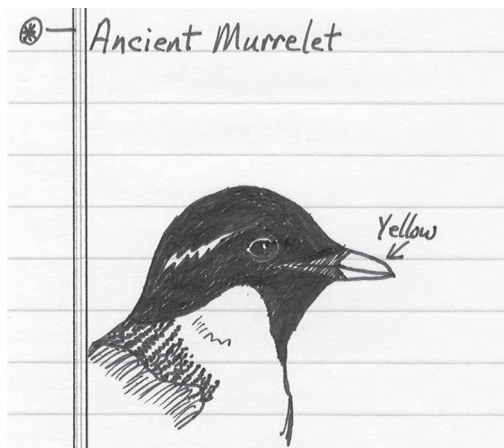


Figure 1. Field sketch of the head of the Ancient Murrelet found dead on the shore of Okanagan Lake near Manhattan Beach, Kelowna, BC on 17 August 1945. Drawing by Glenn R. Ryder. BC Photo 3445.

This was the fourth documented record for the Okanagan valley of six recorded through 1990 (Campbell et al. 1990; Cannings et al. 1987). Other records are from Vaseux Lake (26 May 1930), Rawlings [Swan] Lake (26 October 1939), Okanagan Landing (29 August 1942), Naramata (15 November 1975), and Peachland (21 August 1981).

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About the Author

Glenn has been recording wildlife in British Columbia for over 60 years. He is still passionate about collecting old bottles and artifacts, finding new plants, and is constantly learning from nature and its critters.