

Murres (turrs) or razorbills?

Due to their similar appearance to murres (turrs), distinguishing razorbills from thick-billed and common murres can be challenging, especially during harsh hunting and low light conditions. This can result in razorbills being inadvertently taken and can pose a conservation concern. It is important that hunters take the time to learn how to tell the difference between turrs and razorbills, and always make the effort to identify their target before shooting.



Left to right: Razorbill, thick-billed murre, common murre in summer plumage.
Sabina Wilhelm, Environment Canada-Canadian Wildlife Service

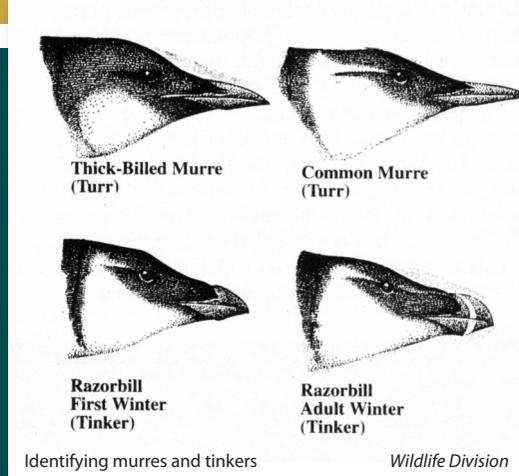
General differences

Thick-billed murres are stockier than common murres, with a shorter, thicker neck, larger head, and deeper bill. Thick-billed murres have a horizontal white line on their bill which is absent in common murres, and a distinctively thicker, stubbier bill than common murres. While razorbills are also quite stocky and thick-necked, an important distinguishing difference is that their deep bill is laterally compressed or flattened and contains a vertical white line.

It is important to note that the smaller bill of the first-winter razorbill lacks this white line, thereby making it more similar to the bill of the thick-billed murre. Unlike murres, razorbills have a long, pointed tail, which extends past their feet when in flight. When the razorbill is sitting on the water, its tail is often raised noticeably upward.

Seasonal differences

In summer, thick-billed murres and razorbills differ from common murres with sootier upperparts (more brownish in common murres). In many common murres, the eye-ring and narrow groove behind the eye is white; a pattern not seen in thick-billed murres or razorbills. In winter, thick-billed murres are best distinguished from common murres by the plumage on their heads. Thick-billed murres are entirely black on the top and sides of their head, while common murres have a prominent white patch behind their eye, bordered below by a black eye-line. The plumage on the razorbill's head resembles that of the common murre, with the white extending above and behind the eye.



Best management practices

- Young razorbills (tinkers) are similar in appearance to adult murres (turrs) in the fall. Hunters should be able to distinguish between the species before shooting: be sure before you shoot.

- Turrs and razorbills often abandon their nests when disturbed and will not nest again that year. Avoid nesting grounds during breeding season and never remove or touch eggs.

- Work together to help conserve resources: the support of like-minded people in coastal communities can truly make a difference to conservation.

- Avoid littering, which attracts predators, and volunteer to participate in a beach cleanup.

- Do not dump pollutants into the ocean, and take care when refueling. Report dead birds to a local CWS office and oiled birds to the Canadian Coast Guard at 1-800-563-9089.

- Hunt within season, and keep within legal bag limits in your area.

- Educate others on the importance of resource conservation and positively influence the actions of others.



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Thick-billed Murres
Wildlife Division

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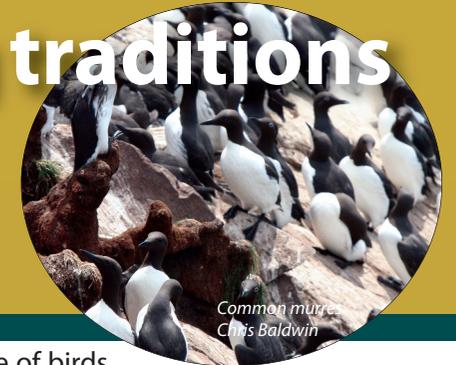
Wildlife Division



Celebrating Newfoundland & Labrador's hunting traditions

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have hunted murre, locally known as turrs, as a winter food source and for recreation for many years. This traditional hunt is a very important part of our natural heritage. In 1949 its importance was recognized after Newfoundland

and Labrador joined Canada and it was proposed that hunting of all seabirds would be closed. In 1956, after a public outcry the province became the only area in North America where turrs (common and thick-billed murre) can be legally harvested by non-Aboriginal people.



Common murre
Chris Baldwin

Coastal conservation

Newfoundland and Labrador's Wildlife Division, as a partner of the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture, has implemented a province-wide Coastal Habitat Stewardship Program. This program is an education and enhancement conservation initiative that partners with municipal governments and resource users to conserve coastal habitats, with the goal of sustaining associated seabird and sea duck populations. As part of this program, it is also a goal to foster a stewardship ethic among hunters and encourage them to continue to be active stewards of their natural heritage, as well as mentors to younger generations.



Thick-billed murre (turr)
Wildlife Division

Turr management

Turr management and legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador is the responsibility of the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS). Regulations govern daily bag and possession limits, and hunting seasons throughout the province. Hunters are also required to be residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, and must possess a Migratory Game Bird Hunting Permit, validated with a Wildlife Habitat Conservation Stamp and a Newfoundland and Labrador Outdoor Identification Card, while hunting. Please refer to the Newfoundland and Labrador Hunting and Trapping Guide or www.gov.nl.ca/env/wildlife/hunting for more information. A portion of the revenues derived from the sale of the stamps from turr hunters is directed toward enhancing turr management and conservation to help ensure sustainable populations. These revenues are distributed through the Newfoundland and Labrador Murre Conservation Fund (<http://www.whc.org/conservation/conservation-projects/newfoundland-and-labrador>).

You can make a difference

Turrs are now included in the CWS Species Composition Survey. Every year selected hunters are encouraged to participate in the Wing and Tail Survey by submitting harvested turr wings. Selected individuals will receive a kit consisting of a set of instructions and wing envelopes.

By submitting turr wings, CWS can determine the species and age of birds taken in the hunt.

Responsible and sustainable harvest management is an important aspect of the conservation of all wildlife, including seabirds and sea ducks. Due to harsh hunting conditions, one of the challenges related to the hunt is the accidental harvest of razorbills - locally known as tinkers - which are protected from the hunt. Due to their similar appearance, distinguishing razorbills from common and thick-billed murre can be difficult and can pose a conservation concern. It is important that hunters recognize the differences between the species and positively identify their target before shooting. Other concerns around the turr hunt include harvesting outside of the designated season, non-compliance with the prescribed bag and possession limits, and the illegal sale and hunting of other seabirds and sea ducks outside of their given seasons.

Turr and razorbill biology: a reason for concern

After over-wintering in coastal waters, turrs and razorbills return to their colonies to nest on ledges or crevices along cliffs of rocky islands. The female lays one egg on bare ground. The pair takes turns incubating the egg for approximately 33 days until it hatches. If the egg does not hatch or if the chick dies, the pair will not lay again that year. For that reason, it is very important that colonies are not disturbed. The chick is cared for and fed by both parents. After two to three weeks, chicks take to sea with their male parent, where they mature and learn to fly.

By fall, chicks have learned to feed, dive and fly, and are ready to move into the open ocean for the winter. At this time, young razorbills closely resemble turrs, making them most vulnerable to hunters. It is important that hunters correctly identify their target before shooting. Additionally, turrs and razorbills do not breed until they have reached four or five years of age, and may live for another 10 to 20 years. Thus, in order to maintain stable turr and razorbill populations in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is important that individuals are able to mature and live a long and productive adulthood.



Summer razorbill (tinker)
Wildlife Division

Common murre
Chris Baldwin