

Species Identification



Northern Pintail (G. Sorenson)



American Wigeon, female on right (G. Sorenson)

Iceland Gull (Thayer's)



Herring Gull



TheWildernessAlternative (eBird)



Gulls

Species	Relative Size	Leg Colour	Eye Colour	Bill	Mantle (back)	Wing-tips
Glaucous-winged	Large, bulky	Pink	Dark	Large yellow with orange spot, like Herring but usually thicker	Light gray	Gray
Western	Large, bulky	Pink	Palish	Large yellow with orange spot, bulbous, often with orange hue	Dark gray/slatey	Black
Herring	Large	Pink	Pale	Long, yellow, with orange spot	Light gray	Black
Iceland	Medium	Deep pink	Darkish	Like Herring but smaller	Light/medium gray	Black, often pale edging
California	Medium	Yellow	Dark	Yellow with black and red spots near tip	Darkish gray	Black
Ring-billed	Small, but larger than Mew	Yellow	Pale	Yellow with black ring	Light gray	Black
Mew	Small	Yellow-green	Dark	Small/slender, unmarked, yellowish-green	Medium gray	Black
Bonaparte's	Smallest	Orange-red	Dark	Dark and thin	Light gray	Black

Challenging to ID, but IDs to species are important for trend data
 Take photos for help if you are unsure, especially for flocks

Heerman's Gull can be found around Victoria and are quite distinct looking



Gulls

Western Gull



- Large, heavy looking
- Dark mantle
- Black wing tips
- Pink Legs

Bonaparte's Gull



- Smallest gull
- Dark bill and eye
- Black spot in winter





Gulls

Glaucous-winged Gull



Herring Gull



TheWildernessAlternative (eBird)

Iceland Gull (Thayer's)



California Gull



Ring-billed Gull



Mew Gull



Gulls

Herring Gull

Iceland Gull (Thayer's)



TheWildernessAlternative (eBird)

Less common, but still regular



More common

Species	Relative Size	Leg Colour	Eye Colour	Bill	Mantle (back)	Wing-tips
Herring	Large	Pink	Pale	Long, yellow, with orange spot	Light gray	Black
Iceland	Medium	Deep pink	Darkish	Like Herring but smaller	Light/medium gray	Black, often pale edging

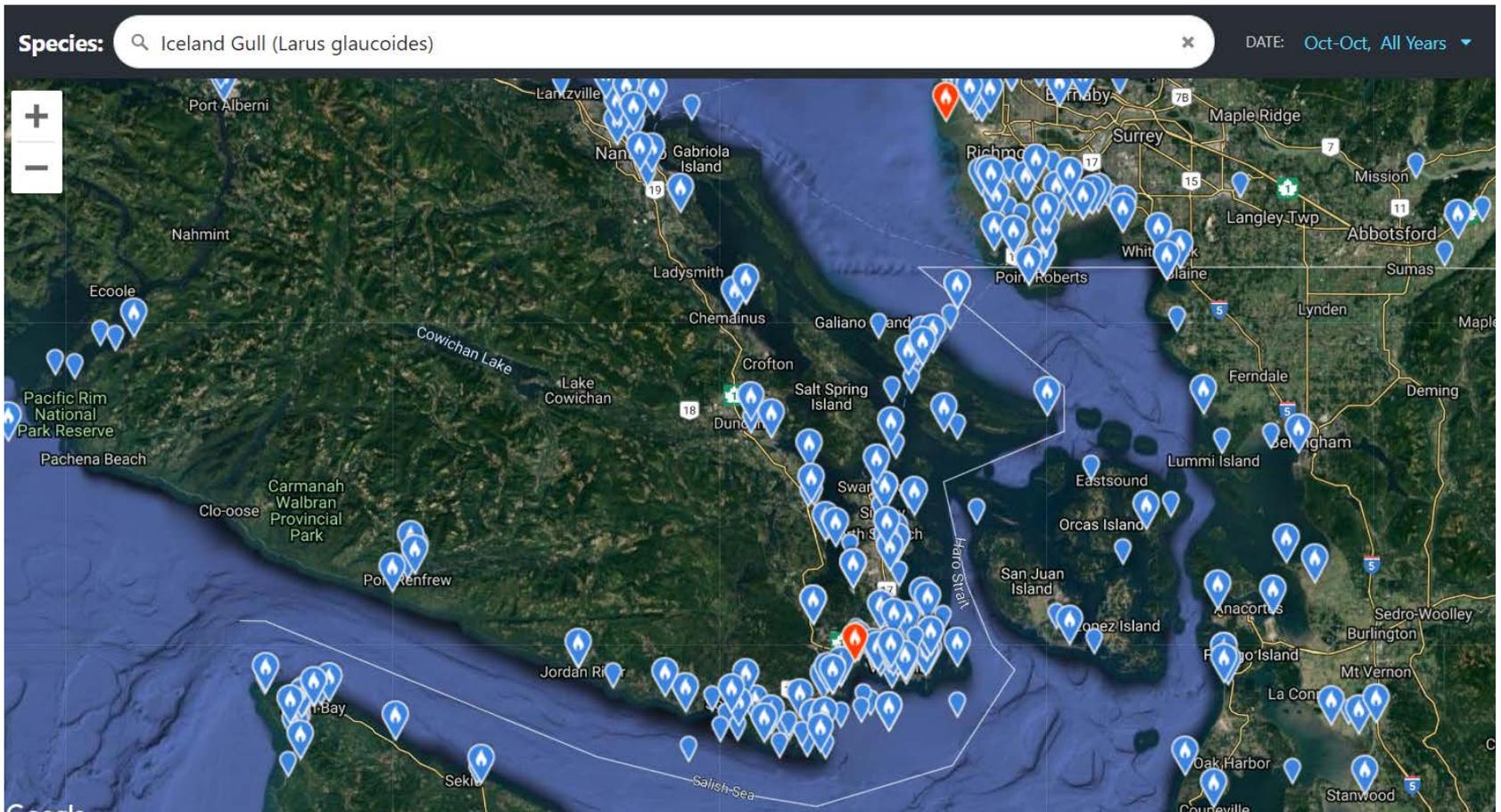


Gulls

October Distribution from eBird

Iceland Gull (Thayer's)

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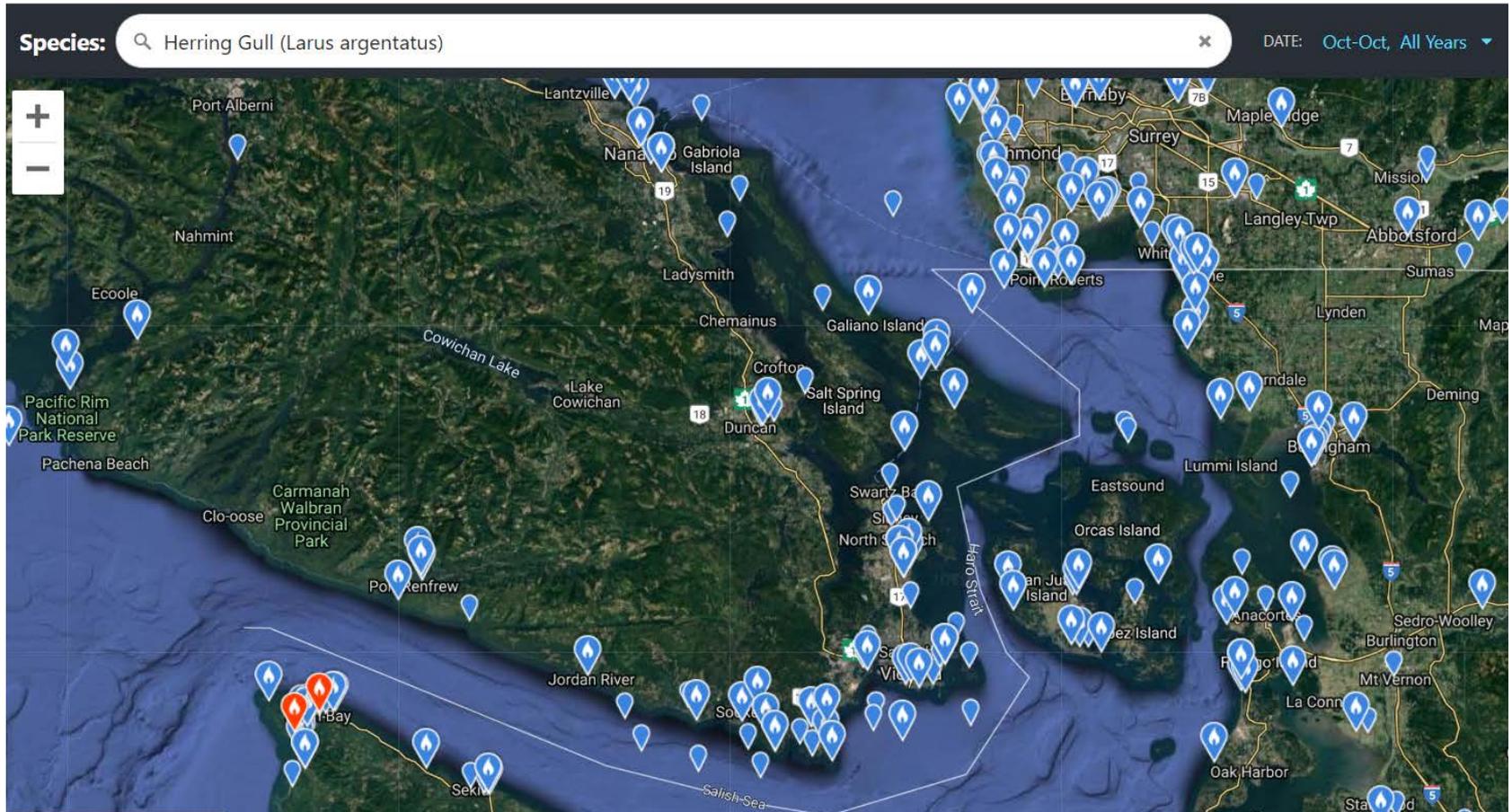


Gulls

October Distribution from eBird

Herring Gull

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Gulls

California Gull

Ring-billed Gull

Mew Gull



Charlotte Morris (eBird)

Species	Relative Size	Leg Colour	Eye Colour	Bill	Mantle (back)	Wing-tips
California	Medium	Yellow	Dark	Yellow with black and red spots near tip	Darkish gray	Black
Ring-billed	Small, but larger than Mew	Yellow	Pale	Yellow with black ring	Light gray	Black
Mew	Small	Yellow-green	Dark	Small/slender, unmarked, yellowish-green	Medium gray	Black



Gulls

What is this gull?



Dark wingtips and pink legs =
Western or Herring or
Iceland

Not dark grey mantle
= Herring or Iceland

Dark eye, rounded head,
bill appearing thin =

Iceland Gull



Common Loon



Pacific Loon



Red-throated Loon



- Common in winter on our coasts
- Winter plumage dark gray above, white below
- Partial collar
- Large bill and head compared to Pacific Loon

- Form large flocks during migration
- Smaller than Common Loon
 - Bill, head size, body size
- May show chin strap
- Darker colour around eye
- General impression of slimmer bird than COLO, in flight and on water

- Less frequent on our coasts
- Found in bays, less in open ocean
- Thin bill often tipped up
- Speckled back in winter
- White neck and lower face



Western Grebe



- Our largest grebe
- Long neck with white throat
- Dark face surrounds red eye
- Thin bill, appears curved up

Red-necked Grebe



- Smaller than Western Grebe, stockier
- Bigger than Horned Grebe with larger bill
- Yellow-green bill
- Neck often reddish-brown
- Dark eye (not red)

Horned Grebe



- Most common wintering grebe
- Smaller than other common grebe species
- White face (more than Red-necked)
- Small gray beak



Double-crested Cormorant

Pelagic Cormorant

Brandt's Cormorant



- Our largest cormorant
- Face is yellow/ orange at all times of the year
- Adults are all black, juveniles (like image) have paler throat and chest

- Smallest cormorant in BC
- Thin neck and beak
- Breeding adults have white patch
- Glossy black-green overall, generally appear black

- Similar color to Pelagic
- Thicker bill and neck
- Beige throat patch always present
- Found in large groups more than Pelagic
- White plumes in summer on head



Common Murre

Pigeon Guillemot

Marbled Murrelet



Ryan Shaw (eBird)



- Bigger than guillemot and murrelet
- Long, sharp bill, held at angle
- Dark brown above, white below

- Whiter overall in winter than murres and murrelets
- Bright red feet
- Thinned head and neck
- Small pointy bill

- Small alcid normally alone or with pair
- Fast, buzzy flight
- White on throat, belly, and white line on back

Bigger



Small



Surf Scoter



- Adult male has white behind head, on forehead, and on orange bill
- Large bill
- Pale eye on adult females

White-winged Scoter



- White wing patches on males and females
- More evenly sloped forehead
- Bigger than other scoter species

Black Scoter



- No white markings
- Thinner bill, often with yellow at base
- Females have dark cap and pale cheeks
- More round head shape



Harlequin Duck

Barrow's Goldeneye

Common Goldeneye



Brian Hicks (eBird)



Kathryn Keith (eBird)



Brian Hicks (eBird)

- Adult males are very distinct, even in winter
- Females have two white patches on face

- Less white on body and tear shaped face patch
- Female usually has mostly yellow bill

- Whiter body and round face patch
- Female usually mostly black bill, overlap between species

Long-tailed Duck



- Very distinct sea duck
- Bold patterning, long tail
- Pink in bill

Bufflehead



- Breeding males are very distinct – mostly white
- Females and non-breeding males have single white cheek patch
- Very small size



Mallard

Northern Pintail

Gadwall



- Orange legs and feet
- Orange beak with some dark (most orange)
- Dark eye stripe
- White feathers on tail
- Blueish speculum (colored feathers on wings during flight)

- Gray legs and feet
- Slimmer, longer bird than Mallard
- Plain face
- Dark gray beak

- Similar to Mallard but overall smaller look
- Less orange on just edges of bill
- Yellow legs
- White speculum in flight
- Domed head shape



American Wigeon



- Very numerous in migration, and in winter
- **Head shape is distinct to wigeons**
- Small round head, dark shadowing around eye
- Small gray bill with black tip

Green-winged Teal



- **Smallest dabbling** – recognizable by size
- Green speculum visible
- Face similar to Mallard, but dark bray bill

Northern Shoveler



- **Large bill is distinct**
- Similar look to Mallard except green speculum
- Orange legs



Dunlin

Sanderling

Western Sandpiper



- Larger and longer-legged than Western Sandpiper
- Arrive later than most peeps in the fall
- Longer, droopy black bill
- Black legs

- Distinctive running behavior
- Short and straight black bill
- Dark legs, pale body
- Dark mark on folded wings (lesser wing coverts) visible in winter

- Black droopy bill
- Black legs
- Smaller than Dunlin
- Uncommon in winter

Breeding Dunlin (left) and Western Sandpiper



Semipalmated Sandpiper



- Less common than other sandpipers
- Gray-brown above, pale with streaks below
- Short black bill, nob at end
- Black legs

Least Sandpiper



- Darker and smaller than similar species
- Crouching behavior
- Yellowish legs
- Short, droopy bill

Black-bellied Plover



- Larger than all mudflat sandpiper species
- Thick dark bill and large eye
- Black armpits in flight

Western Sandpiper
behind crouching
Least Sandpiper





Short-billed Dowitcher

Long-billed Dowitcher

Greater Yellowlegs



Lesser Yellowlegs



- Slightly shorter bill than Long-billed
- When foraging, back appears flat
- Brownish-gray with barred flanks

- Relatively gray in non-breeding plumage
- Very hunched appearance while foraging



Black Turnstone

Surfbird

Black Oystercatcher



- Small, chunky bird
- Thin, short black bill
- White belly contrasting with dark body

- Larger gray shorebird with thick yellow legs
- Orange base to bill

- Distinct large, black shorebird
- Long, bright orange bill



Counting Waterbirds

Herring spawn season in Baynes Sound. Photo: A.Martell

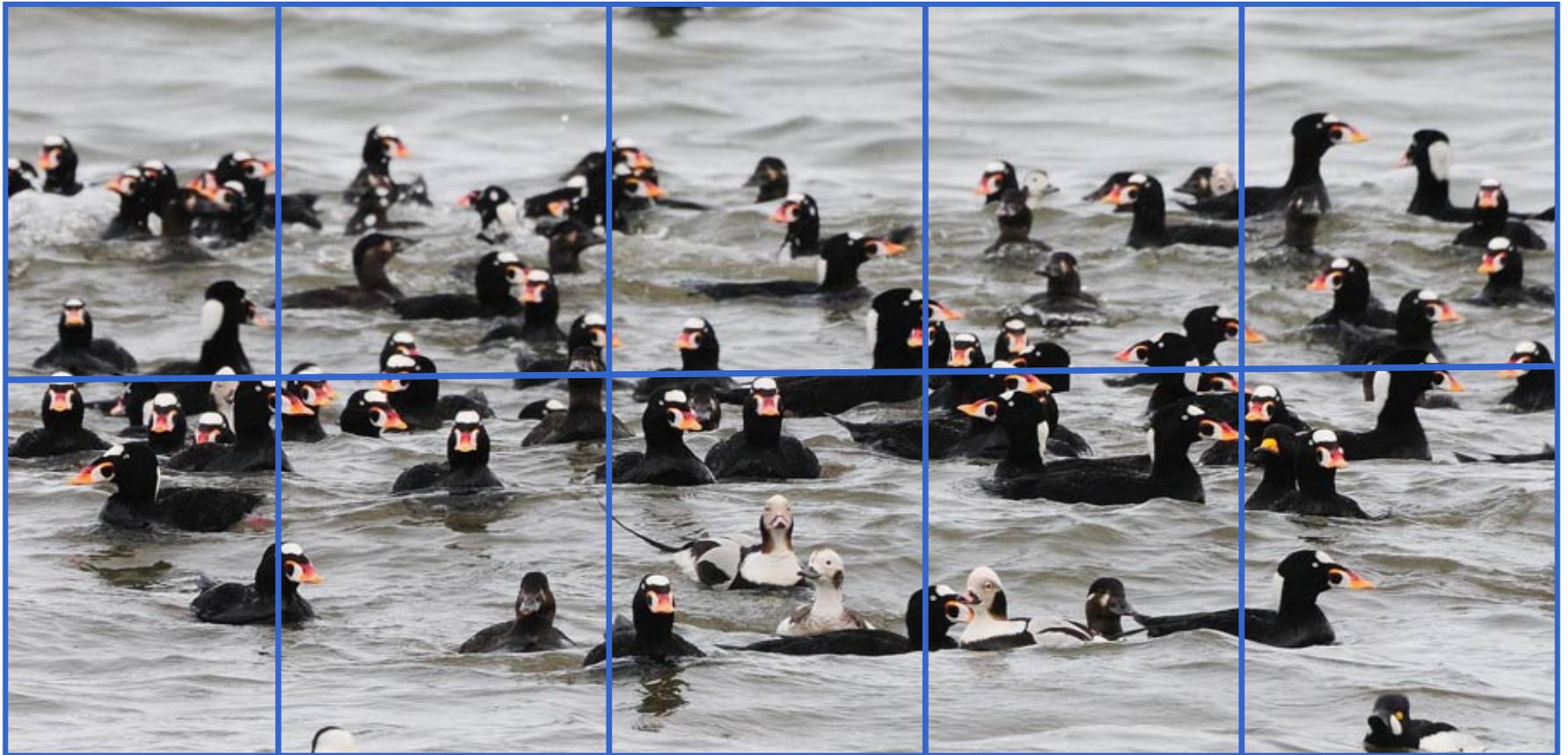




Counting Waterbirds

- Assess flock size & species composition:
 - How many birds? How many species? Look for any unusual or rare species.
 - Is the flock dense or well spaced out?
 - Are the birds actively diving, flying, is there a predator around spooking them (e.g., Peregrine Falcon)
- Can you count them easily by individual bird?
 - If not, estimate using appropriate sub-group classes
- If multiple species, estimate composition along transects

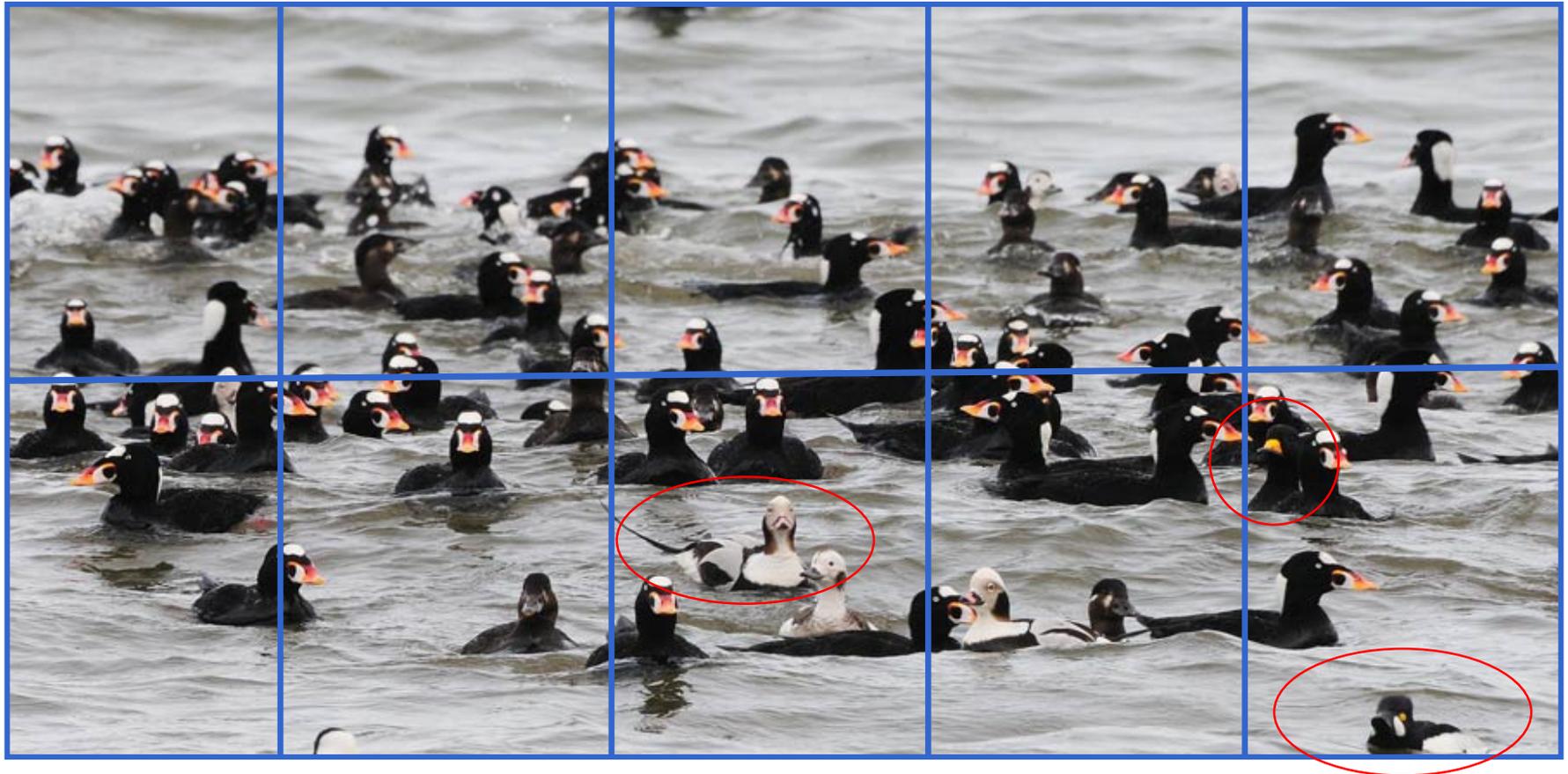
Counting Waterbirds



How many species? How many individuals?

Photo: M. Yip

Counting Waterbirds



71 Surf Scoter, 6 Long-tailed Duck, 1 Barrow's Goldeneye, 1 Black Scoter
95% Surf Scoter, 4% Long-tailed Duck, 1% other

Counting Waterbirds



There are 10 birds in the yellow box. How many birds are there in the flock?

Photo: R. Tizard

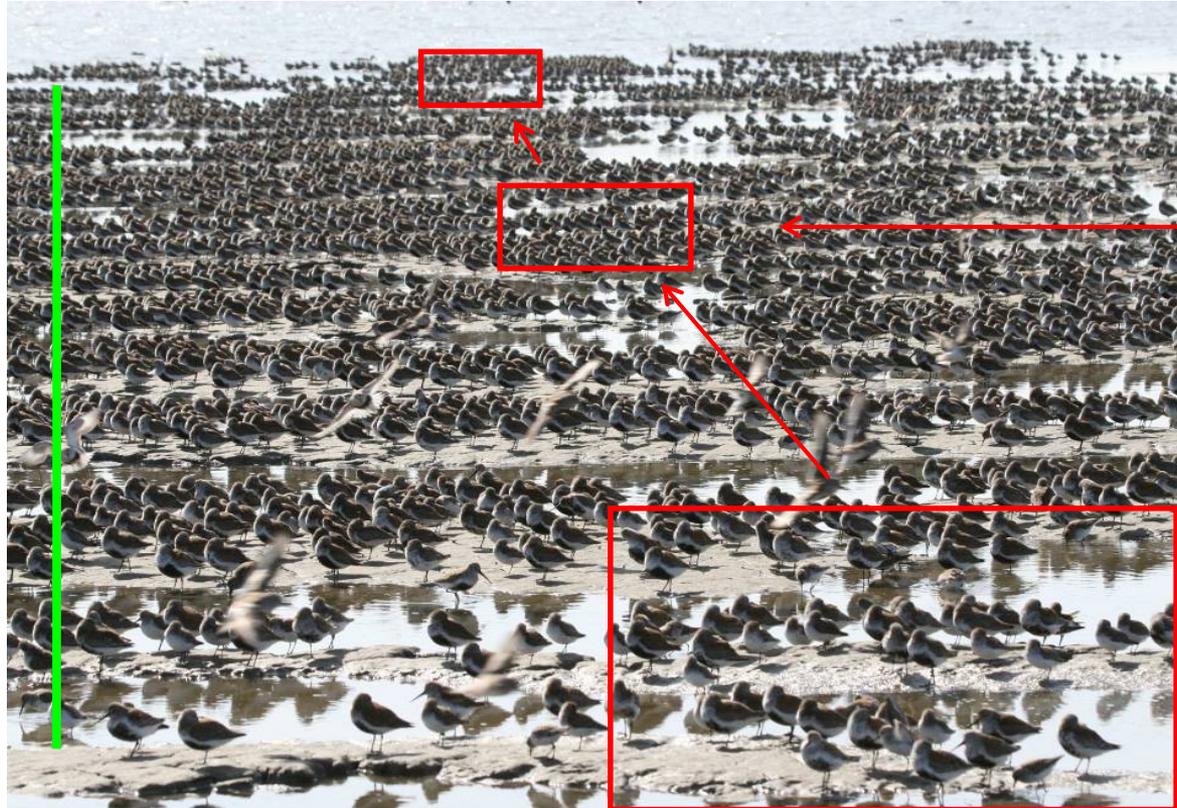
Counting Waterbirds



68 Common Murre in this flock!

Photo: R. Tizard

Counting Waterbirds



Note how the size of your count-estimate frame decreases with distance.

56 birds

Photo: M. Lemon

Estimating flocks of many 1,000s best done in sub-groups of 500-1,000. There's probably ~2,000 birds in this picture. **Estimate the species composition** by counting the # of each species along transects through the flock.

Estimate of ~60 Dunlin to ~20 Westerns → $\frac{3}{4}$ Dunlin and $\frac{1}{4}$ Westerns → ~1,500 Dunlin and ~500 Westerns



Further Counting Help

- [Ebird](#)
 - For bird counting tips and techniques for counting single-species flocks see [Bird Counting 101](#)
 - For guidance for counting large numbers, moving flocks, and mixed species flocks see [Bird Counting 201](#)



- Practice with an experienced person, it gets easier!
- Start with smaller, easier flocks and progress to larger groups.
- Take photos to try to calibrate your eye.
- Have fun!