

Rare Ocean Bird Breeds On Kodiak Island

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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey are teaming up in funding a research project aimed at studying a rare coastal bird in Alaska, which has recently been discovered to take up part of Kodiak Island as their breeding grounds.

Kittlitz's (kit-lits-es) Murrelets (Mur-uh-lets) are the rarest breeding bird in coastal Alaska. To date, there have only been 40 nests documented statewide. James Lawonn, a seasonal field biology technician for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has been studying the bird all summer along with two other researchers. He says they have documented four nests on the Southwest portion of Kodiak Island, where they had their camp set up.

(Kittlitz 1 :22s "to our field site.")

He says this study was the first year of a five year study. Researchers have two main sites they are observing.

(Kittlitz 2 :24s "near glaciers.")

Lawonn says the research gathered at these sites will be used as baseline information to make studying these birds in their more remote and natural habitats a little easier in the future, especially since there isn't a whole lot known about the bird yet.

(Kittlitz 3 :33 "on the breeding grounds.")

He says
what makes the bird even more mysterious is that fact that no one knows where
they disappear to in the winter months.

(Kittlitz 4 :28s “…cliffs right on the ocean.”)

Kittlitz’s Murrelet populations
were estimated at 100-thousand 15-years-ago, and for reasons unknown, are
dropping about 15 percent on a yearly basis. He says their population today is
only estimated to be at 15-thousand birds, and that they hope to figure out why
their numbers are declining. Kittlitz’s Murrelets populate rocky, vegetation
free areas and cliffs located in or around the glaciers of coastal Alaska. They are most common
in southeast and south central Alaska.

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