

Eggs — Maniit

MANIGSURCIQUKUT. – WE'RE GOING TO LOOK FOR EGGS.



Photo: Black oystercatcher eggs on the shore of Kizhuyak Bay.

Bird eggs are a favorite spring food in Alutiiq communities. Each year many thousands of seabirds nest along the rocky shores of the Gulf of Alaska coast. Collectors begin gathering eggs in May, particularly gull eggs. To avoid eggs with developing chicks, it is important to collect those that have been recently laid. Elders teach that you should not collect from a nest with three eggs. This means that the bird has laid its entire clutch and the eggs have been developing for some time. Most people collect eggs by boat, but in the past, they were also harvested by rappelling down steep cliffs with the aid of ropes made from sea-mammal hide.

In the past, people ate eggs fresh or stored them in pits for future use. Elders remember cooking eggs and other fresh foods in hollowed-out cottonwood logs on the beach. They dropped hot rocks from a campfire into the log to heat water for cooking. Before refrigeration, people stored eggs in grass-lined pits to keep them cool, but unfrozen, throughout the winter. Upright sticks marked these pits so they could be easily located.