

Saqullkananek Pililuni – BIRDS AS RESOURCES



Birds are an abundant and valuable natural resource in the Kodiak Archipelago, as sources of both food and raw material. Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people hunted marine birds, waterfowl, and even raptors for their meat, skins, feathers, beaks, talons, and bone. Spring bird eggs have long been a favorite fresh food.

Alutiiq people harvested eagles and geese with fish-baited snares set in feeding areas. They hunted ducks and seabirds from kayaks using special bird darts, or on land with bows and arrows, or braided sinew nets. Seabirds could also be collected at coastal rookeries. Using ropes made of sea mammals skin, hunters repelled down the rocky cliffs, snatching seabirds from their roosts.

Although birds contributed less to the annual diet than foods like salmon or sea mammals, they were of great economic importance. With few land mammals in the Kodiak Archipelago, bird skins were the primary material for clothing. Alutiiq women fashioned long, hoodless parkas from the hides of puffins, cormorants, and even eagles. Alutiiq people did not tan bird skins, but washed, scraped, and chewed the pelts to clean and soften them for clothing. The number of pelts needed for a parka varied by species and garment design. One source reports that it took 150 cormorant neck skins to create a ceremonial parka. Another notes that 10 eagle skins could be made into a coat.

Bird feathers, *culut*, were also used to fletch arrows, stuff mattresses, make brooms, start fires, and decorated a variety of objects, from gut skin raingear and basketry, to hunting hats and ceremonial masks.



Wooden bird carving,
AD 1400–1750, Koniag
Collection, Karluk One site.



Petroglyph from Cape Alitak,
Kodiak Island.

TUNNGAQ – PUFFIN

There are two varieties of puffins—*tunngat* in the Kodiak region: the tufted puffin (Latin: *Lunda cirrhata*) and the horned puffin (Latin: *Fratercula corniculata*). These stout little birds live in near shore waters, nesting on rocky cliffs. Puffins are small, weighing up to two pounds. Although Alutiiq people ate their meat—which is reported to taste like tuna fish—they also used puffins for raw material. Puffin skins made warm, water-resistant parkas; puffin bone could be carved into small tools like needles and awls; and their bright orange beaks created rattles and decorated clothing.