



Al Martin HCTF Conservation Scholarship Recipient 2026



Sonya Pastran

Sonya Pastran is a PhD student at the University of British Columbia's Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, supervised by Dr. Brian Hunt. Her research focuses on the habitat connectivity of the Threatened Marbled Murrelet, integrating movement ecology, diet, and habitat use to better understand the links between marine and terrestrial ecosystems. Sonya began her journey in ecology in 2014 as an intern with the Laskeek Bay Conservation Society in Haida Gwaii. It was there that she was first introduced to seabird research, working in a remote coastal environment that would ultimately shape the direction of her career. What began as an early field experience developed into a long-term interest in seabird ecology and conservation.

She went on to complete a BSc in Ecology at the University of Calgary, where her undergraduate research investigated wildlife disease in coyotes and red foxes and resulted in two peer-reviewed publications. She returned to seabird research for her MSc at Simon Fraser University's Centre for Wildlife Ecology, leading two field seasons in Haida Gwaii investigating the marine ecology of Marbled Murrelets. Her MSc research examined how oceanographic conditions and shoreline predators influence where murrelets occur at sea, establishing many of the ecological questions that continue to guide her research today. Following her MSc, Sonya continued working in seabird research with Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). Her work has increasingly brought together field ecology and quantitative approaches, including at-sea surveys, seabird capture and tracking, habitat modelling, GIS, and the analysis of large and long-term ecological datasets. She has worked on seabird research throughout coastal British Columbia, from southern Vancouver Island to Haida Gwaii and Queen Charlotte Strait. Her research has contributed to 11 peer-reviewed publications, with much of her work focused on Marbled Murrelets and the conservation of Pacific seabirds.

Her PhD brings together her background in seabird field ecology, tracking, spatial analysis, and habitat modelling with expertise at UBC's Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries in marine food webs, ecosystem oceanography, molecular approaches, and statistical ecology. By integrating new tracking technologies with diet and prey sampling, environmental DNA, and spatial modelling, she aims to better understand where Marbled Murrelets forage, what they eat, how prey availability influences their movements, and how their use of the marine environment connects with inland nesting habitat.



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