Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus bachmani*

Though a fairly common resident on Los Coronados Islands, the Black Oystercatcher is just a rare visitor on the nearby coast of San Diego County, seen at all seasons. The oystercatcher frequents natural rocky shorelines, occasionally jetties of riprap. In 2003 a pair was courting on Zuñiga Jetty at the mouth of San Diego Bay—they may have nested and fledged one young.

Winter: Point Loma (S7) and La Jolla (P7) are the primary sites for the Black Oystercatcher in San Diego County.

Photo by Anthony Mercieca

From 1997 to 2002 (all seasons combined) we recorded two sightings at Point Loma, three at La Jolla, plus one from the north end of Sunset Cliffs Natural Park (R7; 24 April 2000, V. P. Johnson). All sightings during the atlas period were of one or two individuals, but up to five were at Point Loma 20 March–2 May 1992 (M. and B. McIntosh, AB 46:480, 1992). Three were at Imperial Beach (V10) 24 September 1980 (AB 35:226, 1981), and one was there 1 May and 13 June 1982 (D. M. Parker, E. A. Cardiff, AB 36: 894, 1016, 1982). The only record for northern San Diego County is of one on the breakwater for the Oceanside harbor (H5) 7 February 1987 (J. O'Brien, AB 41:328, 1987).

Migration: Records of the Black Oystercatcher in San Diego County form no clear seasonal pattern.

Breeding distribution: On 16 May 2003, Robert T. Patton found a pair in courtship display and apparently prospecting for nest sites on Zuñiga Jetty (S8). The birds were seen regularly through 13 June, then disappeared (during incubation?) until 9 July. On 23 July, the last date the oystercatchers were seen at this site in 2003, there were three birds, suggesting a possible juvenile (D. M. Parker, M. Sadowski, L. Norton).

Conservation: Before 1972 the only specific record of the Black Oystercatcher in San Diego County was of the single specimen, collected at Coronado (T9) 2 June 1915 (SDNHM 20645). Since 1977 the species has occurred nearly annually. The possible colonization in 2003 may be part of a continuing trend to slow increase.