

Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*

The Black-footed was the only albatross regular on the ocean off San Diego during the 20th century. It was once fairly common during late spring and summer, but its numbers off southern California have decreased greatly. An unsustainably high rate of mortality due to incidental kill by the longline fishery now threatens the entire species.

Migration: Off southern California, the Black-footed Albatross is most frequent in May and June, concentrating along the Santa Rosa–Cortés Ridge (Briggs et al. 1987). It is rare closer to shore than San Clemente Island, though it has been seen as near the mainland as 1 mile off Mission Beach 16 May 1981 (G. McCaskie) and 3 miles off San Diego 20 May 1989 (J. O'Brien, AB 43:536, 1989). The only specimen preserved from shore was found dead on the beach at Carlsbad (I6) 27 May 1981 (SDNHM 41400).

Conservation: From the maximum of 112 birds 25 miles west of Point Loma 5 August 1958 (AFN 12:436, 1958), the number of Black-footed Albatrosses seen off San Diego County has declined steadily. In the 1970s three to six could be expected on a spring or summer day



Photo by Richard E. Webster

spent on a boat well offshore (Unitt 1984). Since then the species has become rare, in parallel with the decline of the ocean productivity off southern California during the warm-water years of the 1980s and 1990s. Across the North Pacific Ocean, the number of Black-footed Albatrosses killed by swallowing the baited hooks drawn behind longline fishing boats is greater than what the species' reproductive rate can sustain. As a result, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature has designated the species as threatened.