

Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*

Proper interpretation of occurrences of rare birds requires context, and in the case of very rare birds accumulating that context may take decades. This is the story of San Diego County's—and California's—only Black-tailed Gull. Collected in 1954, this Asian bird was long dismissed as so unlikely to reach San Diego unaided that it was presumed to have been brought across the Pacific on a ship. More recently, additional individuals have shown up elsewhere in North America, suggesting that the Black-tailed Gull occasionally does reach this continent as a vagrant on its own (Lethaby and Bangma 1998).

Migration: Monroe (1955) collected California's only Black-tailed Gull at the former Naval Training Center on north San Diego Bay (S8) 28 November 1954, after finding it two days earlier (UMMZ 136176). The next nearest record is of one photographed at El Golfo de Santa Clara, Sonora, 7 June 1997 (Garrett and Molina 1998). Heindel and Patten (1996) outlined the basis for the California Bird Records Committee's reversing course and adding the Black-tailed Gull to the state's bird list.



Photo by Brian L. Sullivan