

AUKS, MURRES, AND PUFFINS — FAMILY ALCIDAE

Common Murre *Uria aalge*

The Common Murre is an irregular winter visitor to the ocean off San Diego County, which represents the southern extreme of the species' range—there are only a few records for northernmost Baja California. Because of its high sensitivity to changing oceanographic conditions like El Niño and ocean warming, the murre experiences wide swings in food availability and nesting success. These ever-changing factors affect how many birds end up in marginal habitat like the coast of San Diego County.

Winter: The Common Murre is usually uncommon off San Diego County and seldom seen from shore except at La Jolla (P7) during northwest winds. Some years bring larger influxes, however, like 1958 (140 on the San Diego Christmas bird count 21 December), 1976 (72 offshore between Point Loma and Imperial Beach 18 December, D. W. Povey), 1982 (60 off San Diego 9 January, G. McCaskie, AB 36:331, 1982), and 2002 (34 at La Jolla 18 December, B. L. Sullivan).

Migration: The Common Murre's appearance and departure in San Diego County vary much from year to year as well. Eleven at La Jolla 10 October 2000 (P. A. Ginsburg, NAB 55:103, 2001) were exceptionally early. Few remain after early May, but after the influx of 1976–77, stragglers were noted as late as 6 July (one off Pacific Beach, Q7, D. W. Povey), after that of 2002–03, to 29 June (one at La Jolla, M. Sadowski). One in molt but with the primaries almost



Photo by Richard E. Webster

completely worn off, found at La Jolla 26 September 1998 (SDNHM 50139), had undoubtedly summered locally.

Conservation: In their turn, commercial egg collecting, oil spills, and gill netting have all taken their toll on the Common Murre in California (Ainley et al. 2002). The birds' sensitivity to the variations of ocean temperature and fish abundance seen through the 20th century suggests that large-scale ocean warming would have a devastating effect. Even so, it is curious that the Common Murre was not known from San Diego County before 1942, when a specimen was collected at Cardiff (L7) 4 February (SDNHM 18950).

Taxonomy: The California Common Murre, *U. a. californica* (Bryant, 1861), inhabits the Pacific coast from California to British Columbia.