

Belcher's or Band-tailed Gull *Larus belcheri*

With little doubt the least expected vagrant reaching San Diego County during the five-year atlas period from 1997 to 2001 was the Band-tailed or Belcher's Gull, normally confined to the coasts of Peru and Chile washed by the Humboldt Current. Vagrants have occurred north to Panama, exceptionally to Florida, but the bird amply photographed at the Tijuana River mouth represents the only well-supported record for California.

Winter: San Diego County's single Band-tailed Gull remained more or less continuously at the Tijuana River mouth (V10) from 3 August 1997 to 2 January 1998 (D. G. Shaw; Rottenborn and Morlan 2000). Perhaps its occurrence so far from its normal range was related to El Niño, that climatic variation striking in 1997–98 and



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

felt most strongly in the gull's range on the west coast of South America.