

### Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

This primarily pelagic gull is a highly irregular winter visitor to San Diego County. In some years there are none; in most, there are few; occasionally, the species is abundant. It is best looked for during the strong northwest winds following winter storms, when the birds are driven to shore and may rest on the beach.

**Winter:** Because of the orientation of the coastline, La Jolla (P7) is the site where the kittiwake is most easily seen in San Diego County, as for other pelagic birds. During the only major invasion that hit shore during the atlas period, February–April 2001, seawatching at La Jolla yielded up to 142 in 3.5 hours on 13 February 2001 (B. L. Sullivan, NAB 55:228, 2001). On 11 February 1999 at least 60 were 30–40 miles west San Diego (P. Lonsdale, NAB 53:209, 1999), but none were seen from shore that winter. The largest known invasion was in 1975–76, when up to 350 were on the ocean within 5 miles of shore between San Diego and Del Mar 28 March 1976 (P. Unitt). There are three inland records, of single birds at Lake Henshaw (G17) 15 January 1981 (R. Higson, AB 35:336, 1981), Lake Murray (Q11) 3 February 1976 (SDNHM 39849), and the east end of Sweetwater Reservoir (S13) 21 April 1995 (SDNHM 49172).



Photo by Kenneth W. Fink

**Migration:** The earliest date known for the Black-legged Kittiwake is 16 November (1962, one on San Diego Bay, AFN 17:69, 1963), but not until late December or January does it become abundant. In spring, most depart in April and early May; in 2001, the latest bird was at La Jolla 21 April (M. Wilson). After some invasions kittiwakes stay into summer. In 1976, 60 remained at La Jolla on 17 May (J. L. Dunn), six were still there 11 July (G. McCaskie), and one was at the Oceanside harbor (H5) 8 October (A. Fries).

**Taxonomy:** *Rissa t. pollicaris* Ridgway, 1884, is the subspecies of Black-legged Kittiwake in the Pacific Ocean.