

Cassin's Auklet *Ptychoramphus aleuticus*

Once the most frequently seen alcid on the ocean off San Diego, Cassin's Auklet has been surpassed by the Rhinoceros Auklet. Cassin's Auklet is among the seabirds most adversely affected by the decline in the biological productivity of the California Current through the late 20th century. The status of the colony at Los Coronados Islands near San Diego is tenuous: Jehl (1977) reported it extirpated, but Everett and Anderson (1991) found some active nests in 1989.

Winter: Cassin's Auklet usually stays at least 5 miles from the coast of San Diego County but is seen occasionally from shore during strong winds. For example, two were at Torrey Pines State Reserve (N7) 7 December 1997 (D. K. Adams), and two were at La Jolla (P7) 7 April 2001 (S. Walens).

Migration: Data specific to San Diego County are insufficient to define Cassin's Auklet's seasonal variation. Briggs et al. (1987) found California's Cassin Auklet population concentrating around major nesting colonies in the breeding season, then shifting in large part off the continental shelf in the nonbreeding season, when the state receives a large influx of winter visitors.



Photo by Kenneth W. Fink

Conservation: As a species feeding on plankton, Cassin's Auklet is sensitive to variation in ocean productivity. Presumably as a result of the increase in ocean temperature and decrease in productivity since the 1970s, the population in California has declined considerably, by over 56% at the primary colony on Southeast Farallon Island off San Francisco (Pyle 2001). By the 1990s numbers seen on boat trips out of San Diego were consistently under those of the 1960s and 1970s (maximum 250 on 21 November 1970, AB 25:109, 1971).

Taxonomy: San Diego County lies within the range of the larger of the two subspecies of Cassin's Auklet, nominate *P. a. aleuticus* (Pallas, 1811).