

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*

In contrast to California's other alcids, whose numbers have declined, the Rhinoceros Auklet has increased and spread, at least as a breeding species. On the ocean off San Diego County, however, the Rhinoceros Auklet is primarily a winter visitor. The decrease of other alcids has left the Rhinoceros Auklet as the most frequently seen of its family off San Diego, where it is an uncommon to fairly common winter visitor.

Winter: Off southern California, Rhinoceros Auklets constitute up to 30% of the wintering seabirds, but most remain seaward of the continental shelf (Briggs et al. 1987). They are regular if uncommon, however, within a few miles of land, and seen occasionally from shore during strong winds. Seventeen in La Jolla Cove (P7) 11 January 2003 (S. Walens) were exceptional. Consistent coverage by D. W. Povey of the ocean near Oceanside and San Diego during Christmas bird counts since the mid 1970s has yielded a maximum of eight on the Oceanside count, 22 December 1990.

Migration: On southern California's continental shelf and slope, Briggs et al. (1987) found the Rhinoceros Auklet arriving in October or November, peaking from January to March, and departing in April and May.



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Stragglers remain rarely through the summer, such as one off San Diego 28 July 1982 (D. W. Povey, AB 36:1016, 1982), one in La Jolla Cove 28 August 2002 (M. Billings), and birds washed ashore at Ocean Beach (R7) 4 July 1970 (SDNHM 37588) and at Torrey Pines State Reserve (N7) 29 July 1973 (SDNHM 38514).

Conservation: The Rhinoceros Auklet was extirpated as a breeding species from California about 1865 (Grinnell and Miller 1944). Since the 1970s, it has recolonized several sites (McChesney et al. 1995), but the number reaching San Diego County as winter visitors has changed little with these variations. Most Rhinoceros Auklets reaching San Diego County probably come from far to the north.