

Short-tailed Albatross *Phoebastria albatrus*

During the 19th century, before it was reduced to the verge of extinction by plume hunters at its nesting colonies in the western Pacific, the Short-tailed Albatross was common on the ocean off southern California year round. Gradual recovery began in the second half of the 20th century, and sporadic sightings off California—one far off San Diego—have increased in tandem. But the species remains of one of the world's most endangered birds.

Migration: Anthony (1924) wrote, “a quarter of a century ago ... ten miles from land they [both the Short-tailed and Black-footed Albatrosses] were almost certain to be found, and in the waters nearer land they were by no means uncommon... So far as my experience goes, there was no particular time of year when either species was more abundant.” Cooper (1868) reported collecting three immatures

inside San Diego Bay. The most recent specimen was taken off San Diego 9 January 1896 (SDNHM 68).

Conservation: From 1933 to 1950 the Short-tailed Albatross hovered on the brink of extinction. Protection and rehabilitation of its primary nesting site, the Japanese island of Torishima, has allowed the population to grow, reaching approximately 1500 birds in 2001 (www.fakr.noaa.gov/infobulletins/2001_infobulletins/albatrossbreeding.html). From 1898 to 1977 there were no well-supported records for California, but 11 accumulated from 1977 through 2002. The sightings closest to San Diego are of an immature 90 miles west of San Diego 28 August 1977 (Luther 1980) and another near Santa Barbara Island 19 February–22 March 2002 (Cole and McCaskie 2004). Although the population trend is now positive the species still faces threats: drowning of birds taking baited fish hooks from longline fishing boats and swallowing of floating plastic trash, blocking the birds' digestive tracts.