

Xantus' Murrelet *Synthliboramphus hypoleucus*

Xantus' Murrelet breeds currently only on the Channel Islands of southern California and Los Coronados Islands, Guadalupe Island, and San Benito Islands of Baja California. The total population is small, perhaps only 7000 birds, apportioned among two subspecies. Thus, even though the ocean off San Diego County is central to the species' range, Xantus' Murrelet is uncommon there. Only rarely is it seen from land.

Winter: Xantus' Murrelets, like other seabirds, are occasionally driven close to shore at La Jolla (P7) by strong winds. Two were there 15 December 1999 (L. Polinsky); one was there 13 February 2001 (B. L. Sullivan).

Migration: Xantus' Murrelet is most numerous off San Diego County during the species' breeding season from March to July. Counts have ranged up to 30 between San Diego and Los Coronados Islands 17 March 1974 (G. McCaskie), but in recent years only one or two, if any, are typically seen in a day offshore. After breeding, some of the population migrates north, out of southern California. But the species occurs off San Diego year round.

Breeding distribution: Los Coronados Islands are home to about 750 Xantus' Murrelets and therefore about 20% of the total population of subspecies *scrippsi* (Drost and Lewis 1995).

Conservation: Cats and rats introduced on the murrelet's nesting islands are the greatest threat to the species; they have extirpated several former colonies (Everett and Anderson 1991).



Photo by Richard E. Webster

Taxonomy: *Synthliboramphus h. scrippsi* (Green and Arnold, 1939) nests through most of the species' range and is the subspecies occurring most frequently off San Diego. It has the line between black and white on the face cutting nearly straight from the base of the bill back past the eye. Nominate *S. h. hypoleucus* (Xantus, 1860), however, occurs rarely in summer and fall, recorded from 3 July (1992, far off San Diego, P. Pyle, AB 46:1179, 1992) to 4 December (1996, two collected 43 miles west of Point Loma 4 December 1966 (SBCM 3887–8). Other specimens are one picked up alive at Imperial Beach (V10) 27 July 1993 (SDNHM 48493) and another at Mission Beach (R7) 29 July 1990 (SDNHM 46957). The latter is a recent fledgling with some down persisting on the head and neck. Nominate *hypoleucus* is distinguished by the white on the face extending up through the lores and curling over the top of the eye (Jehl and Bond 1975).