

## NOTES ON SOME PELAGIC BIRDS OF THE COAST OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

By PATRICK W. MARTIN

In the past few years the author has spent the months from early spring until late summer engaged in commercial salmon trolling along the south and central parts of the coast of British Columbia. The areas covered in particular in this work include the west coast of Vancouver Island from Barkley Sound north to Cape Scott and the mainland coast from Queen Charlotte Strait north to Laredo Sound, as shown on the accompanying chart (fig. 10). During the fishing season it was not possible to make regular observations of the birds in the district, because of the necessity of following the migrations or runs of fish which are by no means regular. In consequence, one seldom finds himself in the same area on the same date in consecutive years.

As a result, the large number of ornithological notes that have been accumulated are more or less disconnected. From these I have selected the following in the hope that they will be of interest to the reader and contribute something to the small store of knowledge we have pertaining to pelagic birds in these waters.

Specimens were taken whenever time and weather permitted or whenever specimens were necessary for purposes of definite identification. I only regret that more actual collecting was not possible.

With one or two exceptions all specimens taken are in the collections of the Provincial Museum, Victoria, B.C. The figures following the names of the birds are the museum catalogue numbers.

*Diomedea nigripes*. Black-footed Albatross. P. M. nos. 8795, 8796, 8797. This species was first observed in 1940 on March 18, off Barkley Sound, Vancouver Island. From that date on, it was constantly observed off Kyuquot until I left that vicinity at the end of May. On the off-shore banks this albatross is a constant companion of the fisherman, at least from April until the end of August. Since most of the off-shore fishing ceases toward the end of August, I have no definite information as to when this bird leaves. However, according to the trollers it is still present off the west coast of Vancouver Island in late September.

Apparently Black-footed Albatrosses procure a considerable portion of their food supply by picking up offal from the fishing boats whenever such an opportunity presents itself. It is a common sight to see several of these birds along with the inevitable train of gulls and shearwaters following a halibut boat, all competing for the choicer morsels that fall from the gutting tables. As might well be expected, these birds appear to prefer the fatter and oilier portions of the offal and I have been told that in former years when the halibut livers were discarded, the albatrosses, or "gooneys," as the fishermen invariably call them, preferred these dainty morsels above all else.

Upon several occasions I have seen albatrosses dive much in the same manner as a shearwater, although they did not stay beneath the surface nearly as long. Inasmuch as we have found squid beaks in the stomachs of several specimens collected, I consider it highly probable that a considerable part of their food is procured in such a manner.

*Fulmarus glacialis rogersii*. Fulmar. This species is apparently more abundant in winter, being only a straggler in the summer months. The only one that I have seen was collected on the Goose Island banks on July 18, 1939.

*Puffinus creatopus*. Pink-footed Shearwater. This bird appears to be rare off the coast of British Columbia. In the month of July, 1937, on the Goose Island banks, I saw two large Pink-footed Shearwaters. On April 28, 1940, I saw a similar shearwater off Kyuquot in company with some Sooty Shearwaters. This particular bird passed by several times and little doubt need be entertained that it was a Pink-footed Shearwater.

*Puffinus opisthomelas*. Black-vented Shearwater. On July 15, 1940, off Cape Scott, Vancouver Island, I saw a shearwater that was decidedly smaller than the accompanying Sooties. It was at quite a distance, but the black back and light underparts contrasted sharply. I refer it to this species.

*Puffinus griseus*. Sooty Shearwater. In 1940 my first spring record for this bird was on March 21

off Kyuquot, Vancouver Island. At this time several were seen at a distance, apparently scouting for food. On each successive day they were more abundant until on the first of April the flocks had attained considerable proportions, although not to be compared with the numbers seen later off Cape Scott and other favorable feeding grounds in the summer. These birds remain on the coast until late October, when they once again disappear to the south.

The Sooty Shearwater appears to prefer to catch most of its food itself but sometimes it will follow the halibut boats and pick up the most palatable scraps from the cleaning tables. At certain stages of the tide, most often low water slack, the sand lance (*Ammodytes personatus*) and "red feed," a small shrimp-like animal, appear on the surface in astounding quantities. At such times the large flocks of shearwaters reap a harvest and their feeding process is indeed most interesting. The foremost ranks of the birds dive headlong into the sea, the next rank pass over and also dive until the

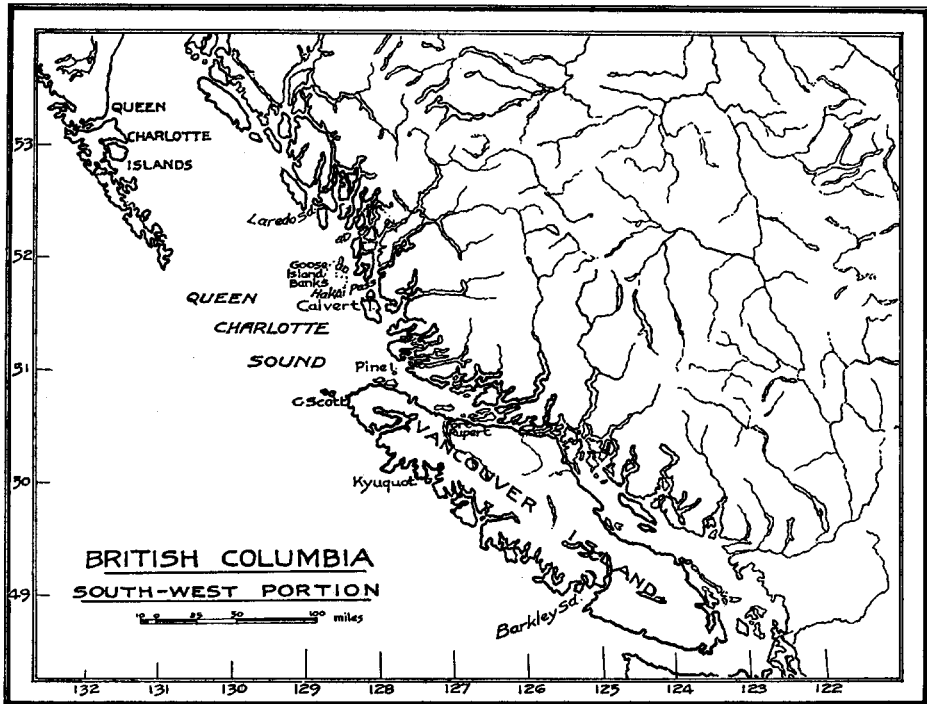


Fig. 10. Map showing location of areas where pelagic birds were observed along the coast of British Columbia.

last of the flock dives in what now can be called the front rank. By this time the first to enter the water come to the surface, swallow their catch, if successful, and, immediately taking off, fly over the submerged flock and once again plunge in just ahead. In this manner the rear is constantly passing over the center and entering the water again in front. Seen from a distance a large flock takes on the appearance of a small cloud progressing along the surface of the ocean with a peculiar rolling motion. When satiated, the flock will usually form into a raft of birds and at such times they hardly bother to move out of the way of a slowly moving trolling boat.

*Puffinus carneipes*. Pale-footed Shearwater. P. M. nos. 8790, 8791, 8792, 8793, 8794. This native of New Zealand and its environs was first observed on the northeast corner of the Goose Island banks on July 31, 1937. On account of bad weather, however, no specimens were obtained. On July 8 and 18, 1939, trips were made to the same vicinity in company with Mr. and Mrs. T. T. McCabe and on both occasions specimens were collected. In fact, on July 18 this species appeared to be the most numerous shearwater in that area. It is interesting to note that during 1940 I observed thousands of Sooty Shearwaters in the Cape Scott area, but not once could I positively identify a Pale-footed Shearwater among them. This gives rise to the supposition that the population of Goose Island banks is a regular but isolated summer population.

*Oceanodroma leucorhoa beali*. Beal Petrel. This little petrel is not seen abroad much in the day-

time. It may therefore be far more numerous than these records indicate. One specimen was collected on July 4, 1937, on the Goose Island banks. The species was also observed once on July 18, 1940, in the Cape Scott area on a very foggy day. It is reported to breed in considerable numbers on the Storm Islands, Queen Charlotte Straits.

*Oceanodroma furcata*. Forked-tailed Petrel. This is the most conspicuous if not the most numerous petrel observed in the area. It was first seen in the latter part of May off Kyuquot and was quite numerous in the Cape Scott and Queen Charlotte areas during July and August. This bird is most commonly observed in dull and foggy weather and appears to have a marked dislike for bright and sunny weather. The Forked-tailed Petrels congregate in small flocks along the tide lines where they appear to be feeding. Occasionally I have had them follow the boat when dressing fish and at such times they pick up only the smallest and softest portions of the fish offal. These birds appear to have no fear of man and upon one occasion I attracted a number of them to the stern of the boat, while at anchor, by feeding them small scraps of halibut liver. They became so intent upon the food that I was able to catch several by hand. They scratched and bit fiercely but upon being released returned immediately to their meal only to be caught again. I was most interested to see them dive quite effortlessly when a morsel had sunk beyond reach.

*Stercorarius pomarinus*. Pomarine Jaeger. P. M. nos. 8788, 8789, 8834, 8835. We collected specimens of this bird on July 18, 1939, when considerable numbers were seen on the northwest portions of the Goose Island banks. At no other time have I been fortunate enough to see a migration of this species.

*Stercorarius parasiticus*. Parasitic Jaeger. This jaeger is an abundant fall migrant, appearing in the Queen Charlotte Sound area about the middle of August. By the first of September it is a conspicuous if not numerous member of the bird population, much to the distress and annoyance of the small gulls.

*Stercorarius longicaudus*. Long-tailed Jaeger. P. M. no. 8787. One specimen was taken on July 18, 1939, near the northwest part of the Goose Island banks.

*Catharacta skua*. Skua. One specimen was collected on the Goose Island banks on July 18, 1939. It was also reliably reported from Laredo Sound in June, 1939.

*Rissa tridactyla pollicaris*. Pacific Kittiwake. P. M. nos. 8784, 8838. I found this little gull quite numerous off Cape Scott during April, 1939. Some individuals stayed as late as the first of June when I collected a specimen off Calvert Island. In 1940 I saw only two small flocks, on the 12th and 16th of April off Kyuquot.

*Xema sabini*. Sabine Gull. P. M. no. 8869. These birds appear to be regular if not numerous fall migrants in the Queen Charlotte Sound area. My first record is for August 11, 1937, at Hakai Pass. Later, on August 16 in the same year, I collected three and saw several more off Pine Island; others were seen off Fort Rupert. On June 25, 1939, I saw a flock of five adults in Laredo Sound. In August of 1939 Mr. T. T. McCabe and I collected specimens in Laredo Channel and later in the same year I observed others. I again saw them in August of the following year in the Cape Scott area.

*Provincial Museum, Victoria, British Columbia, August 11, 1941.*