

BLACK STORM-PETREL BREEDS IN THE UNITED STATES

R. L. PITMAN and STEVEN M. SPEICH, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of California, Irvine, California 92717

We report here the first recorded breeding of Black Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma melania*) in the United States. The Black Storm-Petrel breeds on offshore islands on both sides of Baja California, Mexico. Grinnell (1928) confined it to Islas San Benitos and Los Coronados on the Pacific side with populations on Roca Consag, Isla Partida and Islas San Luis on the Gulf of California side. Colonies may exist on some of the numerous other islands off Baja California.

In southern California waters, the Black Storm-Petrel is primarily a post-breeding visitor with some individuals ranging at least as far north as Pt. Reyes, Marin County. A few, however, can be found throughout the year off California (Crossin 1974).

On 16 July 1976 a Black Storm-Petrel incubating an egg was found on Sutil Island, a tiny islet immediately adjacent to Santa Barbara Island, Channel Islands National Monument, California. The birds' presence on Sutil was first suspected on 27 June 1976 when two or three were heard calling at night while we were mist netting Ashy Storm-Petrels (*O. homochroa*). A small number of Ashy Storm-Petrels had been banded and released. Several others were heard singing and seen flying about the cliffs when loud, rather explosive but short and oft-repeated calls of a presumed different species of storm-petrel were heard. Listening to a recorded tape several days later of Black Storm-Petrels from Islas Los Coronados nearly convinced us that we had heard that species.

Our next visit to Sutil Island was on 16 July 1976 when an estimated 10 Black Storm-Petrels were heard to call from the precipitous ledges above us. Later that night we discovered an incubating bird. It was held till the following morning when it was measured (culmen, 16.5 mm; wing chord, 175 mm), photographed, banded and released.

Our only encounter with breeding Black Storm-Petrels in our surveys of all the Channel Islands has been the very small colony mentioned here, thus requesting permission of the Park Service to collect a specimen was considered unwise. Photographs were deposited at the San Diego Natural History Museum.

The nest was located 60 cm straight back in an estimated 15 cm diameter grotto of a rocky cliff face about 20 m up from the rocky beach. The single white egg was deposited on the ground without the benefit of nesting material. Egg shells of a Xantus' Murrelet (*Endomychura hypoleuca*) that had hatched earlier in the year were also present at the nest site.

Given the extremely small size of Sutil Island (350 x 250 m) and the low-density nesting behavior of this species (Van Rossem 1915), probably no more than 20 or 30 birds could be nesting there.

We thank the superintendent and staff of the Channel Islands National Monument for access to the islands. Gerald Thompson gallantly provided transportation. The research was supported by Bureau of Land Management Contract no. AA-550-CT6-26 to the University of California, Santa Cruz and Irvine: K. Norris, G. L. Hunt, Jr. and B. Le Boeuf, Principal Investigators. G. L. Hunt, Jr. provided comments on an early version of the manuscript.

LITERATURE CITED

- Crossin, R. S. 1974. The storm petrels (Hydrobatidae). Pages 154-205 in W. B. King, ed. Pelagic studies in the Central and Eastern Pacific Ocean. Smithsonian Contr. to Zool. No. 158.
- Grinnell, J. 1928. A distributional summation of the ornithology of Lower California. Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool. 32(1):1-300.
- Van Rossem, A. 1915. Notes on murrelets and petrels. Condor 17:74-78.