

A LAYSAN ALBATROSS IN INTERIOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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On 5 May 1976 while driving north on California State Highway 62, 9 km north of Interstate 10 at the intersection of Indian Avenue, we observed a Laysan Albatross (*Diomedea immutabilis*) flying over the desert. This locality is in Riverside County at the south base of Morongo Pass, Little San Bernardino Mountains, and is just east of San Gorgonio Pass between the San Bernardino and San Jacinto mountains. The bird was flying west-northwestward, parallel to the mountains, about 30 m above the ground. Very strong winds, perhaps 80 km per hour, were blowing from the west through the area at this time.

The following description was made: A very large black and white bird with extremely long, narrow, wings. The head, rump, and underparts appeared pure white. The back and upperwings were blackish, with a whitish flash in the primaries. The tail was rounded and very short in proportion to the rest of the body with black retrices. The underwing pattern was thick prominent black edges to both the leading and trailing margins, extensive black tips, and two large black blotches in the middle of the underwing, leaving only a rather narrow white area through the center. The bill was very long and heavy with a distinct hooked tip. The bill was pale but the exact color was not noted.

We had the bird under observation for about three minutes as it was first seen at a considerable distance flying towards us. It flew almost directly overhead and continued parallel to the mountains until we lost sight of it over a distant hill.

There is to our knowledge but one other true interior record of any albatross in North America, a Yellow-nosed Albatross (*D. chlororhynchos*) captured "a few days previous" to 23 July 1934 at East Fryeburg, Oxford County, Maine (Norton 1934).

Although this is the first record of an albatross in the interior of the southwestern United States, other pelagic or salt water species have been found in that area. Of other Procellariiformes, there are two records of Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*): 6 June 1971, 36 miles east of Yuma on Interstate 8, Yuma County, Arizona (an "extremely fat" female collected, University of Arizona 10316; Quigley 1973) and one observed by Guy McCaskie on 14 August 1971 at Desert Shores, Salton Sea, Imperial County, California (McCaskie 1971). There is also one record of New Zealand Shearwater (*P. bulleri*): a female with extremely little fat collected on 8 August 1966 at the Whitewater River Delta, north end of Salton Sea, Riverside County, California. The specimen is now number 3848 in the San Bernardino County Museum (McCaskie 1966, E. A. Cardiff pers. comm.). The occurrence in this area of Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*), Blue-footed Booby (*Sula nebouxi*), Brown Booby (*S. leucogaster*), and Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) has been described by McCaskie (1970, 1972, 1975). There appears to be an effect in which birds moving northward out of the Gulf of California are funnelled through the Salton Sea, the Coachella Valley and San Gorgonio Pass. In the Coachella Valley, north of the Salton Sea, Magnificent Frigatebird has been observed once (24 June 1961 at Palm Springs, Small 1961) and five records of Blue-footed Booby have been obtained, including two at Whitewater, only about 10 km away from the locality of the Laysan Albatross. Two Brown Pelicans and several Blue-footed Boobies have been found in Riverside, San Bernardino, and interior Los Angeles counties to the west of San Gorgonio Pass. The concentration of these records in a band from the Coachella Valley, through

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San Geronio Pass and the San Bernardino-Riverside area to the San Gabriel and San Fernando valleys indicates some pelagic species have from time to time followed that route north and west.

It thus appears that the Laysan Albatross had become "trapped" in the Gulf of California while moving northward. Continuing north from the north end of the Gulf, it would have moved through the vicinity of the Salton Sea, altering its course more westwardly when blocked by the Little San Bernardino Mountains. Although Laysan Albatross has not yet been found in the Gulf of California, two observations have been made recently to the southeast of its previously known range as indicated by Sanger (1974): one on 26 February 1976 at 18°59'N, 127°10'W in the eastern Pacific Ocean (Unitt pers. obs.), and ten on 29 February 1976 at the Alijos Rocks, 360 km west of southern Baja California (Robert L. Pitman pers. comm.). Although the locality of our observation at the south base of the Little San Bernardino Mountains is on the logical route of a bird flying north out of the Gulf, it is remarkable indeed that such a highly pelagic species should be motivated to leave its normal habitat and fly out over such desolate desert.

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