

NOTES

A SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS OFF CALIFORNIA

ROGER C. HELM, Moss Landing Marine Laboratories, P.O. Box 223, Moss Landing, California 95039 (present address: Coastal Marine Science Center, University of California, Santa Cruz, California 95060)

On 20 April 1978 at 0900 a subadult Short-tailed Albatross (*Diomedea albatrus*) was observed and photographed (Figure 1) from Moss Landing Marine Laboratories' R/V Oconostota approximately 80 km WNW of Monterey Bay, California (36° 14.9'N, 123° 01.8'W). The bird circled the stern of the boat a few times, once within 20 m, and then departed.

Identification was based upon the characteristic large pink bill, blackish-brown hind neck, mottled belly (white to pale brown), and black tail feathers with a white base. The rest of the body was dark brown but not as dark as a Black-footed Albatross (*D. nigripes*). These characteristics are in agreement with Yamashina's (1961) description of a subadult Short-tailed Albatross. Warren B. King of the Smithsonian Institution and G. Victor Morejohn of Moss Landing Marine Laboratories confirmed the identification after examination of the accompanying photograph (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Short-tailed Albatross (*Diomedea albatrus*) photographed approximately 80 km WNW of Monterey Bay, California, 20 April 1978. The color slide from which this print was made shows this bird had a stout pinkish bill, blackish-brown hind neck, mottled belly, stocky large body, dark borders on its underwings, and black tail feathers with a white base.

Photo by Linda A. Belluomini

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A subadult Short-tailed Albatross is very similar to an immature Wandering Albatross (*D. exulans*). The bird in Figure 1 can be distinguished as a Short-tailed Albatross based on the shape and stoutness of its bill and body, the distribution of light and dark feathers on its head and neck, and the development of dark borders on its underwing (Richard Erickson pers. comm.).

The most recent sightings of a Short-tailed Albatross off the west coast of North America were by Wyatt (1963) off the Oregon coast in December 1961 and by Keith C. Richards approximately 150 km west of San Diego, California, in August 1977 (McCaskie 1978).

Wahl (1970) observed and photographed a bird that was at first believed to be a Short-tailed Albatross off Washington in May 1970. After extensive reexamination of the photograph, Wahl (pers. comm.) now believes the bird should have been called *Diomedea* sp. On 30 September 1978, 25 km off Newport, Oregon, T. Crabtree photographed an albatross which closely resembled the one photographed by Wahl in 1970. Hunn and Mattocks (1979) expressed doubts as to the identity of the bird photographed by Crabtree.

Traylor's (1950) observation of a Short-tailed Albatross in February 1946 is the most recent northern California record. The present sighting represents not only the most recent confirmed record of a Short-tailed Albatross off the west coast of North America, but the first sighting of this bird off northern California in over 30 years.

The research of Howard and Dodson (1933) and Murie (1959) on American Indian kitchen middens indicates the Short-tailed Albatross was once fairly common along the west coast of North America. Sanger (1972 and 1976) and Hasegawa (1977) believe this nearly extinct bird has been showing signs of recovery. Perhaps this once abundant species will again be a common sight along the west coast of North America.

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