

NOTES

A SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS OBSERVED NEAR SAN BENEDICTO ISLAND, REVILLAGIGEDO ISLANDS, MEXICO

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On 29 April 1990, at 1500, while on a 73-foot motor yacht cruising the eastern Pacific Ocean at 19°26'N, 110°44'W (approximately 6 nautical miles north of San Benedicto Island, the northernmost of the Revillagigedo Islands of Mexico), Santaella spotted a large albatross about 200 meters from the boat. He immediately pointed out the bird to his companions, all experienced observers: Andrés and Pilar Sada, Eugenio Clariond, Miguel A. Gomez, Barbara M. Montes, and Mario A. Ramos. Having just seen two Laysan Albatrosses (*Diomedea immutabilis*), he initially thought that the approaching bird would be another Laysan. When clearly seen, however, the bird was unmistakably an adult Short-tailed Albatross (*Diomedea albatrus*). We all saw the bird well with binoculars for about three minutes as it flew north low over the water in a leisurely but purposeful manner and disappeared into the distance. The weather was fair with light wind and swell and water temperature of 78°F.

The albatross was larger than the two Laysan Albatrosses we had just seen and had a huge pink bill. The head and body were white with a distinct yellow crown and nape. The wings above were black distally and proximally with black primaries and secondaries separated by a large white patch with irregular borders. The mantle and rump were pure white and the tail was black, with the pale feet projecting beyond it. The massive bill imparted to the bird a front-heavy appearance, as if it were prone to keel forward. The plumage and appearance of the adult Short-tailed Albatross are unique and quite distinct from those of any other of the world's albatrosses (Harrison 1983, 1987). The other two species of the northern Pacific Ocean, the Laysan and the Black-footed (*D. nigripes*), both found in Mexican waters, differ completely, the former having entirely blackish upper wings and mantle, and the latter being entirely dusky brown with black bill and feet. (The juvenile Short-tailed Albatross is entirely brown but retains the pink bill and pale feet.)

Our observation of a Short-tailed Albatross is the first reported for the Revillagigedo Islands. The only other albatross recently recorded from these islands is the Laysan, a recent colonizer (Howell and Webb 1990). Between 29 April and 6 May 1990 we observed two Laysan Albatrosses at sea off San Benedicto, one flying past Roca Partida, and four on landing on Clarión. There is a very old record of a Black-footed Albatross off Clarión Island (Anthony 1898). As far as we are aware, the only other record this century of a Short-tailed Albatross from Mexico is of an adult seen in November 1986 by David Ainley and Larry Spear 230 miles off Manzanillo, Colima (L. Spear pers. comm.). There are no recent reports for Baja California (Wilbur 1987), from where the species was regularly recorded prior to 1900 (Grinnell 1928). This albatross was formerly abundant in the North Pacific, breeding between October and May on numerous small islands off Japan and dispersing north to the Bering Sea and east to the coasts of California and Baja California (Harrison 1983). After the species was nearly exterminated by Japanese

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plume-hunters in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there are now approximately 250 birds breeding only on Torishima, off Japan (Hasegawa 1984), with a total population of about 400 (Ackerman 1990). There are about a dozen recent records from western North America, ranging from Alaska to California (Hasegawa and DeGange 1982, Everett 1983, Campbell et al. 1986). The only records since 1946 of *adult* Short-tailed Albatrosses off western North America south of Alaska are the two from Mexico reported here. Presumably, if the population continues to increase, the species should become more frequent off the Pacific coast of North America, including Mexico.

W. T. Everett and G. McCaskie reviewed this paper and provided many useful comments.

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