

Status and Occurrence of Black-vented Shearwater (*Puffinus opisthomelas*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin and Mitch Meredith.

Introduction and Distribution

The Black-vented Shearwater (*Puffinus opisthomelas*) is a small species of shearwater that has a limited range in Western North America. The species breeds off the Baja California, Mexico on the following islands: Islas Natividad, San Benito, Cedros, and Guadalupe. In the non-breeding season the Black-vented Shearwater is found south of Baja California along the Pacific coast of Mexico to at least Jalisco (Everett 1988). The Black-vented Shearwater wanders north into the waters off southern California mostly in the fall and winter to central California, to Point Conception, located at 34°50'N (Everett 1988). It usually occurs within 25 km of coast (Everett 1988). How far this species wanders up the California coast depends on the water temperature of the eastern Pacific (Keitt *et al.* 2000). The Black-vented Shearwater lives in warmer water and in years of large water events, such as El Nino, this species wanders far north to the waters off Northern California (Keitt *et al.* 2000). There are 5 accepted records for Oregon by the Oregon Bird records Committee (OFO 2012). To date, there are no accepted records for Washington State by the Washington Bird Records Committee (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2012). The Black-vented Shearwater is an accidental visitor to British Columbia (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). The fact that this species prefers warmer water and has turned up during El Nino events means observers should try to look for this species in years where there are strong El Nino events northward (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). The Black-vented Shearwater is hypothetical and unsubstantiated in Alaska as there are records from the 1970's of "dark-vented Shearwaters that were recorded before the Manx and Black-vented Shearwaters were officially split by the AOU in 1983 (AOU 1983).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Black-vented Shearwater is covered in all standard North American Field Guides. The following description is taken from Keitt *et al.* (2000). The Black-vented Shearwater is a small shearwater that is 35–38 cm in length, with a wingspan of 76–89 cm. This makes them smaller than the more common, Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*) which measures 43 cm in length and has a wingspan of 102 cm. The Black-vented Shearwater is best characterized by dark-brown upperparts, blending with mostly dull-white underparts and mostly white underwings, which have smudgy-brown trailing edges; and brownish-black under tail-coverts. The amount and extent of the mottling along the sides of the neck, shoulders, and the flanks is highly variable. The plumage of both sexes is identical. The dark bill is slender, long, and sharply hooked. The tarsus is laterally compressed; the legs and feet are dusky flesh-coloured. This species, like others in the "*puffinus*" group, fly with short, stiff, choppy flight strokes followed by a short dip of a glide (Howell *et al.* 1994).

The Black-vented Shearwater is generally similar in plumage to the larger Pink-footed Shearwater (*P. creatopus*), but Black-vented is smaller with faster wingbeats and lacks the arcing flight pattern of the Pink-footed Shearwater (Keitt *et al.* 2000). The species that may cause observers in British Columbia the most identification problems is the closely related Manx Shearwater (*P. puffinus*) (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). The Manx Shearwater is slightly smaller than the Black-vented Shearwater measuring 34 cm in length, with a wingspan of 33 cm (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Manx Shearwater is a black-backed species with strongly demarcated pure white underparts in stark contrast to the brownish-back and dirty smudgy sides of the Black-vented Shearwater (Keitt *et al.* 2000). The Manx Shearwater has white under tail coverts that extend up its sides and that are visible when the bird is on the water (Keitt *et al.* 2000). This species also has a sharply defined white throat that curves up and has a pale crescent behind the auricular patch on the side of the face (Sibley 2000). The Manx Shearwater has a very similar flight style to the Black-vented Shearwater and this alone can only be used to draw an observer's attention to a different looking species, but isn't an identification field mark that separates the 2 species (Howell *et al.* 1994, Onley and Scofield 2007).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Black-vented Shearwater is an accidental vagrant to British Columbia with 31 Provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). There are three historical specimens of the Black-vented Shearwater collected off Albert Head, near Victoria in the late 1890's (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). Besides the 3 historic specimen records, there are older published records (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). In a couple of cases, based on the descriptions given, the bird in question matches better to a Manx Shearwater (J. Fenneman Pers. Comm.). The recent explosion off the west coast of North America of the similar looking Manx Shearwater has made it difficult to trust many past Black-vented Shearwater records (J. Fenneman Pers. Comm.). Almost all Black-vented Shearwater records come from near-shore pelagic waters (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). The sudden increase in Manx Shearwater records has clouded past records of Black-vented Shearwaters in the province as some records could have been in fact Manx Shearwaters. The Manx Shearwater was unknown before the early 1990's in the North Pacific and observers can be forgiven for assuming a small dark and white shearwater encountered in the fall was a Black-vented Shearwater (Howell *et al.* 1994, Mlodinow 2004). There are also however well-documented sight records of Black-vented Shearwaters seen off the Coast of British Columbia in recent decades (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). Observers are encouraged to get good looks and photographs wherever possible of any future records of Black-vented Shearwater in British Columbia.

Provincial records of Black-vented Shearwater come from coastal regions to pelagic waters. There are 21 records for Vancouver Island, 8 records for the Queen Charlotte Islands, and 1 well documented record for the Vancouver area in the Strait of Georgia accepted by both the Vancouver and Victoria Rare Bird Committees (Pearce 1996, Plath 2000, Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1).

The pattern of vagrancy in British Columbia mirrors the timing when birds move north from Mexico into southern California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). The vast majority of records are from July to September with 20 records (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). There are 5 records from October to December (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). There is one February record and there are 2 May records, with the latter record likely involving the same bird (Toochin *et al.* 2014a, see Table 1). This species has an interesting situation in British Columbia as there are no recent photographic records, only historic specimen records and good written sight records. In an age of digital cameras, it is very likely that a future Black-vented Shearwater will be found and photographed.

It is likely the next El Nino or large-scale warm water ocean event off British Columbia could push the Black-vented Shearwater into provincial waters. It is during these periods observers are encouraged to sea-watch, take pelagic trips offshore and take ferry crossings to look for this species. Given that ocean birds can fly vast distances, and shearwaters are no exception, it is likely this species will again be found in British Columbia.

Table 2: Records of Black-vented Shearwater for British Columbia:

- 1.(2) male/female October 24, 1891: (specimen: RBCM 1494 & 1495) east of Albert Head (Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 2.(2) male/unknown November 1891: (specimen: RBCM 89 & USNM 153194) east of Albert Head (Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 3.(1) male February 1895: (specimen: NMC 1982) east of Albert Head (Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 4.(1) adult July 15, 1940: Patrick Martin: 1 bird with SOSH w of Cape Scott, north west of Vancouver Island (Martin 1942)
- 5.(1) adult August 14, 1948: C. J. Guiget: north of Vancouver Island, Goose Island Group (Martin and Myers 1969)
- 6.(1) adult September 28, 1953: near the mouth of the Juan de Fuca Strait (Poole 1966)
- 7.(1) adult July 3, 1954: west of Solander Island, west Vancouver Island (Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 8.(1) adult July 24, 1967: with Sooty Shearwaters west of Cleland Island (Campbell and Stirling 1968)
- 9.(1) adult July 17, 1976: Hecate Strait, QCI (52°N, 136.02°W)(Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 10.(1) adult September 17, 1982: off Vancouver Island (48.62°N, 126.08°W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 11.(1) adult September 18, 1982: off Vancouver Island (49.10°N, 132.40°W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 12.(1) adult September 28, 1982: off Vancouver Island (50.57°N, 128.80°W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)

- 13.(1) adult September 29, 1982: off Vancouver Island (49.03°N, 126.07°W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 14.(1) adult August 26, 1983: off Vancouver Island (48.92°N, 126.28°W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 15.(1) adult October, 14 1984: Hecate Strait, QCI (53.05°N, 132.60°W)(Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 16.(1) adult September 28, 1986: west of Amphitrite Point, Ucluelet (Campbell *et al.* 1990a)
- 17.(1) adult September 7, 1987: off Amphitrite Point, Ucluelet (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 18.(1) adult July 17, 1988: Mike Toochin, mobs: from ferry mid-Hecate Strait, QCI
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 19.(1) adult August 9, 1988: off Vancouver Island (50.03°N, 127.78°W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 20.(1) adult September 11, 1988: west of Brooks Peninsula, west Vancouver Island
(Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 21.(1) adult October 26, 1988: off Vancouver Island (48.23°N, 125.82°W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 22.(1) adult September 20, 1994: Peter Hamel, mobs: mouth of Masset Inlet
(Bowling 1995a, Davidson 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 23.(1) adult May 18, 1996: Rick Toochin, Mitch Meredith: 10 km west of Pt. Grey on BC Ferry
from Horseshoe Bay – Nanaimo (Toochin 1998, Plath 2000)
- 24.(1) adult May 26, 1996: Jo Ann Mackenzie: 4 km before Active Pass, Victoria side
(Pearce 1996, Bowling 1996c, Davidson 1999, Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 25.(1) adult November 26, 1997: John Anderson: Queen Charlotte Sound, QCI
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 26.(1) adult May 25, 1999: Rob Worona: off Amphitrite Point, Ucluelet (Shepard 1999c,
Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 27.(1) adult June, 23, 1999: off Vancouver Island (48.60°N, 128.03°W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 28.(1) adult June 6, 2000: Dale A. Jensen: seen with Sooty Shearwaters from cruise ship off
northern tip of Vancouver Island (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 29.(1) adult September 24, 2007: Paul Jones, Peter Hamel, mobs: from ferry mid-Hecate Strait,
QCI (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 30.(1) adult July 7, 2008: mobs: from ferry mid-Hecate Strait, QCI (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 31.(1) adult September 19, 2009: Rick Toochin, Louis Haviland: Shirley (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Jamie Fenneman for his help in researching past British Columbia records of Black-vented Shearwaters.

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