

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

RHINOCEROS AUKLET

Cerorhinca monocerata

Family: ALCIDAE

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES

Class: AVES

B247

Written by: S. Sanders

Reviewed by: H. Cogswell

Edited by: R. Duke, S. Granholm

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Common winter visitor in marine pelagic habitat off northern and central California (Grinnell and Miller 1944, McCaskie et al. 1979), and fairly common south of the northern Channel Islands (Garrett and Dunn 1981). Smaller numbers occur in subtidal waters. About 360 remain in California from April to September to breed (Sowls et al. 1980). Breeding has been confirmed at Castle Rock and Prince Island off Del Norte Co. (Osborne 1973, Sowls et al. 1980), and on the Farallon Islands (DeSante and Ainley 1980). Sixty percent of California's breeding population occurs off Del Norte and Humboldt cos., and 28% on the Farallon Islands. Suspected of breeding on Green Rock and Little River Rock off Humboldt Co., Gualala Point Island, Fish Rocks, and Arched Rock, off Sonoma Co., Ano Nuevo Island, San Mateo Co., and in mainland caves at Point Arguello in Santa Barbara Co. (Sowls et al. 1980).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Feeds mainly on small fish, sometimes on crustaceans and cephalopods (Leschner 1976, Cogswell 1977, Terres 1980). In Washington, Richardson (1961) found sand lance (*Ammodytes tobianus*) to be the most common prey. Parents bring young 1-13 fish per feeding (Richardson 1961). Forages by diving and pursuing prey underwater (Terres 1980).

Cover: Can be found year-round resting on pelagic marine waters, usually alone, but sometimes in small groups (Cogswell 1977). Large numbers have been reported leaving a winter roost on Monterey Bay at dawn (Stallcup and Winter 1975).

Reproduction: Nests in a burrow on undisturbed, forested or unforested islands, and probably in cliff caves on the California mainland (Sowls et al. 1980). Digs a nesting burrow 2-6 m (6-20 ft) long, often with 1 to several branches (Sowls et al. 1980, Terres 1980). Nesting material consists of sticks, grasses, and feathers (Terres 1980). DeSante and Ainley (1980) reported use of recently vacated rabbit warrens as burrows on the Farallon Islands. Richardson (1961) found that breeders on Protection Island off Washington preferred to dig burrows in firm, sandy soil on steep slopes, or in dense growths of grass above steep slopes.

Water: No known requirements for fresh water.

Pattern: Prefers undisturbed islands with friable soil for digging burrow, as well as productive, pelagic waters near breeding colony for feeding.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Activity patterns uncertain. Observed in daytime at or near colony (Sowls et al. 1980). When feeding chick, mostly enters and leaves the burrow at night, although may carry food to chick in daytime at some locations (Scott et al. 1974). North of

Oregon, appears more nocturnal, and probably forages at night. Richardson (1961) observed individuals fishing in the daytime within 16 km (10 mi) of the breeding colony.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: From October to April, occurs in large numbers on California's pelagic waters. Most of these individuals migrate from breeding colonies north of California (Sowls et al. 1980). Those that breed in California probably remain near the colony throughout the year (Sowls et al. 1980).

Home Range: On Protection Island off Washington, Richardson (1961) found burrows "one to dozens of feet apart", and found 132 active burrows on 0.12 ha (0.3 ac).

Territory: Richardson (1961) reported no consistent territorial behavior.

Reproduction: In colonies off Del Norte and Humboldt cos., lays eggs mid-May to mid-June, hatches eggs mid-June to mid-July, and fledges chicks through August (Sowls et al. 1980). Monogamous, colonial nester; lays clutch of 1 egg (Harrison 1978). Incubation is by both parents and takes 31-33 days (Sowls et al. 1980). The semiprecocial young remains in burrow 35-45 days, and leaves for sea before reaching adult size.

Niche: Sensitive to human disturbance. The close-to-the surface burrow is crushed easily (Sowls et al. 1980). One of the most susceptible seabirds to oil pollution (Remsen 1978). Presently undergoing a population increase and range extension in California, and all along Pacific Coast (Osborne 1973, Sowls et al. 1980). Nocturnal habits and use of burrow may result from predation and kleptoparasitism by diurnal gulls (Scott et al. 1974).

REFERENCES

- Cogswell, H. L. 1977. Water birds of California. Univ. California Press, Berkley. 399pp.
- Desante, D. F., and D. G. Ainley. 1980. The avifauna of the South Farallon Islands, California. Studies in Avian Biol. No. 4. Cooper Ornithol. Soc., Lawrence, KA. 104pp.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Grinnell, J., and A. H. Miller. 1944. The distribution of the birds of California. Pac. Coast Avifauna No. 27. 608pp.
- Harrison, C. 1978. A field guide to the nests, eggs and nestlings of North American birds. W. Collins Sons and Co., Cleveland, OH. 416pp.
- Leschner, L. L. 1976. The breeding biology of the rhinoceros auklet on Destruction Island. M.S. Thesis, Univ. Washington, Seattle. 77pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. Birds of northern California, an annotated field list. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Osborne, T. O. 1973. Recent nesting of the rhinoceros auklet in California. Condor 75:463-464.
- Remsen, J. V., Jr. 1978. Bird species of special concern in California. Calif. Dept. of Fish and Game, Sacramento. Wildl. Manage. Admin. Rep. No. 78-1. 54pp.
- Richardson, F. 1961. Breeding biology of the rhinoceros auklet on Protection Island, Washington. Condor 63:456-473.
- Scott, J. M., W. Hoffman, D. Ainley, and C. F. Zeillemaker. 1974. Range expansion and activity patterns in rhinoceros auklets. West. Birds 5:13-20.
- Sowls, A. L., A. R. DeGange, J. W. Nelson, and G. S. Lester. 1980. Catalog of California seabird colonies. U.S. Dep. Inter., Fish and Wildl. Serv., Wash. DC. Biol. Serv. Program FWS/OBS-80/37. 371pp.
- Terres, J. K. 1980. The Audubon Society encyclopedia of North American birds. A. Knopf, New York. 1100pp.
- Stallcup, R., and J. Winter. 1975. Middle Pacific Coast Region. Amer. Birds 29:735-740.

of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.