

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

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL

Oceanodroma leucorhoa

Family: HYDROBATIDAE
B580

Order: PROCELLARIIFORMES Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, SEASONALITY

Uncommon to fairly common summer breeders on offshore islands the length of the state, but mostly from the Farallon Islands north (Huntington et al. 1996). More than 90% of breeding colonies occur off of Humboldt and Del Norte counties, and a few in the Channel Islands (Harris 1974, Small 1994, Huntington et al. 1996). Otherwise, restricted to the open ocean, 50 km or more from shore. In winter, widely distributed in the eastern Pacific, especially in tropical waters (Huntington et al. 1996). Leach's storm-petrel is the most widespread breeding procellariiform in the Northern Hemisphere, breeding from Japan to Baja California in the Pacific and Massachusetts to Norway in the Atlantic. SOWLS et al. (1980) estimated nearly 20,000 breeding birds in 13 known or suspected breeding sites off California.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Obtains all food at sea. Feeds on zooplankton and nekton at the surface, while hovering or briefly resting on the water. Important food items include cephalopods, crustaceans, and fishes (Huntington et al. 1996). Is able to digest chitin, an important component of crustaceans (Jackson et al. 1992). Can feed far (200 km) from breeding colony (Steele and Montevecchi 1994)

Cover: Tied to land only to nest; otherwise remains over open sea far from land. Nests in burrow or rock crevice, from which they enter and leave only at night.

Reproduction: Excavates a burrow or nests in rock crevices on islands far enough offshore to prevent mammalian predators. Returns to same site each year.

Water: Drinks seawater. Specialized glands excrete salt through nostrils.

Pattern: For nesting, prefers offshore islands without mammalian predators. Forages over open ocean.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Nonbreeders remain at sea year-round. Nesting pairs enter and leave best burrow only at night. Presumably sleep in burrow or on water at sea.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Not well known; little information from recovered banded birds. Most birds winter in tropical waters (Huntington et al. 1996). Earliest arrivals at the Farallon Islands is the last week of February (Ainley et al. 1990).

Home Range: During breeding, may forage more than 200 km from burrow. No specific information on movements during non-breeding season.

Territory: Not territorial.

Reproduction: Arrives at nesting colony and occupies nest in February-April. Pair formation may occur at burrow site 1 or 2 seasons before breeding. Monogamous (Mauck et al. 1995); nest-site fidelity results in mate fidelity (Morse and Kress 1984). A clutch of a single egg is laid in May or June. Both sexes incubate and feed the young, which begin fledgling the first week of August (Ainley et al. 1975).

Niche: At sea, may be preyed upon by sharks (Huntington et al. 1996). Kleptoparasitism by jaegers, fork-tailed storm-petrels, and conspecifics occurs at nesting colonies (Morgan 1994). Predation by raptors, corvids, and gulls also occurs. Introduced mammals such as cats, rats, and dogs on islands can extirpate nesting colonies. Feeds farther from land in warmer, less productive waters than the closely related, non-migratory ashy storm-petrel (*O. homochroa*).

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