

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

BLACK STORM-PETREL

Oceanodroma melania

Family: HYDROBATIDAE
B584

Order: PROCELLARIIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: T. Kucera, 1998

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, SEASONALITY

Common to abundant post-breeding summer visitor in waters from Monterey Bay south during April to October, sometimes into January. A few birds range as far north as Cape Mendocino (Small 1994). Only known California breeding colony is on Santa Barbara Island and nearby Sutil Island, estimated at about 150 birds (Sowls et al. 1980, Pitman and Speich 1976).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Obtains all food at sea. Chief food off Southern California is larval stage of spiny lobster (Palmer 1962). Feeds on garbage in winter. The black storm-petrel feeds at the sea surface, probably also on cephalopods, other crustaceans, and small fish (Palmer 1962).

Cover: Tied to land only to nest; otherwise remains over open sea. Nests in burrows and rock cavities.

Reproduction: Nests in burrows, natural cavities, or rock crevices on islands. Presumably monogamous. Palmer (1962) noted that it preferred burrows of Cassin's auklet.

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

Pattern: For nesting, prefers offshore islands with cervices and burrows. Forages over open ocean; prefers warmer water than other storm-petrels (Palmer 1962).

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Nocturnal at the breeding colonies. Nesting pairs enter and leave nest only at night. Presumably sleep in burrow or on water at sea.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Migratory (Palmer 1962). After breeding, birds move generally south, some crossing the equator.

Home Range: Not known.

Territory: Not territorial.

Reproduction: A clutch of a single egg is laid between May and September (Palmer 1962). As with other storm-petrels, both sexes incubate and feed the young.

Niche: May be preyed upon, like other pelagic, island-nesting seabirds, by gulls and raptors (Ainley et al. 1975).

REFERENCES

Ainley, D. G., S. Morrell, and T. J. Lewis. 1975. Patterns in the life histories of storm petrels on

- the Farallon Islands. *Living Bird* 13:295-311.
- Palmer, R. S. 1962. *Handbook of North American Birds*. Vol. 1. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Pitman, R. L. and S. M. Speich. 1976. Black storm-petrels breed in California. *Western Birds* 7:71.
- Small, A. 1994. *California birds: their status and distribution*. Ibis Publishing Co., Vista, CA.
- Sowls, A. L., A. R. deGange, J. W. Nelson, and G. S. Lester. 1980. *Catalog of California seabird colonies*. U. S. Fish and Wildl. Serv., No. FWS/OBS 80/37.

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Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. *California's Wildlife*. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.