

## MORE RECORDS OF BREEDING BIRDS FROM MONTAGUE ISLAND, NORTHERN GULF OF CALIFORNIA

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Palacios and Mellink (1992, 1993) have reported on the breeding birds of Isla Montague, northern Gulf of California. Here we report additional breeding species detected during the 1993 breeding season.

**Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*).** Black Skimmers are locally common year-round in northwestern Baja California and are increasing their numbers on the peninsula (Palacios and Alfaro 1992). There are no previous confirmed nesting records for the northern Gulf of California, although Palacios and Mellink (1993) suspected their nesting on Montague. On 20 May 1993 we found a breeding colony of 14 nests with 33 eggs. The colony was about 1 km east of the main channel of the Estero del Chayo in a patch of open saltgrass (*Distichlis palmeri*). This species commonly forms mixed-species colonies, with Gull-billed Terns (*Sterna nilotica*) in North Carolina (Soots and Parnell 1975) and Caspian (*Sterna caspia*) and Elegant Terns (*Sterna elegans*) at Bolsa Chica, California (Schew and Collins 1991). On Montague, Black Skimmer nests were associated with 7 nests (containing 17 eggs) of Gull-billed Terns. Black Skimmers have bred at the Salton Sea, about 180 km north of Montague Island, since 1972 (McCaskie et al. 1974), and Montague might well have been the stepping stone to colonize the former. Black Skimmers evidently move between the upper Gulf and Southern California, as 4 of 17 Black Skimmers sighted at Montague on 23 March 1994 had been banded as chicks at Bolsa Chica (Eduardo Palacios and Salvador González pers. comm.).

**American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*).** On 10 June 1993 we found a pair of American Oystercatchers in an area with saltgrass and exposed shell banks near the island's lighthouse. The area had been flooded the day before and no evidence of nesting could be found. However, the two individuals moved along together and performed a distraction display. This is a widespread breeder in the upper Gulf of California and very often nests adjacent to Least Terns (*Sterna antillarum*) (Mellink and Palacios 1993). Our observation very likely indicates its nesting on Montague, in close proximity to Least Terns.

**Large-billed Sparrow (*Ammodramus sandwichensis rostratus*).** This species is an abundant summer resident of the island, being found in all the grassy patches at least in the southern part of the island, and probably throughout it. This subspecies breeds only in the Colorado River delta area but migrates during the winter to the coast of southern California and northern Baja California (Unitt 1984, Wilbur 1987). Unitt (1984) reported a severe decline in the numbers of Large-billed Sparrows visiting southern California and suggested this was probably associated with habitat changes in the delta. On 10 June 1993 we found two eggs in different sites, on the ground. The area had been flooded the day before, and we could not determine the original location of the eggs.

These additions to the list of known breeding birds of Montague Island, although not unexpected, increase the biological value of the area. Isla Montague is now part of the core zone of a recently decreed biosphere reserve (10 June 1993), and although the breeding bird species were not considered in this designation, they are now protected by it.

## NOTES

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## **PYGMY NUTHATCH SWINGING PYGMY NUTHATCH IN SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA**

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During a trip to Sawmill Canyon in the Huachuca Mountains, Cochise County, Arizona, I observed a Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*) swing another Pygmy Nuthatch by the tail. On 30 July 1993, at approximately 12:00 noon, I was watching a small flock of Pygmy Nuthatches working their way down the trunk of a conifer, about 15 feet off the ground. As one nuthatch hopped down past another, the second nuthatch grasped the first's middle rectrices in its bill and swung the first bird once back and forth like a pendulum, for approximately 2 seconds. During this time, the first remained with its wings folded and did not appear to react in any way. The second bird then let go of the first's tail, and the birds continued to forage down the trunk of the tree. A review of the literature on nuthatches reveals no mention of similar behavior; indeed, I found no mention of similar behavior in any species of bird.

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