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FIRST RECORD OF THE MANX SHEARWATER FOR MEXICO

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On 6 February 2003 we observed a Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) from a promontory at La Bufadora, Baja California, Mexico. We had set up our spotting scopes approximately 50 meters above the Pacific Ocean and were looking west with the sun at our backs at a few northbound Black-vented Shearwaters (*Puffinus opisthomelas*) approximately 400 meters from shore. San Miguel noticed a different looking shearwater and brought it to McGrath's attention. Both observers jointly identified the bird as a Manx Shearwater. The bird was visible for about a minute before disappearing to the north. San Miguel sketched it immediately following our observation (Figure 1). The following description combines the field notes from both observers.

The shearwater appeared identical in size and flight behavior to the accompanying Black-vented Shearwaters. Its flight was direct with few arcs and was characterized by quick wing beats and brief intermittent gliding. The dorsal surface was uniformly black, except for two small white ovals on the sides of the rump and a small white crescent that ran up the neck to the auricular area. The ventral areas were completely white, except for narrow black wing margins. While looking through San Miguel's scope (Swarovski EL 80 mm, 20–60× zoom), McGrath observed the bird as it banked and showed completely white undertail coverts. The contrast between the black dorsal surface and the ventral surface was pronounced, and there was no visible mottling between these two areas. The black crown and face extended to about the eye line,

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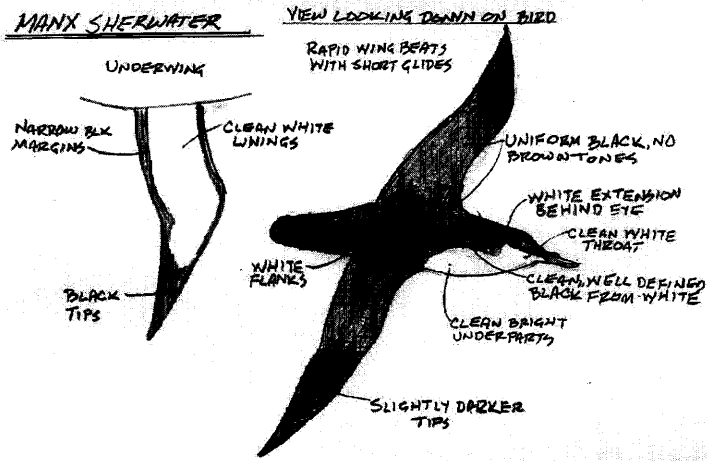


Figure 1. Manx Shearwater at La Bufadora, Baja California, 6 February 2003.

Sketch by Mike San Miguel

and the throat was pure white. The breast, sides, and flanks were also white, and the under wing coverts were clean white with sharply contrasting and well-defined black wing margins (black pigmentation did not extend into the linings).

Direct comparison with Black-vented Shearwaters immediately before and after we were looking at the Manx Shearwater assisted in the identification. Black-vented Shearwaters are brownish above and have variably smudgy dark throats, black vents, dingy white under parts, and smudgy wing linings. These differences were all evident as we were viewing the birds. Although a small fraction of Black-vented Shearwaters have partially or mostly white vents (Roberson 1996, McGrath pers. obs.), such birds are easily distinguished from the Manx by the other features noted above.

Although there are no records from northern Baja California for Townsend's Shearwater (*P. a. auricularis*), and no records anywhere near the peninsula for Newell's Shearwater (*P. a. newelli*), we considered and eliminated both of these taxa. Townsend's Shearwater breeds in the Revillagigedo Islands and disperses along the continental shelf from southern Baja California Sur to Central America (Howell and Webb 1995). Newell's Shearwater breeds only in the main Hawaiian Islands but disperses after breeding mostly east and south of Hawaii into the Equatorial Countercurrent (Spear et al. 1995). Newell's favors warm, deep tropical waters (Ainley et al. 1997) and is unlikely as a vagrant near the shore of northern Baja California. Thorough reviews of the identification of these species were provided by Howell et al. (1994) and Roberson (1996). The best distinguishing feature is the undertail covert pattern, with Townsend's showing all-dark undertail coverts (although some individuals show uneven patchy sections of white on the proximal undertail coverts), Newell's showing an intermediate pattern of white proximal undertail coverts and black on the distal and lateral coverts (Howell et al. 1994). In the Manx Shearwater the undertail coverts are all white. Since this bird showed all-white undertail coverts, Townsend's is easily eliminated. Distinguishing the Manx from Newell's Shearwater requires more care. In strong sun, it is possible that the undertail coverts can appear whiter as a result of the sun's glare making a Newell's Shearwater appear all white on the undertail (Howell et al. 1994).

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There are also five reports of the Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*) for the North Pacific Ocean: two unsubstantiated sight records for Alaska (Gibson et al. 2003), two records for Midway [one of a specimen (Clapp and Woodward 1968) currently being reevaluated (P. Pyle pers. comm.)], and one of a bird photographed on Monterey Bay 29 October 2003. The last has been accepted by the California Bird Records Committee (San Miguel and McGrath 2005). The Little Shearwater is much smaller than the Manx, with proportionately shorter wings and faster more direct flight, appearing almost like that of an alcid (McGrath pers. obs.).

North of the international border, the California Bird Records Committee has accepted at least 79 records of the Manx Shearwater records since the first on 25 July 1993 (Erickson and Terrill 1996). The frequency of records appears to be increasing. Roughly two-thirds are from fall, and most are from the central California coast, especially Monterey Bay. The popularity of fall pelagic boat trips to that location and the fact that these trips spend considerable time in the nearshore waters favored by Manx Shearwaters probably has much to do with these patterns. There are 11 accepted records for southern California (from San Luis Obispo County south) (Table 1), and the distribution of records is much more even seasonally, with five records in March or April, four records in September or October, and two records January or February.

Prior to our observation, the Manx Shearwater was unrecorded in Mexico, but there is a specimen of a carcass from Dangriga, Belize, in February 1990 (Howell and Webb 1996). The sighting of a Manx Shearwater off Costa Rica on 2 November 1997 (Faulkner 2002) is the only other Central American report for this species. But both of these records are from the Caribbean, not the Pacific.

The pattern of southern California sightings suggests that the Manx Shearwater may be a regular visitor off the Pacific coast of Mexico, particularly from September

Table 1 California Manx Shearwater Records South of Monterey County

Date	Number of birds	Location	Reference
2 Oct 1994	2	Morro Bay, San Luis Obispo Co.	Howell and Pyle (1997)
14 Apr 1996	1	Pt. Piedras Blancas, San Luis Obispo Co.	McCaskie and San Miguel (1999)
19 Jan 1997	1	~7 n. mi. SW Morro Bay, San Luis Obispo Co.	Rottenborn and Morlan (2000)
28 Apr 1999	1	Pt. Piedras Blancas, San Luis Obispo Co.	McKee and Erickson (2002)
19 Sep 1999	1	Off Emma Wood State Beach, Ventura Co.	Rogers and Jaramillo (2002)
17 Mar 2001	1	~5 n. mi. NW Pt. Vicente, Los Angeles Co.	Garrett and Wilson (2003)
23 Feb 2002	1	~4.5 mi. NW Palos Verdes Peninsula, Los Angeles Co.	Cole and McCaskie (2004)
4 Mar 2002	1	Off San Clemente Island, Los Angeles Co.	Cole and McCaskie (2004)
8 Sep 2002	1	Off Santa Maria River mouth, Santa Barbara Co.	Cole and McCaskie (2004)
17 Mar 2003	1	Off Pt. Vicente, Los Angeles Co.	San Miguel and McGrath (2005)
25 Oct 2003	1	2-3 mi. off Oxnard, Ventura Co.	San Miguel and McGrath (2005)

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through April. The absence of records to date may reflect the low number of observers in Mexico, the lack of organized pelagic trips, and/or the difficulty of detecting this species among massive numbers of Black-vented or Townsend's Shearwaters normally present in Mexican waters during the periods when the Manx might be expected.

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