Seabirds and Marine Mammals on the NMFS Rockfish Recruitment and Ecosystem Assessment Survey: 2019 Data Report

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Introduction

Seabird and marine mammal observations are an integral part of the NMFS Rockfish Recruitment - Ecosystem Assessment Survey (RREAS). These data are valuable for several reasons: (1) measurements provide an upper trophic level perspective to complement the oceanographic and mid-trophic level data collected by NMFS on this survey, (2) estimates of seabird and marine mammal abundance, diversity and distribution may contribute to various aspects of ecosystem and fisheries management, and (3) by extending our existing time series, measuring annual variation in the top predator community contributes to understanding the effects of climate variability and change on the California Current Ecosystem (CCE). This data report summarizes the at-sea survey observations made during the 2019 cruise, and presents basic distribution and abundance estimates for seabirds and marine mammals. We thank John Field, Keith Sakuma, Jarrod Santora and the captain and crew of the *R/V Reuben Lasker* for facilitating this project. Funding for making observations was provided by NOAA (IOOS-SCCOOS) and private sources.

Methods

Observations of seabirds and marine mammals are made continuously during daylight ship transits, often between oceanographic and mid-water trawl sampling stations. The observer, located on the bridge approximately 15 meters above sea level, uses hand-held binoculars to

assist in the identification and enumeration of birds and mammals. For seabirds, the observer records all individuals seen within a 300-meter strip transect to one side and front of the vessel while the ship is underway at speeds greater than 5 knots. For mammals, the observer records all individuals out to the horizon while the ship is underway. Observations are entered into a portable computer using the dedicated application "Dlog3"; the ship's position is automatically recorded periodically from an external GPS. Each observation includes the species, the number of individuals observed, and their behavior (mostly "flying" or "sitting on the water" for birds). At-sea observation data are post-processed using standardized species codes, validation of positioning data, and binning of observations into along-track sections of 3 km in length. The data are then integrated into a survey database which includes data from May 1996 to the present. These data are used to derive summary statistics on density/relative abundance. Species data are presented for both the "core region" and the full region surveyed since 2004 (see Sakuma et al. 2006 for delineations).

Table 1. The following criteria were applied to the survey database to select data for the data summary and report.

Criteria	Value
Behavior codes included	All values
Species categories included	Birds, Mammals, Unidentified
Species categories excluded	Fish, Excluded Species List
Year	2019
Month	All
Bin length	All bins > 0.1 km
Region	Core and Full

Taxa excluded from this summary were fish, terrestrial birds, and most shorebirds except phalaropes, which are largely pelagic. For seabirds, density is calculated as the total number of individuals observed per species divided by the area (km²) surveyed. For mammals, an "encounter rate" is defined as the total number of individuals observed per species divided by the linear amount of habitat (km) sampled. Density/encounter rate over time is shown for select seabird and mammal species in the core survey area 1996–2019. Seabirds highlighted in this report are black-footed albatross (*Phoebastria nigripes*), Brandt's cormorant (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*), Cassin's auklet (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*), common murre (*Uria aalge*), pinkfooted shearwater (*Ardenna creatopus*), rhinoceros auklet (*Cerorhinca monocerata*), and sooty shearwater (*A. griseus*). Marine mammals included in the 2019 report are humpback whale

(Megaptera novaeangliae), fin whale (Balaenoptera physalus), Pacific white-sided dolphin (Lagenorhynchus obliquidens), and Risso's dolphin (Grampus griseus).

Results

A summary of survey effort is shown in Table 2; transects surveyed are shown in Figure 1. In contrast to previous years, in which daytime predator surveys were largely conducted along random or opportunistic transit lines associated with CTD or MWT sampling stations, the survey this year emphasized nearshore regions expected to be important for anchovies, seabirds and marine mammals. This focus included strategic transects along the shelf-break (200m isobath) as well as fine-scale transects near the Channel Islands, Point Sal, Monterey Bay, Davenport, Farallon Islands, and Point Reyes, and replicate fine scale transects near Point Reyes (outer Drakes Bay) and Davenport to assess short-term shifts in predator-prey associations As a result of these efforts, , within the core area, nearshore regions within the 200 m shelf break were sampled much more thoroughly than in previous survey years; this effort pattern is depicted in Figure 2. The emphasis on nearshore surveys greatly amplified the observed densities of several seabird species, particularly species with nearby breeding colonies (Common Murre, Brandt's Cormorant; see Table 3). Therefore, in order to better compare densities in 2019 with earlier years, we removed five of the fine-scale transects within the core region (see Figure 2).

Summarized species observations for all species in the core region, "standardized" core region (five transects removed) and total survey area are shown in Tables 3 and 4 (see Appendix 1 for exclusions). A total of 28 days of survey effort covering 3,283 km (985 km²) of ocean habitat is summarized; 15 days were spent covering 1,356 km (407 km²) in the core survey area between Cypress Point (Big Sur) and Bodega Bay. Density/encounter rate over time in the core area for the selected species is shown in Figures 2 and 3. Notable results from the normalized 2019 survey for these species include high densities of sooty shearwater (highest density of the time series), and relatedly, the density of all focal species combined. Above average but within 1 s.d. of the mean, Brandt's cormorant and common murre had high densities, while pink-footed shearwater had slightly higher than average density and densities of rhinoceros and Cassin's auklets were below average. There was also low density of black-footed albatross, which was one standard deviation below the average. Our focal marine mammals, combined, had above average abundance within the core area. This is primarily attributed to the high encounter rate for humpback whales; this year was the third highest abundance of humpback whales in the history of the survey. Pacific white-sided dolphins also had higher than average abundance. On the other hand, no fin whales or Risso's dolphins were seen within the core region.

Table 2. Summary of survey effort and seabird and mammal community statistics.

2019	Core Area	Core Area (normalized)	Full
Survey vessel			R/V Reuben Lasker
Start date			5/9/2019
End date			6/6/2019
Number of survey days	15	14	28
Distance surveyed (km)	1,356	1,096	3,283
Area surveyed (km²)	407	329	985
Number of bird species	35	33	50
Overall bird density (per km²)	72.361	63.342	42.544
Total birds observed	29,361	20,835	41,905
Number of mammal species	9	9	19
Overall mammal encounter rate (per 100 km)	60.5	71.2	73.1
Total mammals observed	821	781	2,399

Figure 1. 2019 survey transects for the full (left) and core (right) regions. Gaps usually reflect nighttime.

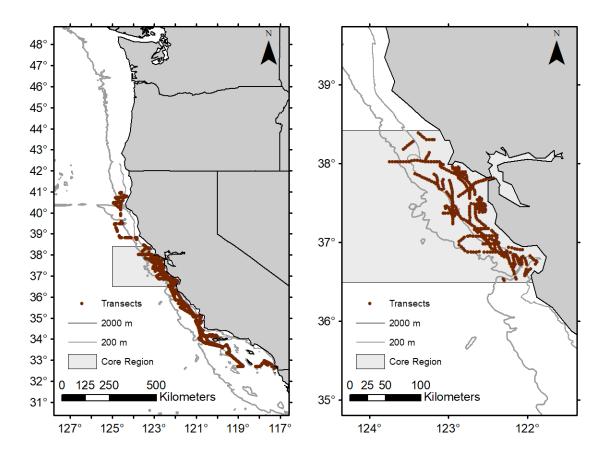


Figure 2. 2019 survey trackline overlaid onto the overall RREAS survey effort map (2004 - 2018). Effort map is presented as 3 km bin midpoints. Circled regions depict transects that were removed in 2019 in order to standardize interannual comparisons.

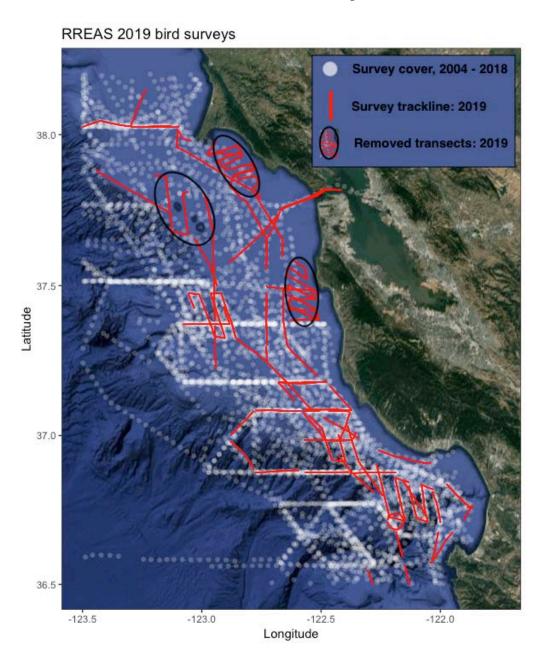


Table 3. Bird survey observations, stratified by area and species. Cell values represent: total number of individuals seen / number of species sightings / average density (birds/km²).

Common Name	Scientific Name	Core Area	Core Area (standardized)	Full Area
American White Pelican	Pelecanus erythrorhynchos			
Ancient Murrelet	Synthliboramphus antiquus			
Arctic Loon	Gavia arctica			
Arctic Tern	Sterna paradisaea			
Ashy Storm-Petrel	Oceanodroma homochroa	1/1/0	1/1/0	37 / 3 / 0.04
Black guillemot	Cepphus grylle			
Black Scoter	Melanitta nigra			
Black Storm-Petrel	Oceanodroma melania			52 / 29 / 0.05
Black-Footed Albatross	Phoebastria nigripes	85 / 77 / 0.21	85 / 77 / 0.26	180 / 167 / 0.18
Black-Legged Kittiwake	Rissa tridactyla			
Black-Vented Shearwater	Puffinus opisthomelas			5 / 2 / 0.01
Bonaparte's Gull	Larus philadelphia			5 / 1 / 0.01
Brandt's Cormorant	Phalacrocorax penicillatus	647 / 251 / 1.59	250 / 116 / 0.76	839 / 324 / 0.85
Brant	Branta bernicla			
Brown Booby	Sula leucogaster			1/1/0
Brown Noddy	Anous stolidus			
Brown Pelican	Pelecanus occidentalis	84 / 36 / 0.21	74 / 31 / 0.22	152 / 68 / 0.15
Buller's Shearwater	Puffinus bulleri			
California Gull	Larus californicus	28 / 12 / 0.07	16 / 8 / 0.05	30 / 14 / 0.03
Caspian Tern	Sterna caspia	5 / 4 / 0.01	4/3/0.01	8 / 7 / 0.01
Cassin's Auklet	Ptychoramphus aleuticus	105 / 52 / 0.26	96 / 48 / 0.29	205 / 106 / 0.21

	Aechmophorus			
Clark's Grebe	clarkii	1/1/0	1/1/0	1/1/0
Common Loon	Gavia immer	1/1/0	1/1/0	2/2/0
Common Murre	Uria aalge	7805 / 2138 / 19.19	3561 / 1091 / 10.83	8997 / 2545 / 9.13
Common Tern	Sterna hirundo			
Cook's Petrel	Pterodroma cookii			7 / 7 / 0.01
Craveri's Murrelet	Synthliboramphus craveri			
Dark Shearwater	(species group)			
Dark-Rumped Petrel	Pterodroma phaeopygia sandwichensis			
Double-Crested Cormorant	Phalacrocorax auritus	2/2/0	2/2/0.01	3/3/0
Eared Grebe	Podiceps nigricollis			
Elegant Tern	Sterna elegans	1/1/0	1/1/0	32 / 14 / 0.03
Flesh-Footed Shearwater	Puffinus carneipes			
Fork-Tailed Storm- Petrel	Oceanodroma furcata			10 / 10 / 0.01
Forster's Tern	Sterna forsteri			
Franklin's Gull	Larus pipixcan			
Glaucous Gull	Larus hyperboreus			
Glaucous-Winged Gull	Larus glaucescens			1/1/0
Guadalupe Murrelet	Synthliboramphus hypoleucus			
Hawaiian Petrel	Pterodroma sandwichensis			
Heermann's Gull	Larus heermanni			2/2/0
Herring Gull	Larus argentatus			
Horned Puffin	Fratercula corniculata			
Hybrid Gull	(species group)			
Juan Fernandez Petrel	Pterodroma externa			

Kelp Gull	Larus dominicanus			
Kermadec Petrel	Pterodroma neglecta			
Laughing Gull	Larus atricilla			
Laysan Albatross	Phoebastria immutabilis	2/2/0	2/2/0.01	4/4/0
Leach's Storm-Petrel	Oceanodroma leucorhoa	1/1/0	1/1/0	13 / 12 / 0.01
Least Storm-Petrel	Oceanodroma microsoma			
Least Tern	Sterna antillarum			
Long-Tailed Jaeger	Stercorarius longicaudus			
Marbled Murrelet	Brachyramphus marmoratus			
Masked Booby	Sula dactylatra			1/1/0
Mew Gull	Larus canus			
Mottled Petrel	Pterodroma inexpectata			
Murphy's Petrel	Pterodroma ultima			
Northern Fulmar	Fulmarus glacialis	5 / 5 / 0.01	5 / 5 / 0.02	8 / 8 / 0.01
Osprey	Pandion haliaetus			
Pacific Loon	Gavia pacifica	25 / 14 / 0.06	19 / 11 / 0.06	36 / 18 / 0.04
Parakeet Auklet	Aethia psittacula			
Parasitic Jaeger	Stercorarius parasiticus	5 / 5 / 0.01	4 / 4 / 0.01	7 / 7 / 0.01
Parkinson's Petrel	Procellaria parkinsoni			
Pelagic Cormorant	Phalacrocorax pelagicus	13 / 11 / 0.03	2/2/0.01	17 / 13 / 0.02
Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus			
Pigeon Guillemot	Cepphus columba	14 / 11 / 0.03	3 / 2 / 0.01	15 / 12 / 0.02
Pink-Footed Shearwater	Puffinus creatopus	249 / 161 / 0.61	227 / 144 / 0.69	683 / 401 / 0.69
Pomarine Jaeger	Stercorarius pomarinus			1/1/0

Red Phalarope	Phalaropus fulicaria	299 / 52 / 0.74	299 / 52 / 0.91	444 / 99 / 0.45
Red-Billed Tropicbird	Phaethon aethereus			3/2/0
Red-Footed Booby	Sula sula			
Red-Necked Grebe	Podiceps grisegena			
Red-Necked Phalarope	Phalaropus lobatus	75 / 16 / 0.18	57 / 14 / 0.17	484 / 71 / 0.49
Red-Tailed Tropicbird	Pheathon rubricauda			
Red-Throated Loon	Gavia stellata	1/1/0		1/1/0
Rhinoceros Auklet	Cerorhinca monocerata	67 / 51 / 0.16	66 / 50 / 0.2	87 / 65 / 0.09
Ring-Billed Gull	Larus delawarensis	2/2/0		5 / 4 / 0.01
Royal Tern	Sterna maxima	7 / 2 / 0.02	4 / 1 / 0.01	18 / 10 / 0.02
Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres			
Sabine's Gull	Larus sabini	5 / 2 / 0.01	5 / 2 / 0.02	27 / 10 / 0.03
Scripps's murrelet	Synthliboramphus scrippsi			63 / 36 / 0.06
Short-Tailed / Slender-Billed Shearwater	Puffinus tenuirostris			
Short-Tailed Albatross	Phoebastria albatrus			
Solander's Petrel	Pterodroma solandri			
Sooty Shearwater	Puffinus griseus	18852 / 1539 / 46.35	15346 / 1234 / 46.65	27966 / 2867 / 28.39
South Polar Skua	Stercorarius maccormicki			
Stejneger's Petrel	Pterodroma longirostris			
Surf Scoter	Melanitta perspicillata	2/1/0	2 / 1 / 0.01	2/1/0
Thayer's Gull	Larus thayeri			
Townsend's Storm- Petrel	Oceanodroma socorroensis			

Tufted Puffin	Fratercula cirrhata	10 / 7 / 0.02	10 / 7 / 0.03	11 / 8 / 0.01
Unidentified Albatross	(species group)			
Unidentified Auklet	(species group)			
Unidentified Cormorant	(species group)			
Unidentified Duck	(species group)			
Unidentified Grebe	(species group)			
Unidentified Gull	(species group)	61 / 38 / 0.15	57 / 34 / 0.17	93 / 67 / 0.09
Unidentified Jaeger	(species group)			1/1/0
Unidentified Large Alcid	(species group)			
Unidentified Leach's Storm-Petrel	(species group)			
Unidentified Loon	(species group)			
Unidentified Murre	(species group)			
Unidentified Petrel	(species group)			
Unidentified Phalarope	(species group)			5/3/0.01
Unidentified Procellarid	(species group)			
Unidentified Shearwater	(species group)	1/1/0	1/1/0	5 / 4 / 0.01
Unidentified Skua	(species group)			
Unidentified Small Alcid	(species group)			
Unidentified Storm- Petrel	(species group)			1/1/0
Unidentified Tern	(species group)	1/1/0	1 / 1 / 0	20 / 6 / 0.02
Unidentified Tropicbird	(species group)			
Wedge-Rumped Storm-Petrel	Oceanodroma tethys			
Wedge-Tailed Shearwater	Puffinus pacificus			
Western Grebe	Aechmophorus occidentalis	7 / 4 / 0.02	7 / 4 / 0.02	7 / 4 / 0.01

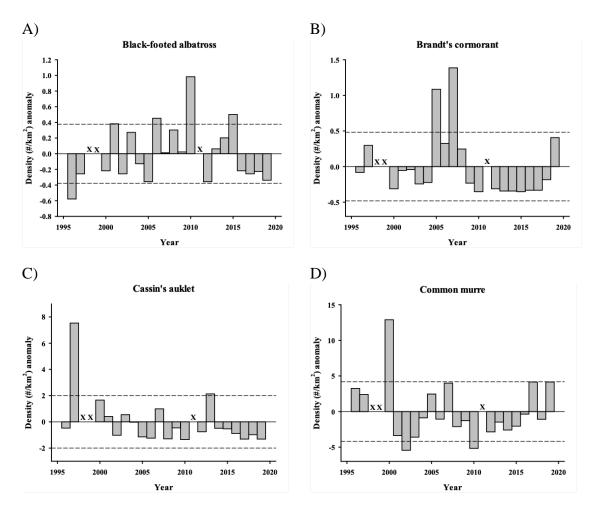
Western Gull	Larus occidentalis	965 / 621 / 2.37	625 / 370 / 1.9	1308 / 878 / 1.33
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	Oceanites oceanicus			
Xantus's / Craveri's Murrelet	(species group)			
Xantus's Murrelet	Synthliboramphus hypoleucus			

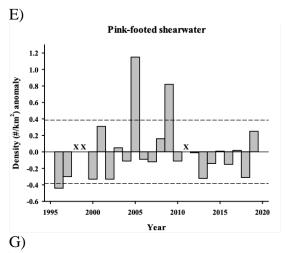
Table 4. Mammal survey observation summary, broken down by survey area and species. Cell values represent: total number of species individuals / number of species sightings / average species encounter rate (individuals per 100 km).

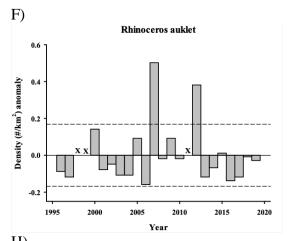
Common Name	Scientific Name	Core Area	Core Area (standardized)	Full Area
Baird's Beaked Whale	Berardius bairdii			
Blue Whale	Balaenoptera musculus			1/1/0
Bottlenose Dolphin	Tursiops truncatus			35 / 3 / 1.1
California Sea Lion	Zalophus californianus	38 / 29 / 2.8	33 / 24 / 3	530 / 184 / 16.1
Common Dolphin	Delphinus delphis			
Cuvier's Beaked Whale	Ziphius cavirostris			
Dall's Porpoise	Phocoenoides dalli	27 / 5 / 2	27 / 5 / 2.5	30 / 6 / 0.9
False Killer Whale	Pseudorca crassidens			
Fin Whale	Balaenoptera physalus			8 / 4 / 0.2
Gray Whale	Eschrichtius robustus			
Green Sea Turtle	Chelonia mydas			
Guadalupe Fur Seal	Arctocephalus townsendi			
Harbor Porpoise	Phocoena phocoena			
Harbor Seal	Phoca vitulina	1 / 1 / 0.1	1 / 1 / 0.1	2/2/0.1
Humpback Whale	Megaptera novaeangliae	175 / 140 / 12.9	141 / 114 / 12.9	347 / 254 / 10.6
Killer Whale	Orcinus orca			5 / 1 / 0.2
Long-beaked Common Dolphin	Delphinus capensis			30 / 1 / 0.9
Minke Whale	Balaenoptera acutorostrata			1/1/0
Northern Elephant Seal	Mirounga angustirostris	1 / 1 / 0.1	1/1/0.1	4 / 4 / 0.1
Northern Fur Seal	Callorhinus ursinus	12 / 10 / 0.9	12 / 10 / 1.1	42 / 28 / 1.3
Northern Right Whale Dolphin	Lissodelphis borealis	100 / 6 / 7.4	100 / 6 / 9.1	200 / 7 / 6.1

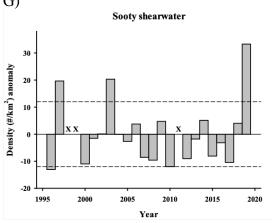
	Lagenorhynchus			
Pacific White-Sided Dolphin	obliquidens	464 / 28 / 34.2	464 / 28 / 42.3	910 / 85 / 27.7
Pilot Whale	Globicephala spp.			
Pygmy Sperm Whale	Kogia breviceps			
Ridley Sea Turtle	Lepidochelys olivacea			
Right whale dolphin	Lissodelphis spp			
Risso's Dolphin	Grampus griseus			14 / 2 / 0.4
Sea Otter	Enhydra lutris			
Sei Whale	Balaenoptera borealis			
Short-Beaked Common Dolphin	Delphinus delphis			130 / 9 / 4
Short-Finned Pilot Whale	Globicephala macrorhynchus			
Sperm Whale	Physeter macrocephalus			
Steller Sea Lion	Eumetopias jubatus			
Striped Dolphin	Stenella coeruleoalba			
Unidentified Balaenoptera	(species group)			12 / 1 / 0.4
Unidentified Beaked Whale	(species group)			
Unidentified Cetacean	(species group)			
Unidentified Dolphin	(species group)			80 / 2 / 2.4
Unidentified Large Whale	(species group)			
Unidentified Pinniped	(species group)			
Unidentified Sea Lion	(species group)			
Unidentified Seal	(species group)			
Unidentified Whale	(species group)	3 / 3 / 0.2	2/2/0.2	18 / 14 / 0.5

Figure 2. Density (number/km²; expressed as anomalies) over time from standardized core area surveys, 1996–2019. A) black-footed albatross, B) Brandt's cormorant, C) Cassin's auklet, D) common murre, E) pink-footed shearwater, F) rhinoceros auklet, G) sooty shearwater, and H) the previously shown seven species (note not all seven species were seen every year). The dashed lines indicate \pm 1 s.d. of the long-term mean, and 'x' indicates years when no survey was conducted.









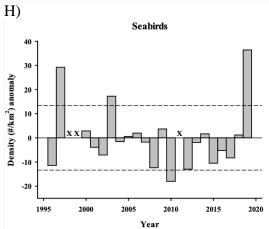
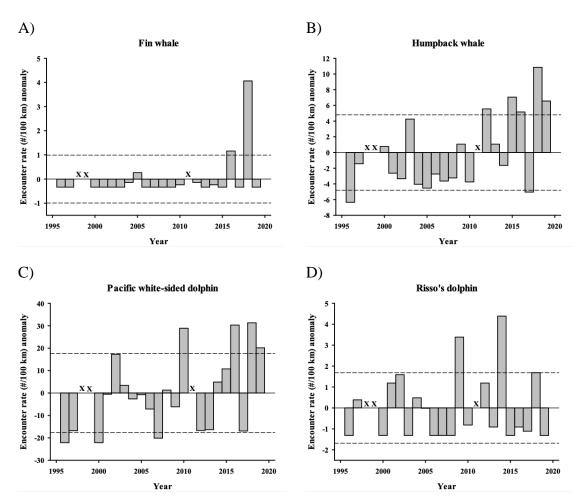
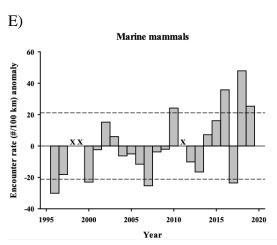


Figure 3. Encounter rate (number/100 km; expressed as anomalies) over time from standardized core area surveys, 1996–2019, of A) fin whale, B) humpback whale, C) Pacific white-sided dolphin, D) Risso's dolphin, and E) the previously shown four species (note not all four species were seen every year). The dashed lines indicate \pm 1 s.d. of the long-term mean, and 'x' indicates years when no survey was conducted.





Reference

Sakuma, K.M., Ralston, S., and Wespestad, V.G. 2006. Interannual and spatial variation in the distribution of young-of-the-year rockfish (*Sebastes* spp.): Expanding and coordinating a survey sampling frame. California Cooperative Oceanic Fisheries Investigations (CalCOFI) Report 47:127-139.

Appendix. List of bird species excluded from this summary. These species may or may not have been observed during the survey.

Common Name	Scientific Name
American coot	Fulica americana
Black oystercatcher	Haematopus bachmani
Black skimmer	Rynchops niger
Black tern	Chlidonias niger
Black turnstone	Arenaria melanocephala
Black-throated gray warbler	Setophaga nigrescens
Brewer's sparrow	Spizella breweri
Brown-headed cowbird	Molothrus ater
Bufflehead	Bucephala albeola
Chaplan's storm-petrel	Oceanodroma leucorhoa chapmani
Eurasian collared dove	Streptopelia decaocto
European starling	Sturnus vulgaris
Great blue heron	Ardea herodias
Great egret	Ardea alba
Green heron	Butorides virescens
Least sandpiper	Calidris minutilla
Long-billed curlew	Numenius americanus
Long-billed dowitcher	Limnodromus scolopaceus
Mallard duck	Anas platyrhynchos
Marbled godwit	Limosa fedoa
Mourning dove	Zenaida macroura
Nazca booby	Sula granti
Red-breasted merganser	Mergus serrator
Ruddy duck	Oxyura jamaicensis
Sanderling	Calidris alba
Savannah sparrow	Passerculus sandwichensis
Snow goose	Chen caerulescens
Snowy egret	Egretta thula
Townsend's warbler	Setophaga townsendi

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Unidentified bird	(species group)
Unidentified dowitcher	(species group)
Unidentified goose	(species group)
Unidentified hummingbird	(species group)
Unidentified passerine	(species group)
Unidentified raptor	(species group)
Unidentified shorebird	(species group)
Wandering tattler	Tringa incana
Western sandpiper	Calidris mauri
Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus
White-winged scoter	Melanitta fusca
Willet	Catoptrophorus semipalmatus
Wilson's warbler	Cardellina pusilla
Yellow-rumped warbler	Dendroica coronata