

Status and Occurrence of Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin and Louis Haviland.

Introduction and Distribution

The Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) is a small species of shearwater found year round along both sides of the North Atlantic Ocean (Onley and Scofield 2007). This species has breeding colonies in Iceland, France, Faeroe Island, Ireland, Scotland, England, Channel Islands, Azores Islands, Madeira Island, and the Canary Islands (Onley and Scofield 2007). In eastern North America, the Manx Shearwater breeds in Newfoundland and is found in the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Maine (Lee and Haney 1996). Some of these birds winter in the North Atlantic Ocean off North America from the Carolinas to Florida, but most birds are trans-equatorial migrants from July to March wintering in the South Atlantic Ocean off Brazil to Argentina and spread across the South Atlantic to South Africa (Lee and Haney 1996, Onley and Scofield 2007). The Manx Shearwater has been undergoing a somewhat mysterious range expansion over the past few decades with more and more birds turning up in the North Pacific Ocean (Roberson 1996, Mlodinow 2004). Though breeding is suspected it has yet to be proven (Mlodinow 2004). One bird was tape recorded at night in a nesting burrow on Triangle Island by Dr. Ian Jones in the summer of 1994 (Mlodinow 2004). The bird was never actually seen and the bird's identity was left unidentified for many years (P. Jones Pers. Comm.). Another possible breeding record comes from Alaska on Middleton Island on May 12, 2005, when 2 birds were seen together possibly prospecting for a nest site (Gibson *et al.* 2008). Records presumed to be this species have been slowly increasing since the late 1970's and now the Manx Shearwater is an annually occurring species in small numbers along the West Coast of North America (Roberson 1980, Mlodinow 2004). One reason for the increasing detections is that Manx Shearwater frequents waters that are close to shore so it gets found quite often by observers (Lee and Haney 1996). There are now over 79 accepted records of the Manx Shearwater in California by the California Bird Records Committee (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2014). In Oregon, there are 12 accepted records by the Oregon Bird Records Committee (OFO 2012). The Manx Shearwater is now so regular in Washington State, with over 37 records, that it was removed from the state review list in 2008 by the Washington Bird Records Committee (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2012). In Alaska, the Manx Shearwater is currently listed in West (2008) as casual, but increasing in frequency in the waters off the state. In British Columbia, the Manx Shearwater has exploded in records since the mid 1990's and now is classified as a rare to casually occurring species with over 50 records for the Province (Campbell *et al.* 2001, Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). Even though the Manx Shearwater is a truly pelagic species, it can be blown inland in eastern parts of North America after Hurricanes (Lee and Haney 1996). There is one incredible photographic record for Charlo, Montana found on May 30, 2004, at the Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge (Holt *et al.* 2007).

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Manx Shearwater is covered in all standard North American field guides. There are other species found in the Pacific Ocean that are similar looking such as the Newell's Shearwater (*Puffinus newelli*) found in the waters near Hawaii, and the Townsend's Shearwater (*Puffinus auricularis*) found in the warm waters off Southern Mexico, but both are out of the scope of this article (Howell 1994, Onley and Scofield 2007). For further information on how to separate and identify these species consult Onley and Scofield (2007). The Manx Shearwater measures 30-38 cm in length with a wing span of 76-79 cm (Lee and Haney 1996). This makes them smaller than the more common, Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*) which measures 43 cm in length and has a wingspan of 102 cm (Onley and Scofield 2007). The Manx Shearwater appears close up and from great distance as black on top and white below (Onley and Scofield 2007). The top of the head, nape and back are black, but can look brownish when the feathers are worn (Onley and Scofield 2007, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This dark colour extends down the sides of the neck (Sibley 2000). The face has dark lores and auriculars with a pale crescent behind the auriculars (Sibley 2000). The bill is thin and black (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The throat, breast, belly and flanks are gleaming white, as are the undertail coverts (Onley and Scofield 2007). The upper wings are black as is the rump and tail (Onley and Scofield 2007). The underwings are white with a thin black border that extends along the entire secondary edge to the primaries and variably along the leading edge of the wing (Lee and Haney 1996). This species flies with shallow, choppy wing strokes and a shallow, quick glide (Lee and Haney 1996).

The Black-vented Shearwater is the most likely candidate to be found in British Columbia that looks similar to the Manx Shearwater. The Black-vented Shearwater is a small shearwater that is 35–38 cm in length, with a wingspan of 76–89 cm (Keitt *et al.* 2000). This species is best characterized by dark-brown upperparts, blending with mostly dull-white underparts and mostly white underwings, which have smudgy-brown trailing edges; and brownish-black under tail-coverts (Keitt *et al.* 2000). The amount and extent of the mottling along the sides of the neck, shoulders, and the flanks is highly variable (Onley and Scofield 2007). The plumage of both sexes is identical (Keitt *et al.* 2000). The dark bill is slender, long, and sharply hooked (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The tarsus is laterally compressed; the legs and feet are dusky flesh-coloured (Keitt *et al.* 2000). The indistinct patterned dusky face and black undertail coverts help distinguish this species from the Manx Shearwater (Onley and Scofield 2007).

Occurrence and Documentation

In British Columbia, there are 56 records from all along the coast of the province (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The sudden increase in British Columbia records of the Manx Shearwater since the 1990's is a complex mystery. What makes deciphering older records difficult is that all

were likely called Black-vented Shearwaters as the idea of a Manx Shearwater being seen in the Pacific Ocean was at one time unheard of (J. Fenneman Pers. Obs.). In our research of past accounts of Black-vented Shearwater, we found at least a few that had perfect descriptions for Manx Shearwater (Martin and Myres 1969). The Manx and Black-vented Shearwaters were split by the AOU in 1983 (AOU 1983). Since that time our identification and understanding of both species has drastically increased. It appears that Black-vented Shearwater is much rarer north of California and occurs in years of large water events such as El Nino (Small 2003). This is not to ever assume that all previously reported sightings of the Black-vented Shearwater are misidentified Manx Shearwaters. A reported Black-vented Shearwater seen by the author on a British Columbia Ferry on May 16, 1996, was seen by both observers at point blank range and Manx Shearwater was easily ruled out (Toochin 1998). Given the problematic nature of older Black-vented Shearwater records, it is probable that a few were in fact Manx Shearwaters (J. Fenneman Pers. Obs.).

The records for Manx Shearwater are from 3 main regions of the Province. There are 45 records for the waters near Vancouver Island, 11 records off the Queen Charlotte Islands, and 1 from deeper pelagic waters off Vancouver Island (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The number of records from the mouth of the Juan de Fuca Strait reflects years when extensive sea watches were conducted from 2006-2009 (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). The Manx Shearwater was detected in May and June with the bulk of sightings coming from August to October (Toochin *et al.* 2014, see Table 1). It is possible that there are a few nesting pairs breeding on the Washington State side of the Juan de Fuca Strait (R. Merrill Pers. Comm.). This seems highly plausible given both the number of birds and frequency of sightings in the area.

The Manx Shearwater has also been found with more frequency on pelagic trips over the past 25 years from California to Washington State (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, OFO 2012, WBRC 2012). Given the explosion of occurrences in recent decades and the use of digital camera by observers, it is likely more Manx Shearwaters will be found in British Columbia as more observers look at seabirds. It is possible that this species will become common in future decades as the species continues to expand into the North Pacific. It should also be noted that records of Manx Shearwater are positively correlated with opportunities for pelagic boat trips off the coast.



Figures 1 & 2: Record #49: Manx Shearwater (on the lower right in both images) at 9NM off Ucluelet on April 29, 2012. Photos © Peter Candido.

Table 1: Records of Manx Shearwater for British Columbia:

- 1.(1) adult July, 1994: Ian Jones, Christine Adkins (tape recorded nocturnal calls on seabird colony) Triangle Island (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 2.(1) adult May 18, 1998: Mike Bentley: northern tip of Vancouver Island (50°45'N , 129 °34'W) (Campbell *et al.* 2001)
- 3.(1) adult June 6, 1998: Michael Force: about 24 NM east of Lyell Island, Hecate Strait, QCI (52°41.7'N 130°42.8'W) (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 4.(1) adult May 4, 2002: Micheal Henry: north of Triangle Island (50 o 57.0' N, 128 o 54.5' W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 5.(1) adult June 16, 2004: Ken Morgan: north of Scott Islands (50 o 50.6' N, 175 o 33.8' W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 6.(1) adult July 20, 2004: Michael L.P. Retter: Hecate Strait, Queen Charlotte Islands (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 7.(1) adult August 8, 2004: Jukka Jantunen, and other observers (photo) off Race Rocks near RPBO, Metchosin (Cecile 2005a, Force *et al.* 2006)
- 8.(1) adult June 2, 2005: Nathan Hentze: off Dare Pt., West Coast Trail (48.64°N, 124.82°W) (Cecile 2005d, Toochin 2012b)
- 9.(1) adult June 20, 2005: Peter Hamel, Margo Hearne : 15 NM ne of Lawn Point, Hecate Strait (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 10.(1) adult July 2, 2005: well off Calvert Island (51.58°N, 128.71°W) (Kenyon *et al.* 2009)
- 11.(1) adult July 10, 2006: Bruce Whittington: Goose Bank, Queen Charlotte Sound (51° 37' N, 128° 43' W)(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 12.(1) adult August 28, 2006: Rick Toochin: just off Jordan River (Cecile 2007a, Toochin 2012b)
- 13.(1) adult September 27, 2006: Jared Towers: north of Hope Island, Fitz Hugh Sound, northern Vancouver Island (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 14.(1) adult July 22, 2007: Rick Toochin: off Botanical Beach, Port Renfrew (Toochin 2012b)
- 15.(1) adult August 11, 2007: Rick Toochin: off Botanical Beach, Port Renfrew (Toochin 2012b)
- 16.(1) adult October 7, 2007: Rick Toochin: Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 17.(1) adult November 18, 2007: Rick Toochin: just off Jordan River (Toochin 2012b)

- 18.(1) adult August 16, 2008: Rick Toochin, Louis Haviland: off Botanical Beach, Port Renfrew (Toochin 2012b)
- 19.(1) adult August 22, 2008: Louis Haviland, Rick Toochin: off Botanical Beach, Port Renfrew (Toochin 2012b)
- 20.(2) adults August 24, 2008: Louis Haviland, Rick Toochin: off Botanical Beach, Port Renfrew (Toochin 2012b)
- 21.(1) adult August 30, 2008: David Allinson, Marcy McKay: Tower Point, Metchosin (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 22.(1) adult September 2, 2008: Bob Hansen: off the West Coast Trail (Toochin 2012b)
- 23.(1) adult September 2, 2008: Peter Hamel, Margo Hearne: Hecate Strait, Queen Charlotte Islands (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 24.(2) adults September 24, 2008: Louis Haviland, Rick Toochin: Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 25.(1) adult May 31, 2009: Rick Toochin, Mitch Meredith: Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 26.(1) adult June 5, 2009: Rick Toochin: Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 27.(1) adult August 4, 2009: Rick Toochin: BC side of Juan de Fuca off Point No Point (Toochin 2012b)
- 28.(1) adult August 5, 2009: Rick Toochin: Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 29.(1) adult August 8, 2009: Louis Haviland, Rick Toochin: Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 30.(1) adult August 8, 2009: Rick Toochin, Louis Haviland: off Botanical Beach, Port Renfrew (Toochin 2012b)
- 31.(2) adults August 11, 2009: Rick Toochin, Louis Haviland: Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 32.(1) adult August 11, 2009: Louis Haviland: Otter Point, Sooke (Toochin 2012b)
- 33.(2) adults August 12, 2009: Rick Toochin, Louis Haviland: Otter Point, Sooke (Toochin 2012b)
- 34.(1) adult August 16, 2009: Brian Stetch: off Botanical Beach, Port Renfrew [Manx type] (Toochin 2012b)
- 35.(1) adult August 13, 2009: Capt Russ Nicks, mobs (video) by zodiac off Sheringham Lighthouse, Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 36.(1) adult August 16, 2009: Brian Stetch: off Botanical Beach, Port Renfrew [Manx type] (Toochin 2012b)
- 37.(1) adult August 19, 2009: Rick Toochin: Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 38.(1) adult August 26, 2009: David Allinson: Tower Point, Witty's Lagoon Park, Metchosin (Charleswort 2010a)
- 39.(1) adult August 29, 2009: Rick Toochin: Shirley (Toochin 2012b)
- 40.(1) adult September 3, 2009: Mike Bentley (photo) about 100 miles off Tofino (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 41.(1) adult September 12, 2009: Rick Toochin: Swiftsure Banks, off Carmanah Lighthouse (Toochin 2012b)
- 42.(1) adult August 21, 2010: Russ Cannings: 10nm west of Triangle Island (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 43.(1) adult August 26, 2010: Russ Cannings: Hecate Strait, 10NM sw to S of Bonilla Island, QCI (Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 44.(1) adult September 17, 2011: Mike and Sharon Toochin: 35NM west of Quatsino Sound (Toochin *et al.* 2014b)

- 45.(1) adult November 11, 2011: Mike Ashbee: Canadian side of Juan de Fuca on Coho Ferry
(Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 46.(1) adult April 29, 2012: Dave Aldcroft, mobs (photo) 9NM off Ucluelet (Toochin *et al.* 2014)
- 47.(1) adult June 20, 2012: Jared Towers (photo) Bajo Reef, 3 miles west of Nootka Island
(Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 48.(1) adult June 6, 2013: Paul Lehman, mobs: 50km west of central Vancouver Island
(Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 49.(1) adult July 16, 2013: Paul Lehman, mobs: 79km ESE of south tip of QCI
(Toochin *et al.* 2014)
- 50.(1) adult July 16, 2013: Paul Lehman, mobs: 100km SE of south tip of QCI
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 51.(1) adult July 16, 2013: Paul Lehman, mobs: 77km off northwest tip of Vancouver Island
(Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 52.(1) adult July 16, 2013: Paul Lehman, mobs: 79km ESE of south tip of QCI
(Toochin *et al.* 2014a)
- 53.(1) adult September 15, 2013: Devon Anderson, mobs: 20km off Ucluelet
(Toochin *et al.* 2014b)
- 54.(1) adult September 18, 2014: Jared Towers (photo) off Goose Islands, South Hecate Strait
(D. Cecile Pers. Comm.)
- 55.(1) adult October 6, 2014: Rick Toochin, Mitch Meredith: Skonun Point, Masset
(R. Toochin Pers. Comm.)
- 56.(1) adult October 18, 2015: Guy Monty, mobs: Amphitrite Point, Ucluelet
(M. Hafting Pers. Comm.)

Table 2:

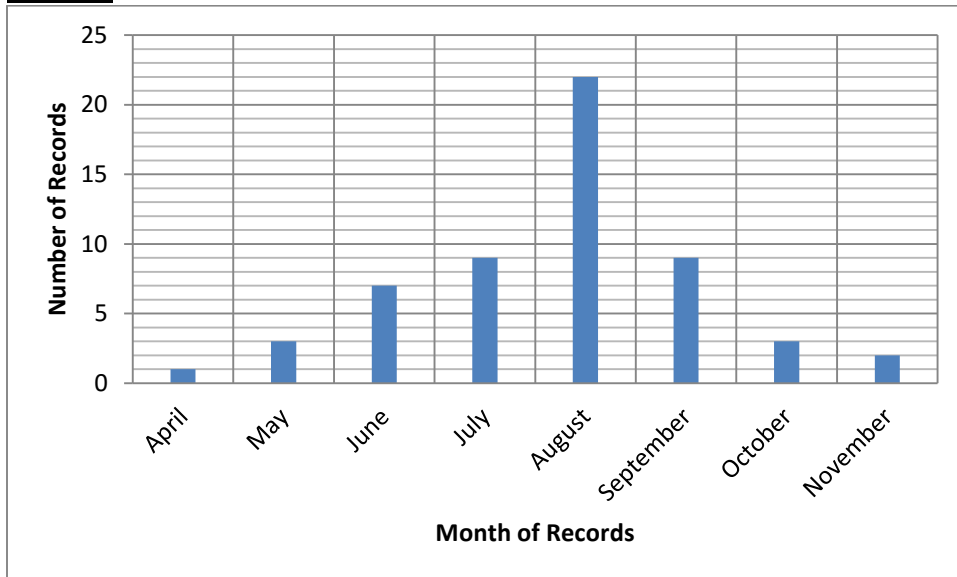


Table 2:

Note the sharply defined occurrence in the summer months of this species with June, July and September having many records. It is interesting to note that the month of August has the highest number of Provincial records.

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