

Cassin's Auklet
North Pacific Winter Wreck - 2024
version 1.0 16 February 2024

Who:

Cassin's Auklet, *Ptychoramphus aleuticus*, is a small (~200g, or 7oz) krill and larval fish-eating seabird that breeds along the West Coast of North America, from Baja to Alaska. Easy to recognize, Cassin's have blue feet, dark back and wings, pale belly, and a pale spot on the lower bill right at the chin. Cassin's nest in burrows dug into the ground, in colonies that reach hundreds of thousands of pairs.

Population Size: ~3.5 Million

Population Center: British Columbia, the Scott Island group, off the NW tip of Vancouver Island, supports ~80% of the world's breeding population, or almost 3 million birds.. The Farallon Islands, a breeding center in California, is ~30,000 birds

Longevity: 6-10 years, max 23

Clutch Size: 1 egg annually except in the southern end of the range, where double clutching (two back-to-back breeding events over a single spring-summer) have become common

Range: Tracking studies have shown that adult birds from British Columbia travel north to southeast Alaska, and as far south as Baja California.

Population Status: Variable, with populations stable/increasing in CA and decreasing in the British Columbia.

What:

In early January 2024, Cassin's Auklets began washing ashore in Oregon and Washington in unexpected numbers. By late January, partners in Northern California had also received reports from their surveyors.

Data Collectors:

Four organizations collectively totaling over 800 trained coastal residents linked to marine biologists at major scientific institutions on the West Coast are collecting data on hundreds of beach sites monthly, from Alaska south to Monterey Bay, California:

Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST) – Alaska south to Mendocino County, U.S.

Redwood National Park – Del Norte to Humboldt County, CA

Beach Watch – Mendocino County to San Mateo County, CA

Beach Coastal Ocean Mammal/Bird Education and Research Surveys (BeachCOMBERS) –San Mateo County to Los Angeles County, CA

When, Where and How Many:

In January 2024, COASSTers living along the coastline of Northern California, Oregon, and Washington, have encountered, on **average**, 5 Cassin's Auklets in each kilometer of beach searched (CAAU/km). The **highest** "encounter rate" (on a single beach) across all COASST regions was 200 CAAU/km, in the Northern Oregon region.

When we break that encounter rate down into regions, **there's a spike in northern Oregon**. Below we compare **regional averages this January** with our **long-term baseline** encounter rate in January (2001-2024, excepting die-off years) as well as the encounter rate recorded during the **record-breaking 2014-2015 Cassin's die-off**, which also occurred across January. (See publication: [Jones et al. 2018](#) for a synthesis of those data.)

	Encounter Rate (CAAU/km) January 2024	Encounter Rate (CAAU/km) Baseline	Encounter Rate (CAAU/km) January 2015
Northern WA	0.4	0.1	11.0
Southern WA	5.4	0.3	13.4
Northern OR	12.0	0.7	13.3
Southern OR	4.9	0.5	6.2
Humboldt CA	0.6	0.1	0.7
Mendocino CA	0.0	0.1	0.0

Contact Information:

WA, OR, CA – (COASST) Jackie Lindsey (Science Coordinator) coasst@uw.edu 206-221-6893, Julia Parrish (Executive Director) jparrish@uw.edu 206-221-5787

Necropsies:

Four carcasses were collected in Oregon by ODFW and sent to the Wildlife Health Lab and the Oregon Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory for analysis. So far, one specimen has tested negative for HPAI (avian influenza). Two carcasses were fresh enough for a necropsy, and the cause of death for those birds was potentially linked to starvation. Test results for cyanotoxin and BT40 (*Mergibacter septicus* sp) are pending.

Contact Information:

Roberta Swift (ODFW): roberta_swift@fws.gov