

The First Record of Guadalupe Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus hypoleucus*) in British Columbia and Canada. By Rick Toochin and Don Cecile. Submitted: April 15, 2018.

Introduction and Distribution

The Guadalupe Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus hypoleucus*) is a small alcid that is found breeding from the months of February to August on offshore rocks and islands of western Baja California from Guadalupe Island south to the San Benito Islands (Howell and Webb 2010, Chesser *et al.* 2012). There are unconfirmed reports of breeding on San Martin Island, Baja California, and San Clemente and Santa Barbara Islands, California (Chesser *et al.* 2012). The Guadalupe Murrelet is listed by BirdLife International (2017) as Endangered with an estimated global population size of 5000 mature individuals and a population that is declining. The biggest threat to the survival of the Guadalupe Murrelet comes mainly from oil spills, because most of its population lives near the busy shipping lanes connecting Los Angeles to other ports (Gilliland 2017). Because a large part of this small population nests in such a small area, a single catastrophic oil spill could have far reaching implications (Gilliland 2017). It is also threatened by introduced species such as rats and feral cats; this threat has been lessened lately by efforts to restore its habitat by removing introduced predators (Gilliland 2017). The Guadalupe Murrelet is rare, geographically restricted, and its life cycle is not well known (Schulenberg 2017).

The Guadalupe Murrelet winters offshore, presumably within the breeding range along the Pacific coast of Baja California (Chesser *et al.* 2012). This species is casual off coastal California at least until early winter, and accidental there in midwinter (Chesser *et al.* 2012). This species wanders north during the months of August and September after the breeding season to waters well offshore of central California (Howell and Webb 2010, Chesser *et al.* 2012). Along the west coast of North America, the Guadalupe Murrelet is a rare and somewhat irregular in late summer and fall in the waters of northern California (Chesser *et al.* 2012). In the nonbreeding season, this species is a pelagic species and spends most of the time in the open ocean and away from the coast (Chesser *et al.* 2012). Now that Guadalupe Murrelet has been split, there should be an increase in records further north as pelagic observers look more closely for this species. Schulenberg (2017) maps the Guadalupe Murrelet as moving north as far as the pelagic water off Haida Gwaii. Further records and information will have to be collected to confirm this hypothesis. Currently in Oregon the Guadalupe Murrelet is a casual or accidental species with only 4 accepted records by the Oregon Bird Records Committee (OFO 2016). Further north along the West Coast the Guadalupe Murrelet is a casual occurring species off Washington with 2 accepted records by the Washington Bird Records Committee, and an additional; 4 records where the very similar and annual Scripp's Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus scrippsi*) was not ruled out (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2016). In British Columbia, the Guadalupe

Murrelet is an accidental species with only 1 well observed sight record from the waters of Haida Gwaii (M. Force Pers. Comm.).

The Guadalupe Murrelet is far less numerous than Scripp's Murrelet in inshore waters (Schulenberg 2017). This species was formerly called Xantus's Murrelet, and was split into 2 separate species; the Guadalupe Murrelet and Scripp's Murrelet by the AOU in 2012 (Chesser *et al.* 2012). One critical reason for the separation of these 2 species was on the basis of a lack of evidence of interbreeding where the two are sympatric on the San Benito Islands, and on differences in morphology, especially facial pattern and bill shape, vocalizations, and genetics (Birt *et al.* 2012, Jehl and Bond 1975, Keitt 2005)

Identification and Similar Species

The identification of the Guadalupe Murrelet is covered in all standard North American field guides. Older field guides show this species under Xantus's Murrelet (Sibley 2000). The Guadalupe Murrelet is overall the same size as a Scripp's Murrelet (Gaston and Jones 1998). This species measures 24 cm in length and has a wingspan of 38 cm (Gilliland 2017). The two species are very similar but, Guadalupe Murrelet has a slightly larger bill and more extensive white around the eye and on the cheek (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This white extends further up in a crescent in front of and sometimes behind the eye with a variable amount behind the eye (Gaston and Jones 1998). There is a white spot on the lower eyelid that forms a broader white streak (Gaston and Jones 1998). The ear-coverts are grey, rather than slate as found on Scripp's Murrelet (Gaston and Jones 1998). The white can sometimes extend to the ear coverts, and sides of the neck (Gaston and Jones 1998). The bill is black (Gaston and Jones 1998). The legs and feet are light blue with black webs (Gaston and Jones 1998). The eye is brown (Gaston and Jones 1998). There are no known differences between breeding and winter plumage (Gaston and Jones 1998).

The Scripps's Murrelet is a small, cleanly marked alcid that has a short slender bill (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). This species measures 23–25 cm in length with a wingspan approximately 40 cm, and adult birds weigh 148–167 grams (Drost and Lewis 1995, Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The top of head and neck, back, wings, and tail are solid black with a bluish-gray cast, especially in fresh plumage (Sibley 2000). In worn plumage the dorsal colour is gray-black, sometimes a dull brown cast, but generally still showing some bluish-gray (Drost and Lewis 1995). The bill is thin, short and black (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Under the bill the chin is white with a distinct demarcation line from the bill to the eye where the dark of the head meets the white of the throat (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The demarcation line isn't straight and has a small white wedge in front of the eye (Gaston and Jones 1998). There are two distinct thin white eye-arcs above and below the dark eyes (Gaston and Jones 1998). On sitting birds, the

dark on the neck comes down towards the breast, but not across the chest and as a result doesn't show an extensive neck collar (Gaston and Jones 1998). The throat, breast, and under-tail coverts are gleaming white (Sibley 2000). The under-wing in flight is bright white with a dark secondary edge that extends up to the primary tips (Gaston and Jones 1998). The upper surface of the wing is all dark (Gaston and Jones 1998). The flight style is straight and direct with rapid wing beats (Gaston and Jones 1998). This species sits upright in the water and takes off in a characteristic manner by rising straight out of the water then flying away (Gaston and Jones 1998). This take-off manner makes them appear different from other Alcids found in British Columbian waters.

The similar Craveri's Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus craveri*) is a flat blackish-brown, without the bluish-gray tones, and shows stronger brown cast in worn plumage (Gaston and Jones 1998). The Craveri's Murrelet has dark feathers forming a partial collar at sides of neck that is longer and narrower than on Guadalupe Murrelet (Gaston and Jones 1998). The under-wing coverts on the Craveri's Murrelet are gray or mottled gray and white with the inner vane of primaries a dull brown (Gaston and Jones 1998). The flanks are a solid brownish-gray (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The under-parts, including throat and under-tail coverts are snowy white (Sibley 2000). The bill is long and thin with black on the chin that extends further down below the eye than on the Guadalupe (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Occurrence and Documentation

The Guadalupe Murrelet is an accidental species in British Columbia with only 1 sight record of 2 adults found together 15 NM west of Moresby Island tip, Haida Gwaii (52°23.2'N, 132°29.2'W) by expert seabird observer Michael Force on August 2, 1994 (M. Force Pers. Comm.). This represents the first record for British Columbia and Canada. The Guadalupe Murrelet has a much more southerly range than the closely related Scripp's Murrelet (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Unlike Scripp's Murrelets that wander regularly after breeding northward in the late summer and fall, the Guadalupe Murrelet is relatively rare in North American waters and is most often encountered off southern California (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The 2 species are different enough that separating records has been done from Oregon and Washington State (OFO 2016, WRBC 2017). Sea surface temperature is a very likely reason that the Guadalupe Murrelet moves further north out of their more southerly range with warmer temperatures pushing birds northward (Wahl *et al.* 2005). In British Columbia, there are so few pelagic trips, most only going offshore as far as 40 NM, which is why observations of Scripps's Murrelet are unrepresentative of how many birds are likely showing up in British Columbian waters (T. Plath Pers. Comm.). Given Guadalupe Murrelet is a more deep-water pelagic species, encountering this species on an inshore pelagic trip is less likely, though not impossible (T. Plath Pers. Comm.). With the recent ability of observers to gain access to the deep-water pelagic zone

through Cruise Ship repositioning cruises, it is possible that there could be more records of the Guadalupe Murrelet in British Columbia waters in the future.

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