

Tom Benson's Report on the Feb. 19, 2017 Winter Pelagic Trip

Sea & Sage Audubon held their annual winter pelagic trip today, February 19, out of Dana Point aboard the Ocean Institute's R/V Sea Explorer. We started out with some drizzle and slightly rough seas that eventually cleared and calmed for a pleasant day on the ocean.

The clear highlight of the trip, as suggested by the subject line, was the encountering of multiple albatrosses. We were only 30 minutes out of the harbor and about 8 km from Dana Point when shouts of Laysan Albatross rang through the air. The bird, a first county record, circled the boat providing good looks for everyone on board before continuing on its way. Not 10 minutes later there were shouts of Black-footed Albatross across the boat, as this bird too circled the boat for a few minutes before departing. We encountered what we presumed was this same individual (Black-footed) just north of Lausen Sea Mount and again north of that location approximately 20 km southwest of Newport Beach. We then had a second Black-footed Albatross (distinguished by plumage) further north about half way between platforms Eureka and Ellen.

Additional highlights from today's trip included a rather distant Flesh-footed Shearwater approximately 12 km southwest of the mouth of the Santa Ana River, an adult Black-legged Kittiwake on and around Platform Ellen, and an adult female Brown Booby on Platform Edith. Other pelagic species included 11 pairs of Scripps's Murrelets, Cassin's (dozens) and Rhinoceros (12) Auklets, Black-vented Shearwaters (hundreds), Sooty Shearwaters (2), a Northern Fulmar, and a Pomarine Jaeger.