FIRST RECORD OF THE MARBLED MURRELET AND THIRD RECORD OF THE ANCIENT MURRELET FOR MEXICO

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We discovered two Marbled Murrelets (*Brachyramphus marmoratus marmoratus*) and an Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) at Ensenada, Baja California, in the early afternoon of 9 January 1994. We first saw the Marbled Murrelets from the beach just south of the southern jetty forming Ensenada harbor. Wishing to document the record more fully, and to consider further the possibility that the birds were of the more vagrancy-prone Asiatic race (*B. m. perdix*), we rented a boat at the harbor. After closely viewing and photographing the Marbled Murrelets on the water, we found the Ancient Murrelet along an inner jetty of the harbor.

MARBLED MURRELETS

The two Marbled Murrelets (Figures 1 and 2) remained close to one another the entire time we observed them, diving and foraging over the sandy bottom. They appeared healthy; their alert posture, with heads and tails up, contrasted with that of the Ancient Murrelet seen later. They called several times as we slowly approached them by boat, giving soft quack-like notes ("eh-eh"; S. B. C. Dechesne, unpubl. data) typical of the species. Presumably the same birds were seen again on 11 January by R. E. Webster (in litt.), but they were not found later in the month, despite considerable searching by K. Radamaker, A. M. Sada, L. Santaella, and T. E. Wurster (pers. comm.).

Distinction between North American and Asiatic Marbled Murrelets

Our descriptions and photographs show that the Ensenada birds were *B. m. marmoratus* in basic plumage, not *B. m. perdix*. *Marmoratus* is primarily resident in its North American breeding range, which extends from southern Alaska to Santa Cruz County, California (AOU 1983, Marshall 1988). *Perdix* occurs at similar latitudes in Asia, ranging from Kamchatka and the Commander Islands south to Japan and Korea (AOU 1983). Except in coastal southern California, all previous North American records of the Marbled Murrelet away from the general breeding range have been of *perdix* (Sealy et al. 1991, Sibley 1993).

After examining two specimens of *perdix* at the California Academy of Sciences and observing a live bird in Ontario, Sibley (1993) suggested field characters useful in distinguishing the two forms of the Marbled Murrelet in basic plumage. On 26 January 1994, Erickson examined specimens at the

Figure 1. Marbled Murrelets at Ensenada, Baja California, 9 January 1994. Note the typical murrelet shape and general plumage pattern, white scapulars, extensively white flanks and, in contrast to the similar Kittlitz's Murrelet, longer bill and dark face. The largely white nape and extent of dark below the eye indicate the nominate race rather than *B. m. perdix*. The ages of these birds are unknown; although Bent (1919) suggested that first winter birds are blacker and less gray than adults, Carter and Stein (in press) stated that "by early fall, older juveniles are not distinguishable in the field from after-hatching-year birds in basic plumage."

Photo by Robert A. Hamilton

Figure 2. Marbled Murrelet at Ensenada 9 January 1994. The nearly complete white nuchal collar typical of *B.m. marmoratus* is evident here.

Photo by Robert A. Hamilton

Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California, Berkeley (MVZ), including a large series of *marmoratus* and eight *perdix*, all but one in basic plumage. These specimens revealed that Sibley's recommendations (quoted here and illustrated in Figure 3; see also useful photographs of *perdix* in *Am. Birds* 34:137, 37:206, 48:105 and *Natl Audubon Soc. Field Notes* 48:291) should be tempered somewhat.

1. "*Perdix* shows an entirely dark hindneck; [*marmoratus* has a] nearly complete white nuchal collar." This, the most obvious distinction between the two forms, was borne out by all of the MVZ specimens, as well as both specimens of *perdix* at the San Diego Natural History Museum (P. Unitt pers. comm.). Caution is essential, however, as specimens showed that some juvenile and molting *marmoratus* can have hindneck patterns suggestive of *perdix*.

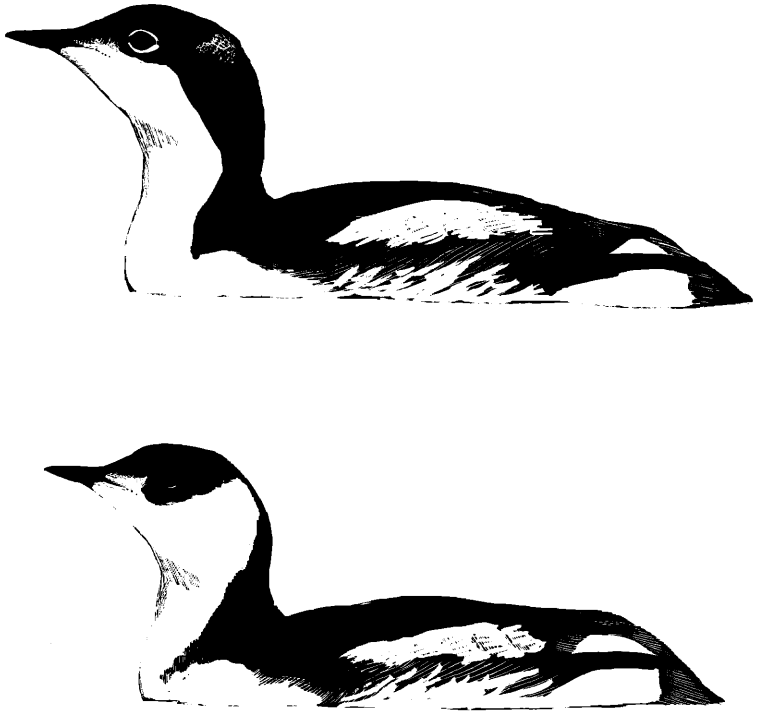

Figure 3. Basic plumages of Asiatic (upper) and American (lower) Marbled Murrelets. This drawing of *perdix* is based entirely on an individual on the St. Lawrence River, Ontario/New York, in October 1993; the drawing of *marmoratus* is based on photos and sketches of numerous birds. See text for further discussion.

Sketch by David Sibley (from *Birders' Journal* 2:277)

2. "*Perdix* shows ... less black below the eye." This was consistent with all MVZ specimens.

3. "*Perdix* shows ... less black on the sides of the breast." This, too, was consistent with all MVZ specimens in basic plumage, though some juveniles of *marmoratus* lacked extensive dark sides of the breast.

4. "*Perdix* shows ... bolder white eye-arcs," (i.e., broken white eye-rings). This mark was earlier suggested by Harrison (1983). Although the MVZ specimens showed this difference to prevail on average, there was complete overlap, with some *marmoratus* showing bold eye-arcs and some *perdix* showing indistinct eye-arcs.

5. "*Perdix* [is] entirely dark above the gape; *marmoratus* shows a broad pale stripe above the gape." Again, the MVZ specimens showed this difference to be of averages only, there being complete overlap in both directions.

6. "Presumably typical of *perdix* is a pair of pale patches on the nape, divided by a darker gray stripe down the center of the nape." This mark was not matched by any of the MVZ *marmoratus* but was not shown by most of the *perdix* either; only two specimens had distinctive patches. As alluded to previously, juvenal and transitional plumages of *marmoratus* may show nape patches if incoming white feathers appear there first.

7. The bill of *perdix* "averages 30% longer" than *marmoratus*. Sealy et al. (1982) found a complete separation at an exposed culmen length of 18 mm. *Perdix* also averages larger in body bulk, 296 g, versus 225 g in *marmoratus* (Piatt et al. 1994). These differences are likely to be difficult to ascertain in the field, especially on lone birds. Note also that Sealy (1975) found fledgling *marmoratus* to weigh an average of only 70.5% of adults and to have exposed culmen lengths averaging 83.8% of adults'.

In all features, the Ensenada birds were typical of *marmoratus*.

Southern Records of the Marbled Murrelet on the Pacific Coast of North America

South of its breeding range, the Marbled Murrelet is nearly annual in the California Current as far south as Point Arguello, Santa Barbara County, primarily in fall and winter (Roberson 1985, Marantz 1986, Lehman 1994). It is irregular farther south, with most records for the Santa Barbara and Los Angeles areas (Webster et al. 1980, Garrett and Dunn 1981, Lehman 1994, *Am. Birds* 35:227, 36:331, 36:894). As it did with the Ancient Murrelet, the winter of 1979–80 brought exceptional numbers of Marbled Murrelets to central and southern California (*Am. Birds* 34:201, 34:303, 34:307; Garrett and Dunn 1981), including the southernmost previously recorded: two at Imperial Beach, San Diego County 15–16 December 1979. Unitt (1984) considered the racial identity of the Imperial Beach birds inconclusive, lacking a specimen, but a photograph in *Am. Birds* 34:307 clearly shows the white hindneck and extensive black below the eye, typical of *marmoratus*. Except for the birds at Ensenada, the species was unrecorded south of Santa Barbara in the winter of 1993–94 (*Natl. Audubon Soc. Field Notes* 48:248).

ANCIENT MURRELET

The Ancient Murrelet at Ensenada was easily approached as it swam just off a jetty within the harbor (Figure 4). Its rather slow movements and slouching manner suggested to us that it was not healthy. Pyle refound the bird later in the afternoon, but it was not seen thereafter, despite the concerted efforts of K. Radamaker, A. M. Sada, L. Santaella, R. E. Webster, and T. E. Wurster (pers. comm.) through the end of the month. There was an irruption of this species in California in the winter of 1993–94, with records from most southern coastal counties and an exceptional inland bird at San Pablo Reservoir, Contra Costa County, 13–22 November (*Am. Birds* 48:149, 48:152; *Natl. Audubon Soc. Field Notes* 48:248).

Among the alcids, the Ancient Murrelet is one of the most prone to vagrancy. It has been recorded as far from its normal North Pacific range as Quebec, Ohio, Louisiana, and England (Munyer 1965, Verbeek 1966, AOU 1983, Waldon 1994). Prior to the one at San Pablo Reservoir, there were only three confirmed inland records for California, of single birds at the north end of the Salton Sea on 16 June 1984 (*Am. Birds* 38:1062) and 23 May 1987 (*Am. Birds* 41:488) and at Mono Lake on 9 December 1985 (Gaines 1988). The location of an undated specimen from Palm Springs reported by Garrett and Dunn (1981) is unknown; we consider the record inconclusive.

Figure 4. Ancient Murrelet at Ensenada, 9 January 1994. The pale bill and gray upperparts contrasting with the uncrested black head are characteristic of this species. The criteria for assessing an Ancient Murrelet's age in winter are poorly known, but the apparently unworn primary coverts visible here may suggest this was an adult.

Photo by Robert A. Hamilton

Along the California coast, the Ancient Murrelet is annual south to San Luis Obispo County (Marantz 1986); it occasionally irrupts to the south (Garrett and Dunn 1981, Lehman 1994). The winter of 1979–80 was especially noteworthy, producing the greatest flight ever recorded in southern California (*Am. Birds* 34:201, 34:307; Garrett and Dunn 1981). Even in that year, very few birds were seen in southern California after the first week of January (*Am. Birds* 34:307).

There are two previous records of Ancient Murrelets in Mexican waters (Howell and Webb in press), of one collected near Ensenada on 25 December 1927 (Grinnell 1928) and five seen near Los Coronados Islands on 24 February 1980, during the invasion (*Am. Birds* 34:307), not in 1975 as stated by Wilbur (1987).

SUMMARY

In basic plumage, the two subspecies of the Marbled Murrelet, *Brachyramphus m. perdix* and *B. m. marmoratus*, differ as follows: *perdix* has an entirely dark hindneck, a narrow band of black below the eye, and limited black on the sides of the breast; *marmoratus* has a nearly complete white nuchal collar, more black below the eye, and extensive black on the sides of the breast. Other plumage characteristics are inconsistent or are average differences only. In addition to the two we photographed at Ensenada, Baja California, on 9 January 1994, all Marbled Murrelet specimens and photographs that we have examined from coastal California south of the species' breeding range have been *marmoratus* on the basis of these criteria. An Ancient Murrelet we photographed at Ensenada on this same date was at the southernmost locality recorded for the species.

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