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INLAND RECORDS OF THE BLACK SKIMMER IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

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In the western United States west of the 100th meridian, the Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*) was first recorded in coastal southern California on 8 September 1962 (Audubon Field Notes 17:69) and first recorded inland, at the Salton Sea in southeastern California, on 3 July 1968 (McCaskie and Suffel 1971). After breeding began at the Salton Sea in 1972 (McCaskie et al. 1974), the Black Skimmer rapidly expanded its distribution in California, with an estimated breeding population of 1200 pairs in 1995 (Collins and Garrett 1996) and 1400–1500 pairs in 2005 (Molina 2008) in breeding colonies at the Salton Sea and scattered coastal localities as far north as south San Francisco Bay (Collins and Garrett 1996, Molina 1996, 2008). Skimmers occasionally wander along the coast north of San Francisco to Bodega Bay in Sonoma County (Bolander and Parmeter 2000), rarely farther north. In Humboldt County, a pair was seen at Eureka from 17 to 23 August 2004 (N. Am. Birds [NAB] 59:144) and one was at McKinleyville on 19 July 2005 (NAB 59:651). Another turned up at Crescent City, Del Norte County, on 13 July 2007 (NAB 61:638). A skimmer subsequently seen at Pistol River in Curry County, Oregon, on 26 January 2008 (NAB 62:294, Irons 2008), represents the northernmost record in western North America.

Although two subspecies of the Black Skimmer nest primarily near fresh water along rivers in the interior of South America, the nominate race of North America is almost exclusively a coastal breeder, yet individuals often stray inland (Gochfeld and Burger 1994). Following its recent range expansion in California, the skimmer has subsequently wandered with increasing frequency to inland localities scattered across California and four other western states. In this note I report the northernmost inland record of Black Skimmer in the western United States, at Clear Lake in northern California, and review the species' occurrence inland in the western United States, from the published literature and recent reports to www.eBird.org (Figure 1). I obtained approximate elevations for each locality from Google Earth.

RECORD FROM CLEAR LAKE, CALIFORNIA

Given the skimmer's extreme rarity north of Bodega Bay, California, with only four coastal records and no inland records, the appearance of one inland, 59 km from the coast, on Clear Lake (elev. 405 m), Lake County, California, was unexpected. At 07:21 on 3 July 2013, Allen Moreno, Bryan McIntosh, and I were searching for grebe nests from a canoe when I spotted an adult Black Skimmer flying toward us, from southeast to southwest, at Rumsey Slough, just south of Lakeport. We watched it for about 1 minute as it flew past us and then vanished when it veered northward over the tules toward Lakeport. It reappeared twice, at 07:37 and again at 07:47, each time flying past us from southeast to northwest as we paddled near Konocti Vista Casino; somehow it circled past us twice without being detected. We heard its nasal grunt several times but never saw it skimming for fish. I managed to obtain several photos (see this issue's back cover). Throughout the day and during the next few days we and other frustrated local birders searched for it in vain from various vantage points around the lake. We also failed to relocate it from a motorboat during a census of waterbirds around the perimeter of the lake on 12 July. At a latitude of 38° 20' 53.15" N, this observation represents the northernmost inland record in the western United States.

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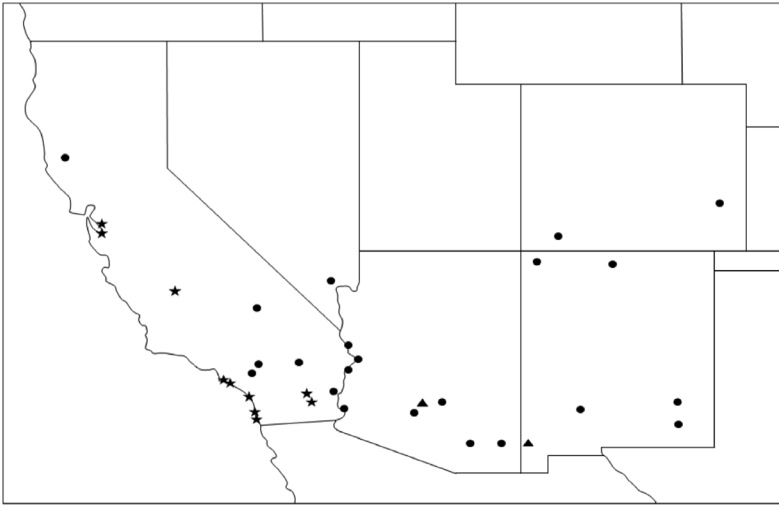


Figure 1. Inland records of the Black Skimmer >50 km from the coast in the western United States. Stars represent breeding localities (Molina 2008), triangles represent band recoveries of skimmers banded at the Salton Sea, California, and circles represent other inland records.

OTHER INLAND RECORDS IN CALIFORNIA

Because all but a few dozen of California's skimmers nest in colonies at the Salton Sea and in coastal southern California, most of the inland records are from those areas. Skimmers routinely wander short distances inland up coastal floodplains near sea level but rarely stray inland to higher elevations. Some of the more significant inland records from southern California away from the Salton Sea begin with a juvenile at San Jacinto Wildlife Area (elev. 435 m) and Lake Elsinore (elev. 378 m), Riverside County, 28 August–4 September 1978 (*Am. Birds* [AB] 33:214, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Subsequent records include two at Palo Verde (elev. 71 m), Imperial County, 30 July 1982 (AB 36:1016, K. V. Rosenberg et al. 1991); two at China Lake Naval Weapons Center (elev. 671 m; highest inland record for California), Kern County, 28 July 1990 (AB 44:1187); two at Twentynine Palms, San Bernardino County, 21 August 1994 (*Natl. Audubon Soc. Field Notes* [NASFN] 49:101); many records at Prado Reservoir and Prado Basin (elev. 142–158 m), between Chino and Corona, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, beginning with one 24–25 July 1997 (NASFN 51:1054), reaching up to eight from 21 May to 18 July 2011 (NAB 65:688), and including a winter record of two, 2–3 January 2012 (Tom Benson and Howard King; eBird); up to four at Mystic Lake (elev. 432 m), Riverside County, 25 October–29 November 1998 (McCaskie 1999) and another there on 4 August 2000 (NAB 55:103); two at Lake Cachuma (elev. 234 m), Santa Barbara County, 13 January 2001, and single individuals there on 6 December 2002, 11 September 2005, and 15 August 2010 (Lehman 2012); one at the San Jacinto Wildlife Area, 21 June–9 July 2011 (NAB 65:688); one at Lake Balboa (elev. 216 m), Los Angeles County, 9–10 August 2011 (Daniel Tinoco; eBird); two at the Santa Maria wastewater-treatment plant (elev. 47 m), Santa Barbara County, 17 August 2012 (Maggie Smith; eBird); one at Lindo Lake (elev. 122 m), San

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Diego County, 23 June 2013 (Tom Frankenberger and B. J. Stacey; eBird); and one at Lake Elsinore, 5–11 August 2013 (Charity Hagen and Julie Szabo; eBird).

In the Central Valley, a pair nested successfully, producing a single fledgling, at the Tulare Lake Drainage District's South Evaporation Basin (elev. 61 m), Kings County, and were also seen at nearby Tulare Lake (elev. 56 m), Kern County, from 19 July to 12 October 1986 (AB 40:1251, 1256, 41:139). Subsequent records from the same area in Kings County are of four on 8 July 1993 (AB 47:1147) and one on 22 and 23 July 2013 (Mark Stacy; eBird).

Farther north, a few skimmers have been observed flying over coastal hills in the Monterey Bay area, including one over Capitola (elev. >10 m), Santa Cruz County, on 27 April and two more on 12 May 1998 (NAB 53:326). In the south San Francisco Bay area, where nesting began in 1994 (Layne et al. 1996), skimmers have been observed flying over coastal hills including one over El Granada (elev. >10 m), San Mateo County, on 17 July 1998 (NASFN 52:500), and a flock of eight over the intersection of Page Road and I-280 (elev. 79 m) in Palo Alto, Santa Cruz County, 12 November 2013 (Jennifer Rycenga; eBird). In the north San Francisco Bay area, there have been a few inland records along coastal floodplains within a few m of sea level, including two at Shollenberger Park, Petaluma, Sonoma County, 25 July 2010 (Steve van der Veen; eBird), and one along the Marsh Creek Trail, Oakley, Contra Costa County, 11 August 2011 (Richard Harris; eBird).

INLAND RECORDS FROM OTHER WESTERN STATES

The Black Skimmer has been recorded twice in Colorado at latitudes slightly lower than the Clear Lake record from California. The first was an adult at Jett Reservoir (elev. 1198 m), Eads, Kiowa County, 19–21 July 2001 (NAB 55:461, Leukering and Semo 2004). Another adult was at Pastorius Reservoir (elev. 2095 m), La Plata County, 29 April 2004 (NAB 58:406, Semo 2006).

In Nevada, two were photographed at the Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve (elev. 488 m), Henderson, Clark County, 18–28 August 1997 (NAB 52:98, Baepler et al. 1999).

Arizona has ten records accepted and one pending. Accepted records are (1) one at two different localities north of Yuma (including Martinez Lake, elev. 56 m), Yuma County, 12 June 1977 (AB 31:1172, K. V. Rosenberg et al. 1991, G. H. Rosenberg and Witzeman 1998); (2) one at Lake Havasu (elev. 138 m), Mohave County, 1–4 September 1977 (AB 32:241, K. V. Rosenberg et al. 1991, G. H. Rosenberg and Witzeman 1998); (3) two at Willcox (elev. 1271 m), Cochise County, 4 August 1984 (AB 39:87, G. H. Rosenberg and Witzeman 1998); (4) one at Painted Rock Dam (elev. 184 m), Maricopa County, 14 July 1993 (AB 47:1134, G. H. Rosenberg and Witzeman 1998); (5) another at Willcox, 4 August 1994 (G. H. Rosenberg and Witzeman 1998); (6) a juvenile at Chandler (elev. 383 m), Maricopa County, 14–15 October 2000 (NAB 55:84, G. H. Rosenberg et al. 2007); (7) an adult at Lakeside Park (elev. 823 m), Tucson, Pima County, 9 May 2002 (NAB 56:338, G. H. Rosenberg et al. 2007); (8) an immature at Gillespie Dam (elev. 229 m), Maricopa County, 16–19 September 2005 (NAB 60:117, G. H. Rosenberg et al. 2011); (9) three at Bill Williams delta (elev. 138 m), Mohave County, 24–28 Oct 2009 (NAB 64:126, Rosenberg et al. 2011); and (10) one at Lake Havasu (elev. 138 m), Mohave County, 28 May 2010 (NAB 64:475). A record of one at Parker (elev. 104 m), on 4 June 2011 (NAB 65:668), is pending.

New Mexico has six records, summarized by Williams and Howe (2008): (1) an immature at Lake McMillan (elev. 1000 m), Eddy County, 5–7 August 1964; (2) an adult at Elephant Butte Lake (elev. 1355 m), Sierra County, 1 May 1993; (3) an adult at Morgan Lake (elev. 1623 m), San Juan County, 15 May 1996; (4) an adult at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge (elev. 1067 m), Chaves County, 10–11 2001; (5) an immature specimen salvaged at Stein's Pass (elev. 1286 m), Hidalgo County, 18

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October 2005 (Museum of Southwestern Biology, University of New Mexico, 25152); and (6) an adult at Heron Lake (elev. 2192 m), Rio Arriba County, 12 May 2007.

DISCUSSION

The widely scattered records in the interior of the western United States indicate that skimmers occasionally wander far from their breeding colonies along the California coast, Salton Sea, and Gulf of Mexico, crossing deserts and high mountain passes, and may occur nearly anywhere. The record most distant from a known breeding colony is for Jett Reservoir near Eads, Kiowa County, Colorado (Leukering and Semo 2004), approximately 1210 km from Galveston Bay, Texas, along the Gulf of Mexico, and approximately 1290 km from the Salton Sea, California. The highest altitudinal record is from Heron Lake, Rio Arriba County, New Mexico, at an elevation of 2192 m (Williams and Howe 2008). In other regions of the species' range, skimmers also wander far inland and at elevations as high as 2200 m in Mexico (Williams 1982), 2600 m in Colombia (Sergio Chaparro Herrera pers. comm), 2700 m in Chile (Barbara Knapton; eBird), 3710 m in Bolivia (Parker and Rowlett 1984, presumably the source of 3900 m reported in Fjeldså and Krabbe 1990), and 4086 m in Peru (Colin Bushell pers. comm.).

The numerous inland records in southern California indicate that skimmers routinely cross between the coast and the Salton Sea. Most inland skimmers in the western United States probably originate from breeding colonies in California, yet some, especially those in Colorado and New Mexico, may originate from coastal nesting colonies along the Gulf of Mexico, which are nearly equidistant from the Salton Sea. The Gulf of Mexico is presumably the source of Black Skimmers occurring farther east in Kansas (one record; Mengel 1970), Oklahoma (three records; Newell 1968, Ray 1972, Oliphant 1991), and Texas (several inland records in western and northern Texas; Lockwood and Freeman 2004). Remarkably two skimmers banded as chicks by K. C. Molina at the Salton Sea, California, on 19 August 2005, were recovered inland; the band of one was read at Gillespie Dam, Maricopa County, central Arizona, approximately 265 km east of where it hatched, 16–19 September 2005 (NAB 60:117, G. H. Rosenberg et al. 2011), and the other was salvaged as a specimen from Steins Pass, Hidalgo County, southwestern New Mexico, approximately 630 km east-southeast of where it hatched, 18 October 2005 (Williams and Howe 2008). Clearly much remains to be learned about the dispersal of skimmers from their breeding colonies.

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“Featured Photo” by © Floyd Hayes of Angwin, California: Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*) over Clear Lake near Lakeport, Lake County, California, 3 July 2013, representing the northernmost inland record in western North America.

