

Seabirds on the CalCOFI/CCE-LTER Survey, Spring 2022 Data Report

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Introduction

Seabird surveys are an integral part of the California Cooperative Oceanic Fisheries Investigation (CalCOFI), California Current Ecosystem - Long-term Ecological Research (CCE-LTER), and Southern California Coastal Ocean Observing System (SCCOOS) programs. The seabird data are valuable for several reasons. First, information on seabird distribution and abundance provides an upper trophic level perspective that complements the lower trophic level plankton and hydrographic data collected by others. Second, estimates of seabird abundance, diversity, and distribution contribute to understanding the spatial ecology of the Southern California Bight and adjacent marine habitats (e.g., Santora et al. 2017), a region characterized by substantial temporal environmental heterogeneity and a major biogeographic boundary associated with Point Conception. Third, by extending our existing records (currently 35 years and building; 1987–present) and coupling this information with long-term hydrographic and plankton data, seabird data contribute to understanding the effects of climate variability and change on the southern sector of the CCE (e.g., Veit et al. 1996, Hyrenbach and Veit 2003, Santora and Sydeman 2015, Sydeman et al. 2015).

This data report summarizes observations made during the 2022 spring CalCOFI/CCE-LTER cruise. We present data on survey effort as well as summary information on seabird abundance, expressed at density (birds/km²).

Methods

Observations of seabirds are made continuously during daylight ship transits between oceanographic and plankton sampling stations. The observer, located on the bridge approximately 15 meters above sea level, uses hand-held binoculars to assist in the identification and enumeration of birds. The observer records all birds seen within a 300-meter strip transect to one side and front of the vessel while the ship is underway at > 5 knots. Observations are entered into a portable computer using the dedicated application “DLog”; the ship’s position is automatically recorded periodically from an external GPS every 20 seconds. Each observation includes the species, the number of individuals observed, and their behavior (mostly “flying” or “sitting on the water”). Observation data are post-processed using standardized species codes, validation of positioning data, and binning of observations into along-track sections of 3 km in length. The data are then integrated into a survey database that contains data from 1987 to the present. These data are used to derive summary statistics.

Table 1. The following criteria were applied to the survey database to select data for the summary.

| Criteria | Value |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Behavior codes included | All values |
| Species categories included | Birds, Unidentified |
| Species categories excluded | Mammals, Fish, Excluded Species List |
| Year | 2022 |
| Month | All |
| Bin length | All bins > 0.1 km |
| Region | Lines 77-93 (core area only) |
| Season | Spring |

Taxa excluded from this summary were all mammals, fish, terrestrial birds, and most shorebirds except phalaropes, which are largely pelagic. Species density was calculated as the total number of individuals observed per species divided by the area (km²) surveyed. Density over time was shown for select species of warm- and cold-water affinities, 1987–2022. For this spring survey, we defined species with warm-water affinity to include black-footed albatross, black-vented shearwater, Cook’s petrel, elegant tern, Leach’s storm-petrel, and pink-footed shearwater (Hyrenbach and Veit 2003). Since 2017 we have used a category for unidentified Leach’s storm-petrels that includes all newly-described species and subspecies under a single heading; in the summary, these birds are combined with Leach’s storm-petrel. Cold-water affinity species include Bonaparte’s gull, common murre, fork-tailed storm-petrel, rhinoceros auklet, Sabine’s gull, and sooty shearwater (Hyrenbach and Veit 2003).

Results

A summary of survey effort is shown in Table 2; transects surveyed are shown in Figure 1. Summarized species observations for all species in the core area are shown in Table 3 (see Appendix 1 for exclusions). A total of 21 days of survey effort covering 2,424 km (727 km²) of ocean habitat was tallied over the entire survey. Density over time for the selected seabird species (listed above) was calculated and is shown as anomalies in Figures 2 (warm-water affinity), 3 (cold-water affinity), and 4 (all seabird species).

Among the warm-water species, black-footed albatross had very low density this year. There were also very few Leach’s storm-petrel observed compared to normal (Table 3, Figure 2); 2022 held the second lowest value in the time series. On the other hand, density of pink-footed shearwater was higher than average, over one standard deviation above the mean (Figure 2). The other warm-water species were near average density (Figure 2). Among the cold-water species, no fork-tailed storm-petrels were seen this year; this species is seen in sporadic high abundances in our time series (Figure 3). Bonaparte’s gull, common murre, rhinoceros auklet and sooty shearwater had near-normal densities, all within one standard deviation of the mean, and Sabine’s gull had average density this year (Figure 3). The general picture provided by these results is that the abundance of these seabird species was average during spring 2022, with the exception of a couple of the warm-water species. This interpretation is supported by the density of all 51 species observed, which was slightly lower than average (Figure 4).

Table 2. Summary of survey effort and seabird statistics for the core area and extended survey area, spring 2022.

| Spring 2022 | Core + extended area |
|---|---------------------------|
| Survey vessel | RV <i>Bell M. Shimada</i> |
| Start date | 4/7/2022 |
| End date | 4/27/2022 |
| Number of survey days | 21 |
| Distance surveyed (km) | 2,424 |
| Area surveyed (km ²) | 727 |
| Number of bird species | 51 |
| Overall bird density (per km ²) | 8.18 |
| Total individuals counted | 5,950 |

Figure 1. Transects sampled during the CalCOFI spring 2022 survey. The core study area is denoted with the box, and includes CalCOFI lines 93 (south) to 77 (north).

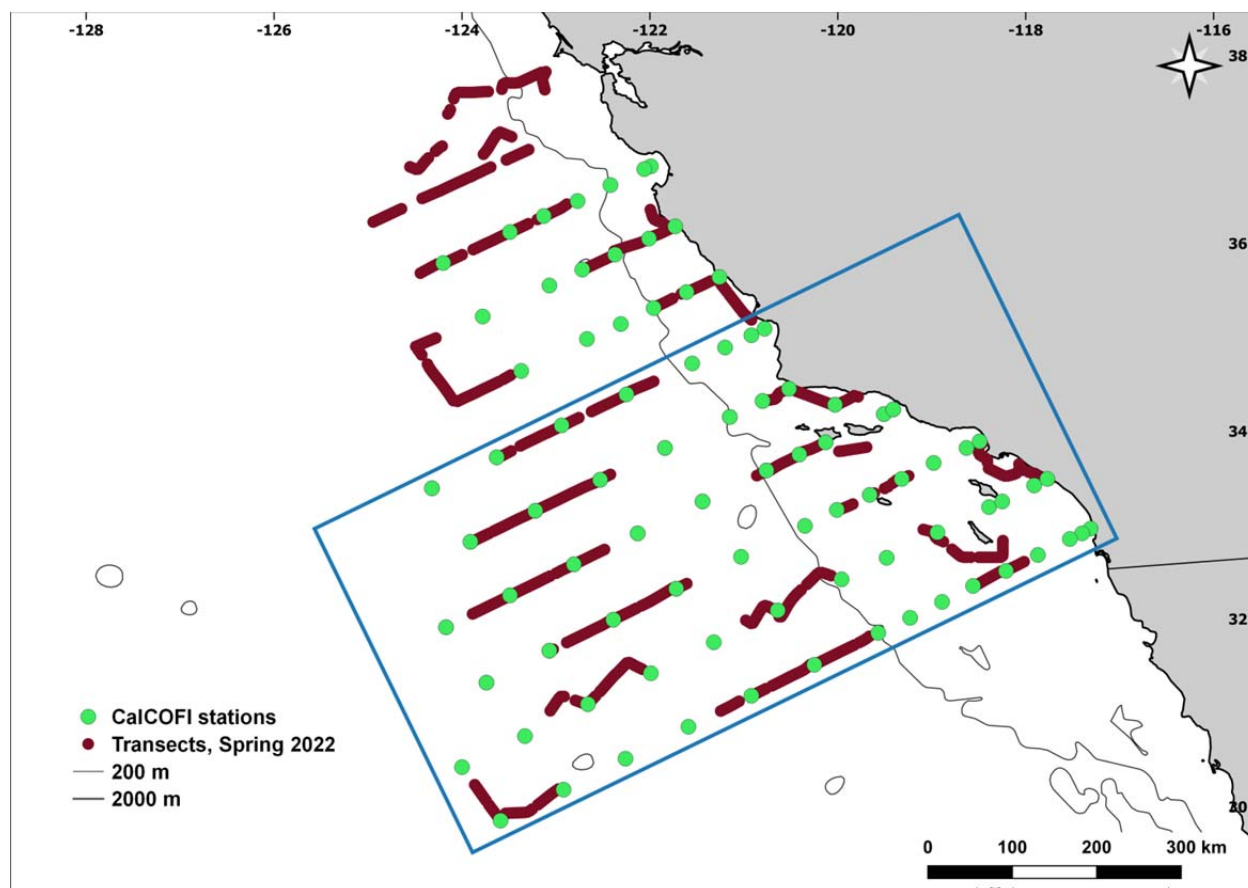


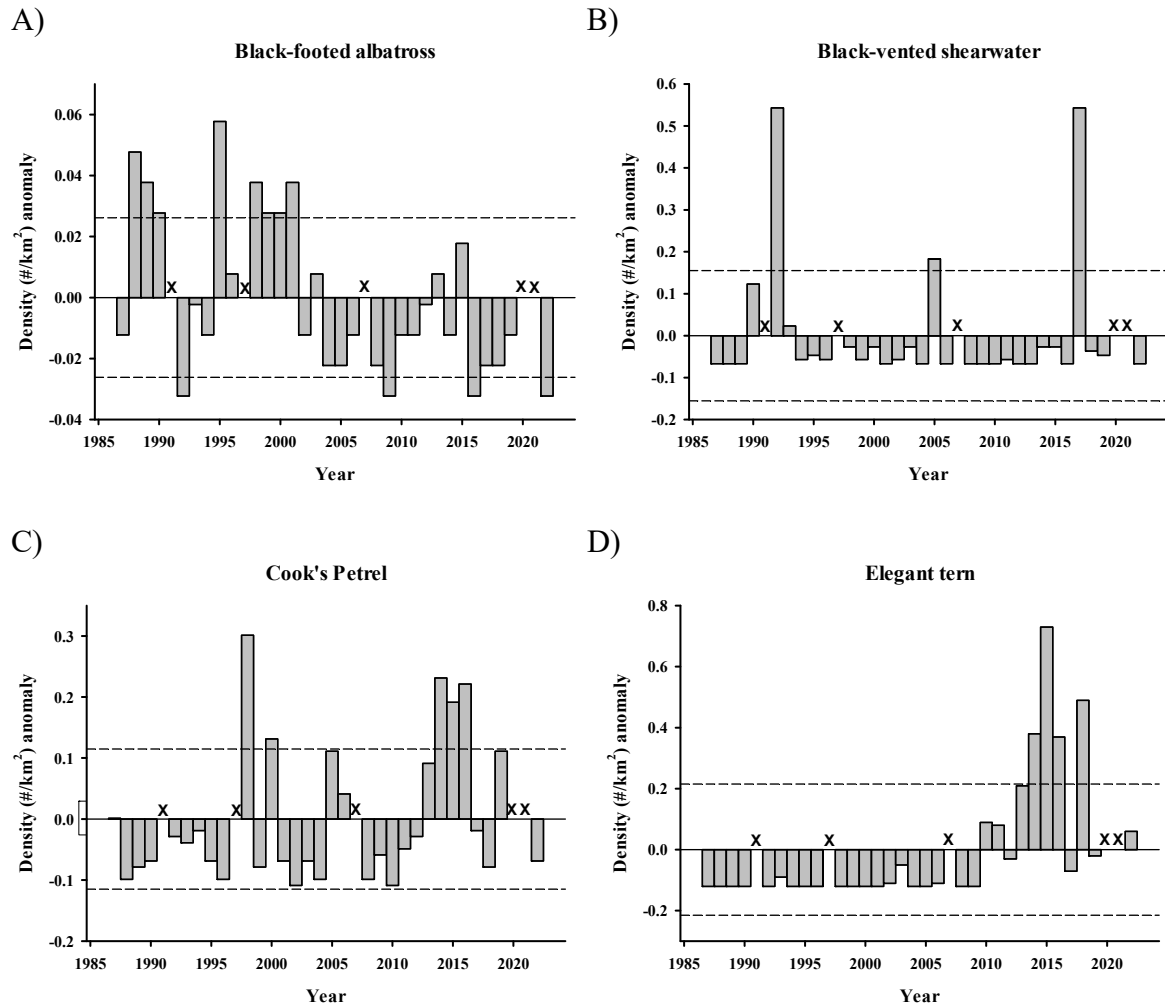
Table 3. Observations in spring 2022 by species in the core area. Cell values: total number of individuals (ind.) / number of observations per species (obs.) / species density (dens.) in individuals per km².

| Common Name | Scientific Name | Core only |
|-------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| American White Pelican | <i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i> | |
| Ancient Murrelet | <i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i> | |
| Arctic Loon | <i>Gavia arctica</i> | |
| Arctic Tern | <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> | |
| Ashy Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanodroma homochroa</i> | 4 / 2 / 0.01 |
| Black guillemot | <i>Cephus grylle</i> | |
| Black Scoter | <i>Melanitta nigra</i> | |
| Black Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanodroma melania</i> | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Black-Footed Albatross | <i>Phoebastria nigripes</i> | 4 / 4 / 0.01 |
| Black-Legged Kittiwake | <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> | |
| Black-Vented Shearwater | <i>Puffinus opisthomelas</i> | |
| Bonaparte's Gull | <i>Larus philadelphia</i> | 89 / 12 / 0.19 |
| Brandt's Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax penicillatus</i> | 81 / 27 / 0.17 |
| Brant | <i>Branta bernicla</i> | |
| Brown Booby | <i>Sula leucogaster</i> | |
| Brown Noddy | <i>Anous stolidus</i> | |
| Brown Pelican | <i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i> | 23 / 19 / 0.05 |
| Buller's Shearwater | <i>Puffinus bulleri</i> | |
| California Gull | <i>Larus californicus</i> | 86 / 42 / 0.18 |
| Caspian Tern | <i>Sterna caspia</i> | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Cassin's Auklet | <i>Ptychoramphus aleuticus</i> | 17 / 8 / 0.04 |
| Clark's Grebe | <i>Aechmophorus clarkii</i> | |
| Common Loon | <i>Gavia immer</i> | 2 / 2 / 0 |
| Common Murre | <i>Uria aalge</i> | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Common Tern | <i>Sterna hirundo</i> | |
| Cook's Petrel | <i>Pterodroma cookii</i> | 18 / 15 / 0.04 |
| Craveri's Murrelet | <i>Synthliboramphus craveri</i> | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Dark Shearwater | (species group) | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Dark-Rumped Petrel | <i>Pterodroma phaeopygia sandwichensis</i> | |
| Double-Crested Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i> | |
| Eared Grebe | <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i> | |
| Elegant Tern | <i>Sterna elegans</i> | 84 / 34 / 0.18 |
| Flesh-Footed Shearwater | <i>Puffinus carneipes</i> | |
| Fork-Tailed Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanodroma furcata</i> | |
| Forster's Tern | <i>Sterna forsteri</i> | 2 / 2 / 0 |
| Franklin's Gull | <i>Larus pipixcan</i> | |
| Glaucous Gull | <i>Larus hyperboreus</i> | |
| Glaucous-Winged Gull | <i>Larus glaucescens</i> | |
| Glaucous-winged/Western Hybrid Gull | | |
| Guadalupe Murrelet | <i>Synthliboramphus hypoleucus</i> | |

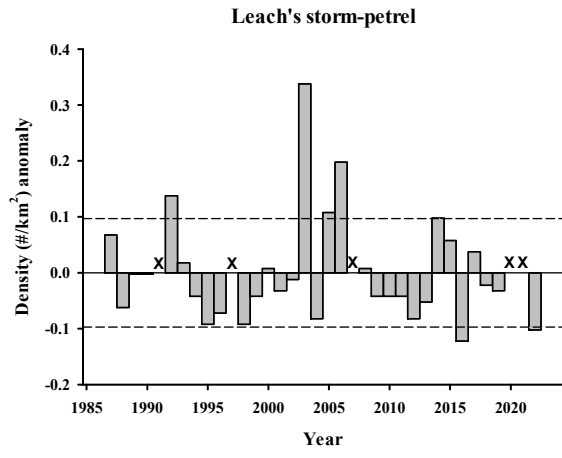
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|--|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Hawaiian Petrel | <i>Pterodroma sandwichensis</i> | |
| Heermann's Gull | <i>Larus heermanni</i> | 2 / 2 / 0 |
| Herring Gull | <i>Larus argentatus</i> | 16 / 14 / 0.03 |
| Horned Puffin | <i>Fratercula corniculata</i> | |
| Hybrid Gull | (species group) | |
| Juan Fernandez Petrel | <i>Pterodroma externa</i> | |
| Kelp Gull | <i>Larus dominicanus</i> | |
| Kermadec Petrel | <i>Pterodroma neglecta</i> | |
| Laughing Gull | <i>Larus atricilla</i> | |
| Laysan Albatross | <i>Phoebastria immutabilis</i> | 4 / 4 / 0.01 |
| Leach's Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i> | 8 / 6 / 0.02 |
| Least Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanodroma microsoma</i> | |
| Least Tern | <i>Sterna antillarum</i> | |
| Long-Tailed Jaeger | <i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i> | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Manx Shearwater | <i>Puffinus puffinus</i> | |
| Marbled Murrelet | <i>Brachyramphus marmoratus</i> | |
| Masked Booby | <i>Sula dactylatra</i> | |
| Mew Gull | <i>Larus canus</i> | |
| Mottled Petrel | <i>Pterodroma inexpectata</i> | |
| Murphy's Petrel | <i>Pterodroma ultima</i> | 4 / 4 / 0.01 |
| Nazca Booby | <i>Sula granti</i> | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Northern Fulmar | <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> | 33 / 32 / 0.07 |
| Osprey | <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> | |
| Pacific Loon | <i>Gavia pacifica</i> | 21 / 6 / 0.04 |
| Parakeet Auklet | <i>Aethia psittacula</i> | |
| Parasitic Jaeger | <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i> | 2 / 2 / 0 |
| Parkinson's Petrel | <i>Procellaria parkinsoni</i> | |
| Pelagic Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i> | |
| Peregrine Falcon | <i>Falco peregrinus</i> | |
| Pigeon Guillemot | <i>Cepphus columba</i> | |
| Pink-Footed Shearwater | <i>Puffinus creatopus</i> | 223 / 73 / 0.47 |
| Pomarine Jaeger | <i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i> | 11 / 10 / 0.02 |
| Red Phalarope | <i>Phalaropus fulicaria</i> | 192 / 90 / 0.4 |
| Red-Billed Tropicbird | <i>Phaethon aethereus</i> | |
| Red-Footed Booby | <i>Sula sula</i> | |
| Red-Necked Grebe | <i>Podiceps grisegena</i> | |
| Red-Necked Phalarope | <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i> | 59 / 21 / 0.12 |
| Red-Tailed Tropicbird | <i>Phaethon rubricauda</i> | |
| Red-Throated Loon | <i>Gavia stellata</i> | |
| Rhinoceros Auklet | <i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i> | 31 / 22 / 0.06 |
| Ring-Billed Gull | <i>Larus delawarensis</i> | |
| Royal Tern | <i>Sterna maxima</i> | |
| Ruddy Turnstone | <i>Arenaria interpres</i> | |
| Sabine's Gull | <i>Larus sabini</i> | 15 / 7 / 0.03 |
| Scripps's murrelet | <i>Synthliboramphus scrippsi</i> | 2 / 1 / 0 |
| Short-Tailed / Slender-Billed Shearwater | <i>Puffinus tenuirostris</i> | |
| Short-Tailed Albatross | <i>Phoebastria albatrus</i> | |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Solander's Petrel | <i>Pterodroma solandri</i> | |
| Sooty Shearwater | <i>Puffinus griseus</i> | 219 / 67 / 0.46 |
| South Polar Skua | <i>Stercorarius maccormicki</i> | |
| Stejneger's Petrel | <i>Pterodroma longirostris</i> | |
| Surf Scoter | <i>Melanitta perspicillata</i> | 4 / 1 / 0.01 |
| Thayer's Gull | <i>Larus thayeri</i> | |
| Townsend's Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanodroma socorroensis</i> | 11 / 5 / 0.02 |
| Tufted Puffin | <i>Fratercula cirrhata</i> | |
| Unidentified Albatross | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Auklet | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Cormorant | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Duck | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Grebe | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Gull | (species group) | 59 / 17 / 0.12 |
| Unidentified Jaeger | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Large Alcid | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Leach's Storm-Petrel | (species group) | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Unidentified Loon | (species group) | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Unidentified Murre | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Petrel | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Phalarope | (species group) | 25 / 14 / 0.05 |
| Unidentified Procellariid | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Shearwater | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Skua | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Small Alcid | (species group) | |
| Unidentified Storm-Petrel | (species group) | 1 / 1 / 0 |
| Unidentified Tern | (species group) | 2 / 1 / 0 |
| Unidentified Tropicbird | (species group) | |
| Wedge-Rumped Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanodroma tethys</i> | |
| Wedge-Tailed Shearwater | <i>Puffinus pacificus</i> | |
| Western Grebe | <i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i> | |
| Western Gull | <i>Larus occidentalis</i> | 119 / 83 / 0.25 |
| Wilson's Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i> | |
| Xantus's / Craveri's Murrelet | (species group) | 4 / 1 / 0.01 |
| Xantus's Murrelet | <i>Synthliboramphus hypoleucus</i> | |

Figure 2. Density (expressed as anomalies) over time from spring surveys for species with warm-water affinity, core survey area, 1987–2022. A) black-footed albatross, B) black-vented shearwater, C) Cook’s petrel, D) elegant tern, E) Leach’s storm-petrel (includes unidentified Leach’s storm-petrels since 2017), and F) pink-footed shearwater. The dashed lines indicate ± 1 s.d. of the long-term mean, and ‘X’ indicates years when no spring survey was conducted.



E)



F)

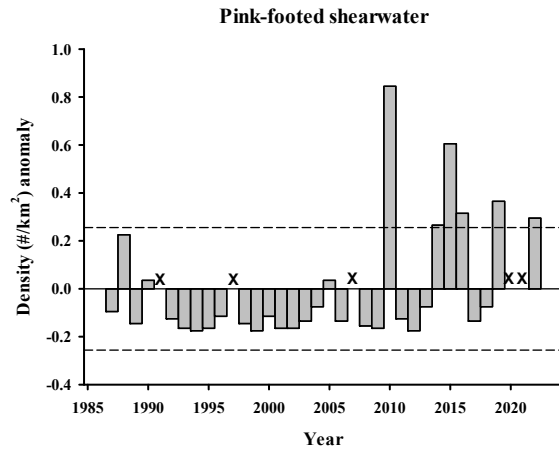
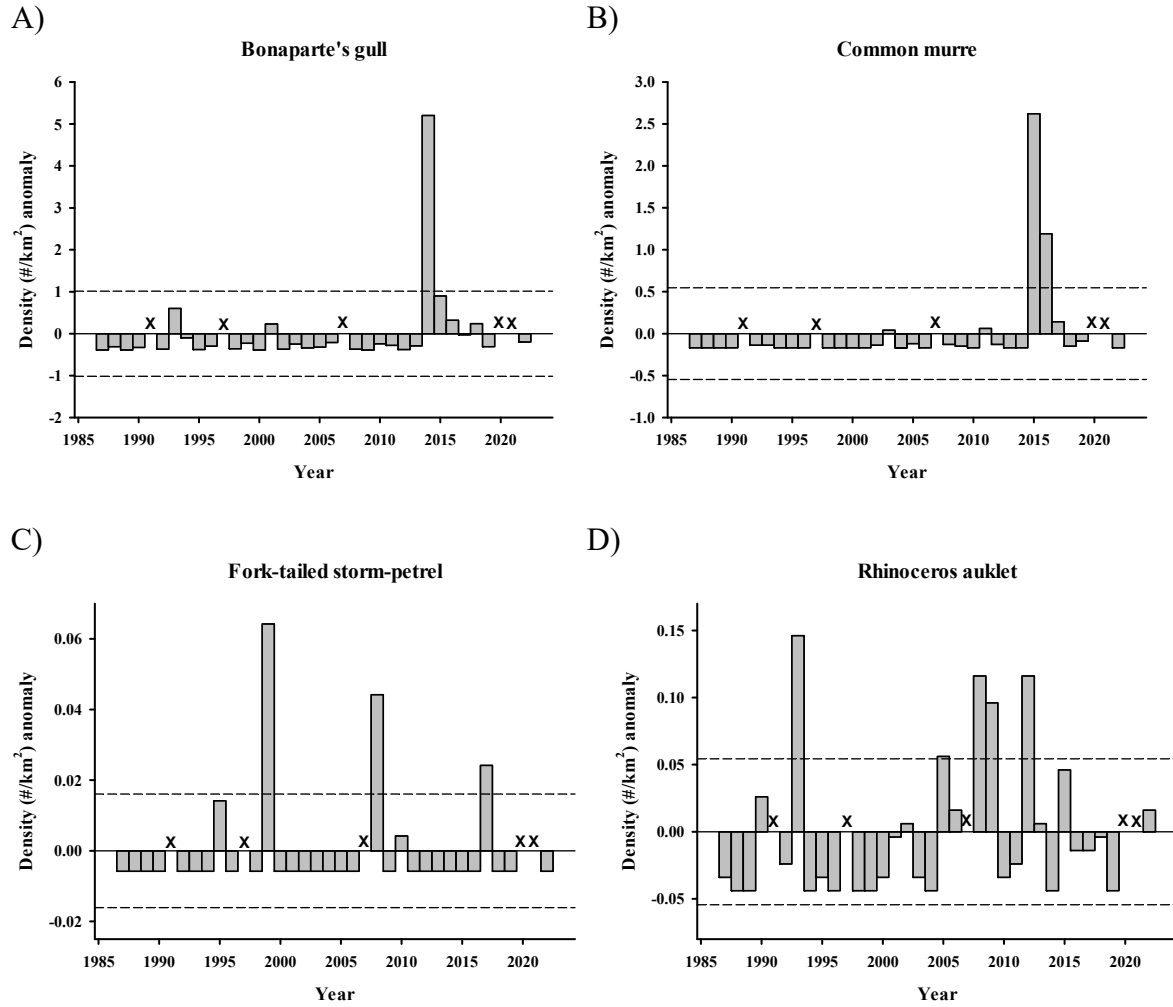
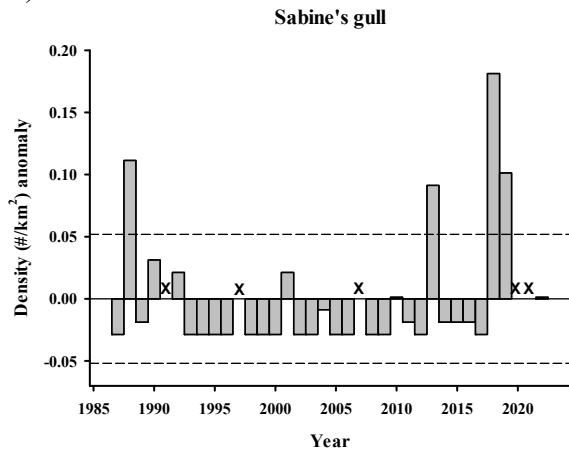


Figure 3. Density (expressed as anomalies) over time in the spring for species with cold-water affinities, core area only, 1987–2022. A) Bonaparte’s gull, B) common murre, C) fork-tailed storm-petrel, D) rhinoceros auklet, E) Sabine’s gull, and F) sooty shearwater. The dashed lines indicate ± 1 s.d. of the long-term mean, and ‘X’ indicates years when no spring survey was conducted.



E)



F)

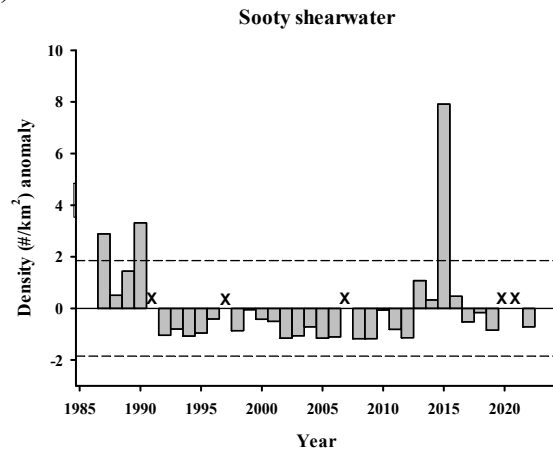
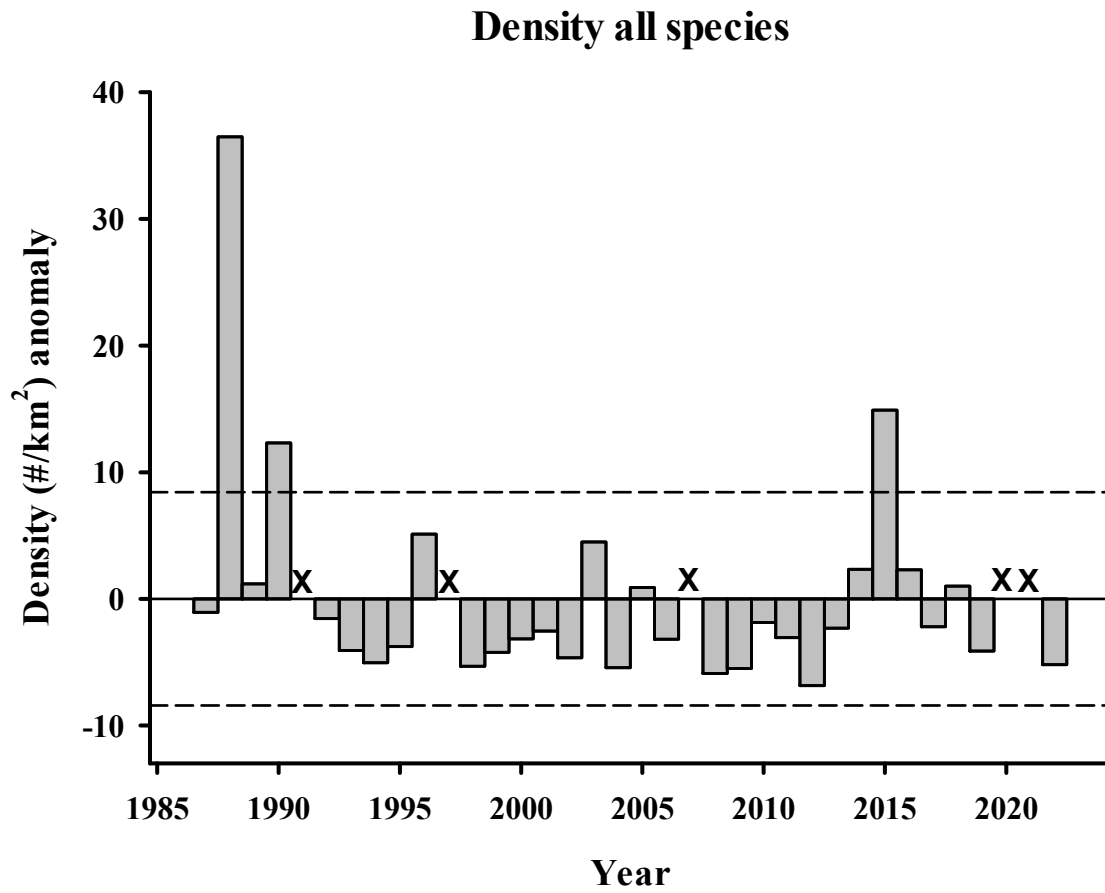


Figure 4. Density (expressed as anomalies) over time in the spring for all species in the core area only, 1987–2022. The dashed lines indicate ± 1 s.d. of the long-term mean, and ‘X’ indicates years when no spring survey was conducted.



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Cover photo: Nazca booby, photo by Michael Force.

Appendix 1. List of bird species excluded from this summary. These species may or may not have been observed during the survey.

| Common Name | Scientific Name |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| American Coot | <i>Fulica americana</i> |
| Black Oystercatcher | <i>Haematopus bachmani</i> |
| Black Skimmer | <i>Rynchops niger</i> |
| Black Tern | <i>Chlidonias niger</i> |
| Black Turnstone | <i>Arenaria melanocephala</i> |
| Black-throated gray warbler | <i>Setophaga nigrescens</i> |
| Brewer's Sparrow | <i>Spizella breweri</i> |
| Brown-headed cowbird | <i>Molothrus ater</i> |
| Bufflehead | <i>Bucephala albeola</i> |
| Chapman's Storm-Petrel | <i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa chapmani</i> |
| Eurasian collared dove | <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i> |
| European Starling | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> |
| Great Blue Heron | <i>Ardea herodias</i> |
| Great Egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> |
| Green Heron | <i>Butorides virescens</i> |
| Least Sandpiper | <i>Calidris minutilla</i> |
| Long-billed Curlew | <i>Numenius americanus</i> |
| Long-billed Dowitcher | <i>Limnodromus scolopaceus</i> |
| Mallard Duck | <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> |
| Marbled Godwit | <i>Limosa fedoa</i> |
| Mourning Dove | <i>Zenaida macroura</i> |
| Red-Breasted Merganser | <i>Mergus serrator</i> |
| Ruddy Duck | <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i> |
| Sanderling | <i>Calidris alba</i> |
| Savannah sparrow | <i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i> |
| Snow Goose | <i>Chen caerulescens</i> |
| Snowy Egret | <i>Egretta thula</i> |
| Townsend's warbler | <i>Setophaga townsendi</i> |
| Unidentified Bird | (species group) |
| Unidentified Dowitcher | |
| Unidentified Goose | (species group) |
| Unidentified Hummingbird | (species group) |
| Unidentified Passerine | (species group) |
| Unidentified raptor | (species group) |
| Unidentified Shorebird | (species group) |
| Wandering tattler | <i>Tringa incana</i> |
| Western Sandpiper | <i>Calidris mauri</i> |
| Whimbrel | <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> |
| White-Winged Scoter | <i>Melanitta fusca</i> |
| Willet | <i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i> |
| Wilson's warbler | <i>Cardellina pusilla</i> |
| Yellow-Rumped Warbler | <i>Dendroica coronata</i> |