

NOTES

A CRESTED AUKLET FROM BAJA CALIFORNIA

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On 7 July 1980, while conducting a marine mammal survey for National Marine Fisheries Service, we discovered a Crested Auklet (*Aethia cristatella*) 9 miles ESE of Cedros Island (27°59'N, 115°00'W), 300 miles south of the United States—Mexico border. In the flat calm water in the lee of Cedros we were able to study it for 10 minutes during midday from a distance of 75 m using mounted 25x 150 mm spotting binoculars.

The bird was a stunning adult in breeding plumage. Its size was intermediate between Cassin's Auklet (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*) and Rhinoceros Auklet (*Cerorhinca monocerata*), both seen during the day. As it sat on the water it was entirely dark grey, its plumage appearing recently renewed with no evident signs of wear. The prominent bill was bright red (or reddish-orange), stout, laterally compressed and had a somewhat rounded appearance when viewed from the side. Also prominent was a line of white plumes extending backwards from the eye and a tuft of grey feathers arising from the base of the upper mandible and curling forward. The eye was pale yellow with a black pupil. As we approached the bird, it started nervously dipping its head into the water, which wetted the tuft of feathers and caused them to droop over onto the bill. These drooping feathers must have annoyed the bird because after each dip it quickly flicked its head to the side to throw the water off, allowing the tuft to bounce back up and out of the way. The bird appeared quite healthy and alert as it sat preening in 66°F (19°C) water. As we approached within 75 m, the auklet whirred off, landing about 1 km away. We turned to follow, but the bird was lost among Craveri's Murrelets (*Synthliboramphus craveri*) in the area.

This sighting represents the first record of a Crested Auklet for Mexico and only the third record for North America exclusive of Alaska. In a recent paper, Weyman (Condor 82:472, 1980) reported the only Crested Auklet record for California and summarized the other known extralimital records for the species. Interestingly, both the California record and our Baja California sighting occurred in July.

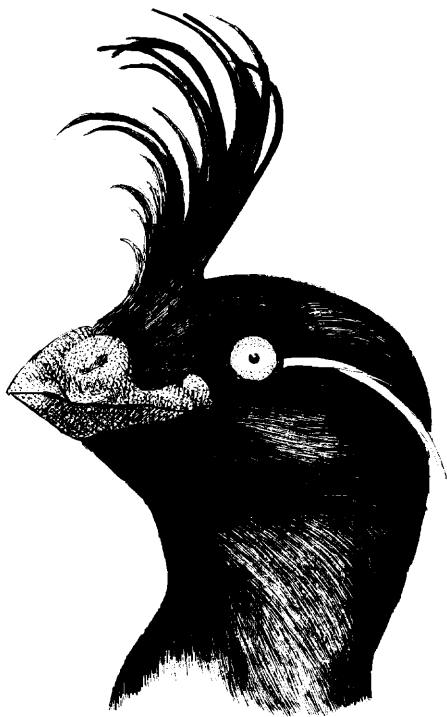
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While searching for any additional records, we were provided with information on an early record for British Columbia: R. Wayne Campbell located a Crested Auklet specimen (no. 11915) in the collection of the British Columbia Provincial Museum. The specimen was collected by a sealer (J.M. Lindley) offshore in the latitude of Kyuquot North West, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, in the winter of 1892-1893. This specimen represents the only record for Canada and the earliest known record of a Crested Auklet for North America outside of Alaska.

As our sighting is an isolated record, it seems highly unlikely that environmental perturbations (e.g., storms, changes in ocean climate) could have forced this boreal species so far south of its normal range. Instead, this occurrence probably again demonstrates the ability of individual seabirds, even species not particularly renowned for their flight capabilities, to turn up as extralimital strays almost anywhere.

We wish to thank R. Wayne Campbell for providing information on the British Columbia record.

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Crested Auklet

Sketch by Narca Moore