



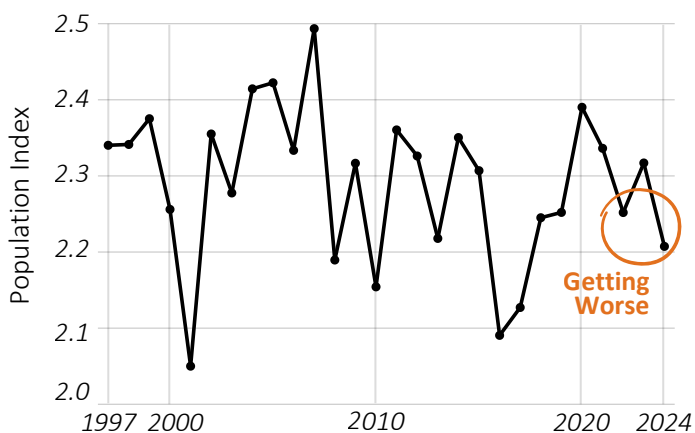
SEABIRDS & SHOREBIRDS

California Coast and Ocean Report *Status, Progress, and What's Ahead* 2026

California's coastline and ocean support hundreds of species of seabirds and shorebirds, from brown pelicans soaring over the surf to tiny snowy plovers nesting on open beaches. These birds are part of what makes California's coast feel alive, and for many Californians, spotting them is one of the quiet pleasures of a day at the shore. They are also sensitive indicators of ocean health: when food is scarce, waters are toxic, or habitat disappears, birds are often the first to show it.

STATUS

Trends in seabird and shorebird population status are mixed. Offshore species, like Black-footed albatross, are highly vulnerable to climate variability and changing prey availability, and are generally declining across the state. Nearshore species, like Brandt's cormorants, are generally doing well. **Coastal and estuarine species, like sandpipers, are showing concerning declines**, likely due to threats such as habitat loss and pollution.



The seabird community has been generally stable over the last 30 years. Since 2019, more bird populations are decreasing than are increasing.

PROGRESS

California passed the Migratory Bird Protection Act to close a gap in federal law that left millions of birds vulnerable to incidental killing, making California a national leader in bird protection. **Restoration projects** along the coast are **rebuilding nesting habitat** for species like the western snowy plover that have been displaced by development and human disturbance. And at the Farallon Islands, the largest seabird breeding colony in the continental United States, **long-term monitoring supported by state funding** continues to track how species are faring as ocean conditions change.

LOOKING AHEAD

California's seabirds and shorebirds face an uncertain future. As ocean conditions continue to change, these species will be threatened by **warming waters**, increased **harmful algal blooms** (which can be toxic to birds), **habitat loss**, and **changing food resources**. To help combat these threats, California is committed to **monitoring** marine birds, **protecting and restoring habitat**, and **mitigating land-based impacts** to the coast and ocean.

SPECIES HIGHLIGHTS



Brandt's cormorants (upper photo) and **common murre**s (lower photo) have more than tripled in population size since the 1990s, largely as a result of increases in their main food source, Northern anchovies, and the successful protection of nearshore islands.



Brown pelicans were heavily impacted in the 1970s by DDT, a now-banned pesticide that was catastrophic for many birds. Since 2019, however, the abundance of this iconic species has increased by 89%.



Ashy storm-petrels had been increasing since the 1990s, but then began decreasing in 2019. Nest failure due to predation is a notable threat to these species.



FARALLON ISLANDS: BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Islands provide safe havens for seabirds to nest, and the waters around islands are often rich sources of food. The wind-swept Farallon Islands off of San Francisco, protected as a National Wildlife Refuge within the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, are home to the single largest seabird breeding colony in the continental United States. These islands are a critical site for long-term seabird monitoring and research.



CALIFORNIA
OCEAN
PROTECTION
COUNCIL



CALIFORNIA
OCEAN SCIENCE TRUST

To learn more, visit
opc.ca.gov/report