

The ***Black Oystercatcher*** (*Haematopus bachmani*) is a large, long-lived shorebird that is completely dependent upon marine shorelines throughout its life cycle. Its global population is estimated to be 10,000 individuals. Black Oystercatchers breed throughout the Pacific Coast from the Aleutian Islands of Alaska to Baja California, Mexico; the majority are concentrated in Alaska and British Columbia, Canada. Some breeding populations are migratory while others are resident. During the nonbreeding season, Black Oystercatchers tend to aggregate in groups of tens to hundreds, although their distribution and seasonal movements are poorly characterized. Primary threats to this species include nest predation, oil-based contaminants, and human disturbance. The Black Oystercatcher is listed as a species of **High Concern** in both the U.S. and Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plans.



SHOREBIRD RECOVERY

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER

~ ACTION PLAN SUMMARY ~

Species Description

Like many shorebirds, Black Oystercatchers are sexually monomorphic in color but slightly dimorphic in size; the female is larger, heavier, and has a longer bill than the male. Plumage appears entirely black at a distance, but ranges from very dark brown to black. Males and females form seasonally monogamous pair-bonds, which may last throughout their lives. This species overlaps with American Oystercatcher (*H. palliatus*) in Baja California and limited hybridization occurs.

Population Outlook

The Black Oystercatcher is one of the least abundant shorebird species in North America. Based on limited survey data, its global population is estimated to be 8,900 to 11,000 birds. Because the Black Oystercatcher is confined to a narrow band of specific shoreline habitat throughout its lifecycle, and because significant portions of the nonbreeding population congregate, it is highly vulnerable to natural and human disturbances.

Threats

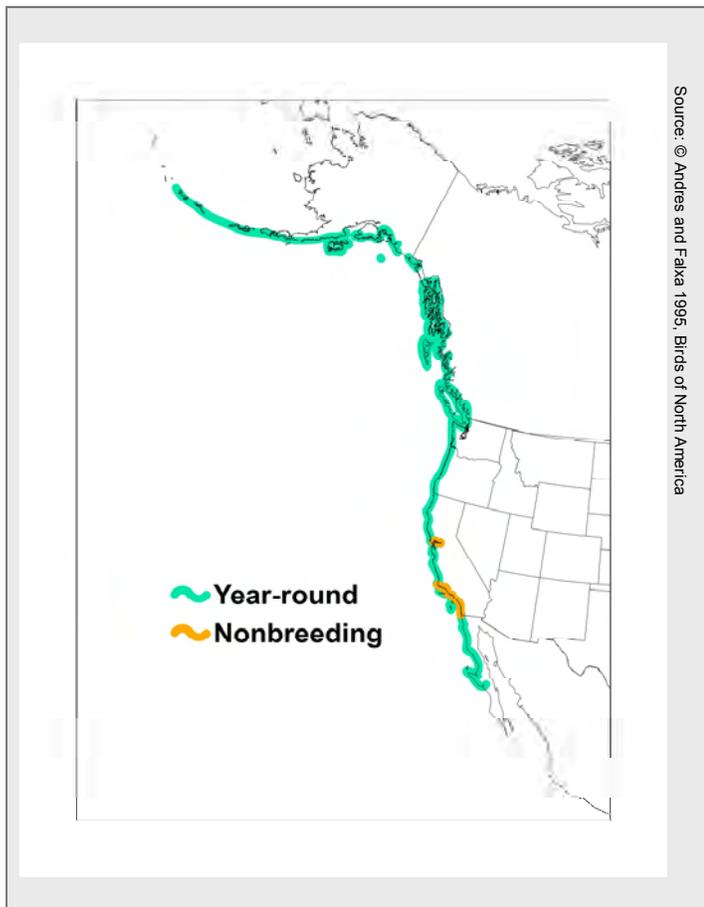
Predation and interference by native, introduced, and feral mammals is the major known cause of mortality to Black Oystercatcher eggs and chicks. **Shoreline contamination** by petroleum-based products from increased recreational boating activity, expelled water from commercial oil tanker ballast tanks, and oil spilled by freight vessels puts birds and their food sources at risk range-wide. **Human disturbance** also threatens nesting success. Nests located on low-sloping gravel beaches and coastal platforms can be lost to greater wave action from increased boat traffic; and other recreational activities can inadvertently destroy or degrade nests and eggs, or interfere with foraging and parental care.

This fact sheet is a summary of: Tessler, D.F., J.A. Johnson, B.A. Andres, S. Thomas, and R.B. Lanctot. 2007. **Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus bachmani*) Conservation Action Plan.** International Black Oystercatcher Working Group, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Anchorage, Alaska, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska, and Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, Manomet, Massachusetts. 115 pp.

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For a copy of this and other species plans and summaries, please visit <http://www.whsrn.org/conservation-plans>.





Conservation Strategies and Actions

To conserve the Black Oystercatcher, the recommended high-priority actions are:

Assess nonbreeding distribution and migratory connectivity between breeding and wintering areas, utilizing aerial and boat-based surveys and satellite and radio telemetry. Determine migratory connectivity between breeding and wintering areas, inter-seasonal habitat use, and the locations of aggregations of wintering birds.

Coordinate a range-wide monitoring and survey effort to estimate population size and detect trends. In the northern range where breeding sites are remote, coordinate monitoring efforts at a selected number of known, important areas across the heart of the range. In the southern range, where breeding sites are relatively accessible, conduct standardized surveys at randomly selected sites to assess population trends.

Develop an Online International Black Oystercatcher Conservation Database to establish a searchable repository of Black Oystercatcher data and methodologies to identify information gaps, track population changes, and facilitate trans-jurisdictional collaboration.

Develop a geospatial map depicting the potential overlap between human activities and the distribution and abundance of Black Oystercatchers range-wide.

Initiate an education and outreach program to highlight the potential impacts of outdoor recreational activities, particularly pedestrian and boat traffic along shorelines, on Black Oystercatchers.

Investigate adult survival, life span, reproductive age, and other fundamental demographic parameters by continuing to track banded populations.

- **Natural History:** Black Oystercatcher spends its entire life in the narrow intertidal zone. It breeds entirely within North America. Limited data are available on adult survival, but birds appear to be relatively long lived.

- **Nesting Habitat:** In the northern range, nests on gravel beaches, wave-cut platforms, rocky headlands, and small rocky islets. In the southern range, nests primarily on rocky headlands, islets, and islands. Nests on gravel beaches are located just above the high-tide line; those on cliffs and islands may be 30 meters or more above it. The nest is usually a shallow, circular depression lined with shell fragments, rock flakes, or pebbles.

- **Foraging Habitat:** Mussel beds and aquatic beds of macrophytic algae are essential. These occur primarily on low-sloping rocky shores exposed to surf action; on sheltered gravel and cobble shores; and on soft-sediment shores in protected bays and sounds that support abundant invertebrate communities.

- **Important Foods:** Intertidal marine invertebrates, particularly mussels, limpets, whelks and other snails, and chitons.

Migration

Black Oystercatchers in the southern portion of the range (Washington, Oregon, and California [USA] and Baja California [Mexico]) are generally considered resident, and undergo only a short-distance migration coincident with winter flock formation. Southern winter flocks stay relatively close to their breeding areas, with some individuals maintaining territories year-round. In contrast, birds from some northern breeding populations undertake relatively long, seasonal migrations (e.g., southcentral Alaska to the coasts of southern British Columbia, Canada), while others exhibit year-round residency. The tendency to return to their birthplace to breed (natal philopatry) is very low, and long-distance juvenile dispersion may have important implications for maintaining genetic diversity in the global population.



The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) is a partnership-driven, hemisphere-wide, site-based shorebird conservation initiative that began in 1985. It is facilitated by the WHSRN Executive Office, a program of the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences located in Manomet, Massachusetts, USA. Learn more at <http://www.whsrn.org>.

