

Black Turnstone

Arenaria melanocephala

The Black Turnstone is one of the defining species for the rocky, wave-battered Pacific Coast. It blends in well with the dark rocks, but a careful winter observer will find it from Alaska through Baja California. It is rarely found far from the vicinity of spraying waves.

Keys to Identification

Adult Description

- Stocky, medium-sized, short-legged shorebird.
- Short, dark bill fairly thick with a slight upturn to the lower mandible.
- Legs usually dark, but occasionally dark red or pinkish.
- Bold wing pattern visible in flight, produced by white feathers at the base of the leading edge of the wing, a white wing stripe, and a white lower back.
- White tail with black terminal band.

Immature Description

Resembles winter adult, but slightly more brownish overall with buffy fringes on feathers of body and tail tipped with brown rather than white.

Cool Facts

- As their name suggests, turnstones often forage by turning over stones and other objects.
- On the breeding grounds, the Black Turnstone is extremely aggressive to avian predators, flying more than 100 m from its territory to pursue jaegers and gulls.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 8.7 - 9.8 inches
- Weight - 3.5 - 6.0 ounces

