

## OFFSHORE SIGHTINGS OF PROCELLARIIFORMES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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The observations reported in this article were made during recent trips from the South-East coast of South Australia to or beyond the Continental Shelf. They have been selected for publication here because they clearly extend published knowledge of the status and distribution of the Procellariiformes in South Australia as summarized by Parker *et al.* (1979). (For convenience, this reference shall be abbreviated to 'Parker *et al.*'). Other observations made on the same trips, but which at present seem less noteworthy, will be published later when supplemented by the results of further trips.

Observations were made from boats designed for marlin, shark or cray fishing, and which varied in length from 13 to 18 metres. All distances given are approximate. I made or shared in all the sightings, except those on trip D. The trips were as follows:

- A. 11 May 1980, from Port Fairy, Victoria (38° 23'S, 142° 14'E) to 50 km SSW. Other observers included M. J. Carter and J. H. Hatch.
- B. 1 June 1980, from Southend (37° 34'S, 140° 08'E) to 64 km WSW. The other observer was I. A. May.
- C. 19 October 1980, from Port MacDonnell (38° 03'S, 140° 42'E) to 32 km SSE. Other observers included Hatch, R. G. T. Snell and A. F. Lees.
- D. 7 June 1981, from Port MacDonnell, other details as in C.
- E. 29 August 1981, from Beachport (37° 29'S, 140° 00'E) to 48 km W.SW.
- F. 5 September 1981, from Beachport to 60 km W.
- G. 20 September 1981, from Port MacDonnell to 48 km S. Other observers included Hatch and Snell.

Except where indicated otherwise, all observations were made on or beyond the continental shelf, the edge being shown on the boats' depth gauges as a steep slope from 80 to 200 fathoms. On trips B and E many sharks were caught, and many birds were attracted to the boat apparently seeking offal from gutted sharks, or simply curious at seeing a large assemblage of other birds.

#### ROYAL ALBATROSS

##### *Diomedea epomophora*

Parker *et al.* tentatively listed both subspecies, the southern *epomophora* and the northern *sanfordi* as having been sighted in South Australian waters. The species has not been recorded as a beach derelict.

Both forms were identified on E, and again on F, on the criteria given by Harrison (1978) and by Carter (in prep., pers. comm.) On E three Royal Albatrosses sat on the water near the boat for over an hour, occasionally taking off when the boat moved. Consequently the black cutting edges to the upper mandibles, and the all white tails and heads, could be seen and photographed. Two were identified as *sanfordi* through their upperwings being uniformly black almost as far as the junction with the body. One was identified as *epomophora* by virtue of round white patches, approximately eight centimetres in diameter, on the otherwise all-black upperwings, about two-thirds of the way from the carpal joint to the body. Its underwings could not be clearly seen.

On F two Royal Albatrosses were seen, sitting on the water and flying, 300 m away. One was identified as *sanfordi* by its all-black upperwings and its marked black leading edge to the underwings distal from the carpal joint. The other was identified as *epomophora* through its mainly black upperwing being liberally blotched with white, and by the very thin black leading edge to the underwing distal from the carpal joint. The all-white tails were seen on both.

The opportunity is taken to note that the identity of the two forms referred to in Parker *et al.* as having been seen on 15 September 1977 has been confirmed by M. Carter (pers. comm.), who saw them with I. A. May and has photographs of them. It is worth noting that one *sanfordi* was seen by Carter, Hatch, myself and others, well within the continental shelf south of Port Fairy, on 17 July 1979, and another by the same observers on the edge of the shelf on A. The latter had dark flecks on the back, indicating immaturity.

#### BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS

##### *Diomedea melanophrys*

J. B. Cox has supplied details of the first South Australian record of the subspecies *impavida*:—

*D. m. impavida*, known to breed only on Campbell Island (Tickell 1976) was observed 80-82 km west of Kingston on 15 and 17 May 1978. At least two adults were present on the former date. The diagnostic characters of this subspecies—a pale yellow iris and a greater area of black in front of the eye than in the nominate form (Serventy *et al.* 1971, cf. figs. 131 and 132)—were clearly seen at ranges of a few metres while the birds were fed on fish offal alongside the boat. Photographs, of too poor quality for reproduction, were also obtained.

The *impavida* individuals were with a flock of approximately 50 nominate *melanophrys* and Shy Albatrosses *D. cauta*. Of four of these that were captured and released (during attempts to capture an *impavida* for photographic purposes), one *melanophrys* was found to have been banded as a chick on Iles Kerguelen in 1971. It is therefore interesting that this one gathering of albatrosses contained *melanophrys* originating from the New Zealand and Indian Ocean subantarctic regions. *D.m. impavida* regularly occurs off south-eastern Australia (Barton 1979), but this S.A. record is probably the furthest west (approx. 139° 10'E) it has been identified.

An adult was seen and photographed on B, and another on D, not far offshore. One adult and one immature were seen and photographed on E, the latter having a dull yellow-brown beak tipped with dark brown and a dull brown iris. A sub-adult was seen on G.

The colour of the iris in these adults was amber, or honey as described in Harper & Kinsky (1978), rather than pale yellow as described by Cox. On each trip many nominate *melanophrys* were seen. The immature *impavida* on E was seen alloprenning with an adult nominate *melanophrys*.

#### BULLER'S ALBATROSS *Diomedea bulleri*

The first to be recorded in South Australia was seen by J. B. Cox from Newland Head (35° 39'S, 138° 31'E) on 10 July 1979 (pers. comm.). A second, an adult, was seen flying slowly past, as near as 40 m, on B. Apparently drawn to the boat by curiosity, it did not stay.

Description: a little larger than nearby Yellow-nosed Albatrosses *D. chlororhynchos* with dark grey rather than black upperwings, and back tinged brownish; grey neck, throat and head, a little lighter than upperwings, with a round white cap extending to the base of the culmen; underwing pattern similar to that of *D. chlororhynchos*, except that the black leading edge was broader and the trailing edge narrower; the black beak had a broad yellow stripe on the culmen (broader than on the Grey-headed Albatross *D. chrysostoma*) and a narrow one, smudged black, along the bottom of the lower mandible.

An adult was seen and photographed on E. It sat near the boat, sometimes coming as close as 15 metres.

The leg colour was recorded on neither of the above birds and so their form could not be determined.

### YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS

*Diomedea chlororhynchos*

Parker *et al.* stated: 'No records from beyond the Continental Shelf . . . and uncommon in the South-East'. A few were seen just beyond the edge of the Shelf on B, and *ca* 20 on E. About 100 were seen several kilometres beyond the Shelf on G at 48 km S of Port MacDonnell, where the water was conjectured by the skipper to be several hundred fathoms deep. They were sitting on the water in three large rafts, each raft a few hundred metres from the other, and were mingled with Black-browed Albatrosses (*ca* 50) and Shy Albatrosses *D. cauta* (*ca* 50). A large proportion of the Yellow-nosed birds were immatures, with all-black beaks. Several (5-10) of those seen on E had the grey cheeks (clearly demarcated from white crowns) that indicate fresh plumage; none of those seen on G had this feature.

### BLUE PETREL *Halobaena caerulea*

The two published sightings mentioned by Parker *et al.* refer to birds driven by gales to the coast. On E in a calm sea, two were seen at different times as near as 10m, flying around the boat and sitting on the water among prions *Pachyptila* spp.

Description: the same overall dimensions as the Fairy Prions *Pachyptila turtur* with which it associated, but with proportionately larger head and neck, which were held more upright when the bird was sitting on the water; very dark grey crown, cheeks, nape and sides to breast, sharply demarcated from white lores, throat, and centre of breast and underparts; upperparts otherwise light grey, with darker grey 'M' mark on outspread upperwings and back (this mark being distinct on one bird and faint on the other); white tip to light grey tail; no mottling on white frons; mainly whitish underwings, merging to grey on leading edges and tips.

A photograph showing these features, except the upperparts, was taken of one bird. Each bird stayed near the boat for 15 minutes. On F a third bird with no visible 'M' mark, stayed near the boat for a few minutes.

### WHITE-CHINNED PETREL

*Procellaria aequinoctialis*

Parker *et al.* mention one unconfirmed record, consisting of sightings from a ship in the Great Australian Bight as far east as 38° 00'S, 133° 00'E, which is 450 km SW of the nearest part of S.A., on western Kangaroo Island.

On E one was seen flying around the boat, as near as two metres, on two occasions, each lasting approximately 10 minutes. The second sighting may of course have been of a different bird, although its appearance was the same.

Description: identical in colour to nearby Short-tailed Shearwaters *Puffinus tenuirostris*, and similar in shape, except a little broader-winged; manner of flight could not be reliably compared with that of other species, as it was flying slowly in a light breeze; much larger than Short-tailed Shearwaters and distinctly smaller than nearby Yellow-nosed Albatrosses; stout beak like that of nearby Great-winged Petrels *Pterodroma macroptera*, but proportionately longer; uniformly pale beak (greenish-yellowish-horn) except for neat dark saddle on the culmen ridge between unguis and nasal tubes; legs dark grey; no pale markings on face or chin.

The similar Black Petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni* is noticeably smaller, and the pale parts of its beak are bluish-horn, while much of the unguis is dark as well as the culmen. The Westland Petrel *Procellaria westlandica* is the same size as the White-chinned, and the pale parts of its beak apparently may be a similar colour (*i.e.* yellowish-horn) but much of the unguis is dark (see Falla *et al.* 1970; Serventy *et al.* 1971; Harper and Kinsky 1978). So, in the absence of white chin or face, this bird was distinguishable from *P. westlandica* by the wholly pale unguis, which I saw well when the bird flew two metres overhead. Photographs were taken showing the shape and comparative size of the bird, but not the pattern of light and dark on the beak. Serventy *et al.* (1971) say that only a small proportion of the individuals of this species in Australian waters is dark-chinned.

### SOOTY SHEARWATER *Puffinus griseus*

Parker *et al.* mention 14 beach derelicts and a sighting of at least nine birds at sea 30 km W of Kingston (36° 50'S, 139° 51'E) on 18 May 1978.

About five were seen, beyond or just within the Shelf, on A. They were distinguishable

from nearby Short-tailed Shearwaters by their larger size, proportionately longer beaks, noticeably longer wings, and extensive bright silvery colour on their underwings. Five to fifteen were seen on C, within the Shelf, 15-25 km SE of Port MacDonnell and Short-tailed Shearwaters were again near for comparison. J. Hatch (pers. comm.) identified one with certainty on D when 20 Short-tailed Shearwaters were also seen.

In the light of the above records, the view that this species is a rare summer visitor to South Australia (e.g. Jaensch 1980) seems misleading.

#### COMMON DIVING PETREL

##### *Pelecanoides urinatrix*

The seven previous records in S.A. consist of beach derelicts (Parker *et al.*). J. Hatch (pers. comm.) saw one bird flying for a few seconds before diving, 15 km S of Port MacDonnell, within the Shelf, on D. He described it as very small, thick-built, with relatively short wings and fast wing beats, and flying low like a flying-fish. On the basis of known status and distribution, the bird was probably the

above species of diving-petrel, which breeds on nearby Lady Julia Percy Island (38° 25'S, 142° 00'E), and would therefore be the only living individual of the species so far recorded in South Australia.

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