

OCCURRENCE OF THE GREY-BACKED STORM-PETREL IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN WATERS

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The main range of the species lies in the Antarctic and Sub-Antarctic zones of the three southern oceans. The northern limit of the latter zone — the Sub-Tropical Convergence — lies far south of the Australian mainland and a little south of Tasmania (see Serventy *et al.*, 1971, pp.4,142). Published records of the species in Australia are few, perhaps because of the lack of recorded observations from ships near the Sub-Tropical Convergence. The few published records from ships include John Gould's (1865) report of "considerable numbers near the eastern entrance" of Bass Strait — presumably east of it as he was en route from Hobart to Sydney — in May 1839. There is also W. R. P. Bourne's report of several somewhere south of the Bight and near the Sub-Tropical Convergence, in August 1974 (cited in Cox, 1976). Derelict records on shore consist of two in Tasmania (Green, 1969), one in Victoria (Isles, 1977), and one in New South Wales (Gibson and Sefton, 1971). According to Serventy (1971) the species had at the time of writing been recorded in southern Queensland but not Western Australia. The following are

the first published records from South Australia.

On Saturday, 5 March 1977, while observing sea-birds from a fishing boat situated over the continental shelf at lat. 37°55'S, long. 139°53'E, about 25 km off the coast and due west from Carpenter Rocks in the South-East of South Australia, I noticed three storm-petrels flying south about 50 m from the stern of the boat. The upper-parts of these birds were predominantly dark grey with the head, neck and upper-breast appearing black. This contrasted with a white abdomen and underwing. The black on the head, neck, and upper-breast gave the birds a hooded appearance. The absence of white on the upper-parts indicated that these birds were Grey-backed Storm-Petrels *Gardodia nereis*. These birds were smaller and had a more swift and direct flight than both Wilsons Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* and White-faced Storm-Petrels *Pelagodroma marina* which were also present in numbers at the time.

During the day more than 100 Grey-backed Storm-Petrels were seen, and many of these birds allowed very close views, especially when

fish were being cleaned, and offal was thrown overboard; although I suspect that these birds were attracted by curiosity caused by the many other birds present and feeding off the offal, rather than by the food itself.

A second visit was made to the continental shelf on 9 April, and on this occasion a count of Grey-backed Storm-Petrels exceeded 300, during nine hours of observation. On this day there was a stronger wind blowing with a heavy swell, and the combination of these two conditions caused many of the smaller birds, including these storm-petrels, to shelter close and down-wind of the boat. Although the weather made observing them considerably more difficult, some excellent views were obtained from distances, at times, of less than four metres.

Further trips were made to the continental shelf, and observations from each visit have confirmed the presence of Grey-backed Storm-Petrels along the shelf from lat. 38°00'S., long. 140°05'E., to lat. 37°15'S., long. 139°15'E., between March and September. It also appears that these birds are restricted to the deeper waters beyond the continental shelf (100 fathoms) as no sightings were made of them close to shore, except during rough weather, when some birds have followed the boat in for some distance, presumably for shelter.

On 5 June 1978 a trip was arranged to the continental shelf with Mike Carter and Aden Sudbury of Melbourne, and on this day we observed more than 30 Grey-backed Storm-Petrels. They were able to observe the points of identification and habits, agreeing on the remarks that I have written in this document and thus confirming the species' presence in South Australian waters.

The list below shows the dates of each visit, and the numbers of Grey-backed Storm-Petrels seen:

5 March 1977: 100.
 9 April 1977: 300.
 8 May 1977: 250. -
 8 June 1977: 40.
 10 September 1977: 5.
 5 June 1978: 30.

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Editorial addition — About 15 Grey-backed Storm-Petrels were observed at sea near Green Cape, New South Wales, in April 1977. Details are given in The Australasian Seabird Group Newsletter No. 10 (May 1978), p. 16.

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