

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee  
Unusual Record Report Form

**Authors:**

Rohan Clarke, Tim Bawden, Gus Daly, Dan Pendavingh, Mel Mitchell, Joy Tansey and Jenn Spry

**Address:**

**Phone No:**

**Email:**

**Species Name: Great Shearwater**

**Scientific Name: *Puffinus gravis***

Date(s) and time(s) of observation:

28 April 2018 from 0912 until 0917  
29 April 2018 at 1216 and again at 1235

How long did you watch the bird(s)?

~5 mins on first date  
1 minute + 1 minute on second date.

First and last date of occurrence:

28 and 29 April 2018

Distance to bird:

Views down to 5 m on both days.

**Site Location**

Pelagic trips off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania.

First sighting: 28 April 2018 at 43 13 48 S, 148 12 48 E over 150-200 fathoms

Second sighting: 29 April 2018 at 43 12 35 S, 148 13 23 E over 300 fathoms

Third sighting: 29 April 2018 at 43 11 11 S, 148 11 39 E over 150 fathoms

**Habitat** (describe habitat in which the bird was seen):

Open ocean at or near the continental shelf edge.

**Sighting conditions:**

Calm seas and sunny skies meant viewing conditions were excellent.

Trip report for 28 April reads: WEATHER: In a word 'superb'. Not perfect for seabirding (the birds and I like some wind), but still a lovely day at sea. Conditions remained unchanged through the day. Mild to warm, calm almost windless and with no cloud to speak of. SEA: Mostly glassy smooth, though I saw some scale ripples a couple of times. Inshore in was basically flat, whilst offshore, especially at the shelf and in pelagic waters there was a long interval 1 m swell from the south.

Trip report for 29 April reads: WEATHER: Another nice day at sea. Mostly clear skies building to thin high hazy cloud later in the day. Mild to cool. Initially a 5 knot variable wind, increasing to 5-8 knots SW when offshore and pelagic, before dropping out altogether (calm) around midday. SEA: Scales ripples and 0.5 m swell inshore, building to 0.2-0.5 m sea on mostly 1 m swell (occasionally to 1.5 m) at the shelf and beyond. With the loss of the wind around midday it again 'glassed out' such that we were on flat seas and a gentle wide interval swell for the last hour beyond the shelf. No spray to speak of other than a couple of little splashes whilst underway.

**To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site?**

To our knowledge this is the third record of Great Shearwater off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania.

Previous records are:

20 February 2011. A flyby that proved to be the first record within a remarkable influx period. BARC Case 860 (accepted)

22 April 2012. A well watched bird that fed at the back of the boat. BARC Case 761 (accepted)

**Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who?** All observers saw the bird on both dates and agree with the identification.

Participants on the 28 April 2018 were: Tim Bawden, Isaac Clarey, Jo Culican, Gus Daly, Elliot Leach, Dan Pendavingh, Mel Mitchell, Joy Tansey, Jenn Spry, Jas Allnut, Andrew Walter, John Weigel, & Rohan Clarke  
Participants on the 29 April 2018 were: Tim Bawden, Isaac Clarey, Jo Culican, Gus Daly, Elliot Leach, Dan Pendavingh, Mel Mitchell, Joy Tansey, Jenn Spry, Nicole Sommer, Peter Vaughan, John Weigel, & Rohan Clarke

**How confident are you of your identification?**

100%

**Please confirm that you are willing for BARC to display your images (fully credited with your name) electronically**

Yes

### **Physical Description of Bird**

A single individual on both days. We consider all sightings over the two dates involve the same bird given calm conditions (seabird movement is inferred to be low on these days), the locations on each date were only about 5 km apart, and sightings on both days involved a bird that consistently lacked a pale hindneck band and showed worn buff fringes to coverts and mantle.

Combined description over both dates as follows: A relatively heavy, thickset shearwater with dark brown cap, grey-brown nape and heavily scalloped upperparts owing to broad buff fringes to feathers of mantle, back and upperwing coverts. A narrow pale rump band was evident above an otherwise all-dark brown uppertail. Below, the bird was mostly white including chin, throat and foreneck. The notable exceptions to this were a dark leading edge to the underwing, a series of dark broken lines in the inner underwing that merge to bound pale-centered triangles and dark primary tips and exposed secondaries along the trailing edge of the wing. The bird also showed a dusky brown belly smudge and dark undertail coverts. The bill was blackish, the legs and feet were mostly pink.

Flight was rather relaxed and powerful for a shearwater with purposeful wingbeats and interspersed by extended gliding.

Trip report for 28 April reads: GREAT SHEARWATER: 1 over ~150 fathoms. Initially called as a Buller's Shearwater well back in the wake, the ID was corrected when we stopped the boat and it flew straight up to land a few meters off our stern. After swimming about for perhaps 30 seconds it flew off, not to be seen again for the day.

Trip report for 29 April reads: GREAT SHEARWATER: 1 great flyby, up the wake and past on the port side in nice light whilst underway, and then a visit to circle the boat once at the third berley stop a little while later (these sightings were 20 mins apart). Presumably the same bird in both instances. These observations were all near to the shelf edge and just 5 km north of the previous day's sighting so probably all involve the same bird.

**Please indicate other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?**

On the 28 April the bird was initially called as a Buller's Shearwater when more than 100 m away from the vessel. After it had more closely approached the boat the ID was corrected to Great Shearwater. Given we were then primed, it is not surprising that the bird was immediately called as a Great Shearwater when detected on the 29 April. With good views this species can't be confused with any other species.

**Was the description written from memory?** Notes taken at the time of the sighting focused on the circumstances. A photographic record for each of the three encounters was also taken and is provided below.



**Figure 1. Great Shearwater coming into land on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘First’ sighting (Rohan Clarke)**



**Figure 2. Great Shearwater showing distinctive underwing pattern on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘First’ sighting (Gus Daly)**





**Figure 3. Great Shearwater showing distinctive underwing pattern on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'First' sighting (Tim Bawden)**



**Figure 4. Great Shearwater at rest on the sea surface on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'First' sighting (Rohan Clarke)**





**Figure 5. Great Shearwater at rest on the sea surface with other ‘typical’ Tasmanian seabirds (Southern Royal Albatross, Buller’s Albatross, Shy Albatross and Short-tailed Shearwater) on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘First’ sighting (Jenn Spry)**



**Figure 6. Great Shearwater taking off on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘First’ sighting. Note the Hippolyte Rock Stack (a distinctive landmark off Eaglehawk Neck) is visible in the top right corner (Mel Mitchell)**





**Figure 7. Great Shearwater in flight as it passed the vessel on 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'Second' sighting (Peter Vaughan)**



**Figure 8. Great Shearwater in flight as it passed the vessel on 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'Second' sighting (Mel Mitchell)**





**Figure 9. Great Shearwater in flight around vessel on 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘Third’ sighting (Rohan Clarke)**

**What experience have you had with the species in question?**

- RHC had previously seen single Great Shearwaters off Port Fairy, Vic (7 April 2002, BARC Case 371 accepted) and Eaglehawk Neck, Tas (20 February 2011, BARC Case 860 accepted).
- TB had previously seen 7(!) Great Shearwaters off Portland, Vic (3 April 2011, BARC Case 949 accepted).
- JT had previously seen Great Shearwaters off Penzance, England on 16 August 1998.
- JS had previously seen a single Great Shearwater off Port Fairy, Vic (17 April 2011, BARC Case 704 accepted).
- This was a new bird for all other authors.

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