

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission for a major rarity in Australia. (It is not a mandatory requirement) Please complete all sections ensuring that you attach all relevant information including any digital images (email to tonyp@bigpond.net.au or andrew.silcocks@birdlife.org.au). Submissions to BARC should be submitted electronically wherever possible.

Full Name: Graham Barwell (GB) Peter Vaughan (PV)	Office Use
---	------------

Address:	Phone No:
	Email:

Species Name: Westland Petrel	Scientific Name: <i>Procellaria westlandica</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	c. 11.49 hrs AEST, 16 June 2018
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	at least 6 minutes
First and last date of occurrence:	16 June 2018
Distance to bird:	estimated 50 m from boat

Site Location Tasman Sea in the vicinity of 43° 06' 25" S; 148° 16' 55" E, 28.4 km ESE of the Pirates Bay jetty, Eaglehawk Neck

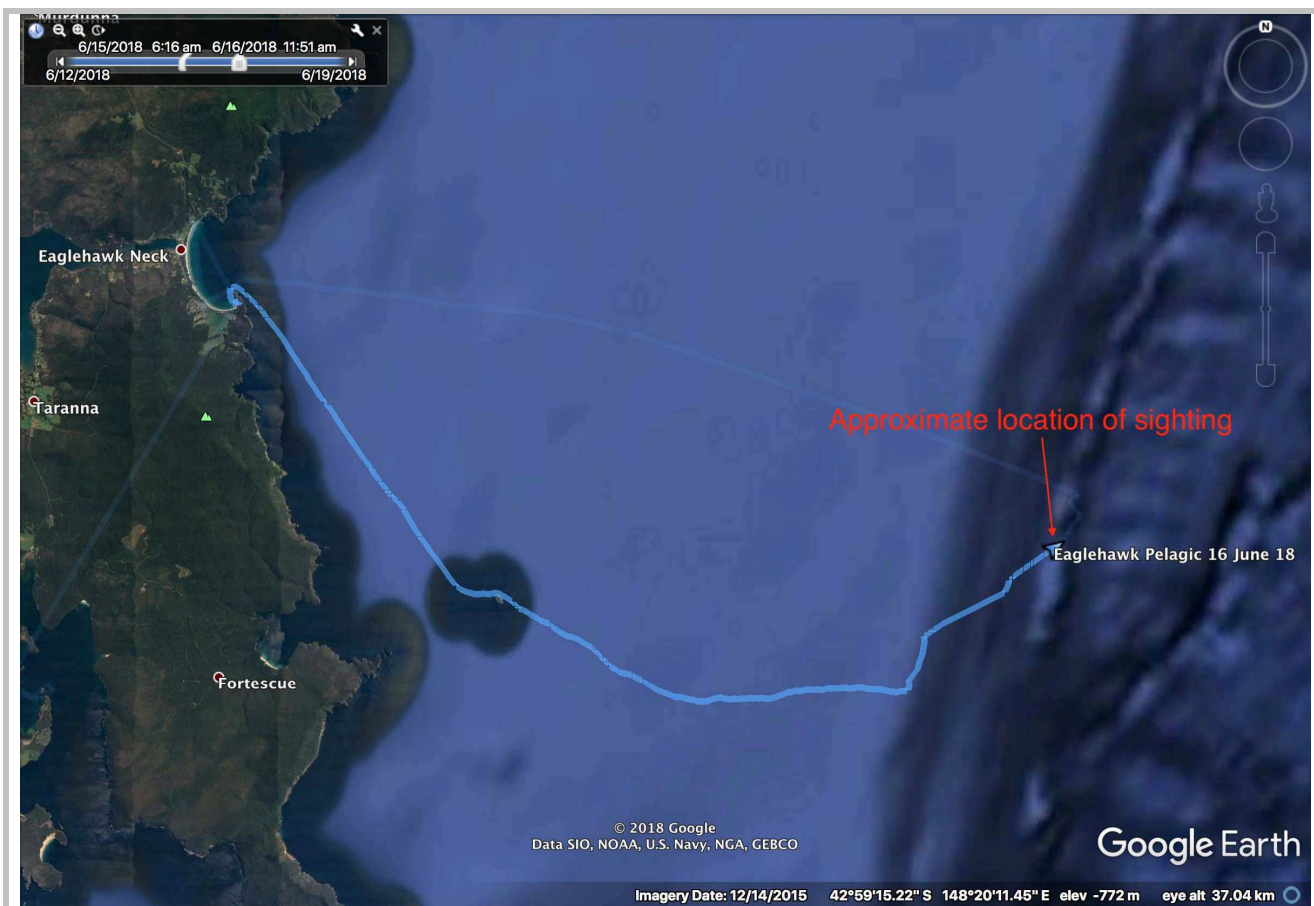


Figure 1 Track of the MV *Pauletta* and location (arrowed) of sighting

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

Pelagic waters just east of the shelf-break

Sighting conditions (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.):

Overcast conditions with good visibility, light-moderate wind, seas 2-2.5 m. Observations were made from the MV *Pauletta*, which was travelling slowly northeast in the deeper water as we were chumming with fish scraps in order to bring the birds in close. Sea temperature was around 13.5°.

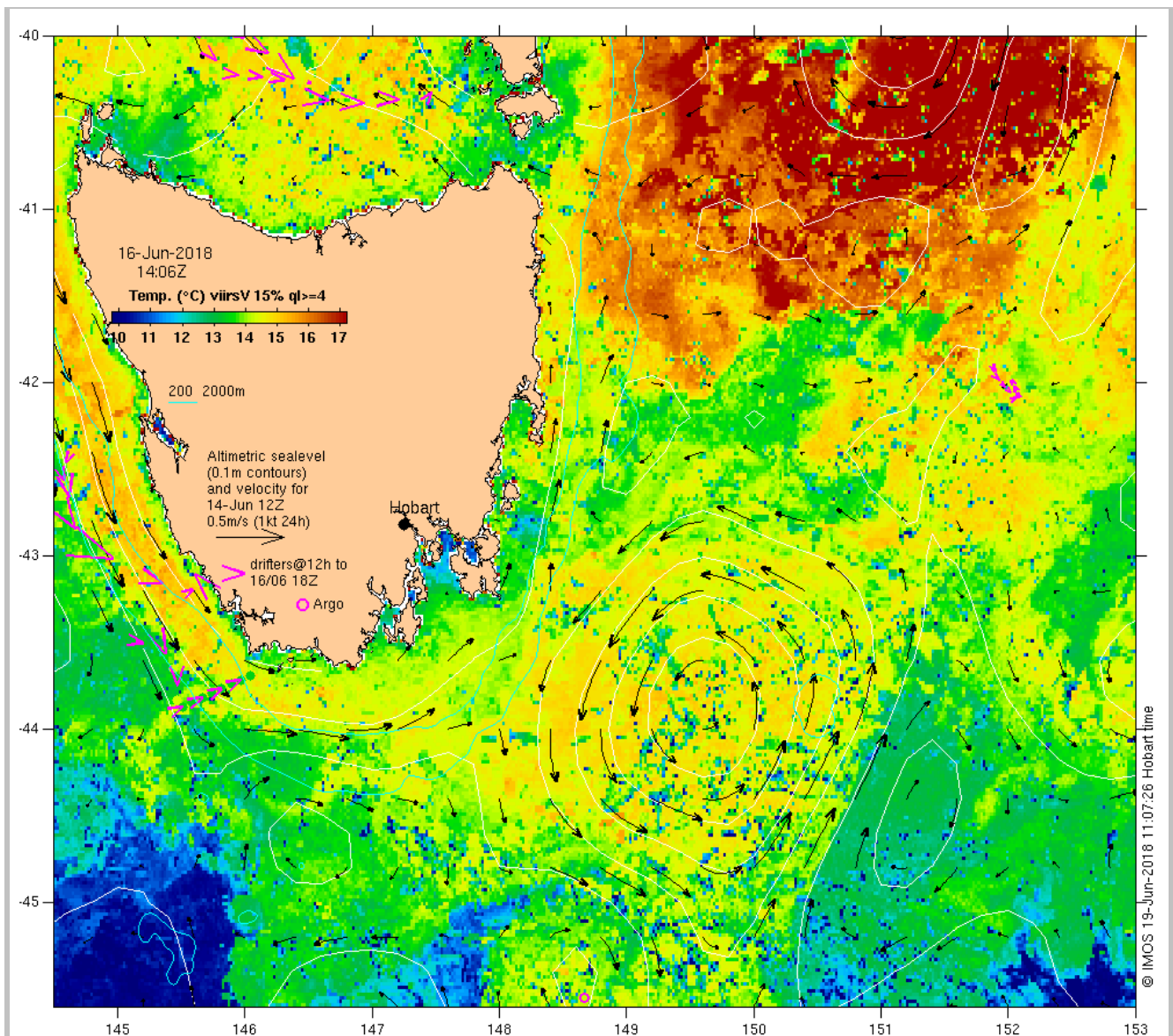


Figure 2 Sea temperature and currents off the east coast of Tasmania, 16 June 2018.

Source <http://oceancurrent.imos.org.au>

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

No, it's something of a rarity. There are only 2 records off Eaglehawk in Birddata, both in April, but there are a number in eBird, 2009-17, predominantly from May and involving 1-3 birds. There are several sightings off Eaglehawk already in eBird from 2018: 1 bird on 28 April (with photos), 4 on 29 April (with photos), 1 on 26 May (with photos) and 1-2 birds on 27 May (with photos). BARC has accepted 3 records, 2013-16, from the area covered by the Eaglehawk pelagics (cases 821, 883 and 920) and another from the Cascade Seamount some 200 km to the southeast in 2010 (case 650). In its verdicts the committee notes that the species is regular off Tasmania, being reported almost annually.

There are only a small number of tracks of this species included in the Seabird Tracking Database. None of these show the birds approaching Australian waters. See also the discussion by Todd J. Landers et al. (2011) of the breeding and post-breeding movements of 8 birds fitted with geolocators. More recent work by Susan M. Waugh et al. (2018) included tracking 21 birds fitted with data loggers during the pre-egg stage, i.e., March-May, in 2011, along with more birds in the incubation and chick-feeding stages, 2011-16. Over the six-year study period 73 individual birds were tracked. None approached Australian waters. Waugh et al. note that their results for the prebreeding period may be unrepresentative and that "prebreeding foraging activity [when a few birds are recorded off Tasmania] warrants further examination" (382). The tracks from this project are not in the Seabird Tracking Database.

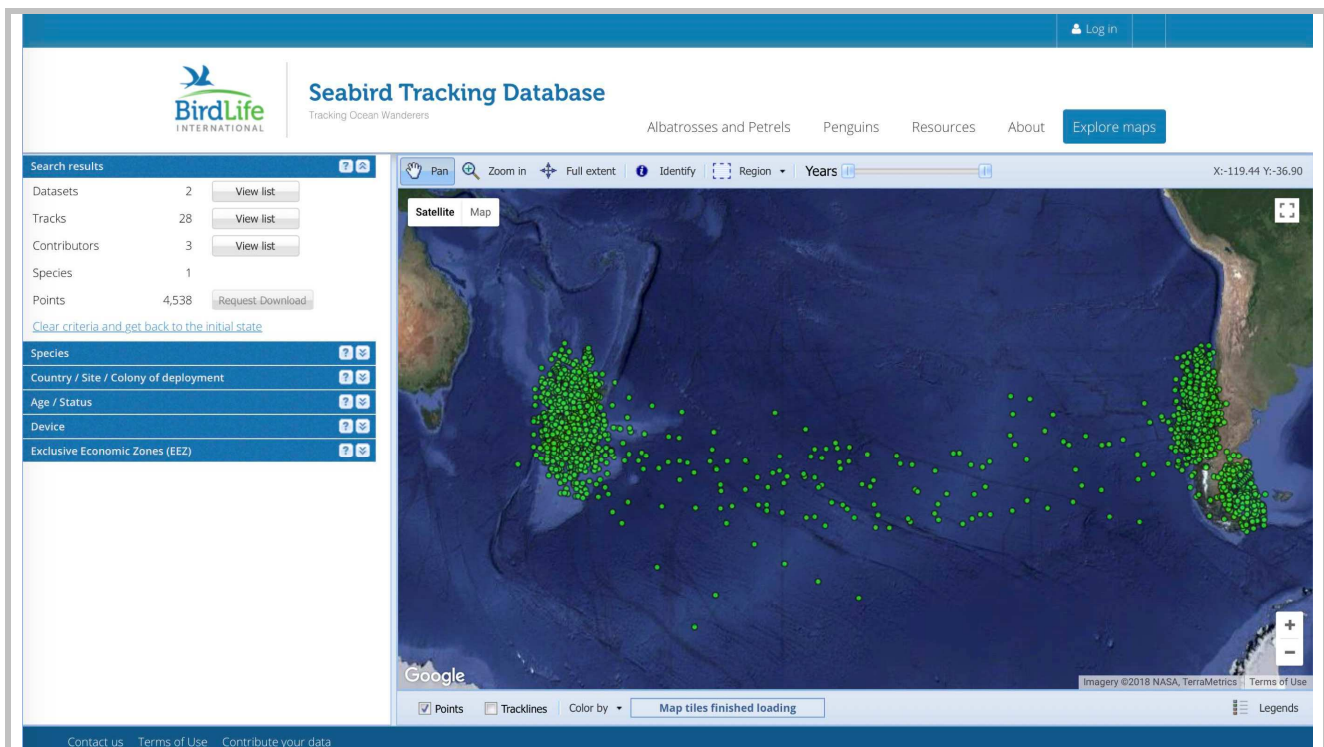


Figure 3 Tracks of Westland Petrels, breeding and post-breeding. Source: Seabird Tracking Database <http://seabirdtracking.org/mapper/>

References

- Landers, Todd J., Matt J. Rayner, Richard A. Phillips and Mark E. Hauber (2011). "Dynamics of Seasonal Movements by a Trans-Pacific Migrant, the Westland Petrel." *The Condor*, 113.1: 71-79.
- Waugh, Susan M., James W. Giffiths, Timothee A. Poupart, Dominique P. Filippi, Karyne Rogers and John Y.P. Arnold (2018). "Environmental Factors and Fisheries Influence the Foraging Patterns of a Subtropical Seabird, the Westland Petrel (*Procellaria westlandica*), in the Tasman Sea." *The Condor: Ornithological Applications*, 120: 371-87.

Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who? (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)?

Yes, in addition to GB and PV, there were a number of other observers present, including those with extensive experience of seabirds off Eaglehawk. No one disagreed with the identification.

How confident are you of your identification?, e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not?
100%

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

YES

Other details:

Other species present: . Good numbers of smaller albatrosses were present, especially Shy and Buller's Albatrosses, as well as Fairy Prions and small numbers of other seabirds, e.g., Wilson's Storm Petrel, Grey-backed Storm Petrel, Northern Royal Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Cape Petrel, Providence Petrel, Greater Crested and White-fronted Terns. For a full listing of species recorded on this pelagic, see <https://ebird.org/australia/view/checklist/S46598446>.

Physical Description of Bird - Please describe only what you saw: (1) No. of individuals present (living or dead); (2) age (adult, juvenile, immature) and sex; (3) size and shape; (4) plumage colour and pattern (including any details of moult); (5) colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet; (6) calls; (7) behaviour, movements, flight pattern, and anything else that might help to identify the bird e.g. feeding, interactions with other birds, describe where the bird was – on ground, in canopy, flying etc. Were comparisons made with other species?

- (1) one individual
- (2) age and sex not determined, but the bird appeared to be in fresh plumage with no signs of moult, which suggests an adult at the start of the breeding cycle (see figs 4-5 & 13-16)
- (3) large size immediately apparent, the first thing that drew attention to it as being different. Much bigger than the Fairy Prions (see fig. 4) but about half the size of the Shy Albatrosses (see fig. 5). Estimated to be about 33% bigger than the Providence Petrels also in the area at the time. Head, neck and chest looked large, giving the appearance of a bull-necked, deep-chested, solidly-built bird. The wings looked fairly broad, in proportion to the solid build and weight of the bird, with dark shafts in the primaries.



Figure 4 Dorsal view of the bird seen off Eaglehawk. Note the size difference between it and the Fairy Prion. Photo by Peter Vaughan.



Figure 5 Presumed Westland Petrel above Shy Albatrosses. Note the relative size. Photo by Peter Vaughan.

- (4) plumage entirely dark brownish black with no sign of any of the white feathering at the base of the underside of the bill (see fig. 6), characteristic of White-chinned Petrel. No sign of moult.
- (5) robust bill, held slightly downwards, a pale creamy yellow with a black tip (maxillary and mandibular ungues), black culminicorn & naricorn extending round slightly blackish creamy yellow nares, black cutting edges to mandibles. Dark brown iris. Black legs and feet with the tips, particularly the nails, just extending beyond the tail tip in flight (see fig. 7).



Figure 6 Head and bill. Note the smallish nares (arrowed) in proportion to bill size and the completely dark feathering at the base of the bill (arrowed). Detail of fig. 14. Photo by Peter Vaughan.



Figure 7 Tail and foot projection. Detail of fig. 4. Photo by Peter Vaughan.

- (6) the bird did not call
- (7) the bird approached the boat while we were chumming in deep water, surrounded by a number of smaller albatrosses and other species attracted to the fish scraps. It came into where the birds were feeding on the chum, occasionally landing on the water, but didn't come in all that close to the boat. Size comparisons with other species are mentioned under (3).

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

Dark-plumaged albatrosses and juvenile giant petrels are eliminated by their much bigger size and their lacking the dark-tipped yellowish bill of the bird seen today.

Dark-plumaged larger shearwaters can be eliminated fairly easily by the big head and body and generally bulky jizz. In addition

- (1) Sooty Shearwater is ruled out by the robust, dark-tipped yellowish bill and the brown underwings
- (2) Short-tailed Shearwater by the robust, dark-tipped yellowish bill and large size
- (3) Flesh-footed Shearwater by the yellowish not pinkish bill and the black feet (see fig. 8).



Figure 8 Black legs and feet of the bird seen off Eaglehawk. Detail of fig. 5. Photo by Peter Vaughan.

Some medium to large dark-plumaged petrels can be eliminated fairly easily by the big head and body and generally bulky jizz. In addition

- (1) Grey-faced Petrel is ruled out by the dark-tipped yellowish bill and dark brownish black face
- (2) Great-winged Petrel by the dark-tipped yellowish bill and dark brownish black face
- (3) Providence Petrel by the dark-tipped yellowish bill, dark brownish black face and underwings
- (4) Dark morph Kermadec Petrel by the dark-tipped yellowish bill and dark primary shafts
- (5) Dark morph Soft-plumaged Petrel by large size and the dark-tipped yellowish bill
- (6) Kerguelen Petrel by large size, the dark-tipped yellowish bill and brownish black not grey plumage

This leaves the all dark *Procellaria* petrels as confusion species. They can be eliminated in turn:

- (1) Spectacled Petrel has white patches on its head, unlike the evenly dark brownish head of the bird seen off Eaglehawk. Spectacled Petrel has not been recorded in SW Pacific waters.
- (2) White-chinned Petrel has a pale, not dark, tip to its bill and has a small patch of white feathers at the bill base, unlike the Eaglehawk bird (figs. 9 & 10). It also has a comparatively large maxillary unguis, more prominent than in Westland Petrel. The issue of a juvenile White-chinned Petrel with a duskier bill tip, mentioned by Menkhorst et al. (2017) as a potential source of confusion, especially if it was an individual with an almost completely dark chin, does not arise with the Eaglehawk bird, since it has an evenly black, not dusky, bill tip.



Figures 9 & 10 White-chinned Petrels captured prior to banding off Wollongong (left) and Kiama (right). Note the small patch of white feathers at the bill base (arrowed), smaller on the bird in fig. 10, and yellowish unguis. Photos by GB.

- (3) Black Petrel is most similar to the Eaglehawk bird of all the possible confusion species. The significantly larger size of the Eaglehawk bird compared with Providence Petrel, coupled with its solidly-built, bull-necked appearance points to Westland rather than Black Petrel. The evenly black unguis together with the smaller nares in proportion to the bill size on the Eaglehawk bird are not consistent with Black Petrel (see fig. 11). Besides Black Petrels are summer, not winter, breeders and will be in eastern tropical Pacific waters off Ecuador at this time of year, not returning to their NZ breeding sites until October.



Figure 11 (left) Black Petrel captured prior to banding off Wollongong. Note the bigger nares in proportion to bill size and less evenly black unguis. Photo by GB.

Figure 12 (right) The Eaglehawk bird has proportionally smaller nares and evenly black unguis. Detail of fig. 14. Photo by Peter Vaughan.

Was the description written from memory?

The description was written from notes made in the field, supplemented by views of the photographs, and consultation with other references. These included accounts in the following:

- Marchant & Higgins, co-ordinators, *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, vol. 1 *Ratites to Ducks* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- Menkhorst et al., *The Australian Bird Guide* (London: Christopher Helm, 2017)
- New Zealand Birds Online <http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz>.
- Onley & Scofield, *Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World* (London: Christopher Helm, 2007)
- Parkinson, *Field Guide to New Zealand Seabirds*, 2nd ed. (Auckland: New Holland, 2006)

* Scofield & Stephenson, *Birds of NZ: A Photographic Guide* (2013), app for iPhones by mydigitalearth.com

Were photographs taken? (please include where possible)

Six photographs (figs 4 & 5 above and 13-16 below) show dorsal and ventral flight views.



Figure 13 dorsal flight view of the Eaglehawk bird. Photo by Peter Vaughan.



Figure 14 dorsal flight view of the Eaglehawk bird. Photo by Peter Vaughan.



Figure 15 ventral flight view of the Eaglehawk bird. Photo by Peter Vaughan.



Figure 16 ventral flight view of the Eaglehawk bird. Photo by Peter Vaughan.

What experience have you had with the species in question? (Did you know it was a Rare bird when you first saw it?)

The bird was recognised as a rarity the moment the species was seen.

GB has seen this species off Wollongong, e.g., the birds constituting BARC Cases #767 (Dec. 2012) and #776 (Feb. 2005), as well as off Kaikoura in New Zealand. He has also seen White-chinned and Black Petrels off Wollongong and Kiama, both in flight and in the hand.

PV has seen this species off Eaglehawk Neck, an individual on 08/05/2016 (BARC case 920 accepted), and 3+ birds on 29/4/18 (BARC submission in preparation).

Name: Graham Barwell **Email Address:** Peter Vaughan

