

**BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee
Unusual Record Report Form**

Authors:

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Address:

**Phone N
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Species Name: Westland Petrel

Scientific Name: *Procellaria westlandica*

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

28 April 2018 from 1328 until 1338
29 April 2018 two birds on three occasions:
0920 to 1030
1030 to 1150
1235 to 1320

How long did you watch the bird(s)?

~10 mins on first date
1 hour + 1 hour 20 minutes + 45 minutes on second date.

First and last date of occurrence:

28 and 29 April 2018

Distance to bird:

Views down to 10 metres on both days.

Site Location

Pelagic trips off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania.

First sighting of a single bird: 28 April 2018 at 43 10' 09" S 148 10' 09" E over 85 fathoms

Two birds simultaneously for each of the following sightings:

Second sightings: 29 April 2018 at first berley point 43 13' 52" S 148 14' 05" E over 350 fathoms

Third sightings: 29 April 2018 at second berley point 43 14' 14" S 148 16' 16" E over 550 fathoms

Fourth sightings: 29 April 2018 at last stop 43 11' 11" S 148 11' 39" E over 130 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 would be the 17th accepted record of Westland Petrel in Australia, and the 4th accepted record off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania.

Previous records are:

- One bird off north-west Tasmania, Tasmania, 17/04/1984 (BARC case 84)
- One bird off Wollongong, New South Wales, 06/1996 (BARC case 231)
- One beachcast bird near Port Campbell, Victoria, 15/02/1989 (BARC case 270)
- One beachcast bird at Ballina, New South Wales, 12/01/2003 (BARC case 373)
- One bird off Southport, Queensland, 19/08/2006 (BARC case 499)
- One beachcast bird at Ocean Grove, Victoria, 14/12/2001 (BARC case 505)
- One bird at Narrabeen, New South Wales, 23/12/2006 (BARC case 513)
- One bird off Sydney, New South Wales, 09/05/2009 (BARC case 598)
- One bird off south-east Tasmania, 10/04/2010 (BARC case 650)
- One bird off Wollongong, New South Wales, 15/12/2012 (BARC case 767)
- One bird off Wollongong, New South Wales, 26/02/2005 (BARC case 776)
- One bird at Port Kembla, New South Wales, 25/12/2012 (BARC case 786)
- One bird off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania, 05/05/2013 (BARC case 821)
- One bird off Tasman Island, Tasmania, 24/05/2015 (BARC case 883)
- One bird at Byron Bay, New South Wales, 13/01/2016 (BARC case 894)
- One bird off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania, 08/05/2016 (BARC case 920)

Although it has been noted by BARC that Westland Petrel is reported almost annually off Tasmania, these observations have not been formally assessed. Data for these observations are contained in HANZAB, eBird, Birddata, Birdline Tasmania, and Tasmanian Bird Reports, and suggest that while Westland Petrel remains uncommon, it is likely a regular visitor to the east coast of Tasmania, especially from around April to May consistent with this submission.

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*Pattern of observations*

A single individual (Bird ID # 1.1) was observed on first day (Saturday 28 April) in offshore waters in the PM with a slightly unusual bill tip that was not entirely black and had some grey areas more clearly visible on the left side. This bird was observed for about 10 minutes.

Birds were observed on three occasions on the second day (Sunday 29 April) with two individuals present simultaneously at each location.

The first record on the second day (ID # 2.1) was at the first berley point at about 0920 with two birds observed and exhibiting a variation in bill tip from pale to dark grey (photos not available of second bird).

Two birds were observed together at the second berley point and both had dark bill tips (photos not available). One bird showed some interest in the berley and came near to the vessel but did not approach any

closer than about 10 metres.

After a break of nearly an hour we again had two birds together at the last berley stop on the shelf (ID # 2.2 and 2.3).

Overall observations

The birds in all observations demonstrated a number of morphological commonalities indicative of Westland Petrel. Structurally, all the birds reported in this submission appeared bulky in flight, and on the water for those birds that did alight (Figures 1 – 12). Notably, all had sturdy necks and relatively square heads, leading into a bulky chest, though there was some slight variation in apparent heft between individuals (Figures 1 – 14). This resulted in a somewhat heavy appearing flight pattern, on broad wings, for all birds (Figures 1 – 10).

In colouration, all birds displayed predominantly sooty brown-black plumage, with light conditions giving the appearance in flight of silvery linings to the greater primary coverts and remiges on the underwing (Figures 1 – 12). The bare parts were coloured as follows; black feet, horn coloured bills with black to dark grey on the ramicorn and sulcus, and varying shades of black and grey on the culmicorn and unguis (Figures 1 – 14). None of the individuals observed displayed foot projection beyond minimal toe projection in flight (Figures 1 – 10).

The varying degrees of black and grey colouration on the culmicorn and unguis are particularly indicative of the number of individual birds present across the observations in this submission, in synergy with minor variations in plumage.

We suggest four individuals were present, with three different birds on Sunday 29th a conservative estimate. Certainly three different individuals have been identified on the second day based on small variations in bill colour and plumage as well as the pattern of arrival and departure. The bird observed on Saturday showed unusual bill colouration (described below) and was not observed on Sunday. All individuals showed a generally low level of interest in the berley (i.e. not feeding at the back of the boat) and drifted away after landing at a distance of more than 10 metres.

Specific individuals

Four individual birds are described in detail below and relevant photographs are provided at figures 1 to 14.

- Bird 1.1 (observed on the 28/04/2018) featured a uniformly pale ramicorn unpatterned by black above the sulcus on the right side of the bird, and only minimally shaded grey above the sulcus to the cutting edge on the left side of the bill (Figures 13 and 14). The latericorn is relatively short and deep giving the bill an overall stocky appearance. The unguis of this individual were dark edged with pale central areas, being lighter grey anterior of the gonys on the mandibular unguis, and uneven lighter grey on the maxillary unguis except towards the hook, which was darker (Figures 13 and 14). A small horn coloured patch towards the rear edge of the right side of the maxillary unguis and slight plumage wear below the eye and toward the chin on the right side of this bird further serve to differentiate it from other individuals observed on the subsequent day (Figure 13).
- Bird 2.1 (observed between 0920 and 1030 on the 29/04/2018) featured dark edged unguis similar to bird 1.1, but the lower anterior portion of the mandibular unguis on the right side was the distinctly blacker on this bird (Figure 13). The ramicorn above the sulcus was also darker on the right side than in bird 1.1, and there was less black bleed from the anterior of the nostril on both sides (Figures 13 and 14). The latericorn was again short and deep. This bird had a different plumage wear pattern to bird 1.1, with the following features of note:
 - a distinctive marking of two displaced feathers on the forehead (Figures 6 and 7, 13 and 14),
 - a small white mark on the left side of the breast (Figures 5 and 8),
 - pale colouration on one of the terminal feathers of the lateral uppertail coverts (Figures 6, 7 and 9), and
 - the left t5 appearing to be growing in (Figures 5 and 8).
- Bird 2.2 (observed between 1235 and 1320 on the 29/04/2018) did not possess any of the plumage

anomalies observed in bird 2.1 or bird 1.1 (Figures 10 and 13). Photographs were obtained of the right side of the bill only for bird 2.2 showing the typical stocky shape. The ramicorn of this bird featured markedly less strong black colouration between the sulcus and the cutting edge in the posterior region of the bill (Figure 13). This colouration was stronger than in bird 1.1, as was the colouration of the unguis, which, while still pale-centred, were substantially darker towards the anterior ends. Bird 2.2 also demonstrated darker grey colouration than bird 1.1 at the posterior end of the ramicorn (Figure 13).

- Bird 2.3 (observed between 1235 and 1320 on the 29/04/2018) displayed bill features more typical of Westland Petrel with a bill substantially darker overall than all other individuals, and also did not demonstrate any of the plumage conditions or patterns described above (Figures 11 - 14). This bird showed markings on the right side of the latericorn, with some possible superficial damage abutting the cutting edge, and some brown staining below the ramicorn and culmicorn (Figure 13). Additionally, the unguis were substantially darker on both sides of this individual than all other birds, being fully black besides some dark grey shading at the abutment of the maxillary unguis to the culmicorn (Figures 13 and 14). The nostril was also notably lighter on the right side of the bird than all others, as was the ramicorn, while the nostril was more shaded than all other birds on the left side of the bill (Figures 13 and 14).

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

Black Petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*) and White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) are the only species likely to be confused with the birds in this submission. The bill morphology and colour, along with general physical structure of the birds, can be used to eliminate these species.

White-chinned Petrel can be eliminated as even though this species is structurally broadly similar to the birds in this submission (Figures 1 – 10), adult White-chinned Petrels do not have dark unguis, and typically have at least some white feathering on the chin. Juvenile White-chinned Petrels require slightly more consideration, as this age class does not necessarily have white colouration on the chin, and can have some dark colouration on the unguis. However, such birds can also be eliminated from contention, as the colouration of the unguis was unlike the duskiness one might anticipate in juvenile White-chinned Petrel compared to those birds in this submission. Further, the latericorn was shorter and deeper than White-chinned Petrel in all birds, giving the appearance of a more thickset bill with a tip that did not appear to droop below the line of the bill in any birds (Figures 13 and 14). In addition, White-chinned Petrel was observed concurrently with several of the subjects of this submission on the second day (Sunday), and differences between these species were clearly observed.

Black Petrel can be eliminated primarily on structure, as all of the birds in this submission were clearly larger and bulkier (especially being deeper chested, thicker necked, and squarer headed) than would be expected for Black Petrel (Figures 1 – 14). Furthermore, the bill colouration and morphology of the birds in this submission differentiates them from Black Petrel; although some birds in this submission displayed grey colouration on the unguis approaching the lightness of Black Petrel, this was at most on only one side of the bill of any bird, and the other side of their bills being more typically dark as observed in Westland Petrel (Figures 13 and 14). The bill of all birds also appeared heavier than depicted in Black Petrel (Figures 13 and 14). In addition, clear foot projection such as that as reported in Black Petrel was not observed while the birds were in flight, with at most a minimal toe projection visible (Figures 1 – 10).

Was the description written from memory?

Notes were taken at the time of the sightings and a photographic record for three of the four encounters is provided below.



Figure 1. Westland Petrel (1.1) approaching boat on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘First’ sighting (Rohan Clarke).



Figure 2. Westland Petrel (1.1) in flight around the boat on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘First’ sighting (Rohan Clarke).

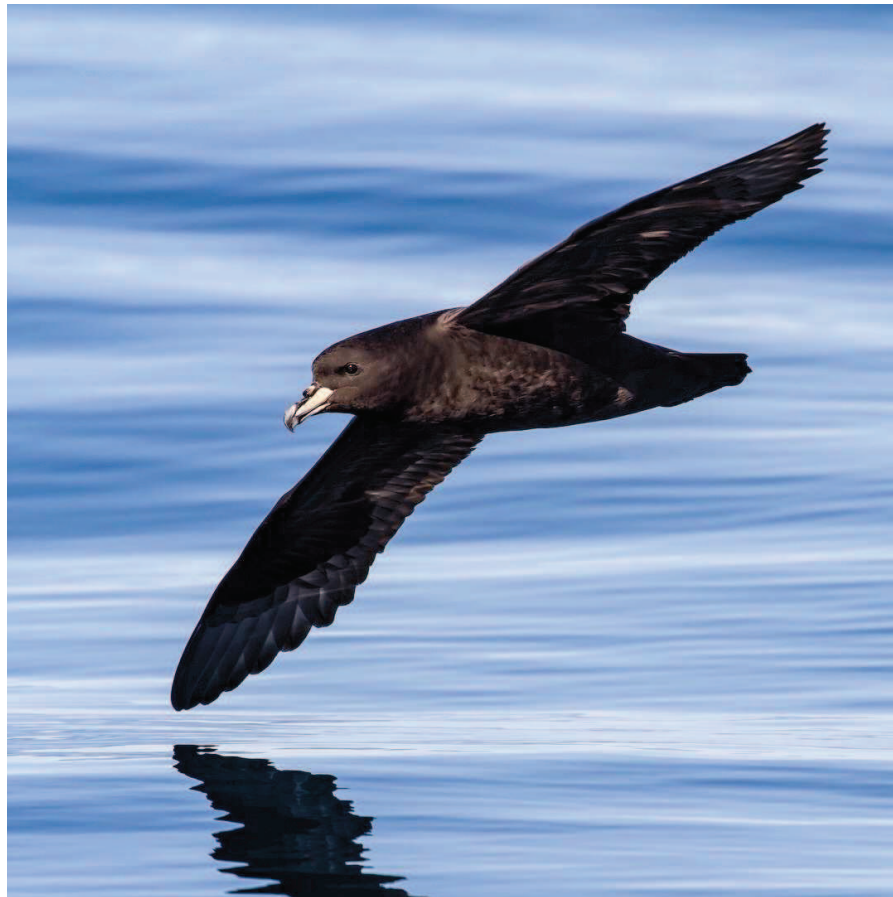


Figure 3. Westland Petrel (1.1) in flight around the boat on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'First' sighting (Gus Daly).

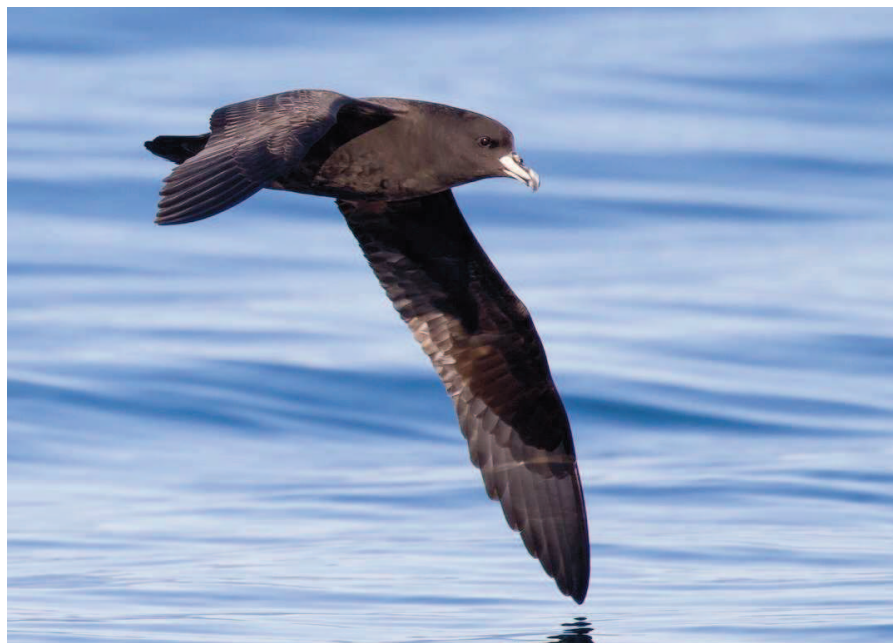


Figure 4. Westland Petrel (1.1) in flight around the boat on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'First' sighting (Gus Daly).



Figure 5. Westland Petrel (2.1) approaching the boat on 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'Second' sighting (Rohan Clarke).



Figure 6. Westland Petrel (2.1) approaching the boat on 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'Second' sighting (Tim Bawden).



Figure 7. Westland Petrel (2.1) approaching the boat on 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘Second’ sighting (Gus Daly).



Figure 8. Westland Petrel (2.1) in flight on 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘Second’ sighting (Peter Vaughan)



Figure 9. Westland Petrel (2.1) in flight on 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘Second’ sighting (Peter Vaughan).



Figure 10. Westland Petrel (2.2) in flight on 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. ‘Fourth’ sighting (Rohan Clarke).



Figure 11. Westland Petrel (2.3) at rest on the sea surface on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'Fourth' sighting (Rohan Clarke).



Figure 12. Westland Petrel (2.3) at rest on the sea surface on 28 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. 'Fourth' sighting (Peter Vaughan).

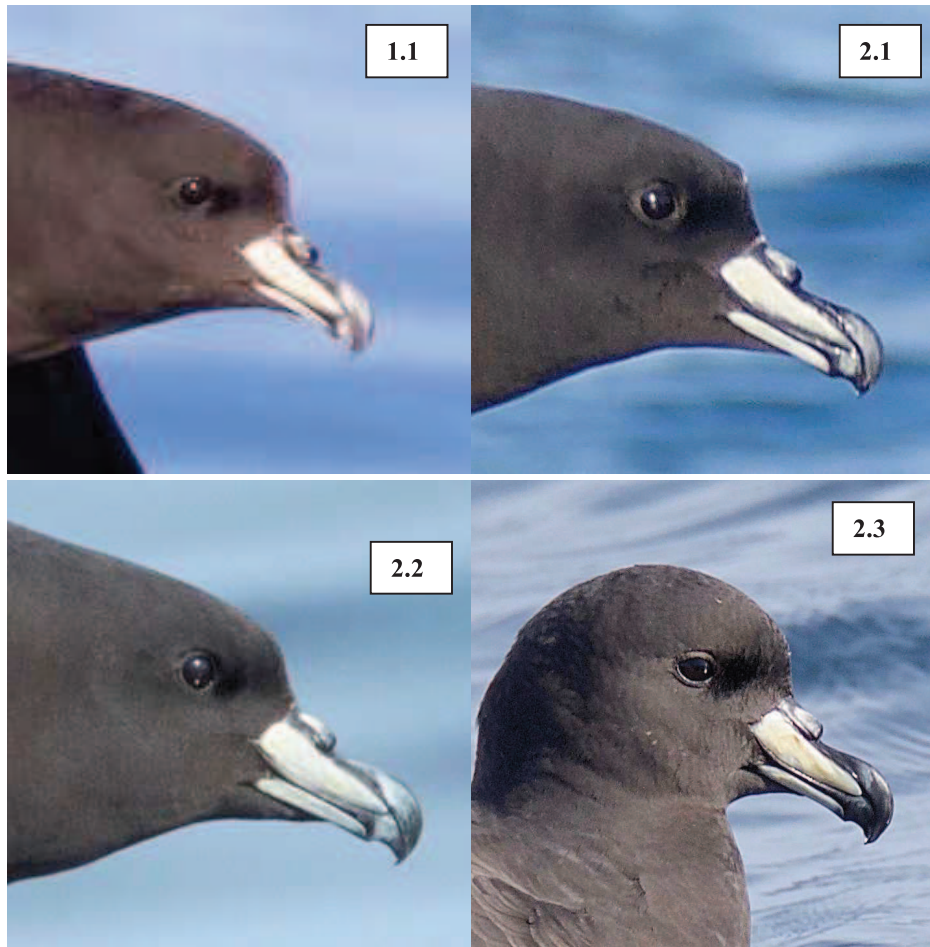


Figure 13. Composite of right sides of the head of Westland Petrels on the 28 April 2018 and 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. Bird 1.1 at top left, bird 2.1 at top right, bird 2.2 at bottom left, bird 2.3 at bottom right (Gus Daly, Peter Vaughan, Rohan Clarke, and Peter Vaughan respectively).

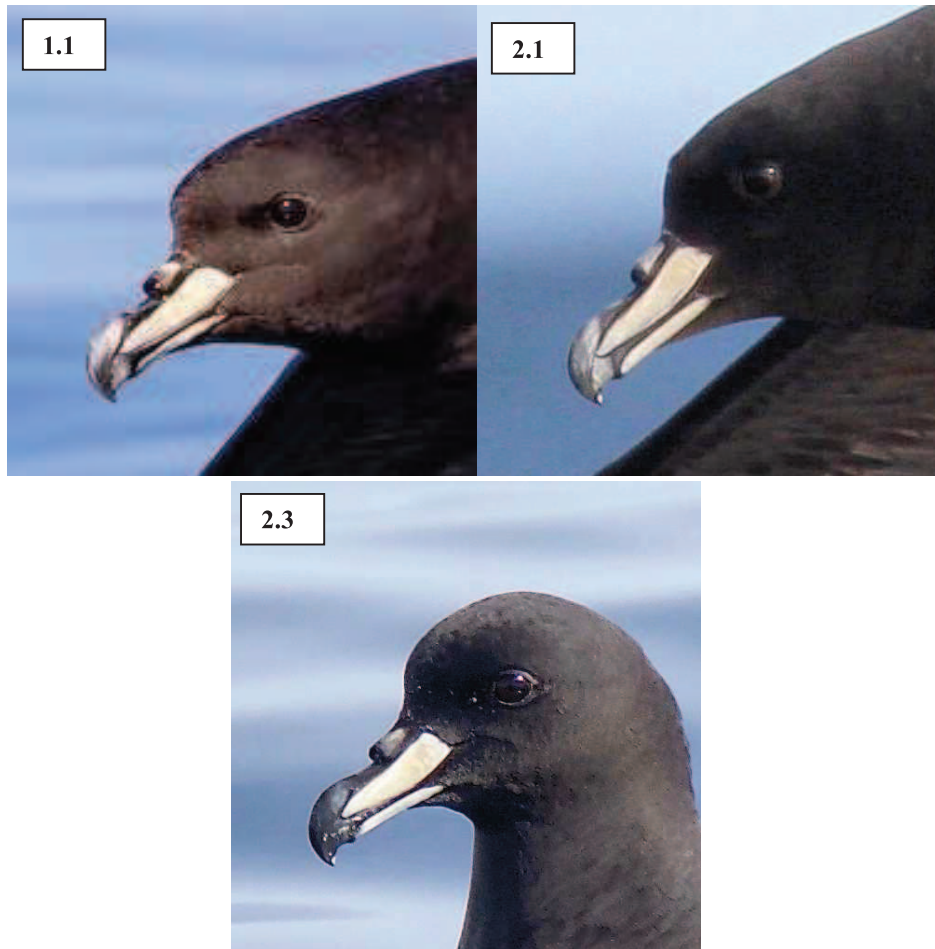


Figure 14. Composite of left sides of the head of Westland Petrels on the 28 April 2018 and 29 April 2018 off Eaglehawk Neck, Tasmania. Bird 1.1 at top left, bird 2.1 at top right, bird 2.3 at bottom centre (Gus Daly, Gus Daly, and Peter Vaughan respectively).

What experience have you had with the species in question?

PV has previously seen a single Westland Petrel off Eaglehawk Neck, Tas (08/05/2016, BARC case 920 accepted), and a single Westland Petrel off Eaglehawk Neck, Tas (16/6/18, BARC case 1012 under review).

RHC has previously seen this species on two previous occasions in Tasmanian waters, and has field experience of both Black and White-chinned Petrel off both Australia and New Zealand.

MM and JT had previously seen this species off Kaikoura NZ in February 2011 and March 2001 respectively, as well as Black and White-chinned Petrel in Australian waters.

JS has prior experience during a Dunedin to Macquarie Island trip in November 2011 as well as Black and White-chinned Petrel in Australian waters.

All other co-authors have observed Black Petrel and White-chinned Petrel in the field but not Westland Petrel.

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