

Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica*: Case 1069

Submission to BARC seeking endorsement of the first Australian record, a beached carcass found by David Eades, Kevin Bartram & Mike Carter on 13th August 1978 at Gunnamatta Beach, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria

MIKE CARTER 15th June 2019

This account provides details of the first Australian record of Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica*.

The carcass of a recently Antarctic Petrel in good condition was found at Gunnamatta Beach in Victoria on 13th August 1978 by David W. Eades, Kevin Bartram & Mike Carter. As at that time, numbers of dead seabirds were being washed up on shores throughout Victoria, i.e. there was a 'wreck', the three of us (and others) were patrolling ocean beaches. On this day we were working the Mornington Peninsula. To cover as much ground as possible we split up. This bird was found on the stretch of beach walked by David. Although this occurrence is widely regarded as a valid record, e.g. Marchant & Higgins (1990), it has not been assessed by BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC) nor by its predecessor, the Australian Records Appraisal Committee. At the time of the occurrence no body or group was responsible for vetting records. Details of this find are not well known. In addition to seeking BARC's endorsement, this write-up is intended to document this discovery. Five photos taken on Kodak Ektachrome colour slide film on that or in the next few days by Mike Carter and recently converted to digital images are presented below as evidence. The carcass was handed to Museum Victoria, Melbourne, and is thought to be retained there as a specimen.



Fig. 1. Antarctic Petrel found dead on Gunnamatta Beach, Victoria 13th August 1978, held to reveal its ventral aspect by finders David W. Eades & Kevin Bartram Photo by Mike Carter.



**Figs. 2 & 3. Antarctic Petrel found dead on Gunnamatta Beach, Victoria 13th August 1978
held and laid out to display its dorsal aspect**

Photos by Mike Carter.



Fig. 4. Antarctic Petrel as above but showing a foot

Photo by Mike Carter.



Fig. 5. Antarctic Petrel as above; close-up of head & bill

Photo by Mike Carter.

The description and identification

As evident from the photos of the bird in the hand, this was a large petrel similar in size to a Southern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides*. It was larger than a Silver Gull *Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae* but smaller than a Pacific Gull *Larus pacificus*. Some measurements were recorded at the time but were not found in a recent search (it was 41 years ago and I've moved to a new house)! Ostensibly this is a 'black-&-white' seabird that should not be confused with any other but does have a vague resemblance to the more familiar and noticeably smaller Cape Petrel *Daption capense*. I say ostensibly because the literature tells us that they are actually chocolate brown but they don't appear so to me at least in fresh plumage like this individual, see for instance figures 6 below. Evidently in worn plumage they are much paler; see Onley & Scofield (2007) plate 13 and Shirihai (2007), plate at top of page 145. The four most obvious distinctions from Cape Petrel visible in the photos are the following. The broad white stripe or panel on the upper wing that extends about three-quarters the length of the wing, (on the rear third of the upper wing remote from the trailing edge) is continuous, not broken at the junction between the arm and the hand and is solid white not chequered black & white. The upper tail, both the rectrices and their coverts, are pure white not chequered. On the underwing, the tips of all but the outermost primaries are white not black. The legs and feet are flesh coloured, therefore pale, not black as in Cape Petrel (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Onley & Scofield 2007; Shirihai 2007; Menkhorst *et al.* 2017).

There is no evidence of moult that I can detect. In the right wing P9 appears loose but this was probably dislodged in the surf or on the beach rather than by moult. Because adults and juveniles moult at similar times I cannot see a way of ageing this individual.

As there will be follow-up submissions particularly regarding some in which only remnants were found, I make the following comments. The illustrations in Menkhorst *et al.* (2017) show the white stripe in the upper wing as running into the body. As evident in the live bird in figure 6 and in the carcass that is the subject of this submission, it can be seen that it does not. The black scapulars overlap the junction between body and wing so that no white is visible adjacent the body. Moreover, the tertials are wholly white not tipped black like the adjacent secondaries.



Fig. 6. Antarctic Petrel in the one degree block 50°S 95°E on 2nd October 1985. Photo by Mike Carter. The bird in this photo is typical of ~6 Antarctic Petrels seen on this voyage from Heard Island to Hobart 30th September to 9th October 1985. A large portion of this voyage particularly in the vicinity of Heard was along the Antarctic Convergence. Note how the black scapulars completely cloak the white tertials so that none of the white wing stripe is visible adjacent the body as per Onley & Scofield (2007) but contra Menkhorst *et al.* (2017).

Acknowledgements

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