

BRISBANE SEABIRD STUDY GROUP
Rare Seabird Forms



(Completed forms to be passed on to BQRAC or BARC, where appropriate).

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Vessel: 46 ft Badenach monohull MV Grinner II
Crew: Craig Newton (skipper)

No. of observers present: 6

Contact(s): (full name). **Contact details: (include address, phone no(s). E-mail, etc.).**

1). Rohan Clarke r.clarke@monash.edu
2). Brian Russell bjr54@bigpond.com
3). Gus Daley Gus.daly@yahoo.com.au
4). Chris Burwell buzzburwell@gmail.com
5). Jon Norling jon@norling.com.au

Date of sighting: 5-6/10/2019

Time & duration of sighting: On 5/10/2019, 14 from 0754 hrs to 1611 hrs. On 6/10/2019, 6 from 0628 hrs to 1726 hrs.

Species name: **Common:** **Scientific:**
Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii*

No. of birds observed: 20

Location: On Britannia Sea Mount 28 29.63S/155 09.68E out to 28 37.17S/155 44.93E. On Queensland Sea Mount 27 43.09S/154 43.15S out to 27 34.25S/155 13.90E

Be precise & include GPS readings when possible.

Habitat (indicate in appropriate box).

Bay/Inlet	Headland	River Mouth	Ocean Beach	Shelf Waters	Slope Waters	Open Ocean	Other
						X	

Optical and/or other aids used: Leica 10x50 BN binoculars plus Canon 1DX Mk II and Canon EF 100-400 mm MKII 'L' lens.

Prior experience with this species: A single off Southport 20/12/2015 and a single off Mooloolaba on 25/11/2017. Rohan Clarke has had extensive experience and Brian Russell in Hauraki Gulf in New Zealand.

Confidence in sighting? (e.g. 90%, 100% etc.): 100%

Received:

BQRAC Case No:

BARC Case No:

Recommendation:

(Office Use Only).

FORM B

Weather Conditions: (including wind speed & direction).

5th: A low over the Bight combined with a high over Tasmania brought N-NW winds to 20 knots to the SEQ region but a SE change swept through late afternoon with winds increasing to 35+ knots. Some light high cloud for most of the day, with mainly sunny conditions, with cloud cover increasing when the SE change came through, visibility excellent. Maximum air temp. 24 °, barometer 1021 hPa.

6th: Conditions lightened off overnight with the southerly dropping off to a more moderate 5-10 knots, although swinging around to the north late in the day, increasing to 20 knots later in the evening. Heavy cloud cover early morning, gradually dissipating, turning into a fine sunny day with just moderate cloud cover, visibility good, improving as the day progressed. Maximum air temp. 25 ° C, barometer 1022 hPa.

Sea Conditions: (including water temp. °C, when possible).

5th: Seas of about 1.5 metres on a similar swell for most of the day, increasing to about 2 metres with the southerly moving in late afternoon. Sea surface temps. around 22.5 ° C for most of the day around the peaks rising to 23.3 ° C in warmer current east of the sea mount.

6th: 1 metre seas on a 1.5 metre swell early morning gradually easing off during the day. Sea surface temps. around 23.4 ° C.

General Observations: (include behaviour of bird(s), view, distance etc).

Almost from the time the first bird appeared nearly all the Cook's Petrels seemed hungry as they fed at the back of the vessel and up the slick, even though they in the main appeared quite plump and in fine condition. They were observed down to about five metres at sea level at the rear of the vessel up to about 20+ metres elevation. A few of them showed little regard to some of the larger petrels and shearwaters present and seemed quite at ease pushing in front of both Kermadec and Providence Petrels to get their share of the spoils available. Rohan Clarke has almost annual experience of this species off Eaglehawk Neck in Tasmania and to quote him "This is unprecedented in Australian waters" on observing this spectacle after just a few minutes. Mostly singles sighted throughout both days but on the 5th, three together around the vessel at 0830 hrs and two at 1611 hrs and on the 6th two together at 0628 hrs.

Description of Bird(s): (be as detailed as possible).

The classic '*cookilaria*', one of several species of small *Pterodroma*, nearly all basically grey and white with some black plumage. Bare parts: bill black, quite long and slender compared with others of the group, legs and feet, pale bluish grey with irregular blackish on the edges of the webbing and in the joints.

Head: pale grey, with some whitish scaling on the forehead and with white lores and white throat. The grey crown, variable, ranging from cut off at the neck in some birds to some bleeding into the neck and to quite extensive into the flanks on a few others (refer to photos I, II & III). There was a noticeable blackish patch around the eye, with a white supercilium directly above the eye.

Underparts: the rest of the underparts were pure white except for the central tail feathers which were blackish.

Underwing: mostly pure white with blackish edged primaries, white centrally (refer to photo VI) and a thin trailing edge to the secondaries widening out into the primaries. From the carpal joint there was a thin blackish line which diffused out into the underwing coverts and also a thicker line broken with white feathering leading into the base of the primaries.

Upperparts: Lower neck pale grey, with the rest of the back grey with scaly whitish edging, uppertail coverts blackish. The tail was grey with a narrow blackish terminal band with white outer retrices.

Upperwing: inner forewing pale grey with the secondaries darker grey, coverts and primaries blackish, in combination with the rest of the upperparts producing the classic 'M' pattern of a '*cookilaria*' pterodroma.

All the birds sighted were in fine, fresh plumage, with no hint of any moult. All observers present who took photographs checked all of their images, as a couple of them appeared to have darker grey plumage but all eventually agreed all the birds viewed well and all those photographed were all Cook's Petrel. Images taken of a bird sighted with a Cook's Petrel late afternoon on the 6th were inconclusive and deemed most likely that of a Cook's Petrel.

How was it distinguished from other similar species?:

There are several other like sized and plumaged petrels in the south Pacific which need to be discussed here.

Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis*; a slightly more robust species, with a similarly patterned head but with a deeper, more robust bill. The upperparts slightly darker more uniform but the underwing shows a decidedly more extensively heavier covert bar, separating the two species immediately.

Gould's Petrel *Pterodroma leucoptera*; slightly more robust, immediately separated by a solid blackish head and a more extensive black cover bar on the underwing.

Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes*; the darker forms obviously different but the palest birds separated from Cook's Petrel for the same reasons as for the above species.

Stejneger's Petrel *Pterodroma longirostris*; a South American species that migrates to the North Pacific near Japan and has now been recorded three times off eastern Australia PW having sighted two of them. Similarly patterned underwing to Cook's Petrel but 'M' pattern on upperparts more well defined and with a much deeper terminal band in the tail. Head diagnostic, extensive white forehead with much darker head and neck and collar with a diagnostic white notch behind the eye, lack of white supercilium.

De Fillipi's Petrel *Pterodroma defillipiana*; another South American species, yet to be recorded in the western Pacific. Like a more robust Stejneger's Petrel, with a paler head and more robust bill but still with the white notch behind the eye and a completely pale grey tail with no terminal band.

Pycroft's Petrel *Pterodroma pycrofti*; the most similar species to Cook's Petrel and the one we were at our most vigilant for. Very similar to Cook's Petrel with a slightly different jizz, which with good photographs would be apparent, Pycroft's has slightly shorter wings, with a longer tail and shorter neck, making the wings appear slightly more forward in the body as opposed to Cook's Petrel where the wings appear more central in the body structure, with an apparent shorter tail and longer neck. Underwing almost identical but the head is darker and the eye patch much less obvious and generally a lack of a supercilium. There is a lack of bleeding of grey into the neck and a more obvious defined neck patch. Plumage differences with Cook's more obvious in fresh plumage, in worn plumage much less so.

Other Comments:

Up until this event, the species was considered to be a vagrant in the region with the first QLD record off Southport on 20/12/2015, BARC Case No. 900 – Accepted. A second bird was recorded off Mooloolaba on 25/11/2017, not submitted as yet. Another bird was sighted off Southport on a regular inshore pelagic on 19/10/2019 after the sea mount trip and will also be submitted, by Chris Burwell. The species is regularly sighted off southern Tasmania in the Summer months and occasionally off southern Victoria during the Summer months, also there have been many sightings over the years off the NSW coastline. It would appear to be a deep water bird on migration and quite possibly uses the Tasmantid Sea mounts as a stopover in the northern part of the chain in the Spring and as a Summer foraging area in the southernmost part of the chain, off eastern Tasmania.

Twenty birds are claimed and I think that to be a conservative figure, as birds were sighted throughout the day on both days, from early morning to late afternoon. Many of the photographs are probably of the same bird on the 5th but this was just to show interaction with other species. All the photographs shown were of birds photographed while the vessel was on the drift, several birds were sighted while the vessel was on the move and these were recorded confidently but not necessarily photographed due to the movement of the vessel and associated spray.

Bibliography:

SEABIRDS an identification guide by Peter Harrison 1985.

PHOTOGRAPHIC HANDBOOK OF THE SEABIRDS OF THE WORLD – JIM ENDICOTT AND DAVID TIPLING.

The Australian Bird Guide, Menkhurst, Rogers, Clarke, Davies, Marsack and Franklin. CSIRO publishing, 2017.

Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World. Derek Onley & Paul Scofield.

Form C



Image I – Taken at 0746 hrs 5/10/2019



Image II – Taken at 0849 hrs 5/10/2019



Image III – Taken at 0820 hrs 5/10/2019



Image IV – Taken at 0747 hrs 5/10/2019



Image V – Taken at 0750 hrs 5/10/2019



Image VI – Taken at 0821 hrs 5/10/2019



Image VII – Taken at 0746 hrs 5/10/2019



Image VIII – Taken at 0746 hrs 5/10/2019



Image IX – Taken at 0751hrs 5/10/2019



Image X – Taken at 0751 hrs 5/10/2019



Image XI – Taken at 0634 hrs 6/10/2019



Image XII – Taken at 0828 hrs 6/10/2019

All the above images were taken by P. Walbridge, with images 1-10 of various birds taken on 5/10/2019 on the Britannia Sea Mount, with some of the images being of the same bird and images 11-12 taken of two of the birds on the Queensland Sea Mount on 6/10/2019.

Image I – Showing a bird with typical head/neck pattern as depicted in the ABG with minimal grey in the neck.

Image II – Depicting a bird with some grey from the head just bleeding into the neck.

Image III – Depicting a bird where the grey bleeds extensively through the neck and into the flanks.

Images IV & V – Showing typical upperparts of Cook's Petrel, showing the dark eye patch on a mainly pale grey head with an obvious white supercilium.

Image VI – Showing a bird coming into land at the back of the vessel.

Image VII – Showing a bird already landed at the back of the vessel, foraging for berley.

Image VIII – With both birds in focus showing well the size difference between Cook's Petrel and Providence Petrel.

Image IX – From L-R, Providence Petrel, Cook's Petrel & Kermadec Petrel, all vying for a piece of berley.

Image X – The following image and shows the Cook's Petrel with the piece of berley in its beak hotly pursued by the Kermadec Petrel.

Images XI & XII – Taken early morning on the Queensland Sea Mount on the 6th of two birds and showing some variation in the underwing.

Obviously not all birds were photographed as they didn't come as close as some and not surprisingly photography concentrated on the birds that presented themselves well.