

BARC SUBMISSION

Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* – Bremer Canyon (near shelf edge), Western Australia, 6th January, 2020. GPS 34° 46' 10.59, 119° 33' 19.18

Keith Lightbody

(prepared by Daniel Mantle & Plaxy Barratt)

Submission note: although still a very rare bird in Australia, there was a notable incursion of the species in January–April 2011 (NSW to South Aus) and there have now been at least eight Western Australian records: October 2008, west of the Abrolhos Islands (BARC 587); the Bremer Canyon scored two birds on the 23rd and 24th April 2019 along with singles on the 6th (this submission), 7th and 13th January 2020 and a further single on the 4th February 2020; finally there was also a single bird offshore Walpole, WA, on the 12th May 2019).

Circumstances of sighting: a single Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* was observed and photographed at 3.32 pm on the 6th January 2020 by Keith Lightbody during the Naturaliste Charter's Orca tour to the Bremer Canyon, southern coast of Western Australia.

Description (from photo): A large, dark, slim-winged shearwater with a dark cap, white collar, long, thin, dark bill and dark, lower belly patch.

Upperparts: dark brown across the back and wings, rump, and uppermost uppertail coverts. The pale edges to some of the mantle feathers and upperwing secondary coverts creates a rather 'scaly appearance'. The lower uppertail coverts formed a narrow white, crescentic band above the dark, blackish-brown tail.

Underparts: The underwings were mostly white with a dark trailing edge and under primaries, and some dark spotting in the axillaries, secondary coverts (mostly lesser coverts) and lesser primary coverts. The rest of the underparts were mostly white with a darker, smudgy, belly patch. Undertail coverts brown.

Head: a well-defined, dark, brown cap extending below the eye, and accentuated by a white collar. Clean white throat.

Bare parts: relatively long and slender, black bill. Feet not apparent in photos.

Distinguishing similar species: This is a very distinctive species and close photos like these, quickly eliminate any superficially similar species. All other large shearwaters are easily distinguished by the combination of dark cap, long dark bill, white collar, white underwings with dark flecking in axillaries, and towards the carpal point, the dark brown, lower belly patch and the white crescent across the lower uppertail coverts.

Observer's experience: Keith is an experienced birder and photographer and has completed numerous trips to the Bremer Canyon with Naturaliste Charters and has found several very rare birds on these trips, notably multiple Barau's Petrels.

References:

Howell, S.N.G. (2012). Petrels, Albatrosses, and Storm-Petrels of North America: A Photographic Guide, Princeton, New Jersey.

Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, P. & Franklin, K. (2017). The Australian Bird Guide, CSIRO, Victoria, Australia.

Onley, D. & Scofield, P. (2007). Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World, Christopher Helm, London.



Figure 1. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* with a Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 6th January 2020 (Keith Lightbody). Note the dark cap, thin white nape collar, long, relatively thin, dark bill, white lowermost uppertail coverts and overall scaly appearance to the dark upperparts.



Figure 2. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* photo-bombing a Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 6th January 2020 (Keith Lightbody). Note the few, smudgy dark feathers on the lower belly, the dark undertail coverts, and the extensive scattered dark secondary coverts and axillaries.