

BARC SUBMISSION

Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* – Bremer Canyon (near shelf edge), Western Australia, 13th January, 2020. GPS 34° 46' 31.70, 119° 36' 18.45

Keith Lightbody and Billy Thom

(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, 7th and 13th (this submission) 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 10.09 am on the 13th January 2020 by Keith Lightbody and Billy Thom 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, long, relatively thin, dark bill and ill-defined dark belly patch.

Upperparts: dark brown across the back and wings, rump, and uppermost uppertail coverts. The pale edges to upperwing secondary coverts, scapulars and mantle feathers creates a rather 'scaly appearance'. Brown on the side of the neck extends as a rather square tab into white underparts.

Underparts: The underwings were mostly white with a thick dark trailing edge, dark under primaries, and a messier dark leading edge. Also, extensive dark spotting in the axillaries, secondary coverts (mostly lesser coverts) and a few lesser primary coverts, but the centre of the underwing remains mostly clean white. The rest of the underparts were mostly white with a darker brown, smudgy, belly patch. Undertail coverts brown.

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

Bare parts: relatively long and slender, black bill. Dark pinkish-brown feet.

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, mostly white underwings with dark flecking in axillaries and secondaries coverts leading diagonally to the elbow and a few dark lesser primary coverts, and the brown, lower belly patch.

Observer's experience: Keith is an experienced birder and photographer and has completed numerous trips to the Bremer Canyon with Naturaliste Charters. Billy Thom works aboard this whale watching boat and is also very experienced with the usual seabirds of the region. Between Billy and Keith, they have found a number of very rare seabirds in the Bremer Canyon, including several Barau's Petrels, Great and Cory's Shearwaters.

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* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 13th January 2020 (Keith Lightbody). Note the dark cap (extending over the eye), long, relatively thin, dark bill, and long, slender wings.



Figure 2. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 13th January 2020 (Keith Lightbody). Note smudgy, dark, lower belly patch, brown undertail coverts and darker spotting on the upper flanks, axillaries, lesser secondary coverts and lesser primary coverts.



Figure 3. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 13th January 2020 (Keith Lightbody). Again, note the dark cap, long, relatively thin, dark bill, and scaly appearance imparted to the brown upper parts by the paler fringes to the greater and median secondary coverts, scapulars and mantle feathers.