

BARC SUBMISSION

Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* – Bremer Canyon (near shelf edge), Western Australia, 4th February, 2020.

Pia Markovic

(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 January 2020 and a further single on the 4th February 2020 (this submission); 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 on the 4th February 2020 by Pia Markovic 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 dark, lower belly patch.

Upperparts: dark brown across the back and wings, rump, and most uppertail coverts, with lowermost uppertail coverts forming a thin white crescent bordering the tail. 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 short, squarish tab.

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 and on lesser and median primary coverts, but the much of the underwing remains clean white. The rest of the underparts were also 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 thin, beige collar across the nape. Clean white throat.

Bare parts: relatively long and slender, black bill.

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 leading diagonally to the elbow and a few dark lesser primary coverts, and the dark brown, lower belly patch.

Observer's experience: Pia is the onboard naturalist with Naturaliste Charters and is comfortable recognising any birds that are not typical out at the Bremer Canyon.

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 4th February 2020 (Pia Markovic). Note the dark cap (extending over the eye), long, relatively thin, dark bill, dark, lower belly patch, brown undertail coverts and dark brown spotting in the axillaries, lesser coverts and lesser and median primary coverts.



Figure 2. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 4th February 2020 (Pia Markovic). Again, note the marginally darker cap separated from the brown back by a thin, paler beige collar, somewhat scaly appearance imparted to the brown upper parts by the paler fringes to the greater and median secondary coverts, scapulars and mantle feathers.