

BARC SUBMISSION

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis* – Bremer Canyon 'hotspot', Western Australia, 5th January 2020

Machi Yoshida

(prepared by Daniel Mantle & Plaxy Barratt)

Submission note: we believe this sighting constitutes the 3rd time that one or more Cory's Shearwater have been sighted in Australia (after a bird seen off Bremer Bay on the 19th January 2019 and up to four birds off Denmark, Western Australia six days prior to this record).

Taxonomic notes: Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis* is a relatively recent split from Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* as accepted by the IOC (version 9.2; following Robb & Mullarney 2008, Howell 2012, and Sangster et al. 2012) and the HBW-Birdlife list of birds (version 3.0). However, other taxonomies such as Clements (2019) still consider these two taxa as subspecies (*C. d. borealis* and *C. d. diomedea*, respectively). All three of these major taxonomies accept Cape Verde Shearwater *Calonectris edwardsii* as a distinct species.

Circumstances of sighting: a single Cory's Shearwater was observed and photographed by Machi Yoshida at the Orca 'hotspot' at the head of the Bremer Canyon (near the shelf edge), Western Australia on the 5th January, 2020. This sighting was considerably more distant than the birds seen off Denmark six days previously by Machi and Billy Thom.

Description (from photo):

- A large shearwater with a thick, yellow bill, pale whitish underparts and dull beige to brown upperparts.
- The yellow bill is notably robust, bright yellow, and with a darker tip (the fine detail is not apparent, but presumed to be a dark subterminal band rather than full dark tip).
- The upperparts are pale brown with a contrast between the coffee/beige-coloured mantle, rump, uppertail, neck, and head and the darker brown wings and rectrices.
- The undertail coverts, belly, breast, flanks and throat are clean white.
- The underwings are mostly white with a thick dark trailing edge, very thin, dark leading edge, a thin line of darker secondary coverts and dark under primaries.
- The under primaries are mostly dark without any obvious white tongues 'bleeding' into the darker 'hand'. The primary moult and very heavily cropped image make this a tricky photo to confidently see the under primary detail; as such the dark spots normally present at the base of P9 and P10 cannot be seen.

Distinguishing similar species:

Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas* is smaller-headed and slimmer (less bulky) bird. It is readily distinguished from Cory's Shearwater by its pale, streaked head, paler, horn-coloured, narrower bill, scallier upperparts and dark underwing primary coverts.

Cape Verde Shearwater *Calonectris edwardsii* is also quite easily eliminated by its finer, duller/darker bill, notably lacking the yellow colour and strongly contrasting dark subterminal band (a dark tip in these photos) that is somewhat apparent on this bird photographed at the Bremer Canyon. Cape Verde Shearwater is also a notably slimmer species with narrower wings and a smaller head that may look 'capped'.

Distinguishing from the very similar Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*:

- Despite the heavily cropped images and active primary moult, the dark under primaries lacking significant white intrusions into the outer primaries. See Howell & Patteson, 2008 for a full discussion; also see Howell, 2012 and Fisher & Flood, 2010.
- Very large, thick yellow bill. Averages thicker and brighter than most Scopoli's Shearwaters.
- The darker eye 'patch' on both these photos is considered more typical of Cory's Shearwater (see BBRC comments after Fisher & Flood, 2010).

Distribution of Cory's and Scopoli's Shearwater:

Cory's Shearwater is considered far more likely to occur off the southwest of Australia than Scopoli's Shearwater. They breed in the north Atlantic but winter as far south as South Africa and even regularly range into the western Indian Ocean (occurring as far north as Madagascar). This distribution into the Indian Ocean is supported by data logger information that also shows that Scopoli's Shearwaters do not enter the Indian Ocean (Robert Flood, pers comm). Scopoli's Shearwater breed in the Mediterranean and mostly winter off west Africa with smaller numbers ranging across to the waters east of Brazil. There are relatively few substantiated records of Scopoli's Shearwater from even as far south as South Africa, with tracking records showing the birds largely remain in the Canaries Current (mostly males) and Angola Current (mostly females).

Observer's experience:

Machi works aboard the Naturaliste Charters whale watching boats. She is experienced with the usual seabirds of the region, and thus spotting anything that is different. She has a great track record of finding or co-finding rare seabirds in Western Australia, including Cory's Shearwaters (a few days earlier) and even a Chatham Albatross!!

References:

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- Sangster, G., Collinson, J.M., Crochet, P-A., Knox, A.G., Parkin, D.T. & Votier, S.C. (2012). Taxonomic recommendations for British birds: eighth report. *Ibis* 154: 874–883.



Figure 1. Cory's Shearwater, 5th January 2020, head of the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia (Machi Yoshida). Despite primary moult, the underwing primaries still appear to be wholly dark without substantial white tongues.



Figure 2. Cory's Shearwater, 5th January 2020, head of the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia (Machi Yoshida). Note the thick yellow bill with a darker tip (likely a darker subterminal band). Also note the pale coffee/beige coloured upperparts, darker wings and rectrices, and white lowermost uppertail coverts.