

BARC SUBMISSION

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis* – Bremer Canyon, Western Australia, 25th January 2020.

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(prepared by Daniel Mantle & Plaxy Barratt)

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Submission note: There have been four previous records of Cory's Shearwater for Australia, all from southern coast of Western Australia (Bremer Canyon on the 19th January 2019, 5th and 11th January 2020; offshore Denmark on the 31st Dec 2019).

This record is submitted as a Cory's Shearwater rather than a Cory's/Scopoli's despite the two taxa not being easily split from these photographs alone (this was requested by the BARC secretary). The likelihood is far greater that this bird is a Cory's Shearwater based on current knowledge of their distribution and following other recent records of Cory's Shearwater from the southern coast of Western Australia.

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 sighted and photographed by Machi Yoshida at the Bremer Canyon on the 25th January 2020.

Description (from photos):

- 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 subterminal band.
- The upperparts are mostly not apparent in the photos, however the nape, neck sides, upper mantle, and most of the head are pale grey-brown with a contrast between the coffee/beige-coloured upper mantle, neck sides and nape and the slightly darker crown and face.
- The undertail coverts, belly, breast, flanks and throat are clean white, with a beige wash extending from the nape to the sides of the upper breast.
- The underwings are mostly white with a thick dark trailing edge, very thin, irregular dark leading edge, and darker under-primaries.
- The details of the under primaries are difficult to accurately discern. All of the primaries are greyish and darker than the white underwing, but appear to be showing strong reflection thus reducing the confidence in the presence/absence of white tongues extending in P5–P10.
- There are no obvious darker spots at the base of the two outermost primaries (P9 and P10), but these are just as likely not apparent in these photos rather than genuinely both absent.

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 that are clearly present on this bird. Cape Verde Shearwater is also a notably slimmer species with narrower wings and a smaller head that may look 'capped'.

This individual cannot be easily separated between Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis* and Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*:

- Cory's Shearwater have dark under-primaries lacking significant white tongues intruding onto P5–P10 but the light reflecting off the under-primaries in these photos obscures this detail. See Howell & Patteson, 2008 for a full discussion; also see Howell, 2012 and Fisher & Flood, 2010.
- Cory's Shearwater also typically has dark spots at the bases of both P10 and P9 (Scopoli's typically has a dark spot at only the base of P10). No dark spots can be seen at the base of either of these primaries in these photos. See Robb et al. 2008, Fisher & Flood, 2010 and Garner, 2012.
- Very large, thick yellow bill. For Cory's Shearwater this averages thicker and brighter than most Scopoli's Shearwaters, but this individual isn't readily distinguished on bill size.

Thus, this individual is largely identified on the greater likelihood of Cory's Shearwater occurring in Western Australia and the other recent records of that species in the area.

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 Yoshida works aboard the Naturaliste Charters whale watching boats and is experienced with the usual seabirds of the region. She has a great track record of finding or co-finding rare birds off southern Western Australia; including several Great Shearwaters, Barau's Petrels, and 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, Bremer Canyon, Western Australia, 25th January 2020 (Machi Yoshida). Note the large yellow bill, beige/brown upperparts, white underparts and mostly white underwings, and darker trailing edge and under-primaries. Details of under-primaries cannot be made out from these images, including the dark spots that typically would be at the base of P10 and P9 on a Cory's or usually only at the base of P10 on a Scopoli's Shearwater.



Figure 2. Cory's Shearwater, Bremer Canyon, Western Australia, 25th January 2020 (Machi Yoshida). Again, note the very robust yellow bill with a dark subterminal band, the darker patch around/in front of the eye and slightly darker brown cap and face than the paler brown/beige nape, neck sides and upper mantle.