

## BARC SUBMISSION

### **Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis* – Bremer Canyon 'hotspot', Western Australia, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2020**

**Billy Thom and Michael Haluwana**

(prepared by Daniel Mantle & Plaxy Barratt)

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Submission note: after the first Australian record of Cory's Shearwater off Bremer Bay on the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2019, there were two other sightings in the fortnight prior to this record—up to four birds off Denmark, Western Australia on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019 and single bird off Bremer Bay on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2020. This was followed by another record from Bremer Canyon on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2020.

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 observed and photographed by Billy Thom and Michael Haluwana at the Bremer Canyon (near the shelf edge), Western Australia on the 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2020. Although the photos are considerably more distant than the birds seen off Denmark six days previously by Machi and Billy Thom, and also more distant the bird seen by Machi at the Bremer Canyon on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 2020, the bird was seen closer initially by Billy who is familiar with all the local seabirds and had already seen Cory's Shearwaters earlier in the month. He was confident this was another Cory's Shearwater.

Description (from photo and discussion with Billy):

- Overall, a large shearwater with a thick, pale bill, pale whitish underparts and dull beige to brown upperparts and darker wings.
- No further bill details other than a large, robust pale bill.
- The upperparts are pale grey-brown with darker brown wings that contrast with the pale grey-brown mantle.
- The tail (or at least terminal end of tail) appears to be dark brown/black and contrasting with white/pale uppertail coverts (the extent of these may be exaggerated by the photo).
- The underwings are mostly clean white with a thick dark trailing edge, and moderate dark leading edge, and apparently mostly dark under primaries (but fine details not evident).

Distinguishing similar species:

Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas* is a smaller-headed and slimmer (less bulky) bird. The differences in head pattern and bill size can't be judged from these photos but the clean white underwings (lacking obvious/significant black markings in the primary coverts) and bulky jizz help eliminate Streaked Shearwater.

Cape Verde Shearwater *Calonectris edwardsii* is probably eliminated even with these highly cropped photos, by the apparently very robust bill, the very broad wings, the large head and the bulky overall jizz.

The fine detail required to separate Cory's and Scopoli's Shearwaters is not apparent from this sighting or the photos. Thus, this submission as a Cory's Shearwater is based on the current knowledge of their global distribution and the further recent records of Cory's Shearwater off the southern coast of Western Australia.

#### 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:

Billy Thom works aboard this whale watching boats and is very experienced with the usual seabirds of the region. He has found a number of very rare seabirds in the Bremer Canyon, including several Barau's Petrels, along with Great Shearwaters and one of the recent Cory's Shearwaters.

#### References:

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Figure 1. Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwater, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2020, Bremer Canyon, Western Australia (Michael Haluwana). Note the substantial pale bill, pale underwings with thick dark trailing edge and less distinct dark leading edge, white undertail coverts and broad, long wings..



Figure 2. Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwater, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2020, Bremer Canyon, Western Australia (Michael Haluwana). Note the dark tail, white uppertail coverts, coffee/brown mantle and darker wings.



Figure 3. Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwater, 11<sup>th</sup> January 2020, Bremer Canyon, Western Australia (Michael Haluwana). Note the dark tail, white uppertail coverts, coffee/brown mantle and darker wings.