

BARC SUBMISSION

Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* – Bremer Canyon (near shelf edge), Western Australia, 18th February, 2020.

Daniel Mantle

Submission note: although still a 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 nine 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 the 4th and 18th February 2020 (latter 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 at 1.57 pm on the 18th February 2020 by Daniel Mantle during the Naturaliste Charter's Orca tour to the Bremer Canyon, southern coast of Western Australia. It made a single, fast pass of the boat.

Description (from photo): A large, dark, slim-winged shearwater with a dark cap, partial white collar, long, thin, dark bill and reduced dark, lower belly patch.

Upperparts: mid-brown across the back and wings, rump, and uppermost uppertail coverts. The pale edges to some of the mantle feathers and upperwing secondary coverts creates a rather 'scaly appearance'. The lower uppertail coverts formed a narrow white, crescentic band above the dark brown tail.

Underparts: The underwings were mostly white with a dark trailing edge and under primaries, and some dark spotting in the axillaries, secondary coverts (mostly lesser coverts). The rest of the underparts were mostly white with a reduced dark belly patch. Undertail coverts brown.

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

Bare parts: relatively long and slender, black bill. Feet not apparent in photos.

Distinguishing similar species: This is a very distinctive species and moderately 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, partial white collar, white underwings with dark flecking in axillaries, and towards the carpal point, the dark brown, reduced lower belly patch and the white crescent across the lower uppertail coverts.

Observer's experience: I have seen this species twice before in Australia, off South Africa, and off Ireland. It is a very distinctive species and I am fully confident of the identification.

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 18th February 2020 (Daniel Mantle). Note the dark cap, partial white collar, long, relatively thin, dark bill, white lowermost uppertail coverts and overall scaly appearance to the dark upperparts.



Figure 2. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 18th February 2020 (Daniel Mantle). Note the few, smudgy dark feathers on the lower belly, the dark undertail coverts, and the scattered dark secondary coverts and axillaries.