

BARC SUBMISSION

Great Shearwater (*Ardenna gravis*) – Bremer Canyon (near shelf edge), Western Australia, 23rd April 2019.

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Submission note: Although still a very rare bird in Australia, there was a notable incursion of this species in January–April 2011 (NSW to South Aus) and there have now been at least six Western Australian records: October 2008, west of the Abrolhos Islands (BARC 587); the Bremer Canyon scored two birds on the 23rd (submitted here) and 24th April 2019, along with singles on the 6th and 7th January 2020; and a single bird offshore Walpole, 12th May 2019.

Circumstances of sighting: On the 23rd April 2019, two Great Shearwaters (*Ardenna gravis*) were observed and photographed during Naturaliste Charters' Orca tour to the Bremer Canyon, southern coast of Western Australia. They were part of a larger group of shearwaters and albatrosses feeding in the area of a recent Blue Whale predation event (predated by the Orca several weeks earlier with schools of tuna now in the area). Both birds were present in the area for at least an hour (1330 – 1430), during which time they were observed periodically at distances ranging between 30-100m.

Description: Large, slim-winged shearwaters with dark caps, white collars, long, relatively thin, dark bills and ill-defined dark belly patches.

Upperparts: Mid-brown back and wings with paler fringes to the scapulars and mantle feathers imparting a scaly appearance to the upperparts.

Underparts: Wings mostly white with distinct dark trailing and leading edges, dark under-primaries, and some dark feathers in the axillaries and secondary coverts. The rest of the underparts were mostly white with a darker, smudgy, belly patch. Undertail coverts brown.

Head: A well-defined, dark, brown cap (extending to the base of the eye) that is accentuated by a full white collar (on at least one of the birds). Clean white throat.

Bare parts: relatively long and slender, black bill.

Distinguishing similar species: This is a very distinctive species and even these heavily cropped, quite distant photos, quickly exclude any superficially similar species. All other large shearwaters are easily eliminated by the combination of dark cap, long, relatively thin, dark bill, white collar, white underwings with dark flecking in armpits and towards the carpal point, the 'dirty' brown lower belly patch and the dark undertail coverts.

Observer's experience: Billy, Brodee and Jamie all work aboard the Naturaliste Charters whale watching boats. They are experienced with the usual seabirds of the region, and thus are great at spotting anything that is different. Between them, they have a great track record of finding or co-finding rare birds off southern Western Australia; including several Barau's Petrels, Cory's Shearwaters and several further Great Shearwaters in 2020. David Brauhart is a keen local birder who is familiar with the regular regional shearwaters.

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 [Billy Thom]: Great Shearwater (*Ardenna gravis*) at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 23rd April 2019. Note the dark cap extending below the eye, relative long, thin, dark bill, the clean white underparts contrasting with the scaly brown upperparts.



Figure 2 [David Brauhart]: Great Shearwater (*Ardenna gravis*) at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 23rd April 2019. Note the dark cap extending to the base of the eye, clean white underparts with a few dark flecks on the flanks, and roughly similar size to the nearby Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Ardenna carneipes*).



Figure 3 [David Brauhart]: Two Great Shearwaters (*Ardenna gravis*) and one Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Ardenna carneipes*) at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 23rd April 2019. Note dark caps, brown upperparts and clean white cheeks, throats and underparts.



Figure 4 [David Brauhart]: Great Shearwater (*Ardenna gravis*) at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 23rd April 2019. Note the dark, smudgy lower belly patch, brown undertail coverts, and scattered dark feathering in the axillaries and secondary coverts.