

FORM B

Weather conditions:

29/3/20 – The winds were NE at 12-15 knots, and occasionally gusted up to 20-25 knots ahead of the increasing blustery extensive rain squalls. It was heavily overcast with the occasional sunny break in the clouds. Visibility was generally average due to the overcast conditions, and it was poor when pushing through squalls. The maximum air temperature was 24° C, and the barometer read 1020 hPa.

Sea conditions:

29/3/20 – There were low seas on a low swell of about 1.5 meters, increasing at times in front of the frequent rain squalls. Conditions were generally more favourable than previous days, which had seen seas of 2 metres on a 2 metre swell. Sea surface temperatures ranged from 27.2° C to 27.7° C, which is higher than has been recorded on the groups previous trips to the Britannia Sea Mount.

General observations:

RM sighted and called a ‘cookilaria’ on the starboard side of the vessel and **EL**, on picking it up with his binoculars, called out ‘*magnificens*’ almost immediately. At the time of the sighting visibility was good; it was overcast but there was no rain. There were many other birds of several species round the boat at the time, including two Gould’s Petrels (one of which briefly provided a direct size comparison in the same field of view). The Collared Petrel approached from the same direction as the Gould’s, but didn’t seem to be associated with them. The bird approached from the starboard side (from around four / five on the ‘clock face’) and made several passes of the boat. At its closest the bird was about 50 meters away from the boat. It seemed to be investigating the boat and the burley, but never landed or attempted to feed. It remained on the wing, from low above the water to about 15/20 meters above sea level, exhibiting the typical banking flight behavior of *Pterodroma* petrels. The bird was in view for approximately two minutes and was well photographed before heading off towards two on the ‘clock face’. Once the bird had made the ‘decision’ to leave it was rapidly out of sight, flying fast and straight ahead of the vessel, with several arcs above the swells visible before it was lost to sight.

Description of bird:

The bird was a small gadfly petrel and was immediately identified as a Collared (Magnificent) Petrel due to the extensive dark underparts and unique underwing pattern. In comparison to nearby Gould’s Petrels, the bird appeared smaller and had a different giss, with a finer build, a noticeably longer and finer tail, and the impression of longer and finer wings (see Form C for images and comparison to Gould’s). Dorsally, the bird was a fairly uniform grey, with a darker hood and tail tip. The ‘M’ pattern on the upperwings was noticeable but not distinct; there was not a lot of contrast in colour between the light and dark dorsal feathers, and the ‘M’ was fairly diffuse in comparison to nearby Gould’s Petrels. The ventral surface of the body was a dark grey / brown colour, apart from a white chin / throat patch that surrounded the bill but did not extend far onto the forehead of the bird. The dark hood merged into the underparts and quickly became concolourous, with no obvious dark breast-band visible. The underwing was uniquely patterned; white axillaries and innerwing coverts, along with a small white section of the median underwing coverts, contrasted strongly with the dark underside of the primaries, the broad dark trailing edge of the wing and the broad black carpal bar, which extended through the underwing coverts to the leading edge of the wing and swelled to include the lesser and median under primary coverts (forming a distinctive comma shape that was visible from a distance). The other feathers in the underwing were various shades of grey. The bird had a dark eye and bill. The bill was relatively short and fine in comparison to the bills of the nearby Gould’s Petrels.

How was it distinguished from similar species?

At a species level, the combination of the dark underparts and the underwing pattern are unique to dark-phase Collared Petrels. However, the darkest phase birds of the nominate race can appear similar to Magnificent Petrels (*P. brevipes magnificens*). Bretagnolle & Shirihai (2010) describe in detail the separation of the two subspecies and note that the extent of the white in the

underwing is a useful feature. The bird we observed has a very dark underwing, with a broad black carpal bar, and most closely resembles the birds shown in Figures 10 and 11 of Bretagnolle & Shirihai (2010). They classified these birds as 'extreme dark grey' and noted that birds of this colouration, as well as those classified as 'dark grey' (see Figures 8-9) represent only 17% of the population of *P. b. brevipes* but c. 90% of the population of *P. b. magnificens*. We believe the combination of the dark underwing and concolourous dark ventral surface of the bird we observed identifies it as a Magnificent Petrel.

Bibliography:

Bretagnolle, V. & Shirihai, H. 2010. A new taxon of Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes* from the Banks Islands, Vanuatu. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologist's Club*. 130 (4): 286-301.

Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, M & Franklin, K. 2017. *The Australian Bird Guide*. Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing.

Onley, D. & Scofield, P. 2007. *Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World*. London, England: Christopher Helm.

Portelli, D. 2017. Plumage variation, morphology and identification of Collared *Pterodroma brevipes* and Gould's *P. leucoptera* petrels. *Marine Ornithology* 45: 59–65.

Form C



Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes* '*magnificens*', Britannia Sea Mount, 29/3/2020. P. Walbridge.
Note the long, fine tail, grey underparts and distinctive underwing pattern.



Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes* '*magnificens*', Britannia Sea Mount, 29/3/2020. P. Walbridge.
Note the relatively concolorous upperparts, with diffuse 'M', in comparison with *P. leucoptera* (shown below).



Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes* '*magnificens*', Britannia Sea Mount, 29/3/2020. J. Norling.
Note the broad black carpal bar, which extends into the lesser and median under primary coverts to form a 'comma'.



Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes* '*magnificens*', Britannia Sea Mount, 29/3/2020. B. Russell.



Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes* '*magnificens*', Britannia Sea Mount, 29/3/2020. R. Morris.



Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes* '*magnificens*', Britannia Sea Mount, 29/3/2020. R. Morris.



Gould's Petrel *Pterodroma leucoptera*, Britannia Sea Mount, 29/3/2020. P. Walbridge.



Gould's Petrel *Pterodroma leucoptera*, Britannia Sea Mount, 29/3/2020. P. Walbridge.