

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission to document a major rare bird in Australia. Its use is NOT mandatory. Please attach and/or include all relevant information including any digital images. Please Email the completed form/submission to the BARC Chair, Tony Palliser tonyp@bigpond.net.au

BARC considers submissions that include a minimum of the submitter's name(s), the bird species claimed and the location and date(s) of the record. However, more information and evidence will usually be required for BARC to accept a record. So, please submit as much detailed information about the bird as possible.

If you choose not to use this form please make sure all relevant information requested in this form is included in your submission. However, it is our preference that you fully complete sections "A" and "B", or follow their headings, so that BARC has some continuity between all submissions.

Section A: Submitter details	
Your name(s) Joint submissions are fine	George Vaughan.
Your email, phone or address	

Section B: Record details	
Common and scientific names Include subspecies if relevant	South Island Pied Oystercatcher (<i>Haemantopus finschi</i>).
Site location (with GPS if possible)	Marion Bay, Tasmania.
Date(s) and time(s) of record (First and last date of occurrence if known)	13 th of November 2020. I can't really remember the time exactly, but it must've been somewhere between about two-thirty and three in the afternoon.
How many individuals were there?	One.
What was the distance to the bird(s)?	The furthest I was would probably have been about twenty metres, and the closest? Probably less than ten metres; I was very keen to see the wings, but the bird wouldn't even move away from me!
Habitat description	The South Islander was on a tidal point formed on the inland side of The Spit Conservation Reserve; this was made of thick, waterlogged sand and huge clumps of muscle-like shells, all of them yawning open to aerate themselves.
Sighting conditions (e.g. weather, visibility, light conditions)	It was an overcast day at the brooding, billowing grey front of a huge squall.
How confident are you in the identification (as a %) and why?	Be it now or when I was there in the field, I have always been 100% sure of this one! As I closed in on the bird, having been alerted by its call, I even caught myself incredulously muttering to myself "it is... <i>it is</i> " the closer I looked at it. I was shocked not so much at the bird itself being there as I was how utterly certain my convictions were, with none of the usual tricks of colour and shape misconceptions one usually plays on oneself when confronted by a potential rarity.
Did you find and/or identify the bird initially? Who else recorded the bird and do they agree with the identification?	I was the first one to stumble across this bird, which was in turn the very first of its kind for Tasmania- <i>Proper!</i> I've actually spent the last five or six years checking virtually every Australian Pied Oystercatcher in Tasmania in search of a South Islander; I was convinced they had to get to Tasmania eventually... and, given the remarkable numbers of

	South Islanders in New South Whales this season, I'd actually been checking the Oystercatchers at Orielton for any treasures not that long before... it wasn't to be. And then, after so many disappointments that my search had effectively turned into a private joke, it finally paid off, on one of the few occasions I wasn't even thinking about it!
What experience have you had with this species?	I've had some experiences with South Islanders in my own native (and yet not resident) home of New Zealand, especially at the famous Miranda Wader site and at the Little Waihi Estuary, but at the time I was more paying attention to them as a joke about their infamously cryptic reputation here in Australia!
Has this species been seen at this location before? When?	This was, in the hundreds of years in which Tasmania has been plied by ornithologists far greater than myself, the very first South Island Pied Oystercatcher in Tasmania Proper, let alone Marion Bay! The closest one has come to here before was a bird that was on Macquarie Island a fair while back, but since Macquarie Island is about as Tasmanian as New Zealand itself this is probably a fair bit more expected.
Have photographs of the bird or discussion of it occurred on the internet? (Please provide the site name, a summary, electronic link, etc.)	I don't believe any discussion was needed on any of the Facebook forums, since the photos were unequivocally of a South Islander, and I put the word out on Birdline rather than Facebook, so that birders of all backgrounds and social media persuasions, or lack thereof, could to get wind of the sighting and enjoy their own hunts!
Do you permit BARC to display your images etc. electronically (credited with your name)	Absolutely yes!

You may choose to delete or ignore this page, but please include as much of the requested information in your submission as possible, especially Sections C and E.

Section C: Supporting evidence

Please include evidence that supports the identification, such as photographs, video, call recordings, etc. Digital images can be pasted into this document below, at the end, or provided separately. Digital video and sound recordings can be sent separately to this form. Label photos etc or insert captions to make note of relevant features they show.

























Section D: Description of the bird(s)	
Please provide a description of the bird(s) including all identification features recorded. Provide all possible details that might corroborate the identification.	
Plumage	When sitting, the plumage was basically identical to that of an Australian Pied... but then, when the bird finally flew, the huge blazes of white on the wings absolutely lit up, even when seen with the naked eye, very clearly going right up to and along most of the trailing edge! In that moment, the sheer difference between the two birds was simply mind-blowing. In the burst of photos, which as you can imagine I checked immediately after, I also noticed the soft veins of white extending outwards along the insides of the primaries and tertiaries.
Bare parts	I really started to get convinced I was looking at a South Islander when I saw it sitting side by side with its Australian relation; the elegant length, fineness and needle-sharp tip of the bill immediately called to mind, even as I admired it, a precision instrument like a spear alongside the Australian's great, powerful chisel-bills. It was also notable that the bill was almost entirely a deep shade of cherry red, as opposed to the rich orange of the other Australians. The legs were also only visible below the knee on account of their shortness and sturdiness; one of the curious quirks of the South Islander that I really noticed as I watched it was the way the feathers of that sturdy little belly completely hid the bird's knees, giving it a very "clothed" and tidy appearance. Later on, looking at the photos in the immediate aftermath, I also noticed that the South Islander's legs were a rich shade of bubble-gum pink, as opposed to the washed-out coral tones the Australians legs have.
Moult details	To my admittedly very limited knowledge of moults, this was a pretty immaculate adult bird.
Structure and 'jizz'	As noted above, the very short, sturdy legs and long, fine bill leant this bird a totally different aspect to its Australian relations, an aspect that I could best summarise as appealingly stout and handsome. Another strange fact about the bird that I noticed at the time was how the overall size of the body was much the same as that of the Australian birds; the tininess of the legs, however, made for an incredible difference when they stood side by side!
Calls	Funnily enough, if not for the calls, I would most likely have never noticed the bird in the field... I was walking back towards the beach from photographing a good flock of Godwits, along with a single Red Knot, out on the tidal point made of waterlogged sand and yawning-open shells when three Oystercatchers flew in. Two of them sounded normal; theirs was the piercing, two-note cry so evocative of and familiar to the Australian seaside. The third one, though... I immediately stopped, rigid with shock, when I heard it. It was clearly the call of an Oystercatcher, yes, but this one was shockingly obvious for being much higher in pitch than any Oystercatcher I've ever heard before, and also for the fact it was made up of a single long, slightly burbling trill that immediately brought to mind a Greenshank when I heard it; it never gave anything like the two-note cry of its relations. In that moment, I knew I had something very, very special! Strangely enough, none of the literature I could find says anything about there being such astonishing differences in the cries of these two species... and yet it was that very call that got me onto the bird!
Behaviours	I was incredibly aware, even at the time, that I had to try and cram as many impressions of this birds' nature into my mind as I could while it was still there; I am always someone who tries to bring birds to life with evocative writing, so I can remember them properly and others can enjoy them. That's why I took especial notes of the South Islander's quirks; it was noticeably more lethargic than its relations in its manner, being very contented to just sit and watch the other Oystercatchers busily feeding. Eventually, it decided to yawn impressively, which really showed off the pointed precision and fineness of the mandibles. In flight, something it was incredibly reluctant to do, the South Islander was again very different to the other Oystercatchers; it didn't so much "fly" as "glide", gliding along on curiously stooped wings after a powerful couple of flaps, a trait as inexplicable as it was notable in the field...
Age, sex and/or taxonomy	I would say with some certainty that this bird was an adult of its monotypic race, but more than that I'm really not qualified to say.

Section E: Confusion species
Please indicate other species that the bird(s) might be confused with and how they can be eliminated

From the call alone, I knew this bird wasn't another Australian Pied Oystercatcher. Then the combination of the tiny, sturdy legs and long, spear-like red bill convinced me further that this was a South Islander as I headed closer. Finally, when the bird flew, the shockingly white burst of those enormous wing-bars, which I saw going all the way to and along much of the trailing edge, my conviction turned to certainty and a deep, deep contentment.

Section F: References and aids

Did you use books, journal articles or on-line sites or pages to help you prepare this submission? Which ones?

I didn't really have to; I've spent the last five or six years systematically checking and rechecking almost every Australian Pied I've ever come across, half-jokingly, in case a South Islander ever turned up in Tasmania; after all that time and many hundreds if not thousands of failures, I've had the differences pretty much drilled into me by my own experiences out in the wild.

Would you like to acknowledge the assistance of others in the identification process or preparation of this submission?

I would very much like to thank my father for driving me out to Marion Bay yet again; it's a fair way from home, but it's one of my favourite places of all in which to hunt for those great favourites of mine... the Waders, who also deserve some acknowledgement; without them, such deep contentments and defining moments of my life would simply not be possible!