

BARC SUBMISSION

Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchos*

Perth Canyon, offshore Perth, WA

Submitted by: Stewart Ford, Dan Mantle, Alan Collins, Martin Cake and John Graff¹

Summary

This submission relates to the sighting of a Yellow-nosed Albatross in waters offshore from Perth near the head of the Perth Canyon on a single-day pelagic trip from Fremantle. The bird was seen amongst a loose aggregation of seabirds associating with a large group of dolphins. If accepted, this would represent the 8th accepted record of the species for Australian waters, and 4th off Western Australia, though at least one other well-supported record is yet to be submitted.

SUBMISSION

Species: Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross (*Thalassarche chlororhynchos*)

Location: Continental shelf waters near the head of the Perth Canyon, c. 50 km offshore from Fremantle, WA

Date: Saturday 18th May 2019

Circumstances of sightings

Two sightings considered to involve the same individual were made at approximately 0910 on the outbound journey and again at approximately 1225 on the inbound journey. On both occasions, the bird was part of a loose aggregation of seabirds associating with a large foraging aggregation of dolphins, including at least two dolphin species. On both occasions, the bird made several passes of the boat affording good views and allowing a series of photos to be taken.

Physical description

Refer also to Figs 1-5 below.

A small *Thalassarche* albatross, of comparable size to the relatively common Indian Yellow-nosed Albatrosses in loose association. Upperwing and back blackish, white rump and black tail. Underparts predominantly white with a moderately broad grey-black black margin to the underwings – slightly broader than on Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, approaching adult Black-browed in width on leading edge but neater, with broad but greyer trailing edge. Bill black and proportionally long and slender for *Thalassarche* albatross, if anything appearing longer than bills of accompanying Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross. Head whitish, with broad grey collar, extending weakly as a full collar, and small dark eyepatch ahead of eye, possibly somewhat triangular in appearance but not as extensive and clearly triangular as on a typical adult Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross. Based on the time of year, very limited weakly pale culminicorn, and seemingly uniformly fresh plumage (see Fig 3), we suspect this is a first year bird fledged earlier in the year, though we wouldn't assert this with certainty.

Elimination of confusion species

The subject bird is readily identifiable as a small albatross (*Thalassarche* sp.). The combination of underwing pattern (white with moderately broad black margins), bill size and

shape (black and proportionally long and slender) and overall compact structure rule out most other members of the genus.

The primary confusion species is Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross (*T. carteri*; hereafter IYNA), which has previously been considered conspecific with *T. chlororhynchos* (hereafter AYNA). Separation of the two taxa is dependent on age, and rests largely on a combination of the presence and extent of grey on the face and neck, the shape and extent of any dark eyepatch, and detail in the shape of the proximal end of the culminicorn and the pale culminicorn stripe (Flood 2015; Menkhorst *et al.* 2017). Details of the culminicorn stripe were not clearly visible in this instance so separation rests largely on the extent of grey collar and dark eyepatch. We consider that the extent of the grey collar on this individual is significantly beyond what would be expected in a young IYNA, but typical for a young AYNA. Flood (2015 pg. 41) illustrates young Indian Yellow-nosed Albatrosses with weak grey collars up until the middle of their second year, but these are considerably weaker than on this bird. Furthermore, in our experience off south-western Western Australia, though young IYNA do occasionally show a weak collar, this is not typical, especially for older individuals – a position supported by a survey of images of young Yellow-nosed Albatrosses taken off Australia available on eBird (<https://ebird.org/home>). Thus we would consider IYNA with collars as illustrated by Flood (2015) to be close to the extreme end for young IYNA rather than typical, and the extent shown by this bird is beyond what we have seen or can find evidence for in IYNA. Conversely, a similar survey of YNA images off South America (where AYNA is the typical species), indicate that this extent of grey collar is fairly typical for young AYNA (though some show a less extensive collar). Similarly, the dark eyepatch is more extensive than typical for a young IYNA (though likely not out of range), and fairly typical for a young AYNA.

Habitat: Pelagic waters over continental shelf near the head of deep undersea canyon.

Previous occurrence: There are five previous records of Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross from south-western Australian waters, of which three have been accepted by BARC, one has not yet been submitted but is supported by diagnostic photos, and a fifth record considered credible though not accepted by BARC. These include two from waters of the Perth Canyon, plus single confirmed records from waters off Albany and from Cape Naturaliste near Dunsborough, and a further unconfirmed record from Albany, as outlined below:

- Adult, Perth Canyon 20th July 1997 (not yet submitted to BARC, diagnostic photos)
- Adult, Perth Canyon 21st August 2016 (BARC Case No. 931)
- Immature, Cape Naturaliste 23rd April 2018 (BARC Case No. 1022)
- Immature, Albany Canyon 5th May 2018 (BARC Case No. 1013)
- Possible immature, Albany Canyon 4th May 2013 (Not accepted – BARC Case No. 841, but considered Atlantic by several notable authorities including Bob Flood)

Previous observer experience

All observers submitting this record have previously seen at least one AYNA in Australian waters, and DM, AC and SF have additional experience with the species overseas. All five observers also have extensive experience with IYNA off south-western Australia.

References

Flood R. L. (2015) The two Yellow-nosed Albatrosses: Molt, Ageing, and Identification. *Birding* **47** (3), pp. 36-47.

Howell S. N. G & Zuffelt K. (2019) *Oceanic Birds of the World: A Photographic Guide*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Menkhorst P., Rogers D., Clarke R., Davies J., Marsack P. & Franklin K. (2019) *The Australian Bird Guide* Revised Edition. CSIRO Publishing, Victoria.

Shirihai H. (2008) *The Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife* 2nd Edition. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Acknowledgements

We thank Paul Newman for supplying one of the images used in this submission.

Images



Figure 1 – Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, side views from morning sighting. Photos Dan Mantle.



Figure 2 – Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, upperwing view from morning sighting. Photo Dan Mantle.



Figure 3 – Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, side view from early afternoon sighting. Photo courtesy Paul Newman.



Figure 4 – Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, side and underwing views from early afternoon sighting. Photos Dan Mantle.



Figure 5 – Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, upperpart view from early afternoon sighting. Photo Dan Mantle.