

## BARC SUBMISSION

**Barau's Petrel – Bremer Canyon, Western Australia, 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2020. GPS 34° 45' 10.69, 119° 35' 42.46**

**Billy Thom and Keith Lightbody**

(prepared by Daniel Mantle & Plaxy Barratt)

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Submission note: although still a very rare bird in Australia, Barau's Petrels have been recorded annually (during summer) since 2015, off the southern coast of Western Australia. Tracking data also suggests they are likely regular off the NW of Western Australia.

Circumstances of sighting: a single Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* was spotted and photographed at 1.08 pm on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020 by Billy Thom and Keith Lightbody during the Naturaliste Charter's Orca tour to the Bremer Canyon, southern coast of Western Australia. Billy spotted this bird at moderate distance and Keith did very well to capture a few record shots as the bird disappeared from the boat.

Description (from photos and discussion with Keith and Billy): A long and slender-winged, medium-sized *Pterodroma* with mostly white underparts with a black carpal bar, grey upperparts with a dark 'M-pattern' across the upperwings, a longish tail, and a darker cap. The bird was longer winged than a Cookilaria petrel, and very roughly similar in size to the Flesh-footed Shearwaters it was seen and photographed with.

**Upperparts:** The upper wings have a distinct darker grey-brown 'M pattern' that contrasts strongly with the paler grey mantle, scapulars and most of the uppertail coverts. The tail is dark grey/black and also contrasts with the paler uppertail coverts.

**Underparts:** The underwings are mostly white, framed by a well-defined black trailing edge, mostly black primaries (with a hint that there might be white tongues extending into the 'hand') and with a substantial black carpal bar that runs from the base of the primaries to the carpal joint and then diagonally back towards the body. The undertail coverts appear whitish but hard to judge clearly from these photos, whilst the undertail feathers are barely discernable but appear to be dark grey.

**Head:** A noticeably darker grey cap (not hooded), extending below the eyes and appears to become paler grey (mid grey) towards the nape. These mid grey tones also extend across the upper breast/lower throat as an indistinct, narrow partial collar. The throat and chin are white, as are the lores and forehead (at least lower forehead) and this contrasts markedly with the darker grey cap.

**Bare parts:** moderately stout, all dark bill, not much more detail apparent from photos. Feet and legs not apparent in photos.

### Distinguishing similar species:

**White-necked Petrel *Pterodroma cervicalis*:** any differences in jizz are not readily discernable from these photographs, although the bird does appear a little slim for a typical White-necked Petrel. The lack of a white hind neck and the substantially thicker black carpal bar (particularly the long and thick diagonal carpal bar extending towards the body) and thicker dark trailing edge to the underwing of the submitted bird all help to rule out White-necked Petrel.

**Vanuatu Petrel *Pterodroma occulta*:** Vanuatu Petrel is marginally smaller and slighter than White-necked Petrel and is thus also very difficult to separate structurally from Barau's Petrel from these photos alone. However, it is distinguished herein for the same reasons as White-necked Petrel—

principally the lack of a white hind collar, and the longer, thicker carpal bar and the broader dark trailing edge to the underwing of the submitted bird.

Juan Fernandez Petrel *Pterodroma externa*: again, structurally quite similar without easily discernable differences from the photographic evidence presented herein. However, distinctive plumage differences include the much-reduced black carpal bar and thinner black trailing edge that would be expected for a Juan Fernandez Petrel.

All similar mid-large *Pterodroma* with white underparts, grey to greyish-brown upperparts and darker 'M pattern' across the upperwing, can be separated by substantial underwing differences; this includes various Atlantic and Pacific taxa that are not dealt with in detail here as they would also be very unlikely confusion species in this part of the world (but they are all distinctive in their own right).

All the smaller cookilaria petrels can be separated on structural jizz alone, even from these photographs. They are all substantially smaller with shorter, broader wings with more rounded hands. The thick black carpal bar also eliminates many of the cookilaria with reduced carpal ticks (e.g. Cook's and Stejneger's Petrel) whilst other regular Australian cookilaria such as Gould's and Black-winged Petrel may both be distinguished by differing head/neck patterns (Gould's is distinctively 'hooded', whilst Black-winged typically lacks the dark cap and has a more pronounced grey half collar). The latter also has notably thicker black carpal bars and trailing edge to the underwings.

Observer's experience: Keith is an experienced birder and photographer and has completed numerous trips to the Bremer Canyon with Naturaliste Charters. Billy Thom works aboard this whale watching boats and is also very experienced with the usual seabirds of the region. Between Billy and Keith, they have found a number of very rare seabirds in the Bremer Canyon, including several previous Barau's Petrels, along with Great and Cory's Shearwaters.

#### References:

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Figure 1. Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020 (Keith Lightbody). Note the thick dark trailing edge, the extensive dark carpal bar, and the dark cap (extending over the eyes) and merging into a mid-grey nape. Note also the extension of the mid grey feathers at the side of the neck and the white throat, lores and forehead.



Figure 2. Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020 (Keith Lightbody). Note the roughly similar size to the Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes* also in the photo.



Figure 3. Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020 (Keith Lightbody). Note the dark grey/black 'M-pattern' across the upperwings, the dark dap, dark tail feathers and mid grey mantle and scapulars.