

BARC SUBMISSION

Barau's Petrel – Bremer Canyon, Western Australia, 3rd March, 2020.

Pia Markovic & Jodie Lowe

(prepared by Plaxy Barratt & Daniel Mantle)

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 on the 3rd March 2020 by Pia Markovic and Jodie Lowe during the Naturaliste Charter's Orca tour to the Bremer Canyon, southern coast of Western Australia.

Description (from photos and discussion with Pia/Jodie): A long and slender-winged, medium-sized *Pterodroma* with mostly white underparts with distinctive black carpal bars, grey upperparts with darkish upperwings, a longish dark tail, and a notable dark cap. The bird also looks proportionately longer winged than a Cookilaria petrel in the photos.

Upperparts: The upper wings are very dark grey-brown to blackish and contrast only moderately with the subtly paler grey mantle, scapulars and most of the uppertail coverts. The tail is dark grey/black and is close to uniform in colour with the uppertail coverts, but contrasts with the marginally paler rump.

Underparts: The underwings are mostly white, framed by a well-defined black trailing edge, mostly black primaries and with very 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 are white and the undertail feathers (what can be seen of them) are dark grey.

Head: An extensive dark grey cap extending below the eyes grades into a mid-grey nape and neck sides. These mid grey tones appear to extend down the neck sides but do not form any noticeable collar or half-collar in these photos. The throat and chin are white, as are the lores and forehead; 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: Pia works aboard the Naturaliste Charters whale watching boats and sees the usual Bremer Canyon seabirds day-in, day-out. She thus immediately noticed this bird was different and very likely a Barau's Petrel (a bird she has now seen a few times).

References:

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- MENKHORST, P., ROGERS, D., CLARKE, R., DAVIES, J., MARSACK, P. & FRANKLIN, K. (2017): *The Australian Bird Guide*. CSIRO publishing.
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- PINET, P., JAQUEMET, S., PINAUD, D., WEIMERSKIRCH, H., PHILLIPS, R.A., & LE CORRE, M. (2011). Migration, wintering distribution and habitat use of an endangered tropical seabird, Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau*. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 423: 291-302.



Figure 1. Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 3rd March 2020 (Pia Markovic/Jode Lowe). Note the thick dark trailing edge, the extensive dark carpal bar, and the dark cap (extending over the eyes). Note also the white undertail coverts and white lores and lower forehead.

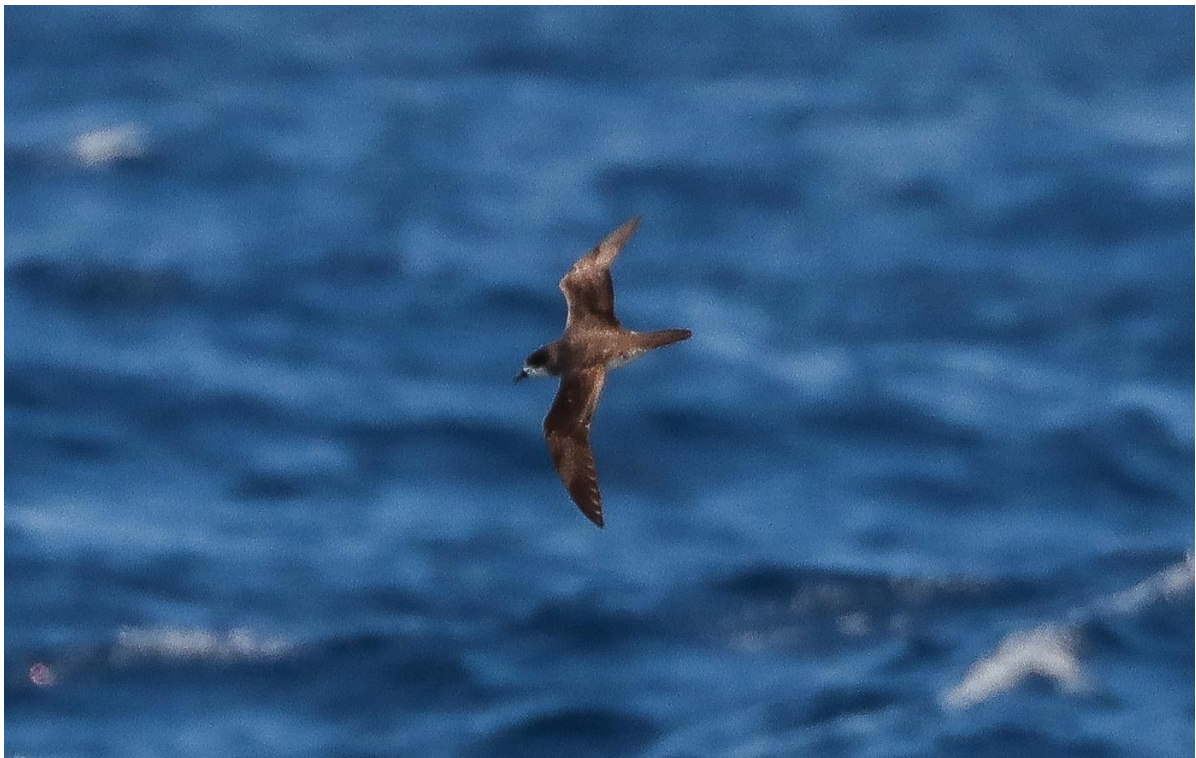


Figure 2. Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 3rd March 2020 (Pia Markovic/Jodie Lowe). Note the dark cap merging into the mid grey neck sides at a distinct angle, and the long dark tail.