

BARC submission

Barau's Petrel – Bremer Canyon, Western Australia, 26th February, 2019.

Steve Reynolds

(BARC submission prepared on observer's behalf by Daniel Mantle & Plaxy Barratt)

Submission note: although still a very rare bird elsewhere in Australia, Barau's Petrels have been recorded annually (January–March) off the southern coast of Western Australia since 2015. 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 26th February 2019 by Steve Reynolds during the Naturaliste Charter's Orca tour to the Bremer Canyon, southern coast of Western Australia.

Description: A long and slender-winged, medium-sized *Pterodroma* with mostly white underparts with distinctive black carpal bars, a longish graduated tail, and a distinctive darker cap. From the photo, the bird looks proportionately longer winged than a Cookilaria petrel.

Upperparts: The upper wings are very dark grey to blackish and contrast only moderately with the slightly paler grey mantle. The tail is dark grey/black and appears largely uniform in colour with the uppertail coverts and 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 are dark grey.

Head: A distinctive blackish cap extending below the eyes can just be seen to grade into smudgy mid-grey neck sides in the attached photos. The throat and chin are white, as are the lores and forehead and contrast markedly with the blackish cap.

Bare parts: dark bill but hard to assess in images.

Distinguishing similar species:

White-necked Petrel *Pterodroma cervicalis*: any differences in jizz are not readily discernible from these photographs, although the bird does appear a little slim for a typical White-necked Petrel. The lack of a white hind neck is the main feature from these images to rule out White-necked Petrel. The minor differences in underwing pattern can't be easily distinguished from these photos. Vanuatu Petrel *Pterodroma occulta* is extremely similar but marginally smaller than White-necked Petrel and is distinguished from Barau's Petrel by the same plumage features.

Juan Fernandez Petrel *Pterodroma externa*: again, structurally quite similar without easily discernible 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 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 often 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: Steve has seen multiple Barau's Petrels at the Bremer Canyon and at the Cocos islands and is very familiar with the typical seabirds of the region and any possible Australian confusion species.

References:

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Image – Steve Reynolds, Bremer Canyon, WA, 26th February 2019