

BARC submission

Barau's Petrel – Bremer Canyon, Western Australia, 11th February, 2021.

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(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 11th Feb 2021 by Machi Yoshida during the Naturaliste Charter's Orca tour to the Bremer Canyon, southern coast of Western Australia.

Description (from photos and discussion with Machi): A long and slender-winged, medium-sized *Pterodroma* with mostly white underparts with distinctive black carpal bars, grey upperparts with darker upperwings, a longish and relatively uniform dark tail, and a distinctive 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 quite strongly with the paler grey mantle (stronger contrast than is typical of many of the January–March sightings at the Bremer Canyon). The tail is dark grey/black and is 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 (what can be seen of them) are dark grey.

Head: A distinctive blackish cap extending below the eyes grades into a mid-grey nape and neck sides. The smudgy grey neck sides form a washed-out grey collar/half-collar. The throat and chin are white, as are the lores and forehead and contrast markedly with the blackish 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 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 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* 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: Machi works aboard the Naturaliste Charters whale watching boats and sees the usual Bremer Canyon seabirds day-in, day-out. She recognised this bird immediately as a likely Barau's Petrel (a bird she has now at least 7 times).

References:

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All images – Machi Yoshida, Bremer Canyon, 11th February 2021