

BARC SUBMISSION

Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* – Bremer Canyon, Western Australia, 8th January, 2022.

Keith Lightbody

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

Submission note: although still a rare bird in Australia, there was a notable Australian incursion of the species in January–April 2011 (NSW to South Aus) and there have now been at least eleven Western Australian records: October 2008, west of the Abrolhos Islands (BARC 587); the Bremer Canyon scored two birds on the 23rd and 24th April 2019 along with singles on the 6th, 7th, 13th and 19th January 2020 and the 4th and 18th February 2020, and 8th January 2022 (this submission); finally there was also a single bird offshore Walpole, WA, on the 12th May 2019.

Circumstances of sighting: a single Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* was observed and photographed at 2.04 pm on the 8th January 2022 by Keith Lightbody during the Naturaliste Charter's Orca tour to the Bremer Canyon, southern coast of Western Australia.

Description (from photo): A large, dark, slim-winged shearwater with a dark cap, partial white collar, long, thin, dark bill and smudgy dark, lower belly patch.

Upperparts: mid-brown across the back and wings, rump, and uppermost uppertail coverts. The pale edges to most of the upperpart feathers gives a distinct 'scaly appearance'. The lower uppertail coverts formed a narrow white, crescentic band above the dark brown tail.

Underparts: The underwings were mostly white with a dark trailing edge and under primaries, and distinctive dark spotting in the axillaries, and secondary coverts. The rest of the underparts were mostly white along with a very distinctive smudgy dark belly patch. Undertail coverts brown.

Head: a well-defined, dark, brown cap extending below the eye, and accentuated by a partial white collar (that fades to mid brown on the central nape). Clean white throat.

Bare parts: relatively long and slender, black bill. Feet only apparent underwater in one image; colour not obvious.

Distinguishing similar species: This is a very distinctive species and this excellent set of photos quickly eliminates any superficially similar species. All other large shearwaters are easily distinguished by the combination of dark cap, long dark bill, partial white collar, white underwings with dark flecking in axillaries and secondary coverts, the dark brown, smudgy lower belly patch and the white crescent across the lower uppertail coverts.

Observer's experience: Keith is very familiar with all the regular seabirds of the Bremer Canyon and previously found a Great Shearwater there on the 6th January 2020.

References:

- Harrison, P., Perrow, M., & Larsson, H. (2021). Seabirds – The New Identification Guide. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.
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- Marchant, S. & Higgins, P.J. (eds) (1990). Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 1: Ratites to Ducks. Melbourne.
- Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, P. & Franklin, K. (2017). The Australian Bird Guide, CSIRO, Victoria, Australia.
- Onley, D. & Scofield, P. (2007). Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World, Christopher Helm, London.



Figure 1. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 8th January 2022 (Keith Lightbody). Note the dark cap, partial white collar (fading to dull brown on mid nape), long, relatively thin, dark bill, white lowermost uppertail coverts and overall scaly appearance to the dark upperparts.



Figure 2. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 8th January 2022 (Keith Lightbody). The dark cap extending below the eye is particularly prominent on the images of the bird sitting on the water.



Figures 3 & 4. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 8th January 2022 (Keith Lightbody). Figure 3 shows a reasonable size comparison with a Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes*.



Figures 5 & 6. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 8th January 2022 (Keith Lightbody). Figure 5 shows the underparts well with the dark smudgy patch on the lower belly, the dark undertail coverts, and dark spotted underwing coverts and axillaries.

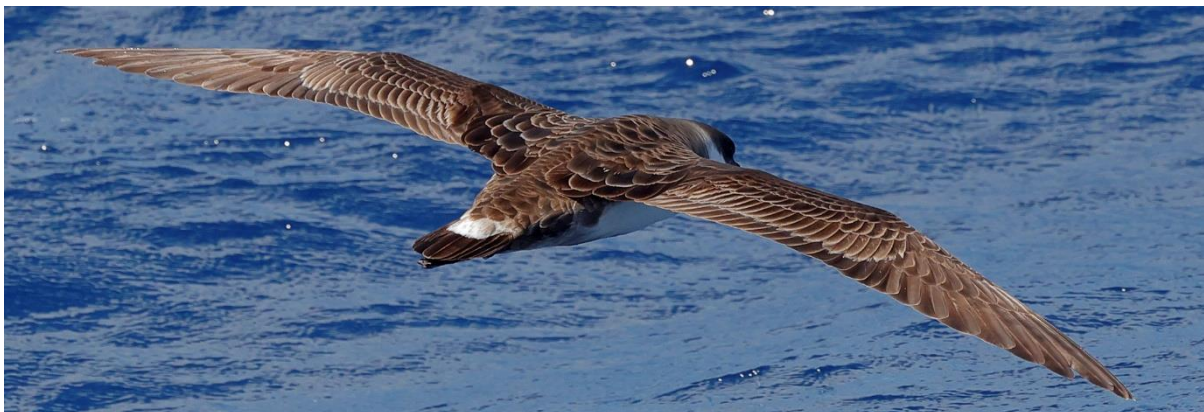


Figure 7. Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis* at the Bremer Canyon, Western Australia on the 8th January 2022 (Keith Lightbody). Note the strongly scaled appearance to the upperparts.