

Memorandum to: The Director of Birds Australia

From: Birds Australia Rarities Committee (BARC)

Date: 24 August 2008

Voting Members:

Tony Palliser	Glenn Holmes
Rohan Clarke	Jamie Matthew
Chris Brandis	Dion Hobcroft
Jeff Davies	Mike Carter

Cc: Keith Brandwood

Submission No 559 Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii*, off Wollongong, NSW. 24 November 2007 (Unpublished). Submitted by: Nikolas. K. Haass.

Verdict: Accepted

This case refers to the sighting of a Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* seen at sea (34°27'S 151°16'E) during a regular pelagic excursion off Wollongong, NSW, 24 November 2007.

The submission relies on photographic evidence and a brief description that details the extent of white on the forehead, a pale supercilium, grey crown, nape and back, a blackish 'M' band across the upperwings and back, a grey tail – tipped blackish, white underparts and white underwing coverts with fine black margins and a slender bill. It was described as having a fast erratic flight.

Members voted unanimously in favour of acceptance, satisfied that the very similar Pycroft's Petrel *P. pycrofti* could be eliminated because of the following combination of characters (which rely mostly on Grant Penryhn's supporting photographs);

- 1) a reasonably prominent M mark across the dorsum, with notable contrast between that mark and the paler grey of the mantle and back. Pycroft's is often darker here;
- 2) fairly prominent supercilium reaching just past the eye. In Pycroft's this is typically less distinct;
- 3) relatively small and clearly defined dark ear covert patch. In Pycroft's this is usually larger and less well defined such that it merges with the sides of the head and the duskier colouration on the crown;
- 4) the fairly neat edge to the grey on the sides of the neck and the absence of any white feathering bleeding into grey towards the rear of ear coverts are both features more typical of Cook's than Pycroft's. Pycroft's is also typically duskier here;
- 5) the extent of black in the underwing carpal bar is more typical of Cook's than Pycroft's which can be slightly more extensive here;
- 6) Structure in Grant Penryhn's photos looks about right for Cook's. This is particularly so for relative tail length which appears similar to that shown in known photographs of Cook's Petrel
- 7) The bill appears relatively deep based so is also better for Cook's than Pycroft's Petrel.

Most of the above features are both subtle and somewhat subjective but in combination they identify this bird as a Cook's Petrel as claimed

Cook's Petrel remains a very rare bird in Australia. This record is only the 3rd acceptable live record.

References and Bibliography:

- Howell, S.N.G., Webb, S. & Spear, L.B., (1996), 'Identification at sea of Cook's, de Filippes and Pycroft's Petrels, *Western Birds*, **27**: 57-64.
- Marchant, S. & Higgins, P.J. (Eds) 1990: *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds. Vol. 1, Ratites to Ducks*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Onley, D. & Scofield, P. (2007), *Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World*, Christopher Helm, London.
- Roberson, D. & Bailey, S.F. (1991), 'Cook's Petrels in the Eastern Pacific Ocean; Part 2 of a Two-Part Series', *American Birds*, **45**: 1067-1081.
- Shirihai, H. (2002), *Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife. The Birds & Marine Mammals of the Antarctic Continent and Southern Ocean*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Tony Palliser
Chairman, Birds Australia Rarities Committee