



## Birds Australia Rarities Committee Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission for a major rarity in Australia. (It is not a mandatory requirement) Please complete all sections ensuring that you attach all relevant information including any digital images (email to [tonyp@bigpond.net.au](mailto:tonyp@bigpond.net.au) or [a.silcocks@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:a.silcocks@birdsaustralia.com.au)). Submissions to BARC should be submitted electronically wherever possible.

<b>Full Name: Mick Roderick, Steve Roderick, Allan Richardson</b>	Office Use
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<b>Species Name: Great Shearwater</b>	<b>Scientific Name: <i>Ardenna gravis</i></b>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	Approx 0725 to 0745 on Thurs 21 <sup>st</sup> April 2011
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	First approach, approx 5 minutes. Second approach 10 mins.
First and last date of occurrence:	As above
Distance to bird:	Closest approx 3m from boat.

<b>Site Location</b> Approx 11nm off Swansea, NSW (33 10 5 S / 151 49 23 E)
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<b>Habitat</b> (describe habitat in which the bird was seen, together with any neighbouring habitats): Open ocean (about one third the way from the coast to the continental shelf)
<b>Sighting conditions</b> (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.): Clear, slight westerly winds, calm seas.
<b>Optical aids used:</b> MR - Swarovski 10x42 binoculars by me (not needed for 90% of the time), SR – 10x 42 Vixen ApexPro binoculars, AR - Canon 10x30 image Stabilizer binoculars and Digital camera and telephoto lens. The bird was close enough to use naked eye on close passes and when sitting on water near boat.

<b>To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site?</b> We have no knowledge of this species being recorded at this location.
<b>Did you use a field guide?</b> (or any other references for help with identification). Not at the time, but consulted various guides for confirmation.
<b>Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who?</b> (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)? Three observers were present (Mick and Steve Roderick and Allan Richardson) – we all agree with the ID.

**How confident are you of your identification?**, e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not? 100%

**Please confirm that you are willing for BARC to display your images** (fully credited with your name) electronically - YES

**Other details:** e.g. Do you have historical and or anecdotal information/comments relating to the prior occurrence/status of the species within or near this location?

This bird was seen during the influx of records off Southern and South-eastern Australia (including Tasmania) in March / April 2011. I had led a pelagic trip off Port Stephens on 15<sup>th</sup> April and had no sign of this species. A single bird had been recorded off Sydney on the 9<sup>th</sup> April and given that generally birds recorded off Swansea correlated better with birds seen on pelagic trips off Sydney / Wollongong (unsubstantiated personal observation from data collected from past pelagic trips off Swansea led by Richard Baxter and Phil Hansbro), we decided to take advantage of calm seas and head to a Fish Attracting Device (FAD) about 11 nautical miles off Swansea Heads in Steve Roderick's 4.8m aluminum boat out specifically to try and see a Great Shearwater. The bird came up the wake of the boat not long (perhaps 15 minutes) after starting berleying (chicken mince and tuna oil), joining good numbers (30+) of Fleshy-foots and a couple of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters (interestingly we saw about 100 Wilson's Storm-petrels during the day, with 80 the peak count at the boat). The GS was rather 'stand-offish' and was harassed by the Fleshies. Eventually, after being dived on by a Fleshy the bird left, flying off south.

We believe this to be the northernmost record for the species on the eastern seaboard.

**Physical Description of Bird - Please describe only what you saw:** (1) No. of individuals present (living or dead); (2) age (adult, juvenile, immature) and sex; (3) size and shape; (4) plumage colour and pattern (including any details of moult); (5) colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet; (6) calls; (7) behaviour, movements, flight pattern, and anything else that might help to identify the bird e.g. feeding, interactions with other birds, describe where the bird was – on ground, in canopy, flying etc. Were comparisons made with other species?

See attached images. Combination of dark cap, collar, upperwing / underwing patterns, tail pattern, smudge on belly and size, etc make the bird diagnostic.

**Please indicate other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?**

Buller's Shearwater, Streaked Shearwater, White-necked Petrel etc all eliminated by the combination of the above features.

**Was the description written from memory?** Yes

**Were photographs taken? (please include where possible)** Yes – see below.

**What experience have you had with the species in question?** (Did you know it was a Rare bird when you first saw it?) We all knew it was a Great Shearwater as it came up the wake. It was the first time any of us had seen the bird anywhere. Despite the lack of field experience, over the previous month preceding both the Swansea outing and the previous Port Stephens April outing guides such as Olney and Scofield (2007), Shirihai (2007) and photos on the internet and previous 2011 south-east Australian sightings were consulted to become familiar with those attributes that differentiate this species from other similar species.

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**4<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

Photo 1 (Allan Richardson)



In Photo 1 a number of diagnostic features are visible, being a diagnostic dark belly patch. Also visible in this view are sooty under-tail coverts and a white collar.

Photo 2 (Allan Richardson)



Photo 2 shows a black bill and a well defined dark cap extending well below the eye. The coverts are scalloped with light edges and a little darker than the mantle plumage as is consistent with Great Shearwater. Buller's Shearwater would show greater contrast between wing coverts and mantle plumage and lack the scalloped appearance to the upper wing feathers.

Photo 3 (Allan Richardson)



Photo 3 shows a number of features diagnostic of Great Shearwater, including, diagonal and parallel underwing marks, well-defined dark cap below eye, light collar, and light rump patch.

Photo 4 (Allan Richardson)



Photo 4 shows another view of the distinctive underwing markings, light collar and dark cap. also visible are the dark outer underwing and secondary tips. The underwing markings are in contrast to the somewhat lighter underwing of Buller's Shearwater, Light phase Wedge-tailed Shearwater and Cory's Shearwater. The somewhat light underwing impression is in contrast to that of a Grey Petrel. Further, the combination of dark bill, light collar, light rump patch (Photo 3), dark belly patch (Photo 1) and underwing characteristics eliminate all the above species and are consistent with Great Shearwater.

Photo 5 (Allan Richardson)



Photo 5 shows light collar, the edge of the dark underbelly patch and white rump patch.