



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 copies of your notes, photographs or other supportive material. (PLEASE USE BLACK INK).

Full Name: Robert M. G. Hynson (RH), David J. James (DJ), Raja Stephenson (RS) & Nikolas K. Haass (NH)	Office Use
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Species Name: Great Shearwater, adult	Scientific Name: <i>Puffinus (Ardenna) gravis</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	9 April 2011, 12.45pm
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	30 minutes
First and last date of occurrence:	9 April 2011
Distance to bird:	Down to 2 meters

Site Location: Continental shelf break about 28NM ESE of Sydney Heads (S33° 59.978' E151° 44.904'), NSW

Habitat: Pelagic. Continental shelf break.
Sighting conditions: Good light conditions, clear visibility, sun in the back. See attached pictures
Optical aids used: Leica 12x50 BA (NH) Swarovski 10x42 EL (RH); Photos: Canon 30D, Canon 400 mm, 5.6 (RS), photos Canon 7D, Canon 100–400 mm f4.5–5.6 L USM IS (RH). Some of the included photographs are low quality to keep the size of the document as small as possible. Higher quality and additional images are available on RS's website (http://www.adarman.com/Pelagics , click on the 2011 April 09 Sydney Pelagic link) and at RH's website http://www.pbase.com/rob_hynson/great_shearwater .

Were other observers present? Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification? Brook Whyllie, Roger McGovern, Hal Epstein, Tom Wilson, Ian McAllan and more participants of the pelagic. Nobody disagreed with the ID.
To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site? Rare vagrant (apparently 5 accepted Australian records) but there is a current invasion into Australian waters.
Did you use a field guide? The bird was identified spontaneously without using a field guide – several observers (NH, RS, RH, DJ) had extensive previous experience with this species. References: ENTICOTT, J. & D. TIPLING (1997): Seabirds of the World. London. • HARRISON, P. (1983): Seabirds, an Identification Guide. Beckenham. • HARRISON, P. (1987): Seabirds of the World. A Photographic Guide. London. • DEL HOYO, J., A.

ELLIOTT & J. SARGATAL (eds) (1992): Handbook of the Birds of the World. Vol. 1. - Barcelona. • MARCHANT, S. & P.J. HIGGINS (eds) (1990). Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 1: Ratites to Ducks. Melbourne. • ONLEY, D. & P. SCOFIELD (2007): Albatrosses, Petrels & Shearwaters of the World. Princeton. • SHIRIHAI, H. (2007, 2nd ed.): A Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife. London.

How confident are you of your identification?

100%

Other details:

Current invasion into Australian waters:

20 February 2011: 1 Great Shearwater, BOCA Eaglehawk Neck pelagic, Tasmania (Rohan Clarke *et al.*)

5 March 2011: 1 Great Shearwater, Pelagic off Eden, New South Wales (Dan Mantle *et al.*)

1 April 2011: 1 Great Shearwater, Kaikoura, NZ (Sav Saville)

3 April 2011: 8 Great Shearwaters, at sea SW of Portland, Victoria (P S Lansley *et al.*)

3 April 2011: 50+ Great Shearwaters, Port MacDonnell, South Australia (Colin Rogers *et al.*)

3 April 2011: 1 Great Shearwater, Kaikoura, NZ (Sav Saville)

6 April: 1 Great Shearwater, Pelagic off St Helens, Tasmania (Ian May)

9 April: 1 Great Shearwater, Pelagic off Sydney, New South Wales (this report)

10 April: 5 Great Shearwaters, Pelagic off St Helens, Tasmania (Ian May)

17 April: 1 Great Shearwater, Pelagic off Port Fairy, Victoria (Simon Mustoe *et al.*)

Physical Description

Summary description: A large shearwater with dark cap, brown, scaly upperparts, white upper-tail coverts, dark tail, predominantly white underparts, with characteristic underwing pattern and dark belly patch.

(1) **Number:** one individual was observed.

(2) **Age, sex:** Likely an adult. The bird was in very fresh plumage. However, the upperwing coverts were older and more worn than the scapulars, and probably still in moult (Figure 1), indicating that bird could not be a juvenile. This is to be expected, as juveniles do not leave their burrows in the South Atlantic until mid April.

(3) **Size and shape:** Large shearwater – significantly larger than Wedge-tailed and Flesh-footed Shearwaters.

(4) **Plumage colour and pattern:** dark cap, white (foreneck) to tan (nape) collar, scaly, brown upperparts, dark upper primaries, white upper-tail coverts, dark tail, predominantly white underparts; characteristic white underwing with narrow, streaky borders and diagonal bars in the ‘arm pit’; and a dark belly patch (‘oil patch’)

(5) **Colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet:** blackish bill and eyes, pale pink legs and feet with blackish toes and narrow blackish margin to the webs.

(6) **Calls:** none heard

(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?**

A large number of Wedge-tailed and a few Flesh-footed Shearwaters were observed at the same time allowing comparisons in size and jizz with the Great Shearwater.

The bird was initially seen in a large flock of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and soon came into to the boat to feed on the chum that had been put out. The bird repeatedly came to feed on the chum and the resulting slick. Flights were short on stiff wings with limited dynamic soaring. Landing was on both feet and when alighted would often dip its head below the surface of the water to retrieve food.

Other birds seen on the day (but not in direct comparison with the Great Shearwater): Good numbers of Australasian Gannets, few Hutton’s and Fluttering Shearwaters, a distant possible Buller’s Shearwater, Providence and Grey-faced Petrels, single Gibson’s, Campbell and Indian Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, a Brown and a South Polar Skua.



Figure 1: Great Shearwater off Sydney, NSW, 9 April 2011 (Photo: Robert Hynson)



Figure 2: Great Shearwater off Sydney, NSW, 9 April 2011 (Photo: Raja Stephenson)



Figure 3: Great Shearwater off Sydney, NSW, 9 April 2011 (Photo: Raja Stephenson)



Figure 4: Great Shearwater off Sydney, NSW, 9 April 2011 (Photo: Raja Stephenson)



Figure 5: Great Shearwater with Wedge-tailed Shearwater off Sydney, NSW, 9 April 2011 (Photo: Raja Stephenson)



Figure 6: Great Shearwater with Wedge-tailed Shearwater off Sydney, NSW, 9 April 2011 (Photo: Raja Stephenson)



Figure 7: Great Shear



Figure 8: Great Shearwater off Sydney, NSW, 9 April 2011 (Photo: Raja Stephenson)

Other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?

Since all key field marks were observed and photographically documented, there are no other species with which this bird might be confused. There are a few other large dark-capped shearwaters with remotely similar patterns such as: Cape Verde Shearwater *Calonectris edwardsii*: no obvious collar, different pattern of underparts and underwings. Buller's Shearwater *Puffinus (Ardenna) bulleri*: smaller, no collar, different upper- and underparts pattern. Pink-footed Shearwater *P. (A.) creatopus* and pale morph Wedge-tailed Shearwater *P. pacificus (A. pacifica)*: smaller, much less contrasting plumage, no collar, different upper- and underparts pattern. Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*: bulkier, much less contrasting plumage, no collar, different upper- and underparts pattern. Gadfly petrels *Pterodroma*: although some species may superficially resemble Great Shearwater, they all stand out by very different jizz, structure and plumage details.

Was the description written from notes and/or sketches made (tick box):

during the observation or; shortly after the observation or; from memory?

Please indicate supportive evidence available.

Was the bird: photographed, taped or video taped? If yes to any of these, by whom? RS, BW, RH

What experience have you had with the species in question?

NH has extensive experience with shearwaters having been pelagic trip leader on many trips off California, New Jersey/New York and Delaware/Maryland and having participated on many pelagic trips off North Carolina, Galapagos, New South Wales and Queensland. NH has been an active member in the Rare Birds Committees of Hessen, Germany, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, and New Jersey, USA. Specifically, NH has seen Great Shearwaters on many occasions in the North Atlantic (both North America and West Africa).

RH has extensive experience with shearwaters having participated in many pelagic trips off California, Washington State, New Jersey/New York, Delaware/Maryland, North Carolina, New South Wales and Queensland. RH has seen Great Shearwater on many pelagics in North America.

RS has extensive experience with shearwaters having participated in many pelagic trips off New Jersey/New York, Delaware/Maryland, North Carolina, New South Wales and Queensland. RS has seen Great Shearwater on many occasions in North America.

DJ is a seabird expert who is has extensive experience with shearwaters including Great Shearwater.

Signature:



Date: 18 April 2011