

# NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission for a major rarity in New South Wales. (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).

<b>Full Name:</b> Brook Whyllie	Office Use
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<b>Species Name:</b> Grey-headed Albatross	<b>Scientific Name:</b> <i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	12 August 2006 4.15pm
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	5 minutes
First and last date of occurrence:	12 August 2006
Distance to bird:	15-20 metres

<b>Site Location</b> (e.g 3km SE of Wybong Head, Munmorah SRA, NSW)  Approximately 3 km east of Wollongong Harbour, NSW.
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<b>Habitat</b> (describe habitat in which the bird was seen, together with any neighbouring habitats):  Open ocean
<b>Sighting conditions</b> (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.):  Sunny day, although light fading in late afternoon.
<b>Optical aids used:</b>  Nil

<b>To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site?</b>  No, although Grey-headed Albatross have been claimed off Wollongong on a number of occasions. To my knowledge, no rarities reports have been submitted.
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<b>Did you use a field guide?</b> (or any other references for help with identification). No, it was immediately identified as GHAL References used later to aid in the submission were: Shirihai, H., <i>A Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife</i> (2 <sup>nd</sup> Ed) Onley D & Scofield P., <i>Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World</i> Marchants S. & Higgins, P., <i>Handbook of Australian, New Zealand &amp; Antarctic Birds</i> (Volume 1A – Ratites to petrels)
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<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)?  Yes, other observers were present, including Lindsay Smith and Peter Milburn, as well as others on the Sandra K. No other observer disagreed with the identification.
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**How confident are you of your identification?**, e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not?

100%

**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? *If more space is needed for any section, please attach with your notes.*

Grey-headed Albatross have been claimed at this site on a number of occasions and satellite tracking data has shown GHAL in the Tasman Sea.

**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? *Please also state whether you saw the complete bird or only part of it?* (e.g. upper/lower/front/rear of bird).

*(Attach a description and where possible a copy your field notes)*

- (1) 1 individual present.
- (2) Immature, probably a second / third year bird as head has become whitish as a result of feather wear (juvenile would have grey head), but bill is still almost all black. Sex unknown..
- (3) Medium sized albatross. Wing slightly slimmer and head/neck more compact than accompanying Black-browed.
- (4) Body, predominately white, mantle light grey, extending almost into a full collar. Head, mostly white, with smudgy grey coloration, giving it a dirty look. Wing upper, all black, wing lower mostly black, with small areas of white showing through, as per accompanying photos.
- (5) Bill, all dark, eye dark, although photographs, due to lighting, show a light iris. Legs/feet, pinkish blue-grey.
- (6) None noted.
- (7) Complete bird sighted. No behavioural differences were noted that would support specific identification.

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

Similar species that could possibly be confused with immature Grey-headed are Black-browed (BBAL)/Campbell (CIAL) Albatrosses and Buller's/Pacific Albatrosses.

Buller's/Pacific Albatross was eliminated as the underwing was sighted. The bird identified as GHAL had a mostly dark underwing, whereas a Buller's/Pacific Albatross would have a mostly white underwing with black edges.

Black-browed/Campbell's Albatross was eliminated as per the following:

- Head/neck more compact than BBAL or CIAL, as evidence in photo 3. This makes the bill look proportionally larger,
- All dark bill, with no evident black tip. Immature BBAL and CIAL mainly have a brownish bill with an obvious dark tip,
- Bill has started to 'colour', as per a GHAL, with the lower mandible showing colouration from the bill base toward the bill tip. This is a noted stage of immature GHAL,
- Wing appeared 'slimmer', with the hand more 'pointed' than BBAL/CIAL would, as per photo 4.

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

during the observation or;  shortly after the observation or;  from memory? From photographs, as attached.

**Please indicate supportive evidence available.**

Was the bird: photographed,  taped or  video taped? If yes to any of these, by whom? By myself. The bird however was widely photographed by many on board the Sandra K.

**What experience have you had with the species in question?** (Did you know it was a Rare bird when you first saw it?)

Myself – previously observed adult GHAL on trips in the Southern Ocean, so had experience with size and shape. Others on board had knowledge of juvenile plumage stages of GHAL's

It was identified quite quickly as a possible GHAL, then, as it allowed a more detail examination, the identification was confirmed.

**Signature:** Brook Whyllie

**Date:**

Please forward all material to: The Secretary, NSWORAC ,  
Roger McGovern, 1/67 Cremorne Rd Cremorne NSW 2090  
Or e-mail to [roglou@bigpond.net.au](mailto:roglou@bigpond.net.au) 02 9953 3484



Photo1 – note all dark bill with no evidence of black tip. Bill tip starting to show slight change of colour.



Photo 2 – proportionally larger looking bill to BBAL/CIAL. Colour starting to become evident on lower mandible.



Photo 3 – dark underwing, eliminates Buller/Pacific Albatross. Head/neck compact compared to BBAL/CIAL. Head still smudgy grey, as the feathers wear from juvenile plumage, grey mantle with full collar evident.



Photo 4 – proportionally slimmer wing, with ‘pointed hand’, compared to BBAL/CIAL.