



# NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee Unusual Record Report Form

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<b>Species Name:</b> <b>Grey-headed Albatross</b>	<b>Scientific Name:</b> <b><i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i></b>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	10 July 2010; 14:51 h.
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	Approx. 1 min
First and last date of occurrence:	10 July 2010
Distance to bird:	Approx. 200 m

<b>Site Location:</b> Over the continental shelf approximately 5 NM off the Sydney heads, NSW.
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<b>Habitat:</b> Neritic zone approximately 5 NM off the Sydney heads, NSW.
<b>Sighting conditions:</b> Brief but sufficient views. Overcast. See attached pictures.
<b>Optical aids used:</b> Leica 12x50 BA (NKH); Canon 30D, Canon 400 mm, f5.6 (RWS)

<b>Were other observers present? Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification?</b> Robert Hynson, Roger McGovern, Hal Epstein and other participants of the pelagic (27 participants total). Nobody disagreed with the ID.
<b>To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site?</b> Rarely ( <i>cf.</i> map, Figure 5). There are only few well-documented records. While on one side most claims of juvenile/immature Grey-headed Albatross (GHAL) are now considered likely to have been instead juvenile/immature Black-browed <i>Th. melanophris</i> (BBAL) or Campbell Albatross <i>Th. impavida</i> (CAAL), on the other hand white-headed immature GHAL may be underreported due to misidentification as BBAL or CAAL (SMITH & WHYLIE 2009).
<b>Did you use a field guide?</b> The bird was identified in the field without using a field guide. References used subsequently to prepare this report are listed below. In addition, a large number of photographs of unequivocal Grey-headed Albatrosses were studied. ENTICOTT, J. & D. TIPLING (1997): Seabirds of the World. London. • ERTEL R. & B. ROSE (1997): [First African record of Buller's Albatross <i>Diomedea bulleri</i> .] (German with English summary) <i>Limicola</i> 11: 306-309. • FITTER, J. & D. MERTON (2011): Birds of New Zealand. • HARRISON, P. (1983): Seabirds, an Identification Guide. Beckenham. • HARRISON, P. (1987): Seabirds of the World. A Photographic Guide. London. • HEATHER, B. & H. ROBERTSON (2005, 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed.): The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand. • HOWELL, S.N.G. (2012): Petrels, Albatrosses, and Storm-Petrels of North America: A Photographic Guide. Princeton. • 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. • MURPHY, R.C. (1936): Oceanic birds of South America. • ONLEY, D. & P. SCOFIELD (2007): Albatrosses, Petrels & Shearwaters of the World. Princeton. • PRINCE, P.A. & S.P. RODWELL (1994): Aging Immature Black-browed and Grey-headed Albatrosses - Using Moult, Bill and Plumage Characteristics. <i>Emu</i> 94: 246-254. • DE ROY, T., M. JONES & J. FITTER (2009): Albatross, Their World, their Ways. CSIRO. • SHIRIHAI, H. (2007, 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed.): A Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife. London. • SIMPSON, K. & N. DAY (2004, 7 <sup>th</sup> ed.): Birds of Australia. Princeton. • SMITH, L. & B. WHYLIE (2009): Grey-headed Albatrosses in NSW. <i>The Albatross</i> 43: 3. • TICKELL, W.L.N. (2000): Albatrosses. Pica Press. Sussex. U.K.
<b>On-line references:</b> Engblom, G. (2010): Discussion of a 'Mystery albatross on Lima Pelagic' 6 <sup>th</sup> May 2010 (with comments from Chris Robertson, Alvaro Jaramillo & Brian Patteson). <a href="http://kolibriexpeditions.com/birdingperu/blog/mystery-albatross-on-lima-pelagic/">http://kolibriexpeditions.com/birdingperu/blog/mystery-albatross-on-lima-pelagic/</a> Haass, N.K. (2012a): Discussion of a juvenile Grey-headed Albatross off Wollongong, 22 <sup>nd</sup> September 2012 (with comments from Tobias Hayashi & Mick Roderick).

<http://www.sossa-international.org/forum/showthread.php?156-juvenile-Grey-headed-Albatross>

Haass, N.K. (2012b): Discussion of a grey-headed Black-browed Albatross off Sydney, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<http://www.sossa-international.org/forum/showthread.php?148-grey-headed-Black-browed-Albatross>

Pym, T. (undated): Identifying Grey-headed and Pacific (Buller's) Albatrosses on the Water

<http://www.seabirding.co.uk/ImmatureAlbatrossesPage2.html>

Smith, L. (2011): Discussion of white-headed Grey-headed Albatross in NSW (with comments from NKH & Tobias Hayashi).

[http://www.sossa-international.org/forum/showthread.php?38-The-White-Headed-Grey-Headed-Albatross-\(juvenile-Grey-headed-Albatrosses\)](http://www.sossa-international.org/forum/showthread.php?38-The-White-Headed-Grey-Headed-Albatross-(juvenile-Grey-headed-Albatrosses))

Wildscreen Arkive (undated): This photo by Bradley W Stahl shows an immature GHAL (not BBAL):

<http://www.arkive.org/black-browed-albatross/thalassarche-melanophrys/image-G15608.html>

Wilson, A./Oceanwanderers: <http://www.oceanwanderers.com/Gryh.Alb.html>

**How confident are you of your identification?** 100%

**Other details:** Surface water temperatures during the day were very steady ranging from 16.8 °C at Sydney Heads to 17.1 °C at the shelf break. On the return trip, about five miles off the heads, an albatross with a dark head and dark underwings was picked up and called a 'possible Grey-headed Albatross', with subsequent analysis of the photographs showing that it was indeed a young immature Grey-headed Albatross. We spent some time detouring to try and find the bird again but to no avail.

### Physical Description

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

(2) **Age, sex:** stage 1 (juvenile or younger immature)

(3) **Size and shape:** Small to mid-sized mollymawk. Slender-winged appearance (Figure 1) and 'stouter' jizz than BBAL/CAAL (16 BBAL and 3 CAAL were seen during the trip and hence allowed for some comparison), i.e. shorter- and thicker-necked ('bull-necked'; Figures 2-3).

(4) **Plumage colour and pattern:**

**Head and neck:** dark grey with a marginally paler forehead and contrastingly whitish chin and cheek. The distribution of whitish areas matches the described areas of feathers with narrower grey tips, which consequently turn white due to wear more quickly (MARCHANT & HIGGINS 1990). Obviously, this field mark alone is not diagnostic as young BBAL and CAAL are commonly grey-headed and are frequently misidentified as GHAL (e.g. HAASS 2012b, online discussion).

**Eye-patch:** Prominent before the eye, no sign of a drawn out 'eye-brow' behind the eye. In other words, the dark around the eye appeared more like a shadow and its weight was in front of the eye and – at this distance – was somewhat reminiscent of the 'upside-down triangle' of an Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *Th. chlororhynchos*. This caused a facial expression dissimilar to that of a BBAL (however, further research on this is certainly needed on the eyebrow shape of CAAL at this age).

**Eye-crescent:** White crescent bordering the rear and bottom of the eye (duller than in adult GHAL).

**Upperparts:** No contrast between hood and grey mantle; blackish back and upperwings; white rump and uppertail coverts; greyish tail.

**Underparts:** Sharp demarcation from dark hood to the strongly contrasting white chest and underparts (all the way from the chest down to the undertail coverts).

**Underwings:** Appeared black with paler greater coverts creating an inconspicuous and narrow pale underwing panel. The lack of white indicates the young age. Interestingly, HARRISON (1983) reports the underwings of juvenile GHAL to be the darkest of all mollymawks. He does not repeat this statement in HARRISON (1987). *Contra* HARRISON (1983) to our own experience, juvenile BBAL and CAAL show entirely dark charcoal underwings and therefore we prefer not to use this feature as a diagnostic field mark.

**Moult:** No evidence for primary moult. P10 appeared very long in comparison to p9 and p8, which could indicate that p10 was fully grown while the inner primaries were still growing in.

(5) **Colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet:**

**Bill colour:** Appeared solid black (under given light and distance conditions). Since this is the 'text book' bill colour of a young GHAL, no further discussion is needed here. However, differential bill colour in young GHAL will be discussed in more detail in our submission of a stage 1 GHAL off Wollongong, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2012.

**Bill shape:** deep base, steep slope of the proximal third of the bill and slender distal two thirds of the bill with approximately parallel upper edge of culmicorn and lower edge of ramicorn. This shape, together with the thicker maxillary unguis caused a 'ski slope' shape or a pinched effect, said to be typical of GHAL.

**Iris:** dark

(6) **Calls:** None heard.

(7) **Behaviour, movements, flight pattern, feeding, interactions with other birds, comparisons with other species:** Nothing to support specific identification.

**Further discussion and analysis of published photographs:**

HARRISON (1987) shows two photographs of 'classic' individuals: one immature and one adult. Eye patch shape, white eye crescent, bill shape and bill colour match the bird reported here, in contrast to the photograph of an immature BBAL on the same page. Also note the difference in overall jizz between the two species. Note: The immature GHAL's bill appears entirely black, as discussed in the accompanying text and also already in HARRISON (1983). This matches the bird reported here but not *all* stage 1 GHAL. The bird reported here shows a broader necklace, indicating younger age.

ENTICOTT & TIPLING (1997) show four photographs of 'classic' GHALs: one juvenile, one immature (same photograph as in HARRISON 1987) and two adult birds. Plumage coloration of head & neck, eye patch and eye crescent of the juvenile and immature birds, respectively, match the bird reported in this submission. In contrast, the young BBALs (one of which is mislabeled as a Shy Albatross!) show eye patches typical for that species. Again, in both the juvenile and the immature GHALs the bills appear entirely black, as discussed in the accompanying text.

SHIRIHAI (2007) shows two photographs of adult and one photograph each of a juvenile, young imm, older imm and 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> year GHAL. Again overall jizz, eye patch shape and the white eye crescent match the bird reported here. While the figure legend to the juvenile GHAL as well as the 'separation from other species' section emphasize a uniform dark bill, the description section states 'dark greyish brown-black with prominent blacker tip'.

FITTER & MERTON (2011) show two photographs of an adult, one of a sub-adult and one of a juvenile.

HOWELL (2012) shows one photograph of an immature GHAL, which stands out of a series of photographs of BBAL and is reminiscent of the bird reported here with regards to overall jizz, eye patch shape and the white eye crescent. Again, the bill appears entirely dark grey/blackish, as discussed in the accompanying text.

DEL HOYO *et al.* (1992), TICKELL (2000) and DE ROY *et al.* (2009) show only photographs of adult and downy chick GHAL.



Figure 1: Grey-headed Albatross off Sydney, NSW, 10 July 2010. Photograph: Raja Stephenson.



Figure 2: Grey-headed Albatross off Sydney, NSW, 10 July 2010. Photograph: Raja Stephenson.



Figure 3: Grey-headed Albatross off Sydney, NSW, 10 July 2010. Photograph: Raja Stephenson.

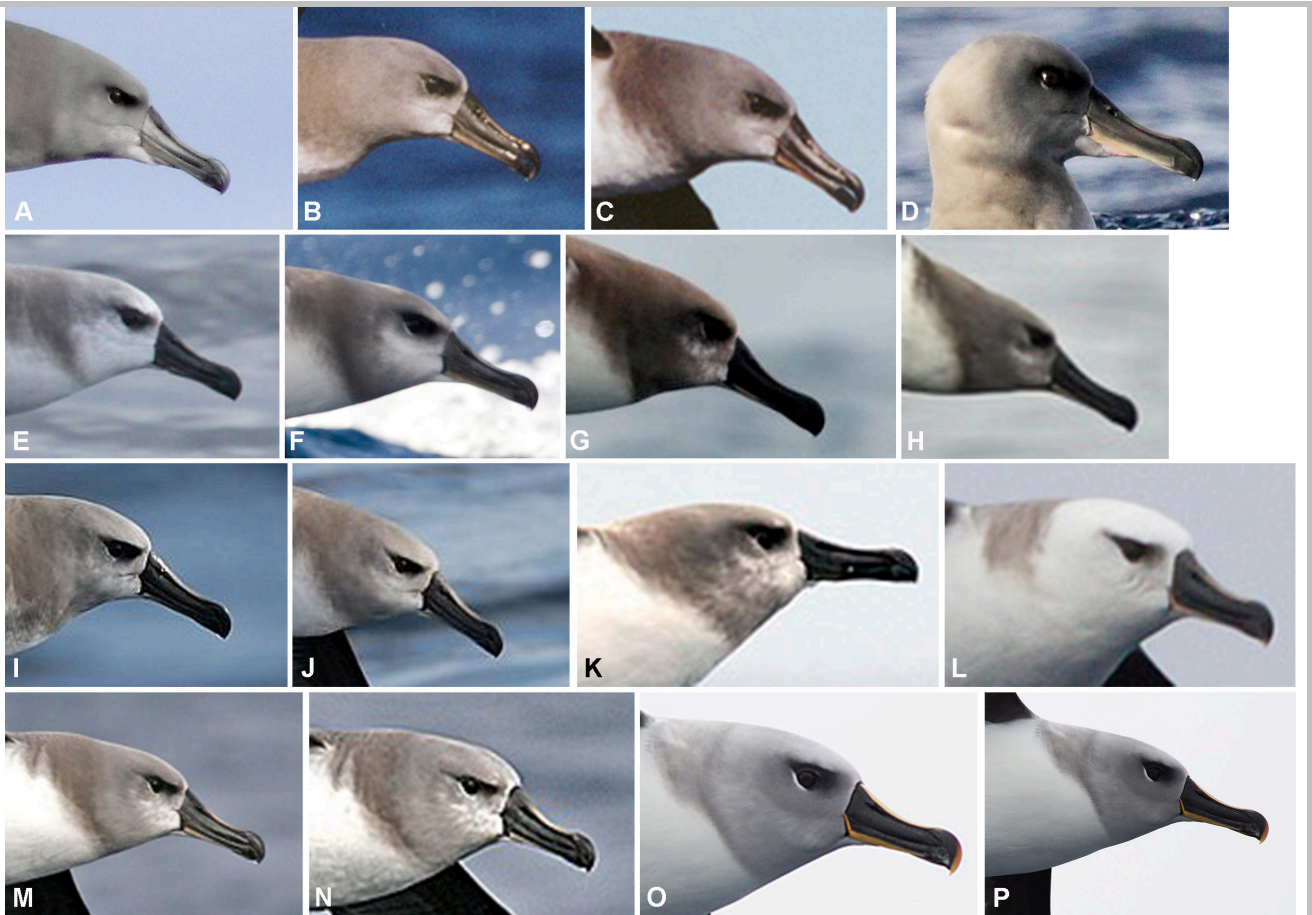


Figure 4: Grey-headed Albatross portraits. Compare shape of eye patch, cheek patch and bill to the bird reported here (Figures 1-3). Photographs: (A) Colin Rogers, (B) Murray Lord, (C) Murray Lord, (D) Colin Rogers, (E) James Lowe, (F) Geoff Jones, (G) Hal Epstein, (H) Alvaro Jaramillo, (I) John Graham, (J) John Graham, (K) Brian Patteson, (L) Geoff Walker, (M) Pete Morris, (N) Pete Morris, (O) Geoff Walker, (P) Geoff Walker

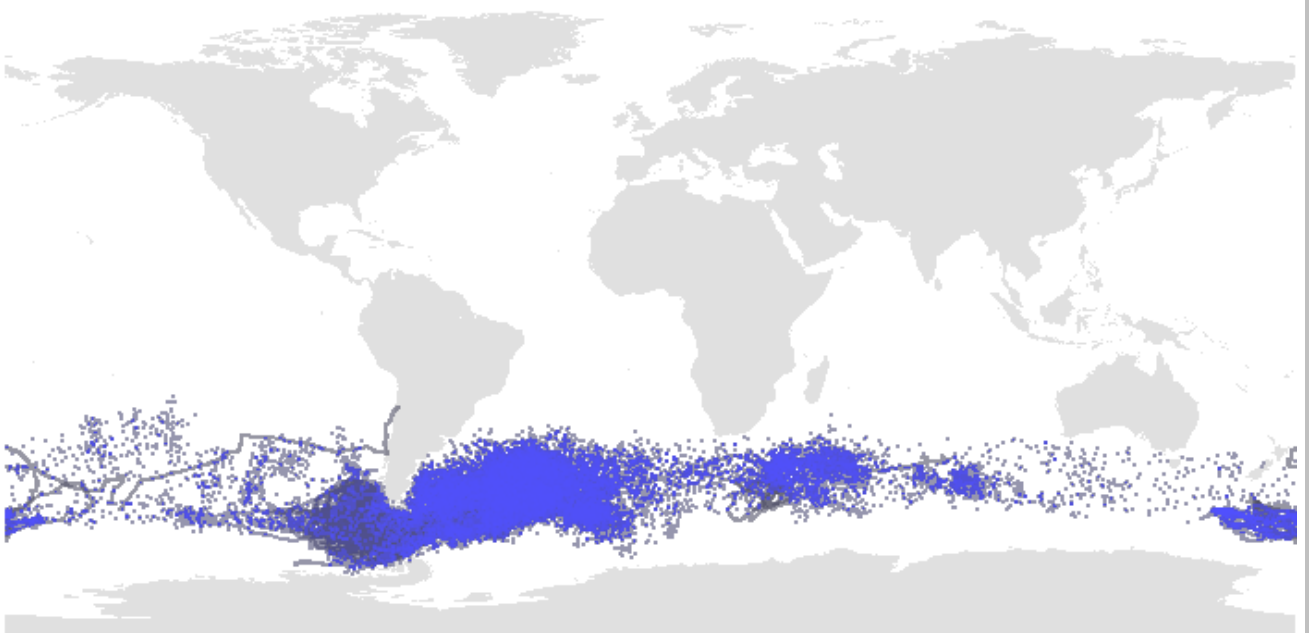


Figure 5: Grey-headed Albatross tracks. Source: BirdLife International, Seabird Tracking Database (<http://www.seabirdtracking.org/dataset.php>)

**Other species seen:** Gibson's Albatross *Diomedea (antipodensis) gibsoni* 7; Wandering Albatross *D. exulans* 1; Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophrys* 16; Campbell Albatross *T. impavida* 3; Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross *T. carteri* 15; Shy Albatross *T. cauta* 8. For non-albatross species see detailed trip report: <http://www.sossa-international.org/forum/content.php?579>

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

There are only two similar species: BBAL and CAAL. While none of the above-discussed field marks alone would suffice to rule out these two species, the combination of all field marks clearly does rule out BBAL and CAAL. All other mollymawk species *Thalassarche* were easily ruled out by their very different underwing pattern.

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

during the observation or;  shortly after the observation or;  from memory;  with the aid of the photographs;  
 with the aid of measurements

**Please indicate supportive evidence available.**

Was the bird:  photographed,  taped or  video taped? If yes to any of these, by whom? Raja Stephenson, for more photographs see here: <http://www.adarman.com/Pelagics/New-South-Wales-Pelagics/2010-July-10-Sydney>

**What experience have you had with the species in question?**

**NKH** has extensive experience with seabirds having been pelagic trip leader on many trips off New South Wales, Tasmania, California, New Jersey/New York and Delaware/Maryland and having participated on many pelagic trips off North Carolina, Galapagos, Queensland, South Australia and New Zealand. NKH has been an active member in the Rare Birds Committees of New Jersey (USA), Hessen and Schleswig-Holstein (both Germany). Following IOC 4.2, NKH has seen 16 albatross species around the world and 14 in Australia. Although NKH had never seen a (definite) GHAL before, he is very familiar with BBAL and CAAL from many observations off Sydney and Wollongong (NSW), Southport (QLD), Port McDonnell (SA), Eaglehawk Neck (TAS), and/or Kaikoura (NZ).

**RWS** has seen 14 albatross species. Although RWS had never seen a GHAL before, she is very familiar with BBAL and CAAL from many observations off Sydney and Wollongong (NSW), Southport (QLD), Port McDonnell (SA), Eaglehawk Neck (TAS), and/or Kaikoura (NZ).

Signature:



Date: 5<sup>th</sup> July 2014