



# NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee Unusual Record Report Form

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<b>Species Name:</b> <b>Little Shearwater</b>	<b>Scientific Name:</b> <i>Puffinus assimilis</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	14 July 2012, 1:34pm
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	1 minute
First and last date of occurrence:	14 July 2012
Distance to bird:	50 metres

<b>Site Location</b> Half way in from the continental shelf break, off Sydney, NSW (regular Sydney pelagic trip run by Hal Epstein)
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<b>Habitat</b> (describe habitat in which the bird was seen, together with any neighbouring habitats): Pelagic. Half way in from the continental shelf break.
<b>Sighting conditions</b> (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.): Clear visibility, calm sunny weather. Air temperature 18°C, surface water temperature 15.6°C at the Sydney heads, 17.1°C at the shelf break; wind 5-8 knots WNW in the morning, increasing to 15-18 knots.
<b>Optical aids used:</b> Leica 12x50 BA and others; Photos: Canon 7D, Canon 400mm, 5.6

<b>To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site?</b> Rarely.
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<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 were: AUSTIN J., V. BRETAGNOLLE & E. PASQUET (2004): A global molecular phylogeny of the small <i>Puffinus</i> shearwaters and implications for systematics of the little-Audubon's shearwater complex. <i>Auk</i> 121: 847-864. • CROCHET, P.-A. (2006): Little Shearwater: underwing pattern. <i>Birding World</i> 19:19-20. • 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. • HOLMSTRÖM, N. (2005): A birding trip to the Salvage Islands. <i>Birding World</i> 18:325-337. • DEL HOYO, J., A. ELLIOTT & J. SARGATAL (eds) (1992): Handbook of the Birds of the World. Vol. 1. - Barcelona. • HUTTON, I. (1991): Birds of Lord Howe Island – Past and Present. – Coffs Harbour. • MARCHANT, S. & P.J. HIGGINS (eds) (1990). Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 1: Ratites to Ducks. Melbourne. • PIZZEY, G. & F. KNIGHT (2007, 8 <sup>th</sup> ed.): The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia. Sydney. • ONLEY, D. & P. SCOFIELD (2007): Albatrosses, Petrels & Shearwaters of the World. Princeton. • 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.
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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)? Other observers: There were 40 participants on the pelagic trip. However, only a few of the participants saw the bird, including experienced observers: RH spotted the bird first, NH, RS (photos) and Roger McGovern immediately got on the bird and confirmed the identification. Nobody disagreed with the identification.
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<b>How confident are you of your identification?</b> , e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not? 100%
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**Other details:** The bird approached from South, past the boat about 50 m off the stern. It did not stop or deviate to follow the boat. Its active flight with rapid wing beats was interrupted by high arches.  
Other birds seen: 120 Fluttering Shearwaters *P. gavia*; surprisingly no Hutton's Shearwaters *P. huttoni* (nor any other shearwaters); 90 Fairy Prions *Pachyptila turtur*; 10 Providence Petrels *Pterodroma solandri*; 1 White-faced Storm-Petrel *Pelagodroma marina*. Only small numbers of the 'classic' winter pelagic birds. Five cetacean species.

### Physical Description.

- (1) Number: One solitary individual was observed (it was not with the Fluttering Shearwaters observed the same day).
- (2) Age & Sex: unknown.
- (3) Size and shape: Very small, compact shearwater with short rounded wings (Fig. 1)
- (4) Plumage colour and pattern (including any details of moult): Underparts including whole face and 'saddle bags' (tabs) white (Fig. 3). Upperparts including crown contrastingly black. Black cap not reaching eye, resulting in conspicuously white-faced appearance (Figs. 1 & 2). Most importantly, underwing conspicuously white with narrow black trailing and leading edges and tip – appearing like a totally gleaming white underwing with a narrow black frame.
- (5) Colour of bill and eyes: dark; colour of legs/feet: not seen
- (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? Faster flight than other shearwaters. Its active flight with rapid wing beats was interrupted by high arches. No attempts to follow the boat. No interactions with other birds.



Fig. 1: Little Shearwater off Sydney, 14 July 2012 (Photograph: Raja Stephenson; captions: Nikolas Haass).



Fig. 2: Little Shearwater off Sydney, 14 July 2012 (Photograph: Raja Stephenson; captions: Nikolas Haass).

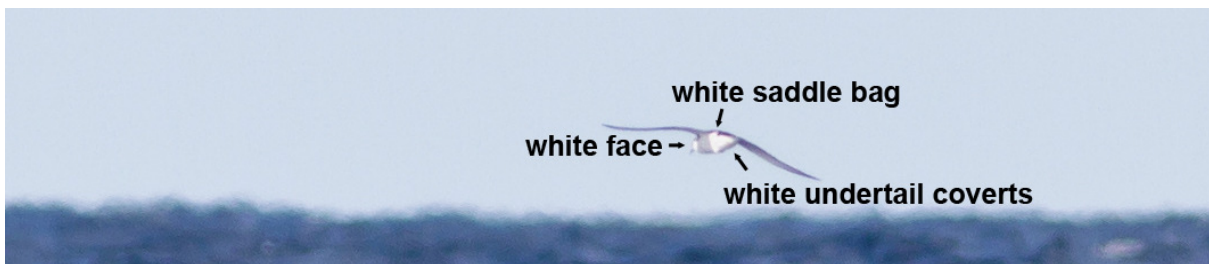


Fig. 3: Little Shearwater off Sydney, 14 July 2012 (Photograph: Raja Stephenson; captions: Nikolas Haass).

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

In NSW the only likely confusion species are Fluttering and Hutton's Shearwaters, which are part of the Manx Shearwater complex (see below: Manx to Hutton's). However, small size, short round wings and stark contrast between black upperparts/upperwings and white underparts/underwings make this bird clearly part of the Little/Audubon Shearwater complex (see below: Audubon's to Boyd's). Within this complex, the combination of facial and underwing pattern and one-toned black upperwing occur only in Little Shearwater. Finally, diving-petrels *Pelecanoides* could cause confusion, but their flight-style is different again: more reminiscent of a small alcid. Also jizz and plumage are different.

<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	Manx Shearwater	Larger, longer pointed wings, dark face, more extensive dark on underwings
<i>Puffinus yelkouan</i>	Yelkouan Shearwater	Larger, longer pointed wings, dark face, more extensive dark on underwings, dark undertail
<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>	Balearic Shearwater	Larger, longer pointed wings, dark face, lack of contrast between upper and underparts, much more extensive dark on underwings, dark 'arm pits', dark undertail
<i>Puffinus opisthomelas</i>	Black-vented Shearwater	Larger, longer pointed wings, dark face, lack of contrast between upper and underparts, much more extensive dark on underwings, dark 'arm pits', dark undertail
<i>Puffinus auricularis</i>	Townsend's Shearwater	Larger, longer pointed wings, dark face, more extensive dark on underwings, dark undertail
<i>Puffinus newelli</i>	Newell's Shearwater	Larger, longer pointed wings, dark face, more extensive dark on underwings, dark undertail
<i>Puffinus gavia</i>	Fluttering Shearwater	Larger, longer pointed wings, dark face, more extensive dark on underwings
<i>Puffinus huttoni</i>	Hutton's Shearwater	Larger, longer pointed wings, dark hood, much more extensive dark on underwings, dark 'arm pits'
<i>Puffinus lherminieri</i>	Audubon's Shearwater	Slightly longer and more pointed wings, dark face, more extensive dark on underwings, dark undertail
<i>Puffinus persicus</i>	Persian Shearwater (Arabian Shearwater)	Slightly longer and more pointed wings, dark face, lack of contrast between upper and underparts, much more extensive dark on underwings, dark 'arm pits', dark undertail
<i>Puffinus bailloni</i>	Tropical Shearwater	Slightly longer and more pointed wings, dark face, much more extensive dark on underwings, dark undertail
<i>Puffinus subalaris</i>	Galapagos Shearwater	Slightly longer and more pointed wings, dark face, lack of contrast between upper and underparts, much more extensive dark on underwings, dark 'arm pits', dark undertail
<i>Puffinus bannermani</i>	Bannerman's Shearwater	Very similar, but still more extensive dark on underwings, dark inner underwing coverts; dark-tipped undertail
<i>Puffinus heinrothi</i>	Heinroth's Shearwater	All dark
<i>Puffinus (assimilis) elegans</i>	Subantarctic Little Shearwater	Very similar, but dark cap extends below eye
<i>Puffinus baroli</i>	Barolo Shearwater (Macaronesian Shearwater)	Almost identical, but still more extensive dark on underwings and two-toned upperwing with pale panel formed by bases of the secondaries
<i>Puffinus boydi</i>	Boyd's Shearwater	Slightly longer and more pointed wings, dark face, more extensive dark on underwings, dark undertail

**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

**Please indicate supportive evidence available.**

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

All photographs by Raja Stephenson: <http://www.adarman.com/Pelagics/Sydney-NSW/2012-July-14-Sydney-Pelagic>

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

NH has extensive experience with seabirds having been pelagic trip leader on many trips off New South Wales, California, New Jersey/New York and Delaware/Maryland and having participated on many pelagic trips off North Carolina, Galapagos, Queensland, Tasmania and New Zealand. NH has been an active member of the Rare Birds Committees of Hessen (Germany), Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), and New Jersey (USA). NH has seen 18 shearwater species around the world, 10 in Australia and 10 in NSW.

RH & RS have extensive experience with shearwaters having participated in many pelagic trips off California, Washington, New Jersey/New York, Delaware/Maryland, North Carolina, New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and New Zealand.

However, Little Shearwater was new for NH, RH & RS.

**Signature:**



**Date: 14 July 2012**

Please forward all material to: The Secretary, NSW Rarities Committee, 1/67, Cremorne Road, Cremorne, NSW 2090