

Memorandum to: The Director of BirdLife Australia
From: BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee (BARC)
Date: 14 June 2012

Voting Members: Danny Rogers Andrew Silcocks
 Jeff Davies Chris Brandis
 Tony Palliser Mike Carter
 David Bishop Rohan Clarke

Cc.

Submission No 684: New Zealand Storm-Petrel *Fregatta* (formerly *Oceanites*) *maoriana* at sea off Ulladulla, NSW 29 March 2010 (Unpublished). Submitted by: Daniel Mantle, Nikolas Haass & Raja Stephenson.

Verdict: Accepted

This case involves the sighting of a New Zealand Storm Petrel *Fregatta* (formerly *Oceanites*) *maoriana* seen and photographed at sea approximately 40 km east of Ulladulla, NSW on the 29th March 2010 by at least nine observers aboard the MV Banks. The bird was seen in association with Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* (up to 70 birds) that were feeding over the oil slick used to attract the birds.

The description supported by photographs describes the bird as small-medium, long-winged storm-petrel with a dark head & upper breast with a white belly and obvious dark streaking was present on the flanks, belly and lower breast. The legs were described as very long and black with the feet protruding well beyond the tail tip. Structurally the bird appeared rather long-bodied and long winged and (when viewing the photographs) relatively small-headed. The submission provides a thorough analysis of the biometrics discerned from photographs comparing this individual with Black-bellied Storm Petrel and White-bellied Storm-Petrel.

The observers found the identification of this bird particularly difficult as it differed marginally from most of the New Zealand Storm-Petrels observed and photographed in the Hauraki Gulf having darker underwing primary coverts and more rounded & apparently broader wings. However, the observer concluded that majority of features point to this bird being a New Zealand Storm-Petrel as no other population of storm petrel has such prominent streaking.

Members also found this case difficult. The first round resulted in only 6 members voting in favour of acceptance. Both dissenting members felt that was a chance that this bird could in fact be an as yet undescribed species, particularly given the number of confirmed reports from seas around New Caledonia. Those that voted in favour agreed with the authors that the only real possibility of all the worlds' storm-petrels was New Zealand Storm-Petrel as claimed suggesting that anomalies noted on this individual may be related to age & moult. Very little is known about this species outside the Hauraki Gulf.

During the second round one of the dissenting members changed their view to one of acceptance agreeing that this bird is likely a variant of the New Zealand Storm-Petrel, therefore providing the minimum number of votes for acceptance. The remaining dissenting member preferred to err on the side of caution feeling that the number of observations of storm-petrels off New Caledonia (2008, 2010 and 2011) that are apparently similar to the Ulladulla bird and are being claimed by those observers as an undescribed taxon (Heritage Expeditions 2012) was enough reason to remain doubtful.

This is the 4th record to be accepted for Australia. Interestingly, the first confirmed record was only a day earlier on the 28th March 2010 off Port Stephens NSW (BARC Case No 636), recent taxonomic advances changed the genus from *Pealeornis* to *Oceanites* (Gill & Donsker 2012) and the current IOC Checklist Version 3.1 (accessed 14 June 2012) places it in *Fregetta*. Even though this record was accepted there is a real chance that this bird could be an as yet unknown population or even a new taxon so should more information come to light in the future in this regard it may be necessary to re-open the case.

Suggested Bibliography:

- BARC Case No. 636. New Zealand Storm Petrel, Port Stephens, NSW. 28th March 2010.
- BARC Case No. 691. New Zealand Storm Petrel, Wollongong NSW. 28th April 2010.
- BARC Case No. 699. New Zealand Storm Petrel, Southport 18th June 2011.
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- Gaskin, C.P.; Baird, K.A. (2005). "Observations of black and white storm petrels in the Hauraki Gulf, November 2003 to June 2005; were they of New Zealand storm petrels?". *Notornis* **52**: 181–194.
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Tony Palliser

Chair: Birdlife Australia Rarities Committee.