



NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission for the sighting of any species on the NSW ORAC Review List for NSW. (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, and forward by email to roglou@bigpond.net.au . Submissions to NSW ORAC should be sent electronically wherever possible.

Full Name: Roger McGovern	Office Use
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Species Name: Soft-plumaged Petrel (pale morph)	Scientific Name: <i>Pterodroma mollis</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	May 11, 2013 9.45am
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	20 seconds
First and last date of occurrence:	May 11, 2013
Distance to bird:	400 metres minimum

Site Location (e.g 3km SE of Lavers Hill, Victoria) Continental shelf break off Sydney approximately 4NM west of Brown's Mountain

Habitat (describe habitat in which the bird was seen, together with any neighbouring habitats): Pelagic. Continental shelf break
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Sighting conditions (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.): Overcast conditions with flat light and gusty winds.
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Optical aids used: 8x42 Leica Ultravids

To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site? Rarely. The previous known sighting off Sydney was on October 26, 2012 on a Sunbird charter (still awaiting a submission from David Fisher as tour leader). The last confirmed record for NSW was on October 9, 2004 and was submitted by Roger McGovern (NSW ORAC Case389)

Did you use a field guide? (or any other references to help with identification). The bird was identified immediately without use of a field guide. References used later to rule out confusion species were: ONLEY D. and SCOFIELD P.: Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World MARCHANT S. and HIGGINS P.J.: Handbook of Australian New Zealand & Antarctic Birds (Volume 1) SHIRIHAI H.: A Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife PIZZEY G. and KNIGHT F.: The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia
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Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who? (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)?

David James was the only observer of a small contingent on the boat with knowledge of this species and he agreed with the identification. Steve Anyon-Smith is familiar with the species but does not use binoculars and so could not see it well enough at the distance seen.

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?

I can find reference to only six confirmed records and two, as yet, unconfirmed records (including this one) in NSW, namely:

A bird at Byron Bay on July 10, 1985 (ref HANZAB)

NSW ORAC Case 83 off Wollongong on October 23, 1988

NSW ORAC Case 250 off Wollongong on October 27, 1996

NSW ORAC Case 297 off Wollongong on July 10, 1999

NSW ORAC Case 371 off Bateman's Bay on October 6, 2003

NSW ORAC Case 389 off Sydney on October 9, 2004

I was present when the bird seen on the Sunbird charter on October 26, 2012 was recorded – it was closely seen and I have no doubt as to its identification.

Physical Description of Bird

We had arrived at our first berley drift which was some 4NM west of Brown's Mountain due to the sudden onset of stronger wind, some storm cells and a very uncomfortable chop. I was at the berley table at the stern of the boat and my eye picked up a very aerobatic pterodroma at a range of about 400 metres at the 7 o'clock position and flying diagonally away from the boat to the left. I alerted everyone to the bird and noted that its dorsal coloration was dark but it seemed smaller than the Providence Petrels that we were expecting to appear.

As soon as I got onto the bird with my binoculars, it banked showing a pale grey cap, a distinct breast band, all dark underwings, and all white underparts including a white undertail. I knew immediately that it was a Soft-plumaged Petrel and it was seen by all the others on board before going out of sight in about 20 seconds or so. When I saw a dorsal view of the bird, I could not see any noticeable dark 'M' upper covert bars but the light was quite flat and this did not surprise me. Although there were no other birds in binocular view with which to compare size, it was clearly an intermediate sized pterodroma looking distinctly smaller than a Providence Petrel and larger and longer winged than any of the cookilaria petrels. A photograph was obtained by Ben Jobson and is shown below which also shows the darker leading edge of the underwing. The bird was too distant to determine eye colour, leg colour, bill colour or bill shape.



Photograph by Ben Jobson has been cropped but not otherwise altered

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

Cookilaria petrels are all noticeably smaller, none have all dark underwings and all appear shorter winged than this bird. **White-headed Petrel** can be eliminated by its larger size, much bulkier build, and very obvious white head even at great distance.

Magenta Petrel is distinctly larger and bulkier, has an all dark head and is longer tailed.

Fea's Petrel and **Zino's Petrel** do not have a breast band and have a much darker eye patch.

Was the description written from memory, notes and/or sketches made in the field or after consulting field guides or other references?

The description was written from memory reinforced by the fact that several observers on board questioned me at the time to go through all the field marks of this bird.

Were photographs taken? Please include where possible.

See above

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

I had previously seen this species on three occasions off NSW and on multiple occasions off Hilary's Boat Harbour pelagics in Perth WA where it is a numerous bird in the winter with often 10 or 15 individuals recorded on one trip.

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Date: May 17, 2013

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Roger McGovern
Secretary NSW ORAC

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