

# *THE PETREL*

# 2014



Annual Report for Southport  
The Brisbane Seabird Study Group  
SOSSA, Northern Sector

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**Cover Photo: - Tahiti Petrel (*Pseudobulweria rostrata*) – Paul Walbridge.  
This page: - 37 ft Steber monohull M.V. Grinner.**

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## Foreword

Pelagic trips were first conducted in the region in the late 1970s, mainly out of Brisbane. Initial trips were conducted by a number of people, notably Tony Palliser, David Stewart, Tom Tarrant and Chris Corben etc. circa 1990, Chris Corben handed the reins over to me and I continue to run these trips to this day, albeit on a more organized and regular basis. From before 1990 until April 1995 the trips were run out of Manly Boat Harbour in Brisbane using the wooden hulled Murphy Star. This meant a long trip, usually under cover of darkness across Moreton Bay before we got out into open ocean. Also, the trips were at best sporadic and four trips a year would be a good year.

Early in 1995, the late Tony Ashby (a founding member of SOSSA) not long from Sydney and newly arrived on the Gold Coast negotiated with Sea World to trial their Research & Rescue Vessel. The trial was successful and from April 1995 until late 2000 we enjoyed a fruitful relationship with Sea World and trips became as a rule, monthly when weather permitted. The trips were now operating out of Southport and via the Southport Seaway we were entering open ocean almost immediately! This partnership ended towards the end of 2000 and I took a year off running pelagics.

Early in January 2002, Steve McCourt, who had worked with us when he was a Sea World employee, contacted me. He'd recently acquired a boat and was keen to start trialling it as an ongoing concern as a pelagic trip and fishing charter. We trialled the vessel which was fast but ran with a pair of large outboard motors and when the number crunching was complete the eventual pricing for that time proved to be too high. I might mention here that we had been rather spoilt by Sea World with charter costs, as the trips were subsidised somewhat, therefore the price now being asked was too big a jump.

Whilst working with Sea World, on the odd occasion when the vessel was unavailable we would use one of the local 'Wahoo Charters' vessels based at Mariner's Cove. I approached the owner of this fleet of four charter boats and negotiated a deal which enabled us to use one of the vessels, once a month at a reasonable cost per head. With four boats ranging from 42 feet to 65 feet there was always a vessel available. Due to circumstances however, by 2005 the operation was becoming less viable and we needed to find yet another operator & vessel.

It must be said here, that finding an operator and vessel prepared to take a bunch of birders out to sea further than they would normally go and for considerably less money than their usual commercial rates, is extremely difficult. Even in a highly competitive arena like the Gold Coast. There was however, yet another option open to us. During our tenure with both Sea World and Wahoo we had been supplied (with written permission from DPI) with free shark liver for berley, by the local beach protection contractor for the Gold Coast beaches, Craig Newton. Craig was keen to start something different and he and various crew over time have become enthusiastic supporters of what we do.

The 2014 edition has not only the usual coverage of the monthly Southport trips but also not one but two accounts of pelagic coverage out to the Queensland and Britannia Sea Mounts, in April and December. What fascinating trips they were, with their contrasting demographic and the more months we cover of this region, approximately 100 nautical miles off the Queensland/New South Wales border coastline, the more we will learn of its importance to seabirds of the western Pacific region. Finally, there is an informative, well illustrated article by Nikolas Haass on the often difficult separation of certain juvenile Black-browed Albatross from juvenile Grey-headed Albatross, which after reading, I'm sure you will agree goes deeper and beyond the average Field Guide.

Paul Walbridge, Editor.

## Introduction

2014 was another great year with fifty two species sighted, with one new for Southport pelagics, namely Collared Petrel and not your run of the mill Collared Petrel but *Pterodroma brevipes magnificens*. Once again as with the previous year 15 trips were conducted but two of these were out to the Queensland and Britannia Sea mounts in April and December. This amounted to a total of 232 hours 42 minutes out on the water.

The January 18<sup>th</sup> pelagic saw a bit of a slow start to the year with just eleven species sighted. There were the usual good numbers of Tahiti Petrels but the star of the day was a Buller's Shearwater which stayed and fed in the slick for some time. A black Noddy was also present and always a welcome sighting on a pelagic. Due to severe weather conditions, February was a non event pelagic wise, we just never got out, a rare event for Southport. The March pelagic was a bit of an improvement on January with fourteen species sighted, including the first Wilson's Storm-Petrels returning north, three species of Shearwater, Wedge-tailed, Flesh-footed and Hutton's plus three species of Petrel, Tahiti, Kermadec and Great-winged. Yet again another Black Noddy was sighted.

There were two pelagics conducted in April, the first being the sea mount research trip from 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, the second such trip conducted to the Queensland and Britannia Sea Mounts. The prime aim of the trip was to locate more of the enigmatic 'Coral Sea' Storm-Petrels and we weren't to be disappointed. Both Red-tailed and White-tailed Tropicbirds were recorded, four species of storm-petrel, including Polynesian Storm-Petrel for the second year in a row, plus Wilson's, White-faced and of course the Coral Sea Storm Petrel. Wedge-tailed and Flesh-footed Shearwaters were present in good numbers plus a couple of Sooty Shearwaters and a Streaked Shearwater. Six Petrel species were recorded, with Tahiti, Kermadec, Great-winged, Providence and Gould's Petrels all recorded in good numbers and to top that off three Collared Petrels of the race '*magnificens*'. Also sighted were a couple of Arctic Jaegers, a couple of Common Noddies, several Sooty Terns and three White Terns.

The second April trip was on the 19<sup>th</sup> and once again four species of storm-petrel were sighted, with good numbers of Wilson's Storm-Petrel, unprecedented numbers of White-faced Storm-Petrel yet another Coral Sea Storm-Petrel and a stunning White-bellied Storm-Petrel. Three species of shearwater were sighted, Wedge-tailed, Flesh-footed and Hutton's but just two species of petrel, Tahiti and Providence Petrels. A single Australasian Gannet was the first returning bird for the Winter. May used to be a month that we used to denounce as quiet and generally useless but not anymore, three species of storm-petrel, Wilson's White-faced and Black-bellied Storm-Petrel were recorded in good numbers. Three Tahiti Petrels is a good count in May and Kermadec, Great-winged and Providence Petrel were also sighted, along with a Brown Booby.

June 21<sup>st</sup> saw three species of storm-petrel, Wilson's, Black-bellied Storm-Petrel in low numbers plus a lone White-faced Storm-Petrel, a species not usually seen around the area in winter. The first Northern Giant Petrel, a juvenile, was the first record for a while and a couple of Fairy Prions were a welcome addition. On a sad note though a young Black-browed Albatross found floating dead on the sea had succumbed to a helium balloon, with the coloured tape still coming out of its mouth. The July pelagic on the 26<sup>th</sup> saw just three Wilson's Storm-Petrels, low numbers of Hutton's Shearwaters and Australasian Gannets but good numbers of Providence Petrels. However the birds of the trip were two Buller's Albatross and Southports second July record of Tahiti Petrel, a combination our southern counterparts can only dream about.

There were three trips in August and the first one on the 9<sup>th</sup> was a pretty good one and as usual saw the first returning Wedge-tailed Shearwaters with twenty six sighted. Once again three species of Storm-Petrel sighted with double figures of Wilson's Storm-Petrel, only a single Black-bellied Storm-Petrel but three White-faced Storm-Petrels. Two other shearwaters were observed, both Fluttering and Hutton's but the latter was predominant. Three species of pterodroma were present, Kermadec, with seven sighted, Providence and Great-

winged Petrels. A small number of Australasian Gannets were also present, along with double figures of Common Noddy. The second trip on the 16<sup>th</sup> (which was the scheduled trip) was even better than the first, with a total of eighteen species sighted and a quality list for this neck of the woods. The southern movement of Wilson's Storm-Petrel was really starting to kick in with sixty three and White-faced Storm-Petrel was present yet again with five sighted, still only one Black-bellied Storm-Petrel though. Albatrosses were well represented with a single Gibson's, two Black-browed and an astonishing Light-mantled Sooty Albatross which settled at the rear of the vessel for an extended feed. Providence Petrel were around in triple figures and Great-winged in double figures while there were singles of Kermadec Petrel and a rarely sighted White-headed Petrel. A single Masked Booby was also a good Winter sighting. The third trip on the 31<sup>st</sup> was a much quieter affair with good numbers of Providence Petrels around and a few Hutton's Shearwaters plus just a few Wilson's Storm-Petrels and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters.

Species diversity was down slightly on the September pelagic but some quality species were sighted. Once again three species of storm-petrel were sighted and 2014 was some kind of record year for White-faced Storm-Petrel with another single recorded and this time more than one Black-bellied Storm-Petrels, with three sighted. Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were back in large numbers with upwards of five hundred present and three species of petrel were recorded with two Tahiti Petrels, two Kermadec and eighty six Providence Petrels sighted. A Red-footed Booby was a good September sighting.

Two trips were conducted in October as the conditions seemed favourable and October is generally considered to be a peak migration period for the Australian east coast. The first pelagic on the 11<sup>th</sup> was untypical for October with just nine species sighted, with good numbers of Wilson's Storm- Petrel (92) recorded but little else save for a couple of Black-bellied Storm-Petrels and Providence Petrels just getting into double figures. The second trip on the 18<sup>th</sup> was a bit more interesting with more diversity and larger numbers of birds present. Large numbers of Wilson's Storm-Petrel were moving through with sixty two recorded and five species of shearwater were sighted, with just under five hundred Short-tailed Shearwaters passing through to the south. Only one species of petrel was recorded, albeit in good numbers with eighty five Providence Petrels sighted, a surprise, albeit not such a big one was the presence of three Gibson's Albatrosses. A Brown Booby and half a dozen Australasian Gannets day rounded off the day.

Only one trip was carried out in November, that being on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, with the scheduled trip being cancelled due to inclement conditions. A very quiet trip considering the time of year, with just a couple of Wilson's Storm Petrels, three species of shearwater, Wedge-tailed, Flesh-footed and Short-tailed Shearwater and a couple of late Providence Petrels. The scheduled December trip was also cancelled due to inclement weather but there was a planned sea mount trip and this went ahead, with surprising results. Both Red-tailed and White-tailed Tropicbirds were no surprise but two species of storm-petrel was good for December with singles of Wilson's and White-bellied. Only two species of shearwater with reasonable numbers of both Wedge-tailed and Flesh-footed. A Wandering Albatross and two Gibson's Albatrosses were unexpected and seven species of petrel was pretty special, with good numbers of the expected species, such as Tahiti, Kermadec and Great-winged but also a few Black-winged Petrels and a couple of Gould's Petrels. Goods numbers of Black Petrels were sighted, which wasn't that big of a surprise unlike the three White-chinned Petrels which were. This was all topped off with a Red-footed Booby, two species of Jaeger, Pomarine and Long-tailed plus possibly the bird of the trip, a South Polar Skua. The waters surrounding southern Queensland and northern New South Wales can truly claim to be where the Southern Ocean meets the Tropics.

**Paul Walbridge, Editor.**

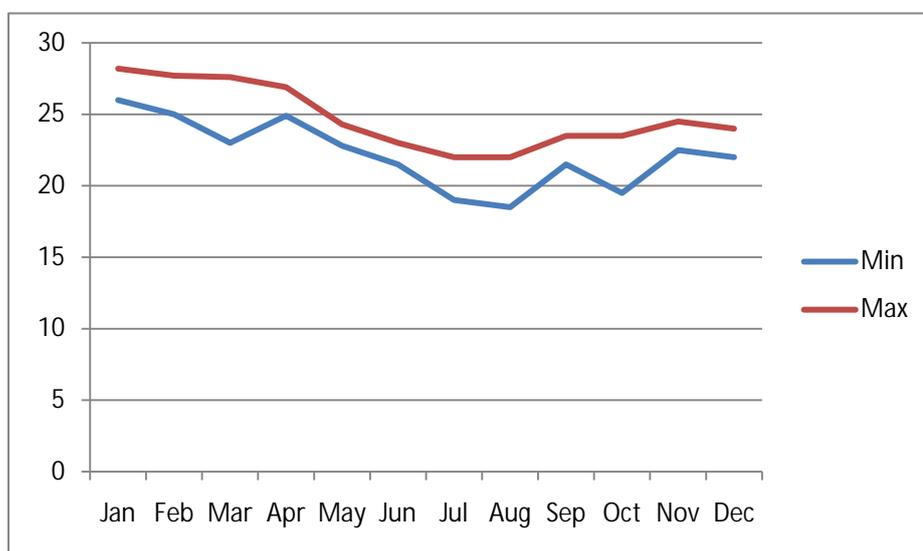
## The Region

The area around Southport is situated in the south Coral Sea, with the warm, north/ south moving East Australian Current being the major influential feature. The main offshore underwater structures in this region are a series of Sea-mounts and Guyots, ranging north to south from adjacent to Fraser Island Queensland, down to Ballina, NSW. These are in order north/south, Fraser Seamount, Brisbane Guyot, Moreton Seamount, Queensland Guyot, Britannia Guyot and Stradbroke Seamount, with distances from shore ranging from the widest, Fraser Seamount at 138 nautical miles to the closest the Queensland Guyot at 91.1 nautical miles. The highest of these are the Fraser Seamount, rising to within 359 metres of the sea surface and the Queensland Guyot which comes within 306 metres of the sea surface, it is these areas where upwelling is most likely to occur. The largest of these undersea structures is the Britannia Guyot which adjoins the southern edge of the Queensland Guyot.

Closer to shore and in the vicinity of Southport, the main offshore structures range from Mick's Mountain, ENE of Southport, moving south through Jim's Mountain, the Riviera Grounds and the Tweed Canyon's south of the Qld/NSW border adjacent to Fingal Head or just to the south. These rises are all around roughly 30 nautical miles offshore but the Tweed Canyons are considerably closer to the coast, however all these sea floor rises lie just off the Continental Shelf.

As with any part of the Australian coastline or anywhere else for that matter the Continental Shelf ends at the 100 fathom (or approx. 200 metre) mark, this is also referred to as the Shelf-break. Distance from shore varies greatly around the Australian coastline but off the Gold Coast it is roughly around 23 nm offshore at 153 51.50E ranging further out, moving further north, approaching the southern reaches of the Great Barrier Reef.

Understandably, given the region lies in the southern Coral Sea and not that far south of the world's largest collection of coral reefs, the water temperatures are warm in summer and still relatively warm in winter. During these winter months, May-August, colder water currents from the south push up, forcing the weakening warm current further out wide.

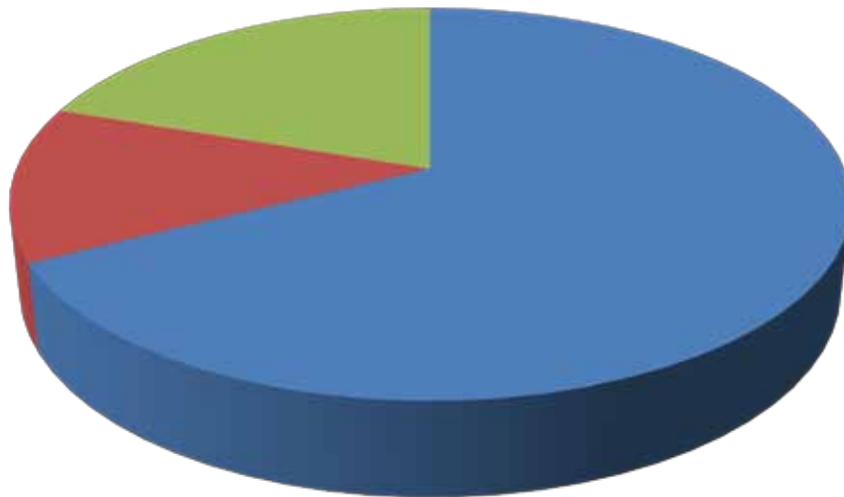


An unusual pattern for 2014, with the warm sea-surface temperatures carrying through from late 2013 into early 2014 but with unusual warm spikes in the cooler inshore water temperatures from April through to November. At the end of the year, cooler water temperatures than normally expected for the month of December, although there was an El Nino weather pattern current, meaning cooler surface water temperatures in the western Pacific compared to the central Pacific Ocean.

## Participation

A grand total of 86 patrons travelled out of Southport in 2014 on a total of 15 trips, 13 of these being on regular day trips and two being four day sea mount excursions, with an average of 13.9 pax per trip, slightly up on last year, an overall good result. Bearing in mind here that the maximum that can be carried on the regular day trips is 15 and the sea mount cruises were restricted to 13 and 12 respectively and both of these were fully complimented. As always, the vast number of patrons came from Queensland but 2014 saw nine coming from New South Wales, ten from Victoria, two from Western Australia, one from the ACT and one from South Australia. Also internationally, two from the United States, and singles from the United Kingdom, Belgium, New Zealand and Spain. Clearly, we are still not attracting the overseas visitor and I put this down, partly to unfair, biased, past and recent publications that portrayed us in a not so favourable light.

Once only trippers for 2014 amounted to 58 or about 67% , 8% up on 2013, so only 28 returned for at least a second go at 33%, well down on 2013 but to be fair we ran several extra trips that our more regular punters couldn't back up on. A further breakdown revealed that 12 patrons at 14% travelled out on at least a third of the trips and 9 patrons at just over 10% managed 50% or more of the trips, proving that the local hard core was still there. Once again, only one patron managed every trip and that was yours truly, with Rob Morris failing to keep his promise from 2013, falling short by three trips.



- **One trip only**
- **Less than 4 trips**
- **4 trips or more**

## Galerie



**Polynesian Storm-Petrel** *Nesofregetta fuliginosa* 12/4/2014. P.Walbridge.



**White-faced Storm-Petrel** *Pelagodroma marina* 17/5/2014. P.Walbridge.



**White-bellied Storm-Petrel** *Fregetta grallaria* 19/4/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Black-bellied Storm-Petrel** *Fregetta tropica* 17/5/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Wilson's Storm-Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus*, 11/10/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Coral Sea Storm-Petrel** *Fregetta* sps, 13/4/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Gibson's Albatross** *Diomedea antipodensis gibsoni*, 16/8/2014. R. Morris.



**Black-browed Albatross** *Diomedea melanophris*, 16/8/2014. R. Morris.



**Buller's Albatross** *Thalassarche bulleri*, 26/7/2014. R. Morris



**Light-mantled Sooty Albatross** *Phoebastria palpebrata*, 16/8/2014. R. Morris



**Northern Giant Petrel** *Macronectes halli*, 21/6/2014. B. Russell.



**Fairy Prion** *Pachyptila turtur*, 21/6/2014. R. Morris



**Buller's Shearwater** *Puffinus bulleri*, 18/1/2014. R. Morris



**Short-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus tenuirostris*, 18/10/2014. R. Morris.



**Hutton's Shearwater** *Puffinus huttoni*, 31/8/2014. B. Russell.



**Kermadec Petrel** *Pterodroma neglecta*, 20/9/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Providence Petrel** *Pterodroma solandri*, 26/7/2014. B. Russell.



**White-headed Petrel** *Pterodroma lessonii*, 16/8/2014. R. Morris.



**Australasian Gannet** *Morus serrator*, 9/8/2014. R. Morris.



**Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius pomarinus*, 15/3/2014. R. Morris.

## Systematic List

### PHAETHONTIFORMES

#### Phaethontidae

##### **Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda*

Breeds on Lady Elliott Island to the north and Lord Howe Island to the southeast but rarely sighted on Southport pelagics.

A single on the 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount, 28 31.58S/155 31.51E and another single on 16<sup>th</sup> December also on the Britannia Sea Mount, 28 31.00/155 15.00E.

##### **White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus*

Uncommon visitor, often after strong SE winds, likely any time of year.

Records in full and all on the Sea Mounts this year. On 12<sup>th</sup> April on the Queensland Sea Mount, singles at 27 29.88S/155 01.13E, 27 30.07S/155 07.65E and 27 36.76S/155 09.45E. On 13<sup>th</sup> April a family party of three on the Britannia Sea Mount, 28 10.47S/155 32.93E. On 17<sup>th</sup> December on the Queensland Sea Mount singles at, 27 35.09S/155 10.00E, 27 38.22S/155 10.13E, 27 32.86S/155 07.52E and finally 27 30.90S/155 04.58E.

### PROCELLARIIFORMES

#### Hydrobatidae

##### **Polynesian Storm-Petrel** *Nesofregatta fuliginosa*

Breeds on a few Pacific Islands. Endangered. Vagrant to Australian waters.

A single, intermediate bird sighted on 12<sup>th</sup> April on the Queensland Sea Mount 27 35.87S/155 07.68E. The second recorded from Southport and accepted by BARC, submission number 820.

#### Oceanitidae

##### **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** *Oceanites oceanicus*

Common Spring and Autumn passage migrant with small numbers over-wintering and occasionally in Summer. Records in full; first sightings for the year on 15<sup>th</sup> March, with four sighted, 27 48.02S/153 56.00E to 27 48.67S/153 56.13E. Numbers rising considerably in April with nine on the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April, ranging from 27 33.11S/155 07.51E to 27 38.13S/155 10.10E and on the 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount a total of one hundred and one, sighted from 28 10.23S/155 30.74E to 28 42.46S/155 31.43E. Then on 19<sup>th</sup> April a total of thirty four between 27 55.15S/153 29.58E and 27 47.02S/153 57.87E. On 17<sup>th</sup> May a total of twenty nine ranging from 27 56.40S/153 41.51E out to 27 55.12S/153 52.88E. 21<sup>st</sup> June saw just four birds recorded from 27 49.36S/153 49.30E out to 27 51.98S/153 56.91E and on 26<sup>th</sup> July, just three sighted, 27 48.72S/153 58.70E to 27 48.29S/153 59.50E. A total of ten birds sighted on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 27 55.55S/153 38.06E to 27 50.29S/153 51.71E. On 16<sup>th</sup> August numbers rose to sixty three ranging from 27 54.47S/153 35.67E out to 27 49.62S/153 50.52E. Much lower numbers on 31<sup>st</sup> August with a total of only seven, from 27 51.73S/153 52.35E to 27 54.17S/153 53.31E. Numbers rising slightly again on 20<sup>th</sup> September with sixteen, ranging from 27 48.65S/153 55.39E out to 27 52.38S/153 55.36E. There was a steep rise in numbers on 11<sup>th</sup> October with ninety two recorded, 27 53.30S/153 34.63E to 27 45.51S/153 57.37E and again on 18<sup>th</sup> October with sixty two sighted between 27 59.44S/153 40.79E and 27 59.55S/153 50.52E. Just two single birds on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 27 50.56S/153 56.46E and 27 50.94S/153 56.70E. A single late bird on the 17<sup>th</sup> December on the Queensland Sea Mount, 27 35.69S/155 10.20E.

**White-faced Storm-Petrel** *Pelagodroma marina*

Once considered rare in the region, sightings becoming increasingly regular, Autumn/Winter/Spring. This species is really on the increase in the region, with 2014 being a record year of unprecedented numbers. On 13<sup>th</sup> April three singles on the Britannia Sea Mount, 28 38.10S/155 32.02E, 28 30.46S/155 35.41E and 28 08.58S/155 14.49E. Thirty eight sighted on 19<sup>th</sup> April, with up to six together, 27 44.95S/153 57.42E to 27 47.24S/153 57.92E and on 17<sup>th</sup> May, fifteen birds recorded 27 56.47S/153 51.25E to 27 55.12S/153 52.88E. A single bird was sighted on 21<sup>st</sup> June at 27 50.62S/153 57.27E and on 9<sup>th</sup> August three birds recorded with a single at 27 50.92S/153 51.96E and two at 27 49.96S/153 50.86E. On 16<sup>th</sup> August five sighted between 27 51.20S/153 50.63E and 27 49.60S/153 51.54E and finally on 20<sup>th</sup> September a single bird sighted at 27 50.37S/153 55.32E.

**Black-bellied Storm-Petrel** *Fregetta tropica*

Regular Winter visitor and Spring passage migrant.

First sightings were on 17<sup>th</sup> May with twenty four counted between 27 56.44S/153 42.90E and 27 55.12S/153 52.88E. Two singles on 21<sup>st</sup> June, 27 50.81S/153 57.27E and 27 51.98S/153 56.91E. Just a single on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 27 50.20S/153 51.50E and likewise for 16<sup>th</sup> August, with just a single sighted at 27 50.46S/153 51.07E. Three birds on 20<sup>th</sup> September, with a single at 27 51.68S/153 55.33E and two birds at 27 52.36S/153 55.36E. Finally, two singles on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 27 45.51S/153 57.37E and 27 45.74S/153 57.23E.

**White-bellied Storm-Petrel** *Fregetta grallaria*

Although breeds Lord-Howe Island group, and winters in the Coral Sea, only rarely recorded in south east Queensland waters.

A single off Southport, around the vessel for several minutes on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 27 47.24S/153 57.92E and another bird sighted on 17<sup>th</sup> December on the Queensland Sea Mount, 27 35.69S/155 10.20E.

**Coral Sea Storm-Petrel** *Fregetta sps*

A possibly previously undescribed taxon, until now thought to be New Zealand Storm-Petrel, now known not to be and probably the same as the birds sighted off southern New Caledonia. Work in progress.

On 12<sup>th</sup> April on the Queensland Sea Mount a total of four sighted with three at 27 39.21S/155 11.22E and a single at 27 48.40S/155 21.19E. On 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount, a total of twenty one sighted with a maximum of seven together from 28 41.25S/155 32.05E to 28 13.38S/155 36.75E. Finally, a single sighted on a regular Southport trip on 19<sup>th</sup> April 27 47.24S/153 57.92E.

**Diomedeidae**

**Wandering Albatross** *Diomedea exulans*

Rare winter visitor, not recorded annually.

On 17<sup>th</sup> December on the Queensland Sea Mount, a single bird 27 31.62S/155 09.38E, an unusually late bird.

**Gibson's Albatross** *Diomedea gibsoni*

Uncommon visitor April – October, recorded most years.

A good year for this species with some surprising dates, with records in full. A single bird on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 27 49.62S/153 50.52E, 3 individuals on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 27 58.14S/153 50.08E, 27 58.48S/153 50.10E and 27 59.68S/153 49.98E. Then some surprising December records, on 16<sup>th</sup> December on the Britannia Sea mount 28 31.21S/155 35.53E and 28 25.87S/155 35.37E.

**Black-browed Albatross** *Thalassarche melanophris*

Uncommon Winter visitor, recorded most years in low numbers.

A deceased juvenile bird found floating on the sea surface still had the balloon ribbon protruding from its bill, 27 49.91S/153 52.00E. Then two singles on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 27 50.00S/153 50.51E and 27 49.89S/153 51.05E.

**Buller's Albatross** *Thalassarche bulleri*

Vagrant to Queensland waters but of increasing frequency in recent years.  
Two adult birds on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 27 50.87S/153 47.20E and 27 48.25S/153 58.09E.

**Light-mantled Sooty Albatross** *Phoebastria palpebrata*

Beach-washed specimens suggest an almost annual visitor, mainly in winter and most likely to the local Sea Mounts.

A single sub adult bird on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 27 54.47S/153 35.67E, less than nine nautical miles from shore.

**Procellariidae**

**Northern Giant Petrel** *Macronectes halli*

Until 1996, almost unknown in this region, now considered an annual Winter visitor in low numbers and mainly juvenile birds.

A single juvenile bird on 21<sup>st</sup> June, 27 51.62S/153 56.95E.

**Fairy Prion** *Pachyptila turtur*

Erratic Winter visitor June-August, some years more numerous than in others, depending on sea-surface temps.  
On 21<sup>st</sup> June two birds behind the vessel, 27 52.29S/153 56.87E.

**White-chinned Petrel** *Procellaria aequinoctialis*

Very rare visitor from the south, July 1995, the only previous record.

Three birds on the Britannia Sea Mount on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 28 31.83S/155 15.21E, 28 31.37S/155 32.33E and 28 36.73S/155 33.69E, constitutes the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> records from Southport since July 1995.

**Black Petrel** *Procellaria parkinsoni*

Once considered a very rare Spring/Autumn passage migrant, now appearing annually in low numbers.

Eleven on the Britannia Sea Mount on 16<sup>th</sup> December, with up to two together, ranging from 28 31.83S/155 15.21E to 28 24.13S/155 38.41E. Another two on 17<sup>th</sup> December, on the Queensland Sea Mount, 27 41.93S/155 14.97E and 27 43.41S/155 12.50E.

**Streaked Shearwater** *Calonectris leucomelas*

Annual summer visitor to SEQ waters Dec-Apr. usually in inshore waters but sometimes well offshore.

A single on 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount, 28 40.08S/155 32.55E.

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus pacificus*

Common Summer visitor and local colony breeder August-April, with large local colonies on Mudjimba Island on the Sunshine Coast and on Cook Island off Fingal Head, Tweed Coast, NSW.

A total of 138 sighted on 18<sup>th</sup> January from 27 56.04S/153 26.75E out to 27 49.01S/153 56.03E, the next trip was 15<sup>th</sup> March with 278 sighted, 27 55.88S/153 27.45E to 27 50.66S/153 56.56.40E. On 12<sup>th</sup> April on the Queensland Sea Mount a total of 191 between 27 52.14S/154 58.34E and 27 43.81S/155 14.30E. The next day 13<sup>th</sup> on the Britannia Sea Mount a total of 97, 28 50.28S/155 36.19E, on the 19<sup>th</sup> April on a regular Southport trip a total of 182 between 27 56.12S/153 26.38S and 27 46.66S/153 57.77E. None then until the Spring with the first returning birds on 9<sup>th</sup> August with a total of twenty six sighted between 27 56.61S/153 27.26E and 27 50.56S/153 52.52E. then on 16<sup>th</sup> August with just thirty between 27 55.94S/153 28.08S and 27 49.62S/153 50.52E. Just six birds sighted on 31<sup>st</sup> August, all just outside the shelf-break then on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 598 recorded, 500 of these in a long continuous stream heading south at 27 53.08S/153 50.84E. Whether these were returning birds on southern migration back to their more southerly breeding grounds or local Cook Island birds is uncertain as the size of the Cook Island population is not readily available. In October, there were counts on the 11<sup>th</sup>, with twenty six sighted between 27 55.63S/153 27.00E and 27 45.64S/153 57.37E and on 18<sup>th</sup> October with just eleven birds, none inshore, 27 57.47S/153 46.53 to 27 59.55S/153 50.52E. On 2<sup>nd</sup> November again just low numbers encountered with just thirty one sighted between 27 56.17S/153 26.52E and 27 51.13S/153 56.88E. There was no regular December trip so recorded only from the sea mounts over two days, this species tends to forage closer inshore and this is backed up by the numbers recorded over the two days. On 16<sup>th</sup> December, on the furthest from shore Britannia Sea Mount a total of nineteen sighted between 28 31.83S/155 15.21E and

28 25.60S/155 39.52E. Whereas on the 17<sup>th</sup> December on the closer in Queensland Sea Mount, a total of seventy six birds recorded between 27 31.06S/155 05.15E and 27 39.50S/155 13.29E.

**Buller's Shearwater** *Puffinus bulleri*

Rare Spring/Autumn passage migrant and occasional summer visitor.

One on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 27 48.80S/153 56.02E.

**Flesh-footed Shearwater** *Puffinus carneipes*

A once common & numerous summer visitor, September – April, now in much lower numbers.

Typically low numbers on the regular 'inshore' pelagics in the first few months of the year, with just three birds on 18<sup>th</sup> January, one at 27 47.81S/153 55.82E and two at 27 50.50S/153 55.59E. On 15<sup>th</sup> March, just four sighted between 27 52.52S/153 49.28E and 27 50.40S/153 56.45E. On the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April eighteen recorded between 27 48.83S/154 59.81E and 27 43.81S/155 14.30E, whilst further out on 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount, fifty two sighted, 28 44.59S/155 30.41E to 28 34.08S/155 36.19E. Closer to shore on 19<sup>th</sup> April on a regular Southport trip eleven sighted between 27 53.37S/153 31.35E and 27 48.38S/153 57.72E. None then until 11<sup>th</sup> October with a single bird sighted at 27 47.13S/153 53.93E and on 18<sup>th</sup> October with just three singles recorded between 27 58.61S/153 37.12E and 27 59.55S/153 50.52E. On 2<sup>nd</sup> November just a single bird sighted at 27 54.47S/153 30.38E and on the Britannia Sea Mount on 16<sup>th</sup> December a total of seventy three from 28 32.28S/155 15.22E to 28 25.60S/155 39.52E. On the Queensland Sea Mount on 17<sup>th</sup> December, lower numbers, with only twenty nine sighted between 27 31.62S/155 09.38E and 27 39.50S/155 13.29E.

**Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus*

Rare, mainly Autumn/Winter visitor.

Singles on the Britannia Sea mount on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 28 43.37S/155 30.92E and 28 13.58S/155 37.52E.

**Short-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus tenuirostris*

A sometimes numerous Spring passage migrant, with small numbers still trickling through into summer. less so in Autumn.

Recorded on two days only, both in the Autumn, with a peak on 18<sup>th</sup> October when 473 were recorded on southward migration, largest flock of 100, between 27 56.17S/153 27.35E and 27 59.55S/153 50.52E. Just three birds then on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, a single at 27 51.14S/153 50.05E and two birds at 27 52.72S/153 40.40E.

**Fluttering Shearwater** *Puffinus gavia*

A common, mainly Autumn/ Winter visitor which tends to form large feeding flocks close inshore and not usually encountered in any numbers on pelagic trips.

An even leaner year than last year, being recorded on just three dates, a single bird on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 27 55.90S/153 28.52E, on 16<sup>th</sup> August a single at 27 55.80S/153 27.08E and six birds at 27 55.94S/153 28.08E. On 18<sup>th</sup> October five sighted at 27 56.53S/153 29.57E. The question has to be asked, is this species in decline?

**Hutton's Shearwater** *Puffinus huttoni*

A common visitor from New Zealand, occurring any time of the year. Sighted off the Shelf more often than the preceding species.

A far more productive year for this species than for the preceding one. On 18<sup>th</sup> January two singles recorded at, 27 55.40S/153 28.56E and 27 54.94S/153 30.56E. On 15<sup>th</sup> March, six birds sighted between 27 52.04S/153 34.77E and 27 52.52S/153 49.28E and on 19<sup>th</sup> April, nine recorded from 27 55.87S/153 27.69E to 27 53.53S/153 30.58E. None then until 26<sup>th</sup> July with seven birds recorded from 27 54.71S/153 32.81E to 27 50.81S/153 39.41E. During August, recorded on three separate days, on 9<sup>th</sup> August forty one recorded between 27 55.90S/153 28.52E and 27 50.56S/153 52.31E, then on 16<sup>th</sup> August 248 sighted, including 200 in one flock 27 55.80S/153 27.08E to 27 50.43S/153 44.21E and 31<sup>st</sup> August, when twelve recorded between 27 54.23S/153 36.73E and 27 54.17S/153 53.31E. On 20<sup>th</sup> September, seven sighted between 27 52.66S/153 39.66E and 27 48.95S/153 55.39E and finally on 18<sup>th</sup> October two singles only, 27 57.25S/153 45.13E and 28 01.35S/153 48.85E.

**Tahiti Petrel** *Pseudobulweria rostrata*

A common Summer visitor, mainly September-April but has been recorded every month of the year, numbers usually peaking around Feb/Mar. when birds are returning to breeding sites in New Caledonia. Doesn't usually tolerate water temperatures < 23° C.

A total of nineteen on 18<sup>th</sup> January, from 27 50.50S/153 55.59E to 27 49.01S/153 56.03E and on 16<sup>th</sup> March, sixteen sighted, 27 52.52S/153 49.28S/27 50.66S/153 56.40E. On the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April, seventy five recorded between 27 51.19S/154 59.48E and 27 43.81S/155 14.30E, on the Britannia Sea Mount on 13<sup>th</sup> April, just eleven sighted, 28 10.23S/155 30.74E/ to 28 43.37S/155 30.92E. On 19<sup>th</sup> April, back closer to the coast, just nine sighted between 27 50.78S/153 46.34E to 27 46.38S/153 57.72E and this year into May with on the 17<sup>th</sup> a single at 27 55.56S/153 52.54E and two birds at 27 55.80S/153 52.26E, then another winter record on 26<sup>th</sup> July with a single bird at 27 48.91S/153 59. 23E. Two early returning birds on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 27 49.06S/153 55.38E and 27 49.45S/153 55.35E, then none until 2<sup>nd</sup> November with seventeen recorded, 27 50.07S/153 53.25E out to 27 51.13S/153 56.88E. Out on the Britannia Sea Mount on 16<sup>th</sup> December just seven birds sighted, 28 19.35S/155 33.96E to 28 24.31S/155 38.58E, whilst on the next day 17<sup>th</sup> December on the Queensland Sea Mount a total of forty two recorded between 27 31.62S/155 09.38E and 27 39.50S/153 13.29E.

**Kermadec Petrel** *Pterodroma neglecta*

With the species now having been recorded every month of the year and a pattern of occurrence forming, the status of this species has been revised to common visitor to SEQ waters.

Recorded in six months, starting on 15<sup>th</sup> March with a single bird, 27 48.67S/153 56.13E. Numbers rising sharply in April, with on the 12<sup>th</sup> on the Queensland Sea Mount thirty four recorded between 27 49.43S/154 59.72E and 27 46.11S/155 18.33E then eighteen on 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount, ranging from 28 10.00S/155 31.18E to 28 34.08S/155 35.96E. Still present on 17<sup>th</sup> May with four sighted 27 55.28S/153 44.01E to 27 54.41S/153. None then until 9<sup>th</sup> August with seven counted between 27 53.21S/153 43.53E and 27 20.62S/153 52.52E, then just a single bird on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 27 49.73S/153 51.35E. Singles on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 27 49.97S/153 55.25E and 27 51.68S/153 55.33E then none until 16<sup>th</sup> December on the Britannia Sea mount with four singles, 28 38.33S/155 33.64E, 28 35.31S/155 31.35E, 28 31.21S/155 35.53E and 28 26.10S/155 32.23E. Greater numbers on the Queensland Sea Mount on the 17<sup>th</sup> December with fifteen sighted, 27 30.52S/155 04.46E to 28 39.50S/155 39.29E.

**White-headed Petrel** *Pterodroma lessonii*

Rare Spring/Winter/Autumn visitor.

A single bird on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 27 50.26S/153 45.15E, still on the Continental Shelf.

**Great-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma macroptera*

An uncommon, mainly Summer visitor but also Autumn/Winter. Another species whose local status is under review.

Becoming more frequent in the area and recorded in five months for the year, including winter and as usual larger numbers well offshore around the sea mounts. First records on 15<sup>th</sup> March with a single sighted 27 44.88S/153 56.13E and a further two sighted at 27 49.84S/153 56.33E. On the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April a total of thirty six recorded between 27 52.48S/154 56.92E and 27 43.81S/155 14.30E and the next day on the Britannia Sea Mount, just thirteen sighted from 28 10.47S/155 32.91E to 28 44.59S/155 30.41E. Five recorded on 17<sup>th</sup> May, 27 56.47S/153 51.25E to 27 54.71S/153 53.35E, none then until 9<sup>th</sup> August when three single birds sighted, 27 51.36/153 49.81E, 27 50.70S/153 52.72E and 27 49.78S/153 50.40E. On 16<sup>th</sup> August a total of ten birds recorded between 27 54.47S/153 35.67E and 27 49.73S/153 51.35E. None then until the December sea mount trips with 110 on the Britannia Sea Mount on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 28 31.83S/155 15.21E and 28 25.60S/155 39.52E followed by ninety seven on the 17<sup>th</sup> December on the Queensland Sea Mount 27 31.62S/155 09.38E to 27 41.93S/155 14.97E.

**Providence Petrel** *Pterodroma solandri*

A common Winter visitor, occurring March- November, breeding on Lord Howe Island some 600 kilometres to the southeast.

The first birds sighted for the year were on the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April with eight recorded between 27 52.93S/154 59.14E and 27 30.65S/155 06.51E and on the 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount single birds at 28 42.83S/155 31.18E, 28 42.46S/155 31.43E and two sighted at 28 10.11S/155 35.01E. on the following weekend on 19<sup>th</sup> April on a regular pelagic forty seven sighted, 27 50.78S/153 46.34E to 27 47.02S/153 57.87E. On 17<sup>th</sup> May, eighty eight sighted (maximum thirty) between 27 55.63S/153 35.24E and 27 54.41S/153 53.61E and good numbers again on 21<sup>st</sup> June with fifty six counted, 27 54.28S/153 48.68S/ out to 27 50.87S/153 57.27E. Again, a good count on 26<sup>th</sup> July with sixty seven recorded, 27 48.78S/153 55.10E to 27 48.19S/153 59.50E and on 9<sup>th</sup> August, numbers down slightly with just twenty one sighted between 27 52.45S/153 46.48E and 27 50.62S/153 52.52E. Then on 16<sup>th</sup> August numbers rose again with 124 recorded (maximum sixty) between 27 54.47S/153 35.67E and 27 49.73S/153 51.35E. On 31<sup>st</sup> August still good numbers in the area with a total of sixty one counted from 27 52.05S/153 48.05E to 27 54.17S/153 53.31E and on 20<sup>th</sup> September a total of eighty six birds sighted between 27 52.46S/153 40.47E and 27 48.95S/153 55.39E. Numbers usually start to wain in October as was the case on the 11<sup>th</sup> with just nineteen recorded, from 27 53.30S/153 34.63E out to 27 45.64S/153 57.29E but a late peak on 18<sup>th</sup> October saw numbers rise to eighty five, 27 57.58S/153 40/68E out to 27 59.55S/153 50.52E. Two late singles on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 27 50.56S/153 56.46E and 27 50.69S/153 56.54E.

#### **Gould's Petrel** *Pterodroma leucoptera*

An uncommon Spring/Autumn passage bird and Summer visitor.

Two singles on the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 27 29.94S/155 05.32E and 27 30.02S/155 06.53E. On the Britannia Sea Mount on 13<sup>th</sup> April a total of nine birds sighted, 28 08.58S/155 14.49E to 28 41.25S/155 32.03E. Not recorded again until 17<sup>th</sup> December on the Queensland Sea Mount with two singles, 27 39.86S/155 11.50E and 27 34.20S/155 09.24E.

#### **Collared Petrel** *Pterodroma brevipes*

Vagrant, closest breeding grounds in Vanuatu. Previous Australian records north of Norfolk Island.

Three birds all of the *P. b. magnificens* form, singles on the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 27 33.07S/155 01.36E and 27 41.53S/155 13.41E and a further single on 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount 28 10.11S/155 35.01E. BARC submission 837. A new species for Southport.

#### **Black-winged Petrel** (*Pterodroma nigripennis*)

Uncommon Spring/Autumn passage bird and Summer visitor.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> December three single birds on the Britannia Sea Mount, 28 30.23S/155 33.83E, 28 23.46S/155 37.79E and 28 21.26S/155 35.61E. On 17<sup>th</sup> December on the Queensland Sea Mounts, a single at 27 38.60S/155 11.14E and two birds at 27 39.86S/155 11.50E.

### **PHALACROCORACIFORMES**

#### **Sulidae**

#### **Australasian Gannet** *Morus serrator*

Common Winter visitor, mainly from New Zealand late April-Oct.

Only recorded in moderate numbers in 2014 with the first sighting on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 27 55.86S/153 28.07E, not recorded then until 21<sup>st</sup> June when twenty three sighted, 27 56.08S/153 26.15E to 27 55.84S/153 31.02E. Very quiet on 26<sup>th</sup> July with just five birds sighted 27 55.77S/153 27.56E right out to 27 48.78S/153 55.10E, an indication that food stocks were in short supply as this species is generally encountered close inshore, not generally out that wide. On 9<sup>th</sup> August a total of twenty eight sighted between 27 56.09S/153 26.00E and 27 50.56S/153 52.31E, again birds foraging outside the Continental Shelf. Numbers dropped on 16<sup>th</sup> August with just fourteen recorded between 27 56.11S/153 26.28E and 27 52.21S/153 41.76E. Numbers still dropping on 31<sup>st</sup> August with just nine sighted between 27 56.07S/153 26.05E and 27 52.21S/153 47.02E and finally on 18<sup>th</sup> October, six birds recorded between 27 56.05S/153 26.07E and 27 59.12S/153 39.50E.

#### **Masked Booby** *Sula dactylatra*

Uncommon visitor from both Lord Howe Island and presumably the Coral Sea Territories.

A single adult bird of the race *S. d. personata* most likely from the Coral Sea sighted on 16<sup>th</sup> August at 27 50.00S/153 50.31E.

**Red-footed Booby** *Sula sula*

A rare visitor to SEQ waters most likely from the Coral Sea Territory and sightings on the increase in recent years.

A single sighted on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 27 49.06S/153 55.38E and another, a sub-adult bird on the Queensland Sea Mount on 17<sup>th</sup> December at 27 34.52S/155 10.29E.

**Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster*

Uncommon, with sightings most years.

Singles sighted on 17<sup>th</sup> May, 27 55.04S/153 52.98E and on 18<sup>th</sup> October at 27 57.36S/153 45.85E.

**Phalacrocoracidae****Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

In most years the least frequently seen of the Cormorants outside the Seaway.

On 15<sup>th</sup> March a total of four birds around incoming trawlers within a couple of nautical miles of the Southport seaway, with a single at 27 56.05S/153 27.09E and three birds at 27 55.88S/153 27.45E.

**Little Black Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*

Regularly sighted, usually on or behind returning trawlers.

An exceptionally poor year for this species, most likely due to a lack of trawler activity when the pelagics were conducted, with the sole record for the year on 19<sup>th</sup> April with two birds, 27 53.68S/153 30.29E.

**Pied Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax varius*

As with above but usually in smaller numbers.

As with the preceding species a quiet year, although less reliant on trawler activity and often seen fishing just beyond the surf line. Five birds sighted on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 27 56.05S/153 27.09E to 27 54.40S/153 29.50E, on 19<sup>th</sup> April just a single bird at 27 53.68S/153 30.29E and on 21<sup>st</sup> June just a single at 27 54.15S/153 28.97E. None then until 18<sup>th</sup> October, with a single bird, 27 56.06S/153 26.09, basically just outside the seaway. Finally, two single birds on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 27 55.89S/153 27.91E and 27 55.95S/153 26.42E.

**CHARADRIIFORMES****Stercorariidae****South Polar Skua** *Stercorarius maccormicki*

Rare Spring/Autumn passage bird, sometimes Summer.

A single pale intermediate, probable sub-adult bird on the Queensland Sea Mount on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 27 43.02S/155 12.37E.

**Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius pomarinus*

The most often encountered of the group in the region, Spring to Autumn.

On 18<sup>th</sup> January four sighted between 27 55.71S/153 27.60E and 27 54.61S/153 31.45E. On 15<sup>th</sup> March a single sighted at 27 54.40S/153 29.50E and another three at 27 52.21S/153 32.97E. A single on 18<sup>th</sup> October at 28 01.39S/153 49.21E and another two on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 27 55.71S/153 28.94E. Finally on 17<sup>th</sup> December on the Queensland Sea Mount two single birds at 27 33.15S/155 09.50E and 27 39.86S/155 11.50E.

**Arctic Jaeger** *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Most often occurs in inshore waters in SEQ and not recorded on pelagic trips as often as the above species.

A poor year with just a single near the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 27 33.07S/155 01.36E and another on the 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount, 28 28.26S/155 34.87E.

**Long-tailed Jaeger** *Stercorarius longicaudus*

Rare Spring/Autumn passage migrant.

A sole record of a single bird on the Britannia Sea Mount on the 16<sup>th</sup> December, 28 39.04S/155 33.28E.

## Laridae

### **Common Noddy** *Anous stolidus*

Frequent visitor, which can occur any time of year.

A relatively quiet year for this species with two birds on the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 27 33.03S/155 01.36E, on 9<sup>th</sup> August after unsettled conditions ten sighted between 27 49.91S/153 50.94E and 27 50.46S/153 52.11E. Finally, five birds on 16<sup>th</sup> August between 27 51.20S/153 50.63E and 27 49.93S/153 51.35E.

### **Black Noddy** *Anous minutus*

Infrequent visitor to SEQ waters.

A single on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 27 51.90S/153 40.85E and another on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 27 49.84S/153 56.33E.

### **White Tern** *Gygis alba*

Uncommon visitor to SEQ waters January-April.

Three single birds sighted on the Britannia Sea Mount on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 28 31.32S/155 31.87E, 28 15.38S/155 36.75E and 28 09.78S/155 14.49E.

### **Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscata*

Far more commonly encountered than Bridled Tern, occurring throughout the year but mostly Summer months. On 18<sup>th</sup> January, just a single bird sighted at 27 44.01S/153 56.03S, none then until the Queensland Sea Mount on 12<sup>th</sup> April with twenty four sighted between 27 29.88S/155 01.13E and 27 46.01S/155 13.37E. Fewer sighted on the 13<sup>th</sup> April on the Britannia Sea Mount with just five sighted between 28 09.79S/155 26.35E and 28 31.32S/155 31.87E. None then until singles on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 27 49.06S/153 53.38 and 18<sup>th</sup> October, 27 58.64S/153 50.10E. Numbers picked up on the Britannia Sea Mount on 16<sup>th</sup> December with a total of twenty six sighted, 28 31.83S/155 15.21E and 28 25.50S/155 39.58E and on 17<sup>th</sup> December, a further nineteen counted on the Queensland Sea Mount between 27 32.86S/155 07.52E and 27 40.15S/155 13.13E.

### **Little Tern** (*Sterna albifrons*)

Small numbers breeding locally on the larger sand islands but most birds summer visitors from northern Asia. Recorded on just three dates and all just to the north of the seaway, just beyond the surf line, a single on 19<sup>th</sup> April, eight on 11<sup>th</sup> October and two on 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

### **Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*

Summer visitor, with small numbers, probably immature birds, overwintering.

Most of the records were from just outside the Southport Seaway of foraging birds just beyond the breakers, with 100 on 15<sup>th</sup> March, fourteen on 19<sup>th</sup> April. Then none until two birds on 20<sup>th</sup> September well off the shelf at 27 51.09S/153 55.32E which could have been two early returning birds from the northern hemisphere. After that just three on 11<sup>th</sup> October and two on 18<sup>th</sup> October, all just outside the seaway.

### **Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bergii*

Common, breeds locally on Cook Island off Fingal Head, NSW.

2014 again proved that this is a wide ranging foraging species, starting with 18<sup>th</sup> January with thirteen sighted between 27 56.08S/153 26.00E and 27 49.47S/153 56.00E. On 15<sup>th</sup> March a total of 440 from 27 56.21S/153 26.41E to 27 49.84S/153 56.33E and 190 on 19<sup>th</sup> April to a distance of only about four nautical miles offshore. On 17<sup>th</sup> May much lower numbers with just 24 recorded between 27 56.07S/153 26.00E and 27 54.91S/153 53.13E and the following trips on 21<sup>st</sup> June, 26<sup>th</sup> July, 9<sup>th</sup> August and 16<sup>th</sup> August saw just low numbers of foraging birds just outside the Southport seaway. 31<sup>st</sup> August saw just four birds, ranging from 27 56.07S/153 26.03E to 27 54.76S/153 50.33E and on 20<sup>th</sup> September just twenty two birds out to just six nautical miles offshore. On 11<sup>th</sup> October just nine birds from 27 56.07S/153 26.00S to 27 42.08S/153 53.64E and on 18<sup>th</sup> October, thirty sighted between 27 56.05S/153 26.07E and 27 58.48S/153 50.10E. Finally on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, just thirteen sighted, 27 56.16S/153 26.52E to 27 30.66S/153 55.06E.

**Silver Gull** *Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae*

Common locally, breeds. Mainly associated with trawler activity offshore.

In a year of interrupted trawler activity, mainly due to weather but also closed seasons, not particularly high numbers for this species and not recorded beyond five to six nautical miles offshore. A peak count of sixty five on 19<sup>th</sup> April 27 56.12S/153 26.38E out to 27 53.02S/153 31.90E.

### Rarities Submissions (with some carried over from previous years)

Species	Submitter	Sighting Date	Case No.	Verdict
Polynesian Storm-Petrel <i>Nesofregatta fuliginosa</i>	R. Morris	12/4/14	BARC 820	Accepted
White-bellied Storm-Petrel <i>Fregatta grallaria</i>	P. Walbridge	19/4/14	BARC 834	Accepted
Buller's Albatross <i>Thalassarche bulleri</i>	P. Walbridge	29/6/2013	BQRAC 182	Submitted
Buller's Albatross <i>Thalassarche bulleri</i>	P. Walbridge	26/7/2014	BQRAC 181	Submitted
Campbell Albatross <i>Thalassarche impavida</i>	P. Walbridge	29/6/2013	BQRAC 183	Submitted
Light-mantled Sooty Albatross <i>Phoebetria palpebrata</i>	P. Walbridge	16/8/2014	BQRAC 180	Submitted
Collared Petrel <i>Pterodroma brevipes</i>	D. Mantle	12-13/4/14	BARC 837	Accepted
Black Petrel <i>Procellaria parkinsoni</i> #	N. Haass	5/12/2014	BQRAC 178	Accepted
Mottled Petrel <i>Pterodroma inexpectata</i>	N. Haass	20/10/2013	BQRAC 176	Accepted
Mottled Petrel <i>Pterodroma inexpectata</i> #	N. Haass	2/11/2013	BQRAC 177	Accepted

# Neither of these sightings were from Southport but from off Mooloolaba and shown here just as a matter of record. Black Petrel no longer has to be submitted from Southport monthly pelagics.

### Monthly Maxima Table

Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr*	May	Jun	Jul	Aug*	Sep	Oct*	Nov	Dec
Red-tailed Tropicbird	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
White-tailed Tropicbird	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Polynesian Storm-Petrel	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	0	0	4	144	29	4	3	80	16	154	2	1
White-faced Storm-Petrel	0	0	0	41	15	1	0	8	1	0	0	0
Black-bellied Storm-Petrel	0	0	0	0	24	2	0	2	3	2	0	0
White-bellied Storm-Petrel	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Coral Sea Storm-Petrel	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wandering Albatross	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gibson's Albatross	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	2
Black-browed Albatross	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
Buller's Albatross	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Light-mantled Sooty Albatross	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Northern Giant Petrel	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fairy Prion	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
White-chinned Petrel	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Black Petrel	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	138	0	278	470	0	0	0	36	598	37	31	93
Buller's Shearwater	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flesh-footed Shearwater	3	0	4	81	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	99
Sooty Shearwater	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Short-tailed Shearwater	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	473	3	0
Streaked Shearwater	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fluttering Shearwater	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	5	0	0
Hutton's Shearwater	2	0	6	9	0	0	7	303	7	2	0	0
Tahiti Petrel	19	0	16	95	3	0	1	0	2	0	17	49
Kermadec Petrel	0	0	1	52	4	0	0	8	2	0	0	19
White-headed Petrel	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Great-winged Petrel	0	0	3	47	5	0	0	13	0	0	0	207
Providence Petrel	0	0	0	59	88	56	67	205	86	104	2	0
Gould's Petrel	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Collared Petrel	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Black-winged Petrel	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Australasian Gannet	0	0	0	1	0	23	5	51	0	6	0	0
Masked Booby	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Red footed Booby	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Brown Booby	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Great Cormorant	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Little Black Cormorant	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pied Cormorant	2	0	5	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0
South Polar Skua	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Pomarine Jaeger	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2
Arctic Jaeger	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Long-tailed Jaeger	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Common Noddy	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	18	0	0	0	0
Black Noddy	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
White Tern	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sooty Tern	1	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	44
Little Tern	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	8	2	0
Common Tern	0	0	100	14	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	0
Crested Tern	1	0	440	190	24	13	1	37	22	39	13	0
Silver Gull	1	0	25	65	3	10	22	21	14	12	1	0

\* Denotes more than one trip conducted for that month.

## **Expedition to the Queensland and Britannia Sea Mounts April 11<sup>th</sup>-14th 2014**

Paul Walbridge

### **Introduction:**

After the highly successful trip to these sea mounts on the 84ft Texas T from 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> April 2012, it was always planned to get out there again as soon as possible, in particular to further study the unidentified stripe-bellied storm-petrels which were being increasingly sighted in the region, January – June, 2011-2013. By now and as mentioned in the joint submission by Walbridge and Mantle to BARC of the 2012 sightings of these birds there was some doubt as to the authenticity of these birds actually being New Zealand Storm-Petrels. More likely they were the same as the birds being seen off the southern tip of New Caledonia. Unfortunately, the Texas T was no longer available to us, as the owners had stationed it further afield.

However, early in 2014 our regular Southport skipper, Craig Newton was socialising with one of the Texas T owners, who suggested Craig should contact Richard Cavill, a chef and restaurateur, owner of the 90 ft Laura J. A meeting was arranged for myself and Brian Russell to meet Craig and Richard at his restaurant, Cavs' Steakhouse and put forward our proposal. Richard was immediately interested and enthusiastic to try something different with his vessel, so after an excellent lunch, we visited Richards' canal front property and inspected the vessel. It was immediately apparent that this vessel would be perfect for our needs, luxurious facilities, all round access to the upper deck and easy access to the sea for an inflatable. Within a short period of time, Richard had worked out the logistics and costing for the trip and I could then plan for it to go ahead. We planned for two alternative dates to allow for weather conditions, the second weekend in April and the last weekend in April, with the first trip the preference. I had the number of passengers ready, with substitutes ready for those not able to back up for the second date.

The area covered by the two sea mounts, stretches from the northern edge of the Queensland Sea Mount on the approximate latitude to Point Lookout on North Stradbroke Island in Queensland, running in a SSE direction to the southern edge of the Britannia Sea Mount roughly the same latitude as Ballina in New South Wales. In several areas the ridges approach to within 306 metres of the ocean surface along the Queensland Sea Mount, though the shallowest encountered was 430 meters and along the Britannia Sea Mount, to as little as 395 metres. Rising up from a 4,000 metre deep ocean floor and with a north/south flowing east Australian current flowing, there was ample opportunity for up-welling to occur, a sure fire event for the gathering of marine life.

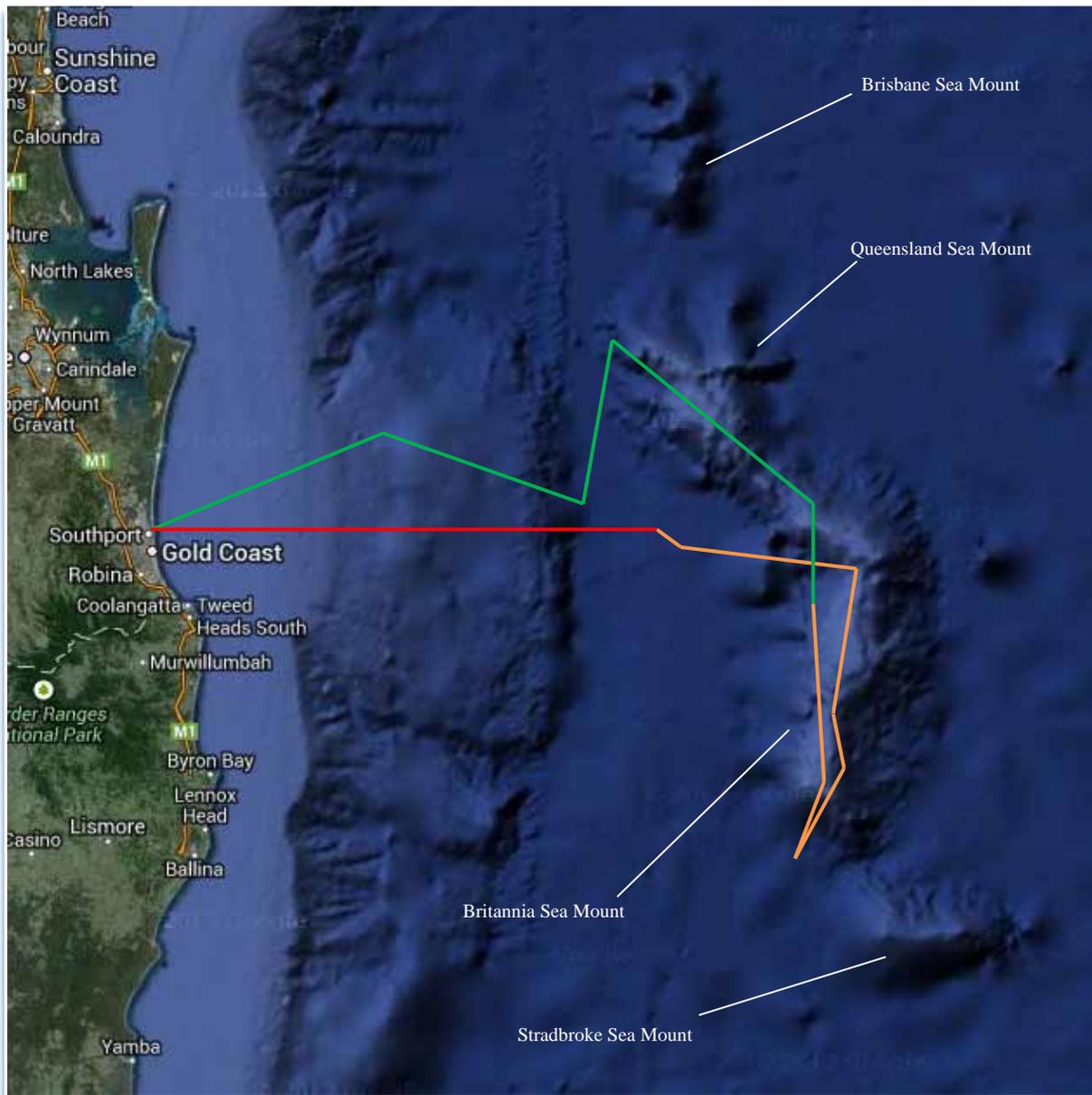
### **Weather conditions:**

With category 5 Cyclone Ita crossing the coast over far north Queensland and with a fairly intense low over southern NSW, working its way up the NSW coast, gusty NW-N winds on the Friday evening to 20+ knots. Winds easing slightly to 15-20 knots from the north on Saturday with a projected strong southerly change over Saturday evening not really eventuating. Sunday saw light SE winds, freshening slightly later in the day. Saturday saw some high cloud with mainly fine sunny conditions, with cloud increasing on Sunday with the SE change. Maximum air temps. over the weekend 26° C, barometer 1012 hPa.

### **Sea conditions:**

Seas to 1.5 metres on a 2 metre swell on the Saturday, easing to slight seas on a 2-3 metre swell from the SE on the Sunday. Sea-surface temps. 24-25° C.

## The Route taken



————— 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> April 
 ————— 13<sup>th</sup> April 
 ————— 14<sup>th</sup> April

A total distance of approximately 390 nautical miles was travelled over the period covered; 2100 hrs on the 11<sup>th</sup> April to 0700 hrs on the 14<sup>th</sup> April. Waypoints were from the Southport Seaway 27 56.00S/153 27.00E out to the widest point which was on the Britannia Sea Mount 28 34.08S/155 35.71E. Furthest point north was at the top end of the Queensland Sea Mount at 27 29.45S/153 03.38E, down to the bottom of the Britannia Sea Mount at 28 44.59S/155 30.41E. This was not necessarily on a constant straight course as the occasional retrace back up the slick was performed. Total time outside the seaway was approximately 57 hours 30 minutes, while total hours of observation amounted to 23 hours and 20 minutes.

## The Trip:

### 11/4/2014

Everyone met, at approximately 1930 hrs Cavs' Steakhouse at Southport on the Gold Coast and sat down for a great meal, with most of the team already knowing each other but some meeting for the first time and most meeting with the owner for the first time. After the meal, it was time to be ferried with all our gear to Richard Cavills' canal front house where the Laura J, our home for the next three days, was berthed. By 2100 hrs we had cast off and headed down the Broadwater toward the Southport Seaway and out into the ocean.

Once the cabins were allocated, most headed there and bedded down for the night, while three of us opted to sleep in the upper lounge area in order to be the first awake each morning. At first, conditions were quite benign as we headed NE to our destination but conditions soon deteriorated and late on the 11<sup>th</sup> Craig Newton, on skipper watch changed course to the ESE to allow for a following wind and to make conditions a lot more comfortable for the passengers, as it would be the first night at sea and a good night's sleep would be all important for many.

### 12/4/2014

Up at pre-dawn on the 12<sup>th</sup> and few birds could be seen in the lights of the vessel, although a *cookilaria* type petrel passed very close astern and up the port side, with not enough light to ascertain which species. The first positively identified bird was just before sun up with a solitary Great-winged Petrel appearing astern at 0540 hrs and joined by three others at 0549 hrs, all of which were New Zealand Grey-faced Petrels as is the norm for this region. In just a few minutes other species began to arrive, a couple of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and a Providence Petrel. At 0625 hrs species number four for the day arrived, the first of many Tahiti Petrels.

Birds were arriving only slowly to begin with but at 0643 hrs a dark phase Kermadec Petrel zoomed in along with a few more Great-winged Petrels and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. Another Kermadec Petrel arrived, a much paler bird this time, at 0650 hrs followed shortly by another Tahiti Petrel and the first Flesh-footed Shearwater for the day. By 0709 hrs the numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwater at the rear of the vessel had built to a dozen, with an adult and a juvenile Sooty Tern also putting in an appearance.

For the next two and a half hours no new species arrived but there were still plenty of arrivals into the slick behind the vessel as we continued to head NNE to the top end of the Queensland Sea Mount, with up to 12 Grey-faced Petrels (Great-winged), 15 Tahiti Petrels, 2 Kermadec Petrels, 40 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and 6 Fleshy-footed Shearwaters around the vessel at a time. Then, at 0930 hrs a cry went out from Geoff Jones, a *cookilaria* on the port side, with everyone else apparently, except for Rob Morris looking too far out, the bird passing fairly close, with Rob getting great views and no-one getting any photos. Rob had no doubt he and Geoff had witnessed the first Australian mainland based pelagic sighting of a Collared Petrel and not only that but one of Hadoram's fabled *magnificens*. For a while there would be eleven other fully gripped off punters but that was to change! Two new species for the day were sighted at around the same time, namely singles of Arctic Jaeger and Common Noddy

Further numbers of the already present species were arriving around the vessel when a very white bird was sighted on the sea surface at 1026 hrs, our eleventh species for the day, a White-tailed Tropicbird, one of the oceans great travellers and not unexpected here. More Sooty Terns started to appear along with several more Tahiti Petrels and Kermadec Petrels, when at 1119 hrs the first Gould's Petrel put in an appearance with another turning up at 1133 hrs and at 1146 hrs the second White-tailed Tropicbird for the day. At 1135 hrs a second Gould's Petrel circled the vessel for a short while.

At 1215 hrs we had finally reached the northern edge of the Queensland Sea Mount and the skipper informed us he would be changing course, to travel SSE down through the sea mount as close as possible to the drop offs. It was midday but there were still a few birds present around the vessel with up to three each of Tahiti Petrels and Kermadec Petrels, when at 1257 hrs probably the palest Kermadec Petrel anyone on board had ever seen, appeared very close, allowing for many photos to be taken.

At 1310 hrs, with yet another couple of Kermadec Petrels turning up, the first storm-petrel of the trip arrived, a Wilson's Storm-Petrel, with another appearing at 1325 hrs along with three Kermadec Petrels and three Tahiti Petrels and 30 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. At 1347 hrs, Craig Newton shouted out loudly that he had a very white bellied storm-petrel at the front of the vessel, everyone rushed to the bows as a large storm-petrel with a

'bump up' flight pattern zigzagged 30-40 metres in front of us for a few minutes. It was Southports second Polynesian Storm-Petrel record in two years and the streaked underparts making it an intermediate bird.

Over the next hour, the Wilson's Storm-Petrels began to increase with up to three at a time around the vessel, along with up to a dozen more Tahiti Petrels and fifteen Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. Then at 1500 hrs finally, the target bird, the main reason for the expedition, with at least three birds around the vessel, the mystical striped bellied storm-petrel, which were more intent on feeding on something other than the berley we were offering. The prevailing conditions of the day weren't conducive to launching an inflatable and anyway these particular birds didn't hang around long, which was unusual from our previous experience with these birds.

Things were a little quiet until 1550 hrs when another *cookilaria* approached, a quite dark bird which this time most on board got good views of, a second Collared Petrel, once again a *magnificens* and this time adequate photos were obtained. We kept maintaining our southerly course with more Kermadec and Tahiti Petrels approaching the berley trail but with the number of birds generally dropping of as sundown approached, when at 1720 hrs another Coral Sea Storm-Petrel (as we were now calling them) approached the rear of the vessel. Counting then stopped for the day as we adjourned to the rec area for drinks and the evening meal and with much anticipation to the following day ahead on the Britannia Sea Mount to the south.

#### **Species sighted:**

**White-tailed Tropicbird – 3 (1)**  
**Polynesian Storm-Petrel – 1**  
**Wilson's Storm-Petrel – 9 (3)**  
**Coral Sea Storm-Petrel – 4 (3)**  
**Wedge-tailed Shearwater – 191 (40)**  
**Flesh-footed Shearwater – 18 (6)**  
**Tahiti Petrel – 75 (15)**  
**Kermadec Petrel – 34 (3)**  
**Great-winged Petrel – 36 (12) all *P.m. gouldi***  
**Providence Petrel – 8 (2)**  
**Gould's Petrel – 2 (1)**  
**Collared Petrel – 2 (1) *P. b.magnificens***  
**Arctic Jaeger – 1**  
**Common Noddy – 2 (1)**  
**Sooty Tern – 26 (4)**

A total of 15 species for the day, with an overall total bird count of 412, not particularly of great diversity and not in the numbers expected. Providence Petrel numbers were particularly lower than expected as were Flesh-footed Shearwater, although Tahiti Petrel numbers were high for April. Though we were expecting to see the Coral Sea Storm-Petrels, Polynesian Storm-Petrel and Collared Petrel were a welcome surprise.



**Kermadec Petrel** *Pterodroma neglecta* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014 – P.Walbridge.



**Polynesian Storm-Petrel** *Nesofregetta fuliginosa* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. P.Walbridge.



**Great-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma macroptera gouldi* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. B. Russell.



**Tahiti Petrel** *Pseudobulweria rostrata* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Polynesian Storm-Petrel** *Nesofregetta fuliginosa* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. R. Morris.



**Kermadec Petrel** *Pterodroma neglecta* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. R. Morris.



**Providence Petrel** *Pterodroma solandri* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. R. Morris



**Flesh-footed Shearwater** *Puffinus carneipes* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. B. Russell.



**Collared Petrel** *Pterodroma brevipes' magnificens'* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. R. Morris.



**Collared Petrel** *Pterodroma brevipes' magnificens'* Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. R. Stephenson.



Sunset over the Queensland Sea Mount 12/4/2014. R. Baxter.

13/4/2014

Counting started at 0545 hrs with two Great-winged Petrels arriving astern along with a single Flesh-footed Shearwater. Things began to liven quickly, more so than the day before, with more diversity on offer right from the start. At 0600 hrs a lone Sooty Shearwater appeared on the port side along with a Tahiti Petrel and Wedge-tailed Shearwater, followed just a few minutes later by the first Providence and Kermadec Petrels. At 0610 hrs more Tahiti, Providence and Great-winged Petrels appeared as well as more Flesh-footed Shearwaters and the first Wilson's Storm-Petrel for the day.

By 0614 hrs, Wedge-tailed Shearwater numbers had risen to ten and at 0620 hrs the first Gould's Petrel for the day put in an appearance, followed shortly by two of the Coral Sea Storm-Petrels. With the seas being quite benign on albeit a 2-3 metre swell it was decided to launch the inflatable and prepare to catch one of these birds, something so far that had not been achieved, at least not in modern times. The deck was a bit hectic as preparations were made to get the inflatable launched and gear prepared, into what was not the easiest of conditions. While all this was going on, a Streaked Shearwater suddenly appeared at 0641 hrs and although the early morning light wasn't the best, it came tantalisingly close for people to get plenty of shots.

The dinghy was finally launched, with Craig Newton as the oarsman and the back-up catcher Brian Russell on board and when cast adrift, the dinghy drifted some two to three hundred meters away and quickly a count of seven Coral Sea Storm-Petrels were sighted around the dinghy, surely Brian must succeed. While all the excitement was going on a single White-faced Storm-Petrel arrived astern and at 0718 hrs just a few minutes after launch and after a misfire and a miss, Brian, on his third attempt had a stripey type storm-petrel safely trapped under the net and the call came back to the mother ship, the bird is safely in the bag – a cheer went up!!

We'd done it, so amazingly simple and so quickly, it took some while to sink in and didn't fully until the catching crew arrived astern and handed the gear with the bagged bird to the analysing team, namely myself, Dave Stewart and Rob Morris for measurement and photographing. The next few minutes were spent with the team of three, taking the relevant measurements ie; tarsus, bill, wing, etc. and extracting feathers for DNA analysis, plus forensic quality photographs taken of certain plumage characteristics, in particular of the underwing and foot profiles. This was done meticulously but as quickly as possible to avoid stress to the bird, it was then time for the photo shoot for the rest of the team before the bird was finally released, it flew strongly from the hand as if nothing had happened.

The numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters had built to forty by 0834 hrs, with up to four Flesh-footed Shearwaters and yet another Kermadec Petrel, with more of the Coral Sea Storm-Petrels arriving. At 0910 hrs, with both Wilson's and Coral Sea Storm-Petrels behind the vessel another Gould's Petrel arrived and shortly after at 0926 hrs, a new bird for the trip, a Red-tailed Tropicbird loomed to starboard at some distance but didn't show any interest in the vessel. This was followed a few minutes later by a lone White Tern, the first for the day, along with a couple of Sooty Terns.

Over the next two hours, the number of Flesh-footed Shearwaters had built up to twenty, with a couple more Gould's Petrels passing through, along with a couple more Kermadec Petrels and two more Coral Sea Storm-Petrels also arriving. By 1112 hrs Wilson's Storm-Petrels had risen to seven with more arriving by the minute, the vessel was then turned around, as we had reached the southern edge and headed back ENE along the sea mount. The only Jaeger for the day an Arctic flew by at 1146 hrs. By 1305 hrs Wilson's Storm-Petrel now numbered up to seventeen with the first Great-winged Petrel sighted for quite a while along with a Tahiti Petrel. Another White Tern arrived at 1332 hrs as two more Coral Sea Storm-Petrels appeared along with many more Wilson's Storm-Petrels. At 1359 hrs a solitary Sooty Tern passed astern while the second Sooty Shearwater appeared among the other feeding shearwaters.

1416 hrs saw additional singles of Gould's, Great-winged and Tahiti Petrels arriving in the slick, although the Gould's didn't stay long. The next bit of excitement manifested itself at 1457 hrs in the shape of the third Collared Petrel for the trip, this one being a slightly lighter version of *magnificens*, still mainly all dark underneath but with a bit more white on the underwing. A single Tahiti Petrel also appeared at this time, along with a couple of Kermadec and Providence Petrels.

At 1514 hrs, loud calls emanated from directly above the vessel with what appeared to be a family party of three White-tailed Tropicbirds. Unusual, as the closest breeding grounds for this species is Fiji; I've thought for some time now (since 2006) that they could be breeding in the Coral Sea Territory to the north. Although arriving birds were beginning to slow down, at 1530 hrs there were still two Tahiti Petrels, thirty two Wilson's Storm-

Petrels and at 1544 hrs another two Kermadec Petrels. Two Sooty Terns passed by at 1600 hrs, along with a White Tern. The final count for the day at 1725 hrs produced a White-faced Storm-Petrel and a Gould's Petrel.

**Species sighted:**

**Red-tailed Tropicbird – 1**  
**White-tailed Tropicbird – 3 (3)**  
**Wilson's Storm-Petrel – 101 (32)**  
**White-faced Storm-Petrel – 3 (1)**  
**Coral Sea Storm-Petrel – 21 (7)**  
**Wedge-tailed Shearwater – 97 (40)**  
**Flesh-footed Shearwater – 52 (20)**  
**Sooty Shearwater – 2 (1)**  
**Streaked Shearwater – 1**  
**Tahiti Petrel – 11 (2)**  
**Kermadec Petrel – 18 (2)**  
**Great-winged Petrel – 11 (3)**  
**Providence Petrel – 4 (2)**  
**Gould's Petrel – 9 (1)**  
**Collared Petrel – 1**  
**Arctic Jaeger – 1**  
**White Tern – 3 (1)**  
**Sooty Tern – 5 (2)**

Although species diversity was up slightly on the preceding day, with 18 species sighted, the overall count was down slightly, though the numbers of the target species, Coral Sea Storm-Petrel increased considerably. One of the big surprises was to encounter an apparent family party of White-tailed Tropicbirds, so far away from their supposed nearest breeding sites, in Fiji. As noted above in the day notes, the author encountered this species, flying in pairs, in the Coral Sea Territory in December 2006. The Tahiti Petrel numbers were down significantly on the day before but Wilson's Storm-Petrel numbers were up considerably, not surprising as the month of April represents the peak northerly passage for this species, through this region.

**Summary:**

Diversity was only slightly down on 2012 with a total of 20 species sighted compared to 22 on the previous trip, whilst total numbers encountered were almost identical, with a 762 bird count in 2012 and 756 for 2014. The major difference being that 2014 had sea surface temperatures averaging 2° C warmer than in 2012, even though the trips were carried out on almost exactly the same dates. So while in 2012, cooler water species such as Gibson's Albatross were sighted and only very low numbers of Tahiti Petrel, 2014 had a decidedly more tropical feel with much larger numbers of Tahiti Petrel present and other typically warm water species, like Polynesian Storm-Petrel and Collared Petrel.

**Footnote:**

The Southport group has full animal ethics clearance under the **Australian Museum Animal Research Authority** and a **Federal permit** to capture up to **10** of these 'striped' storm-petrels, Walter Boles being the Principal Investigator, with Paul Walbridge, Dr David Stewart and Brian Russell, the Associate Investigators. This is in order to obtain a larger data set of measurements and to collect further DNA to add to what we have collected from the bird we captured and to finally identify this particular taxon.

### The capture of the target bird



Craig Newton at the oars and Brian Russell at the ready with the net gun primed and aimed. The birds, L-R Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Great-winged Petrel and then three of the stripey storm-petrels.



Success, Craig rows feverishly as Brian eyes off the captured bird, seen here sitting on the surface just to the right of the bow rope. All four of the projectile floats can be clearly seen on the surface.



A very proud trip leader holds the bird up, post processing, for the final photo shoot, prior to release.



Finally, the release, the bird stood in the captors' hands for about three seconds before flying off strongly.



**Streaked Shearwater** *Calonectris leucomelas* Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Coral Sea Storm-Petrel** *Fregatta sps?* Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. B. Russell.



**White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus*. Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. R. Morris.



**Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscata* Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. R. Morris.



**Kermadec Petrel** *Pterodroma neglecta* Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Gould's Petrel** *Pterodroma leucoptera* Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Streaked Shearwater** *Calonectris leucomelas* Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. B. Russell.



**Upper: Flesh-footed Shearwater** *Puffinus carneipes*

**Lower: Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus pacifica* Britannia Sea 13/4/2014. R. Stephenson.



**Collared Petrel** *Pterodroma brevipes* 'magnificens' Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. R. Stephenson.



**Collared Petrel** *Pterodroma brevipes* 'magnificens' Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. R. Stephenson.



**Kermadec Petrel** *Pterodroma neglecta* Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. R. Stephenson.



**White Tern** *Gygis alba* Britannia Sea Mount 13/4/2014. R. Stephenson.

## The Vessel



To visit the kind of waters we were visiting, averaging one hundred nautical miles offshore, demands a vessel of substance and size plus it has to be surveyed to carry a certain amount of passengers out to this distance from shore along with the crew. The M.V. Laura J was built at Bulimba Brisbane by Norman Wainwright and Sons in 1989, a 90 ft monohull of wooden construction and fibreglass outer skin, with teak decks. Top speed is around 24 knots, cruising speed around 15 knots, while we spent most of the time around the sea mounts at about 6 knots. The upper decks had plenty of all round viewing room, with access right around the main deck from aft, around the sides to the ample forecastle. There is also a smaller, higher area behind the bridge, for picking birds out at a greater distance. At the stern is a lower deck, which was great for photography as it got the photographers down lower, more level with the feeding birds.

Inside, there was plenty of room in the lounge area, for dining and drinking, although most of the dining was done outside, to the rear of the lounge area. Below deck there were two staterooms with double beds and en suites where the two couples slept. Most of the rest of the team slept in the bunked cabins, while three slept in the main lounge.

## Participants



**The Crew: L-R Richard Cavill (vessel owner, chef), Craig Newton (deckie), Mark Grosskreutz (skipper)**

### The crew:

The skipper, Mark Grosskreutz is a holder of a Master class 1 merchant marine ticket, who drives a variety of ships, in various parts of the world and had just arrived back via the Panama Canal. You need a captain of his experience for exploring the kind of marine terrain we were heading for especially in light of the kind of weather conditions we were heading out in. He is also a keen marine angler, aware of the attraction of birds to fish and marine mammals.

Craig Newton, deckie and watch captain, is also a mariner of considerable experience with a coxswain MED 3 class ticket, which he needs to take the regular Southport crew and visitors out beyond the shelf on regular trips with the MV Grinner. Craig is the state government shark netting contractor for the Gold Coast from Southport down to the New South Wales border. He started taking us out in 2004 and has built up quite a rapport with birders and takes a keen interest in what we do. Also a keen angler he too has learnt a lot about the connection between birds and fish and other marine life. He is also an expert oarsman, which proved to be invaluable when he was called upon, to man the dinghy.

When it became apparent during 2013 that our previous vessel to the sea mounts in April 2012, the Texas Tea, would not be available for the foreseeable future, we were back to square one. I was preparing another trip for April 2014 and time was running out but Craig was talking to the owner of the Texas Tea, who suggested Craig contact the owner of the Laura J, Richard Cavill.

Richard Cavill, is the owner of Cavills Butchery and next door Cavs Steakhouse at Labrador on the Gold Coast. A meeting was organised with myself, Brian Russell and Craig Newton at the steakhouse to put a proposal to Richard (who'd already been briefed by Craig) regarding the hiring of his vessel. When he heard what we had to say and what it was we wanted to achieve, he was more than willing to participate and in a relatively short time put a costing to us which was more than reasonable.



**The Team: Back Row L-R Brian Russell, Richard Baxter, Geoff Jones, Rob Morris, William Abbott, Middle Row Daniel Mantle, Nikolas Haass, David Stewart, Front Row Raja Stephenson, Paul Walbridge (team leader & organiser), Plaxy Barrett, Rob Hynson, (Steve Murray, not present).**

### **The Team**

Paul Walbridge, a keen sea birder for over 50 years, arrived in Australia in 1970 from the UK, initially spent eleven years in the Australian Navy and has worked for Queensland Health for the last twenty nine years. Since 1990 he has been the sole organiser of pelagics in south east Queensland, initially out of Manly in Brisbane and since 1995 out of Southport on the Gold Coast, he is also the author of many rare seabird submissions to BARC and BQRAC. Brian Russell is a retired Pathology manager, also for Queensland Health. A keen birder of many years, is also an expert photographer and international photographic judge, a regular on Southport pelagics.

Richard Baxter, is a well known lister and organiser of birding tours to remote areas and is a member of the New South Wales police force and currently resides on the north coast of New South Wales, also a fairly regular participant on Southport pelagics. Geoff Jones is an executive of a steel company and is a well known bird photographer, while Rob Morris is an ecologist and is on the national board of a large ecological consultancy group. William Abbott is a keen wildlife photographer from New Zealand who has been on several pelagic trips off New Zealand and Australia, while Daniel Mantle is a geologist or more specifically a palynologist, originally from Ireland but now based in Australia where he gained his PhD and is an avid pelagic follower.

Dr Nikolas Haass is a medical specialist, originally from Germany, has spent some time in the US and now resides in Australia with his wife Raja Stephenson. Nikolas has served on rarities committees overseas and Raja who is from the US is a linguist and expert photographer. Dr David Stewart is a scientist with the Queensland Government in charge of the threatened species program and head consultant to the group. Steve Murray (not present in the photograph), is one of Southports' regulars and is an officer for Australian Customs. Plaxy Barrett, an ecologist by profession is a keen birder and for many years active around the Toowoomba area in southern Queensland but now resident in Western Australia. Finally, Rob Hynson is a research biochemist, originally from the UK, now residing in Sydney and currently working at the Australian synchrotron.

## **Expedition to the Queensland and Britannia Sea Mounts 15-18<sup>th</sup> December 2014**

Paul Walbridge.

### **Introduction:**

The second trip out to the Queensland and Britannia Sea Mounts in April 11-14<sup>th</sup> 2014 was highly successful, following on from the April 2012 trip and greatly appreciated by all who had participated. However, one of the original people booked on was not at all happy, one Jon Weigel. Jon was in the process of another Big Year, out to break his own record set two years previously but after booking on for the April expedition he changed his mind, preferring to head out west instead. As it turned out he missed out on three exceptional rarities, one of which still hasn't yet actually got a name.

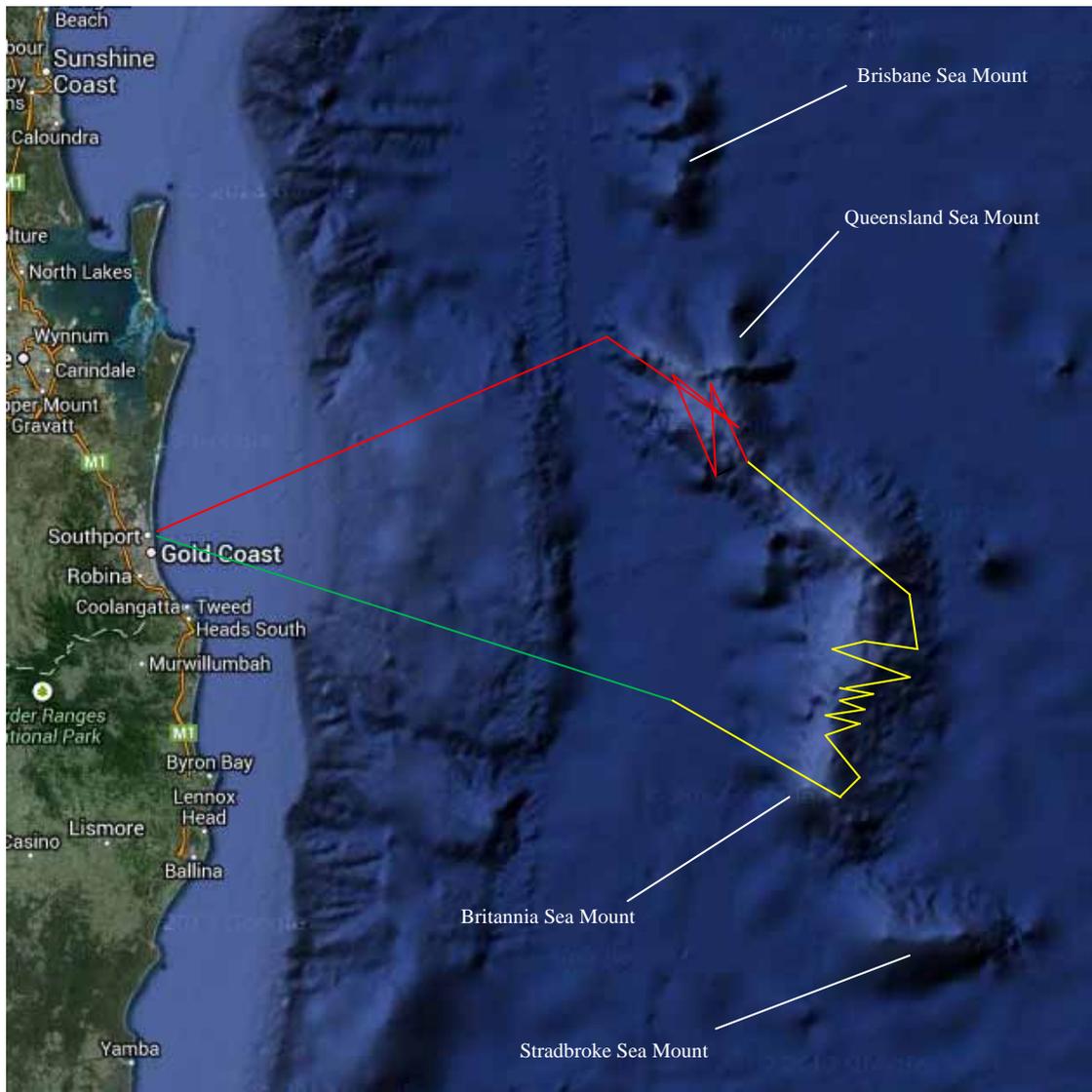
Jon was not a happy camper and he was still also yet to see Black Petrel, usually easy enough to see on the east coast of Australia in the first four months of the year, not a common bird but regular enough. Through his hard working lieutenant Tim Faulkner from the Australian Reptile Park, I was contacted to see if I could organize a trip for May, out to the sea mounts. I informed Tim that John was wasting his time, first of all, most of the major players (vessels) were already heading or had headed up north for the entire Winter/Spring period, where the money was. Secondly and most importantly, May is not a month conducive to finding seabird diversity, in the southern Coral Sea region. Again, Jon was not happy but after speaking with other seabirders, conceded that he'd missed the boat, so to speak, for the first half of the year, the birds he was after are tropical and were unlikely to be seen with colder water temperatures approaching for the winter.

Jon is not a man to give up and that Black Petrel issue was eating away at him and would keep on doing so right into the summer months. He got go to man Faulkner on to the job again, while he himself would gallivant around the country adding to the all important list, breaking the old record by midyear. Tim managed to find a vessel via a booking agent on the Gold Coast, that vessel was the Phoenix One. Once the initial details were confirmed and most of the passengers contacted, Jon then contacted me. I had already conducted two excursions out to the Queensland and Britannia sea mounts and with his constant on the road itinerary Jon booked me on to lead the trip and finalise details leading up to voyage.

Unlike the two previous trips I'd conducted, this one was mainly for the twitchers and photographers and not a research trip as such. However, both the previous excursions had been in April and as we had recorded the as yet un-named storm-petrel in January, I was keen to participate in a December sea mount pelagic, if only to see what was around out there in early Summer. The prime difficulty, is the ability to get a vessel suitable for a trip out to an area averaging 100 nautical miles offshore, carrying around twelve passengers, both comfortably and safely.

Initially in contact with the booking agent Kristin Wilson at Sailfree, I was then in contact with David Cooper and his wife Lynette Cooper and negotiations went from there. At the initial booking the Phoenix One was still up in the Barrier Reef and wasn't due to arrive back at Marina Mirage on the Gold Coast until late November. It was imperative that I inspect the vessel and meet the skipper as soon as possible so there was just a relatively small window of opportunity for this. Also, unlike previous trips that I had planned, there was no back-up contingency plan/dates, this was a one off, so completely at the mercy of the weather. I organized a meeting between myself and Brian Russell with David and Lynette Cooper on the vessel on the 4<sup>th</sup> December. Both Brian and I took to the vessel immediately and David and Lynette were very accommodating and enthusiastic about the trip ahead, although it was quite apparent that David and his crew had not encountered anything quite like us before. I had sent a PDF of the April 2014 trip to Lynette, so David knew where we wanted to go and the logistics involved but it was still a bit of a learning curve for him and his crew and for us, a new crew and vessel to break in. All looked good for the trip – happy days.

**Route taken**



————— 15<sup>th</sup> December   
 ————— 16<sup>th</sup> December   
 ————— 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> December

A total distance of approximately 370 nautical miles was travelled over the period covered; from 1800 hrs on the 15<sup>th</sup> December to around 0200 hrs on the 18<sup>th</sup> December. Total time out from the seaway was 56 hours and total hours of observation amounted to approximately 27 hours. A different course was plotted from the previous two April trips due to the prevailing conditions and the Britannia Sea Mount was covered first, with a zigzag approach for maximum coverage, whether this was more effective re; bird observations remains to be seen. At least two full passes of the Queensland Sea Mount gave us pretty comprehensive coverage of the northern sea mount.

The most southerly point reached on the Britannia Sea Mount was achieved at 0650 hrs on the 16<sup>th</sup> at 28 40.13S/155 32.99E, the most easterly point was reached, also on the Britannia Sea Mount at 1600 hrs on the 16<sup>th</sup> at 28 25.50S/155 39.58E. The most northerly point reached was obviously on the Queensland Sea Mount, late on 17<sup>th</sup> December and wasn't recorded but was several nautical miles northwest of 27 30.52S/155 04.46E.

## **The Trip**

### **Weather conditions:**

A developing low to the east of the Coral Sea combined with a high north of New Zealand brought changing conditions to coastal South east Queensland waters. Fine conditions on the 16<sup>th</sup> with just some light, high cloud, visibility, very good with some haze, variable 10-15 knot SE winds lightening off to < 10 knots in the afternoon. Maximum air temperature 26° C, barometer 1008 hPa. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, wind swung around to the north overnight, strengthening to 25 knots, gusting to 30 knots. Heavier cloud cover early morning, breaking up during the day, visibility good, with some haze on the horizon. Maximum air temperature 27° C.

### **Sea conditions:**

Light seas on a 1.5 metre swell on leaving the Southport seaway on the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Light seas on the 16<sup>th</sup> on a 1.5 metre swell, decreasing to calm, almost glassy conditions by the mid afternoon. With the change in wind direction overnight, dawn of the 17<sup>th</sup> saw seas to 1.7 metres on up to 2 metre swell, increasing during the day, before a southerly change overnight of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>. No water measurement device on board but from the internet sea-surface temperatures estimated at 22-24° C, over the two sea mounts.

### **15/12/2014**

The original plan was to slip from the mooring at Marina Mirage at 2000 hrs but the skipper, David Cooper, had put the time forward to 1800 hrs in accordance with the forecast conditions. So as soon as everyone had mustered at Mariner's Cove car park, I got everyone to get their gear on board the Phoenix One and secure their vehicles in the car parks, then we all went to one of the waterside restaurants at Mariner's Cove and had a seafood meal and a couple of beers. While everyone then headed back to the private wharf, myself and Brian Russell went to DPI depot to pick up the ready cubed shark liver berley, kindly provided by our regular skipper, Craig Newton.

Once the 12 x 4 litre ice cream containers were placed in coolite boxes they were all placed into the freezers on board. All the team were organised into their respective cabins and we were underway. We sat down to nibbles provided and broke out the wine or beer we brought along and discussed what we might see over the coming days ahead. I showed everyone notes I had written on the mysterious undescribed Coral Sea Storm-Petrel, with several composites of White-bellied, Black-bellied, New Zealand and the undescribed bird, to show all the major differences between the four species. This in turn invoked discussion as to which species had been seen where over the last four years or so, New Zealand Storm-Petrel or the undescribed bird. The skipper planned to steam south overnight to have us near the southern end of the Britannia Sea Mount at daybreak.

### **16/12/2014**

The day started with still a few nautical miles of steaming before we reached the southern limit of the Britannia Sea mount and kicked off with a Red-tailed Tropicbird sighted by a few early risers up on the boat deck at 0430 hrs. Birds had already been following us in the dark and by 0500 hrs there were at least four Great-winged Petrels, a Wedge-tailed Shearwater along with singles of White-chinned Petrel and Black Petrel. White-chinned Petrel is considered extremely rare in these waters but they are regular in summer in southern Australia and maybe more regular to these sea mounts in summer than we realise. Black Petrel however was not a surprise and John Weigel had finally got his Big Year bogey bird, off to a good start.

Shortly after at 0503 hrs after at least three Sooty Terns had flown past, the first Flesh-footed Shearwater appeared and Great-winged Petrel numbers had risen to seven. Over the next couple of hours just small numbers of Wedge-tailed and Flesh-footed Shearwaters were new arrivals plus a couple more Black Petrels when, at 0650 hrs we finally reached the southern edge of the Britannia Sea Mount and it was time to head north. Just ten minutes after the turn around the only Long-tailed Jaeger for the trip was sighted but didn't hang around and kept flying through.

By now everyone had had breakfast and all eyes were on the sky and ocean, there were a lot of Australians of the southern persuasion on board, keen to see what the southern Coral Sea could offer. More Great-winged Petrels were starting to appear again, when at 0710 hrs the first Kermadec Petrel appeared and fully expected. More Black Petrels were arriving as singles along with the odd flyby of Sooty Tern and by 0745 hrs Flesh-footed Shearwater numbers had risen to ten around the vessel. Another Black Petrel joined the throng at 0805 hrs, followed by yet another flypast of three Sooty Terns at 0810 hrs and by 0825 hrs Great-winged Petrel numbers had risen to at least 20.

At 0900 hrs a second White-chinned Petrel appeared, this one showing an actual white chin, albeit just a short, thin wedge of white at the bill base, along with yet another Black Petrel, showing direct size comparison. Not long after at 0930 hrs the first Tahiti Petrel arrived, with the water temperature probably at the lower end of tolerance. Ten minutes later another surprise species turned up in the shape of a Gibson's Albatross, not a species expected this far north in December. Another Kermadec Petrel also appeared at this time and by now there were two Black Petrels around the vessel.

At 0955 hrs yet another Black Petrel joined in along with another Tahiti Petrel and a newcomer for the day, a single Black-winged Petrel. By 1040 hrs Flesh-footed Shearwater numbers around the vessel had risen to twenty five and Great-winged Petrel to twenty. By 1130 hrs with further birds arriving all the time Flesh-footed Shearwater number were maintained at about twenty with a couple more Wedge-tailed Shearwaters arriving. Nothing much changed then until 1315 hrs when further singles of Black Petrel, Kermadec Petrel and Tahiti Petrel arrived from downwind, then at 1355 hrs as another Sooty Tern did a flypast a second Gibson's Albatross arrived astern, a similarly aged bird to the first one but with a little bit more white in the upperwing.

The more common species for the day such as Great-winged Petrel and Flesh-footed Shearwater will still arriving and dropping off as they fed on the chum and at 1425 hrs yet another White-chinned Petrel arrived, this one with a mere dot of white at the base of the bill. Then a heron like bird loomed up astern at 1503 hrs that caught everyone off guard, considering how far we were out to sea, a fully plumaged Cattle Egret that circled the vessel for just a few short minutes before heading off to who knows where. Great-winged Petrel numbers seemed constant as other species began to drop off but at 1615 hrs another Tahiti Petrel joined in along with yet another Black Petrel at 1620 hrs followed by another Black-winged Petrel at 1630 hrs and yet another at 1705 hrs. Finally, at 1735 hrs as dinner approached and drinks were brought out two more Tahiti Petrels arrived.

**Species sighted:**

**Red-tailed Tropicbird – 1**

**Gibson's Albatross – 2 (1)**

**White-chinned Petrel – 3 (2)**

**Black Petrel – 11 (2)**

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater – 19 (10)**

**Flesh-footed Shearwater – 70 (25)**

**Tahiti Petrel – 7 (2)**

**Kermadec Petrel – 4 (1)**

**Great-winged Petrel – 110 (25) all *P. m gouldi***

**Black-winged Petrel – 3 (1)**

**Long-tailed Jaeger – 1**

**Sooty Tern – 26 (4)**



**Black-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma nigripennis* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Black-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma nigripennis* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/2014. B. Russell.



**White-chinned Petrel** *Procellaria aequinoctialis* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Gibson's Albatross** *Diomedea antipodensis gibsoni* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/2014. B. Russell.



**Great-winged Petrel** *Pterodroma macroptera gouldi* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/14. B. Russell.



**Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscata* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/2014. G. Jones.



**Flesh-footed Shearwater** *Puffinus carneipes* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus pacificus* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Black Petrel** *Procellaria parkinsoni* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Cattle Egret** *Ardea ibis* Britannia Sea Mount 16/12/2014. P. Walbridge.

17/12/2014

After a good nights' sleep, the days records began again at 0430 hrs and it wasn't until people arrived on the upper deck that we realised just how the conditions had changed, such were the abilities of this vessel and we found ourselves heading into a 25-30 knot northerly. The first birds of the day at the rear of the vessel were a Black Petrel and four Great-winged Petrels. At 0445 hrs an adult Sooty Tern accompanied by a juvenile flew astern and at 0505 hrs the first Flesh-footed Shearwater arrived, followed by yet another Sooty Tern flypast. At 0524 hrs the first Tahiti Petrel zoomed in and with the warmer water it was the first of many, considerably more than the previous day. This bird was almost immediately accompanied by a Kermadec Petrel and half a dozen Wedge-tailed and Flesh-footed Shearwaters.

At 0525 hrs five Sooty Terns were circling the vessel and by 0530 hrs the numbers of Great-winged Petrels had now grown to twenty, with up to four Flesh-footed Shearwaters and a dozen Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. With more Tahiti Petrels arriving two single Kermadec Petrels arrived at 0545 hrs and 0557 hrs respectively when a storm-petrel was sighted momentarily but not identified and no photos taken. At 0630 hrs a huge albatross arrived from wider out, a more mature bird than the two from the previous day and judging by size and proportions of the bill, almost certainly an *exulans* Wandering Albatross. By 0645 hrs there were at least three Tahiti Petrels around the vessel, along with thirty Great-winged Petrels, twelve Flesh-footed Shearwaters and ten Wedge-tailed Shearwaters. With the Queensland Sea Mount slightly closer to the coast and seemingly more influenced by the East Australian Current judging by the warmer water, it wasn't a surprise to see Tahiti Petrels more prevalent than on the previous day.

At 0650 hrs we had reached the northern end of the Queensland Sea Mount and turned to head south, with two more Kermadec Petrels looming up at 0703 hrs along with a Pomarine Jaeger. At 0735 hrs a Wilson's Storm-Petrel was sighted, an unusual December sighting for these latitudes but unbeknownst to us at the time, Jenny Spry, whilst trying to photograph this bird she had unwittingly photographed another, a White-bellied Storm-Petrel, perhaps not so unusual, given the relative proximity to Lord Howe Island. Singles of Kermadec and Tahiti Petrel along with a Sooty Tern passed by with at 0810 hrs there were up to thirty Great-winged Petrels, twelve Wedge-tailed Shearwaters along with the first Black-winged Petrel for the day. At 0825 hrs things started to really heat up with a further two Black-winged Petrels, a Gould's Petrel, two Kermadec Petrels and another Pomarine Jaeger joining the throng of birds around the vessel, this one giving a merry chase to a Great-winged Petrel, with the two Black-winged Petrels in particular really performing for the photographers on board.

A few more birds were arriving with Tahiti Petrels numbering up to four and another Kermadec Petrel arriving at 0857 hrs, when at 0910 hrs a large dark shape loomed in and started chasing a Great-winged Petrel, an intermediate South Polar Skua, resplendent not with a gingery nuchal collar but a silvery grey one, possibly a sub-adult bird. The third sighting and fourth individual bird for December from Southport, there have been more than double the number of sightings of this species from Southport than for Brown Skua and December the most popular month. Just a couple of minutes later at 0912 hrs the second Black Petrel of the day arrived and at 0930 hrs the vessel changed direction again and headed north.

Pretty much nothing changed over the next hour or so with just the usual Great-winged Petrels and by now predominately Wedge-tailed Shearwaters following at the rear of the vessel until 1015 hrs, when a couple more Kermadec Petrels turned up. It was another hour before something new arrived and that was a White-tailed Tropicbird. The numbers of Tahiti Petrel had now begun to build as the day progressed and were actively feeding, arriving in the midst of the other petrels and shearwaters and asserting their authority in order to get to the food first, by 1405 hrs there were at least eight around the vessel. At 1422 hrs a large bird approached which turned out to be a sub-adult Red-footed Booby, which did a couple of circuits before heading off.

There were still a quite a few birds following in the wake feeding on the chum tossed over, namely Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Great-winged and Tahiti Petrels but it wasn't until 1437 hrs until the next Kermadec Petrel appeared. By 1520 hrs, when another three Sooty Terns did a flypast, the numbers of Tahiti Petrel had peaked at thirteen, with still half a dozen Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and seven Great-winged Petrels present. At 1530 hrs the second Gould's Petrel for the day arrived but not for long and was followed very shortly after by yet another Kermadec Petrel at 1540 hrs. Another White-tailed Tropicbird was sighted at 1545 hrs and yet another a while later at 1620 hrs by which time, Wedge-tailed Shearwater numbers still numbered twenty. Another Kermadec Petrel at 1624 hrs was the final extra sighting for the day, although many birds were still following the vessel. Time to relax and reflect on the days proceedings and enjoy our last meal for the trip.

**Species sighted:**

**White-tailed Tropicbird – 4 (1)**  
**Wilson’s Storm-Petrel – 1**  
**White-bellied Storm-Petrel – 1**  
**Wandering Albatross – 1**  
**Black Petrel – 2 (1)**  
**Wedge-tailed Shearwater – 76 (20)**  
**Flesh-footed Shearwater – 29 (12)**  
**Tahiti Petrel – 42 (13)**  
**Kermadec Petrel – 15 (2)**  
**Great-winged Petrel – 97 (30)**  
**Gould’s Petrel – 2 (1)**  
**Black-winged Petrel – 3 (2)**  
**Red-footed Booby – 1**  
**South Polar Skua – 1**  
**Pomarine Jaeger – 2 (1)**  
**Sooty Tern – 18 (5)**



**South Polar Skua** *Stercorarius maccormicki* Queensland Sea Mount 17/12/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Tahiti Petrel** *Pseudobulweria rostrata* Queensland Sea Mount 17/12/2014. P.Walbridge.



**White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus* Queensland Sea Mount 17/12/2014. Jenny Spry.



**Black Petrel** *Procellaria parkinsoni* Queensland Sea Mount, 17/12/2014. Brian Russell.



**Kermadec Petrel** *Pterodroma neglecta* Queensland Sea Mount 17/12/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Red-footed Booby** *Sula sula* Queensland Sea Mount 17/12/2014. P.Walbridge.



**Wandering Albatross** *Diomedea exulans*, Queensland Sea Mount 17/12/2014. P. Walbridge.



**Gould's Petrel** *Pterodroma leucoptera* Queensland Sea Mount 17/12/2014. P. Dodd.



**Tahiti Petrel** *Pseudobulweria rostrata* Queensland Sea Mount 17/12/2014. B. Russell.

## The Vessel



**Motor Yacht Phoenix One**

The Phoenix One was built along with two other Benetti designed sister yachts in Brisbane, by Lloyds Shipping, approximately 32 years ago. The Phoenix One is driven by two Volvo V6 turbo-charged diesels, backed up by two 4L Gardiners. She has a cruising speed of 12 knots with a range of 1700 nautical miles. Fully air conditioned throughout the vessel each cabin area has its own shower and toilet and everything about the vessel inside oozes luxury.

Approximately 116 ft long with a beam of just over 20ft and 211 gross tonnage the Phoenix One is a long, sleek aluminium vessel that sits relatively low to the water so not prone to roll around so much as the higher sided vessels one sees so much of these days, plus she is fully fitted with stabilisers. Of the three vessels that the Brisbane Seabird Study Group has used to get out to the sea mounts thus far, this one was the best equipped for the job. Not that the other two weren't a joy to sail in, just that this vessel handled the prevailing conditions that much better, enabling all observers to go about their business with ease and a minimum of fuss. The stabilisers were worked to the max but ensured that we were able to cruise up and down the sea mounts at just over idle speed.

### The Crew



L-R, David Cooper, Lynette Cooper, Jo Mackie, Trent Eugene, Peter Donohue and Paul Butler.

### The Team



Back Row: L-R Brian Johnstone, Glen Pacey, Bill Moorhead, Geoff Jones, Brian Russell, John Weigel, Jack Moorhead, Colin Rogers, Paul Dodd, Ruth Woodrow. Front: Jenny Spry, Paul Walbridge (leader, organiser).



**Life doesn't get any better at sea, looking forw'd through the main lounge.**



**The head spotter, no way we were going to miss a thing!! Absolute legend!!!**



**Whoa John, I said “feed the BIRDS!!”**



**Actually life does get better, lunch at the rear deck lounge, John back on normal foodstuffs.**

## **Summary:**

This was the first December expedition out to the Queensland and Britannia Sea Mounts, so apart from the usual birds seen closer inshore at this time of year on regular monthly pelagics, it was unsure what we might see. It turned out to be two days of contrasting sea conditions, water temperatures and consequently birds from different clinal zones. By early December the East Australian Current (EAC) hasn't yet reached its peak temperature or speed of current, particularly in an apparent El Nino situation. The Britannia Sea Mount lies further offshore than the Queensland Seamount to the north and possibly on the eastern edge of the EAC and on this occasion was reading approximately two degrees Celsius lower than the Queensland Sea Mount.

On the 16<sup>th</sup>, comparatively large numbers of Black Petrels were present but not totally unexpected as the species has been sighted on regular Southport trips in December. What wasn't expected was the presence of three of its close relative, the White-chinned Petrel, a species that is most often sighted in Australian waters in the Summer months but usually at least 2000 kilometres to the south, off southern Tasmania and the southern coasts of Victoria and South Australia. The plumage of the birds sighted were typically of the New Zealand population, with very little white feathering under the chin, or elsewhere on the head. The presence of three Gibson's Albatrosses was also unexpected in these latitudes in December. The good numbers on both days of Great-winged Petrel demonstrated that this species is indeed common at these latitudes on the east coast of Australia between the months of December to April and that they don't always appear closer inshore.

Once again there were few Tahiti Petrels in the cooler waters out wide but on moving closer to the coast on the Queensland Sea Mount and the subsequent rise in water temperature by a couple of degrees Celsius, saw the numbers of this species rise considerably. This may sound odd but I wasn't overly surprised at the presence of a South Polar Skua, as this was the second individual sighted in these waters for the month of December and was probably a young, non breeding bird. It's possible that non-breeders inhabit the strings of sea mounts down through the South Pacific during the Austral Summer, while the adults are breeding in Antarctica. The numbers of Flesh-footed Shearwaters sighted remain considerably higher out on the sea mounts than on Shelf waters compared to the years prior to the mid 1990s but numbers overall have fallen dramatically on the east coast of Australia. The numbers of Kermadec Petrels were not unexpected but I would have expected to see more Black-winged Petrels and the lack of any White-necked Petrels was a surprise. As for the Red-footed Booby, this is a species, increasingly being sighted both off southern Queensland and further south into New South Wales waters.

As for the vessel, well, I can't say enough about the Phoenix One, it's a beautifully designed and finished vessel that handles all kinds of sea conditions, well. The day area and sleeping area is luxurious to say the least and importantly there are few, if any hazards to worry about, for manic, twitching, photographing seabirders, rushing around trying not to miss anything. I've mentioned the vessel, now for the crew, led more than ably by skipper David Cooper, basically, on an excursion such as this, we need to go about our business the way we do without worrying about anything else. That is what happened, the three skippers always made sure that we were where we needed to be and when I had to pull Mr Weigel up from the rear lower deck when it got a bit hairy for chumming, provision was made for chumming from the rear side of the vessel. The three deckies, Lynette, Jo and Trent (head chef) were always on hand for anything we needed and both the ladies and Trent made sure we never went hungry – no complaints, whatsoever.

The uptake of all this was that I was very quick to book the Phoenix One for March 2015, once again out to the Queensland and Britannia Sea mounts, not only to further our knowledge of this seabird rich area but this time to catch more of the enigmatic Striped Coral Sea/New Caledonian Storm-Petrels. We have a full team booked and hopefully all the paperwork will be in order in readiness for the voyage. My team is very close to unravelling the mystery of these birds we have been sighting off this coastline and hopefully after March 2015 we will be much closer to an answer.

**Paul Walbridge.**

## NEW ZEALAND PELAGICS PHOTOSPOT – NOVEMBER 2014

Rob Morris & Brian Russell



In early November 2014 (3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>) Brian and I travelled to Auckland (North Island, New Zealand) with the main purpose being to go on three pelagic trips to do some photography: two back-to-back trips out into the Hauraki Gulf and a third trip out in to seas around the Mercury Islands off the northern tip of the Coromandel Peninsular. All three trips were organised by Wrybill Tours; they were well organised, on excellent boats, with plenty of room for photography and comfortable facilities.

Our focus for the first 2 trips was primarily to watch and hopefully photograph New Zealand Storm-Petrels *Fregetta maoriana* in the Hauraki Gulf. This plan was driven by the current work Paul Walbridge is leading out of Southport on the as yet unidentified 'stripy' or 'Coral Sea' Storm-Petrels. We wanted to get top quality photographs of New Zealand Storm-petrels *F. maoriana*, as well as observe the flight patterns and behaviour of this apparently very similar species.

The plan for the Mercury Islands trip was to watch and hopefully photograph Pycroft's Petrel *Pterodroma pycrofti*. In addition the broad plan for the trip was to watch and photograph as many seabirds as we could and to also try and see and photograph the critically endangered New Zealand sub-species of Fairy Tern *Sternula nereis davisae*. The trip was excellent and a great success as I will detail below.

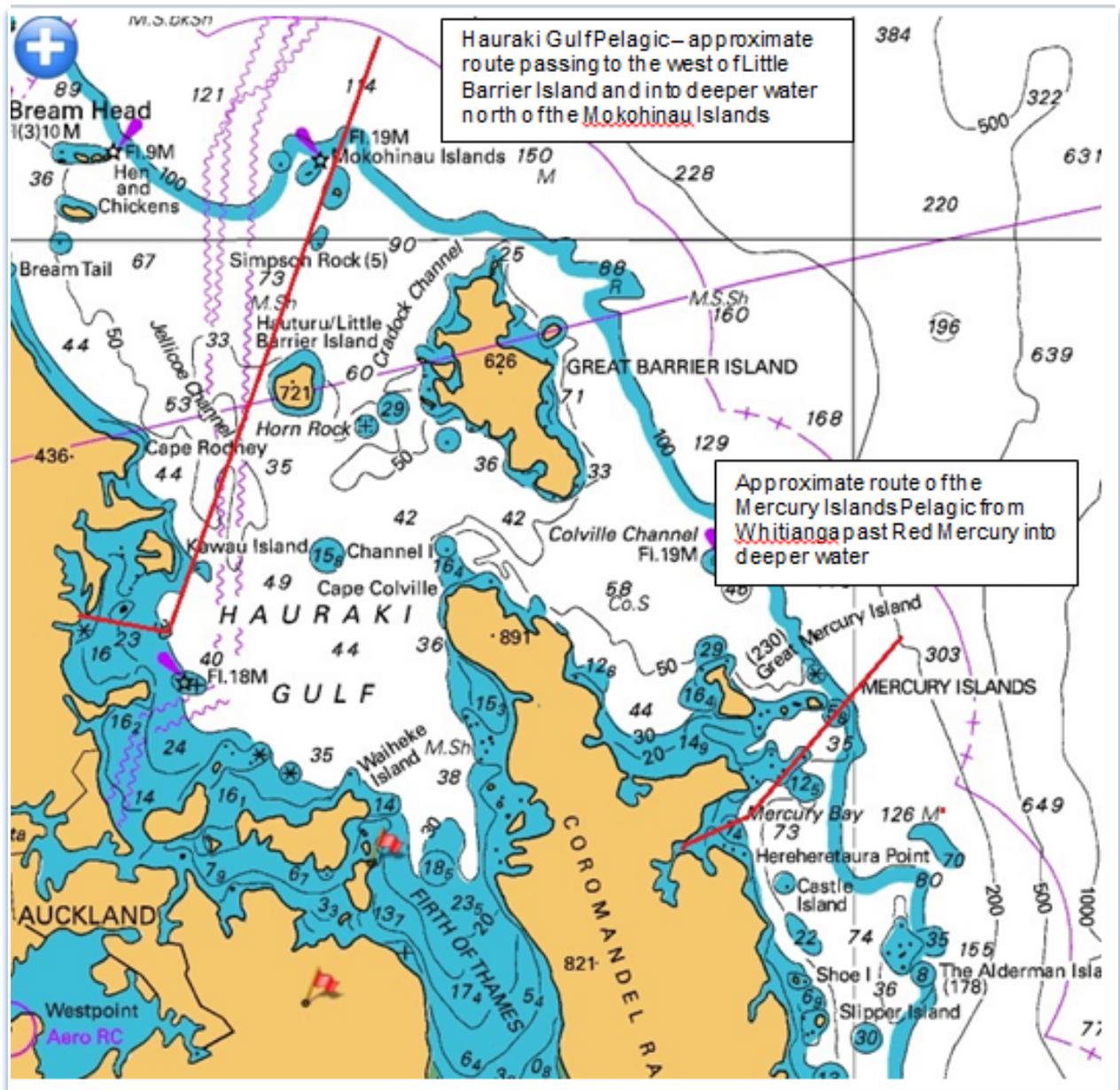


Figure 1 Bathymetric and geographic map of the Hauraki Gulf showing the routes of the 2 pelagic trips.

**Hauraki Gulf – 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of November (both approximately 08.00–19.30)**

We decided that 2 trips into the Hauraki Gulf was a good plan to maximise our photographic opportunities and to cover any possible weather issues. Trips depart from the Sandspit Wharf a few kms from the town of Warkworth, where we stayed. We had 2 very different days weatherwise; one calm and dull, the second brighter with a bit more wind. The Hauraki Gulf is the partially enclosed area of shallow sea to the north of Auckland, on the east side of the mainland. The sea is semi-enclosed by the Coromandel Peninsular and Great Barrier Island to the east. The dominant feature in the sea is the mountainous Little Barrier Island, the site where New Zealand Storm-Petrels have been recently discovered breeding.



The Hauraki Gulf looking towards Little Barrier Island (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)



Figure 2 Bathymetric map of the Hauraki Gulf showing the route of the 2 pelagics into the Gulf, passed Little Barrier Island.

The approximate route of the pelagic, which we followed both days, is set out in Figures 1 and 2. We headed out of the bay from Sandspit, and then NNE past Little Barrier Island, up to the Mokohinau Islands and in to deeper water beyond these islands. On the route back on the second day we went close inshore to Little Barrier Island. Some broad bathymetric data is also given (in metres) on Figure 1 and a little more detail of Figure 2.

The following species were seen on the trips: (Nov 4<sup>th</sup>, Nov 5<sup>th</sup>)

1. Little Blue Penguins	<i>Eudyptula minor iredalei</i>	4, 7
2. White-capped Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta steadi</i>	3, 1
3. Northern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	1, 2
4. Black Petrel	<i>Procellaria parkinsoni</i>	c20, c30
5. Cook's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma cookii</i>	100s, 100s
6. Fairy Prions	<i>Pachyptila turtur</i>	1000s, 1000s
7. Fluttering Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gaviial</i>	c200, c300s
8. Buller's Shearwater	<i>Puffinus bulleri</i>	c500s, c400
9. Sooty Shearwater	<i>Puffinus griseus</i>	2, 1
10. Little Shearwater	<i>Puffinus assimilis haurakiensis</i>	c10, c15
11. Flesh-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus carneipes</i>	c100, c100
12. New Zealand Storm-petrel	<i>Fregetta maoriana</i>	15+, 20+
13. White-faced Storm-petrel	<i>Pelagodroma marina maoriana</i>	100s, 100s
14. Wilson's Storm-petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	1, 0
15. Common Diving Petrels	<i>Pelecanoides urinatrix</i>	100s, 100s
16. Australasian Gannets	<i>Morus serrator</i>	c500, c500
17. Pied Cormorants	<i>Phalacrocorax varius varius</i>	6, 10
18. White-fronted Terns	<i>Sterna striata</i>	2, 4
19. Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	0, 2
20. Red-billed Gulls	<i>Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae scopulinus</i>	c30, c30



**Mixed Shearwater (Fluttering and Buller's) and Fairy Prion flock – Hauraki Gulf, Rob Morris (Nov, 2014)**

**New Zealand Storm-Petrel (Brian Russell) Photos 1-4 (in bright sunshine)**



**Photo 1 - New Zealand Storm-Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 2 - New Zealand Storm-Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 3 - New Zealand Storm-Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 4 - New Zealand Storm-Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**

**New Zealand Storm-Petrel (Rob Morris) Photos 5-6 (same location in dull overcast conditions)**



**Photo 5 - New Zealand Storm-Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 14)**



**Photo 6 - New Zealand Storm-Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 7 - Cook's Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 8 - Cook's Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 9 - Cook's Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 10 - Cook's Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 11 - White-faced Storm-Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 12 - White-faced Storm-Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 13 - White-faced Storm-Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 14 – Wilson's Storm-Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 15 – Wilson's Storm-Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 16 – Wilson's Storm-Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 17 – Black Petrel (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 18 – Black Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 19 – Black Petrel Rob Morris (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 20 – White-capped Albatross (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 21 – Northern Giant Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 22 – Common Diving Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 23 – Little Blue Penguin (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 24 – Buller's Shearwater (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 25 – Buller's Shearwater (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 26 – Fluttering Shearwater (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 27 – Fluttering Shearwater (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 28 – Little Shearwater (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 29 Little Shearwater (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 30 Flesh-footed Shearwater (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 31- Sooty Shearwater (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 32 – Fairy Prion (Brian Russell, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 33 – Fairy Prion (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**

**Waipu Estuary    Nov 6th 2014**

New Zealand Fairy Tern *Sternula nereis davisae*. (World Population is around 36 birds) – after a tip off on the pelagic on the 5<sup>th</sup>, we got great views of this critically endangered and rarely seen or photographed sub-species at a known feeding area on the Waipu Estuary.



**Photo 34 – New Zealand Fairy Tern (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



Photo 35 – New Zealand Fairy Tern (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)

#### Mercury Is Pelagic (from Whitianga) 8th November 1pm-8pm

The trip out to the seas around the Mercury Islands leaves from the picturesque coastal town of Whitianga on the eastern side of the Coromandel Peninsular. The main target species for this trip is Pycroft's Petrel, which breed on Red Mercury. The trips typically head out in the afternoon to observed Pycroft's Petrels returning to their breeding grounds. During this trip we had calm seas and bright sunning conditions which contrasted greatly with my successful December 2009 trip which was cloudy, wet and quite rough. The birds looked much more like Cook's Petrel's in bright light than in dull conditions. The trip followed the approximate course set out in Figure 1. The following species were seen on the trip:

1. White-capped Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta stadi</i>	5
2. Northern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	4
3. Black Petrel	<i>Procellaria parkinsoni</i>	3
4. Cook's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma cookii</i>	c10
5. Pycroft's Petrel	<i>Pterodroma pycrofti</i>	c10
6. Grey-faced Petrel	<i>Pterodroma macroptera gouldi</i>	3
7. Fairy Prions	<i>Pachyptila turtur</i>	c10
8. Fluttering Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gavius</i>	100s
9. Buller's Shearwater	<i>Puffinus bulleri</i>	100s
10. Flesh-footed Shearwater	<i>Puffinus carneipes</i>	c20
11. White-faced Storm-petrel	<i>Pelagodroma marina maoriana</i>	50+
12. Common Diving Petrels	<i>Pelecanoides urinatrix</i>	100s
13. Australasian Gannets	<i>Morus serrator</i>	20
14. White-fronted Terns	<i>Sterna striata</i>	2
15. Pied Cormorants	<i>Phalacrocorax varius</i>	c20
16. Red-billed Gulls	<i>Chroicocephalus novaehollandiae scopulinus</i>	common
17. Kelp Gulls	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	c10
18. Arctic Jaeger (Skua)	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	4



**Photo 36 – Great-winged (Grey-faced) Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014)**



**Photo 37 – Pycroft's Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014) – bright conditions**



**Photo 38 – Pycroft's Petrel (Rob Morris, Nov 2014) – bright conditions**



**Photo 39 – Pycroft's Petrel (Rob Morris, Dec 2009) – dull overcast conditions**



**Photo 40 – Pycroft's Petrel (Rob Morris, Dec 2009) – dull overcast conditions**



**Photo 41 – Pycroft's Petrel (Rob Morris, Dec 2009) – dull overcast conditions**

# The Grey-headed Albatross conundrum at the Australian east coast

Nikolas K. Haass

## Abstract

Prompted by the paucity of documented sightings of Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* in Queensland and New South Wales and a series of misidentifications in several online platforms, this article aims to provide an update on the separation of juvenile and immature Grey-headed Albatross from Black-browed *Th. melanophris* and Campbell Albatross *Th. impavida*.

## Abbreviations

BBAL, Black-browed Albatross; CAAL, Campbell Albatross; GHAL, Grey-headed Albatross; NSW, New South Wales; QLD, Queensland.

## Introduction

Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* (GHAL) breeds on many subantarctic islands: South Georgia, Islas Diego Ramirez and Ildefonso (Chile), Prince Edward and Marion Islands (South Africa), Crozet Islands, Kerguelen Islands (French Southern Territories), Campbell Island (New Zealand) and Macquarie Island (Australia). During non-breeding season it has a circumpolar distribution over cold subantarctic and Antarctic waters (**Figure 1**). Hence it is not surprising that there are only few well-documented records of GHAL in Queensland (QLD) and New South Wales (NSW).

While on the one hand most claims of juvenile/immature GHAL from NSW and QLD are now considered likely to have been instead grey-headed juvenile/immature Black-browed *Th. melanophris* (BBAL) or Campbell Albatross *Th. impavida* (CAAL), on the other hand white-headed immature GHAL may be underreported due to misidentification as BBAL or CAAL (SMITH & WHYLLIE 2009). The notorious confusion of GHAL with other mollymawk species prompted the author to write a brief update of its identification.



**Figure 1:** Grey-headed Albatross tracks. Source: BirdLife International, Seabird Tracking Database (<http://www.seabirdtracking.org>)

## Description

Adult GHAL are unmistakable and resemble Buller's *Th. b. bulleri* and 'Pacific' Albatross *Th. b. ssp. nov.* (often erroneously referred to as *Th. b. platei*) only very superficially. The differences are well covered in the literature and will not be discussed here further. Moreover, adult GHAL have never been documented in NSW and QLD waters. Hence, this article will focus on young birds.

## Size and shape

GHAL is a mid-sized mollymawk. Its jizz is similar to that of BBAL/CAAL but appears 'stouter' with a shorter and thicker neck ('bull neck').



**Figure 2:** Juvenile GHAL off Port MacDonnell, VIC, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2010. Photograph: Kevin Bartram. This bird shows a stout jizz with a ‘bull neck’, a velvety dark grey hood, pale cheeks, shadow-like eye-patch and a conspicuous white eye-crescent. The bill shape is hard to assess from this angle, but it appears to be pinched ‘ski slope’-shaped. However, the bill is not black.

#### ***Head and neck plumage***

‘Classic’ GHAL in stage 1 (i.e. juvenile and very young immature) show a dark velvety grey head and neck, a marginally paler forehead, a whitish chin and pale grey to white cheeks. The distribution of paler and whitish areas are due to feathers with narrower grey tips, which consequently turn white due to wear more quickly (MARCHANT & HIGGINS 1990). Confusion risks are young BBAL and CAAL that are commonly grey-headed and frequently misidentified as GHAL (see also HAASS 2012b, online discussion). Second year and older GHAL often lose their grey hood and then appear white-headed. These birds can easily be overlooked amongst other mollymawks (SMITH & WHYLLIE 2009).

#### ***Eye-patch***

In GHAL the dark eye-patch is prominent and diffuse before the eye, only narrow and weak above the eye and quickly petering out behind the eye. It thus appears more like a shadow with its weight in front of the eye. This causes 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, which based the authors’ own notes looks like ‘runny mascara’ and might resemble that of a GHAL more so than that of a BBAL.

#### ***Eye-crescent***

Young GHAL show a contrasting white crescent bordering the rear and bottom of the eye (similar in shape to that of adult GHAL but duller). However, BBAL and CAAL also have white eye-crescents but the contrast is just harder to see because of the usually paler heads (see Haass 2012a, online discussion).

#### ***Upper- and underparts***

As the strong contrast between the head and the grey mantle and underparts or the lack thereof is highly dependent on the greyness of the hood (see above), upper- and underpart pattern does not provide diagnostic clues. The remainder of the upperparts is typical of that of the other mid-sized mollymawks with blackish back and upperwings, white rump and uppertail coverts and a blackish tail.

#### ***Underwing pattern***

The underwing pattern can be used for ageing all three similar species, GHAL, CAAL and BBAL. All three species show a black leading edge, black primaries and dark grey secondaries. In fresh juveniles the entire underwing is reflective charcoal grey, with the greater coverts being palest (or most reflective). The lack of any

white indicates stage 1. Older immature birds of either taxon show a whitish panel formed by the greater coverts and eventually develop the adult underwing pattern.

### **Bill colour**

Usually, juvenile GHAL sport a fully blackish bill. However, the bill can also be greyish with a black mandibular unguis. Very young juveniles can have an olivaceous tinge to the bill, which differs from BBAL, which can have blackish bill as well, but with more brownish tones (Kevin Bartram, pers. comm.; see also Figure 2). This is in agreement with the description in some (e.g. MARCHANT & HIGGINS 1990; HEATHER & ROBERTSON 2005; ONLEY & SCOFIELD 2007), but in disagreement with others (e.g. HARRISON 1983; HARRISON 1987; DEL HOYO *et al.* 1992; ENTICOTT & TIPLING 1997; DE ROY *et al.* 2009; HOWELL 2012) and some recent comments on the bill colour of juvenile GHAL (e.g. Alvaro Jaramillo and Brian Patteson, pers. comm.) – see further discussion below. SHIRIHAI (2007) uses the entirely black bill in conjunction with correct ageing as a diagnostic field mark, but also describes the bill as ‘dark greyish brown-black with prominent blacker tip’. Characteristic are (1) the pale longitudinal line which starts at the face and projects outwards along the bottom edge of the ramicorn, which always seems to be there from the youngest age and (2) the lack of an obvious pale halo between the maxillary unguis and the culminicorn (typical of BBAL and CAAL; Jeff Davies, pers. comm.). From the 3<sup>rd</sup> year on, the culminicorn and ramicorn start to show yellow that eventually develops to the bright bill pattern of adult GHAL.

### **Bill shape and structure of the naricorn**

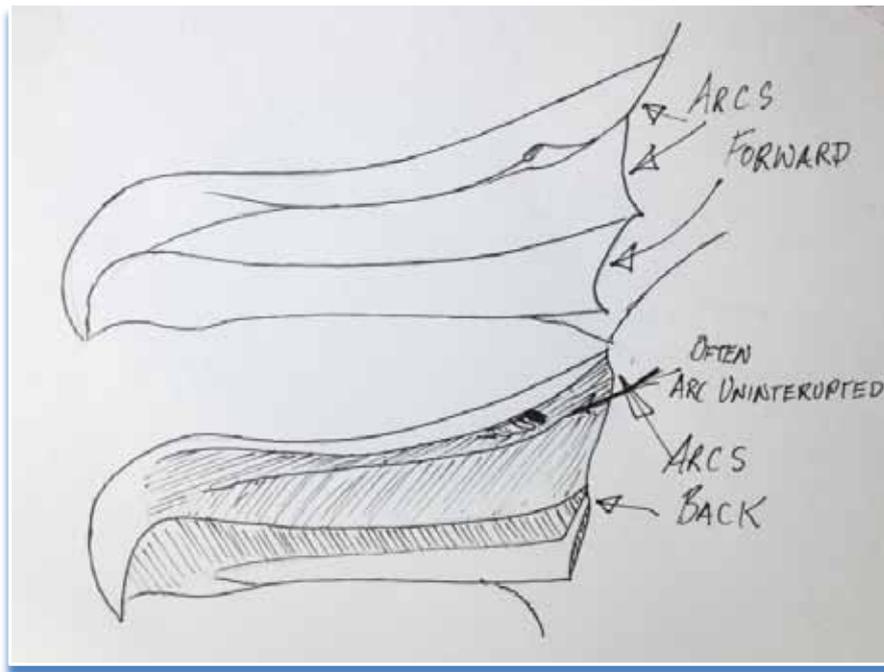
Typically, GHAL’s bill shape looks like a ‘ski slope’ or has a pinched effect. However, examination of dozens of published photographs in the literature and online proves that this is not a sufficient field mark. In contrast, the ‘membranous naricorn’ appears to be diagnostic of GHAL but missing in BBAL/CAAL (MURPHY 1936; MARCHANT & HIGGINS 1990; PRINCE & RODWELL 1994; SIMPSON & DAY 2004): This is a separate area bordered by the nostril, the culminicorn, the ramicorn and the feathered face. The membranous naricorn of a GHAL is nicely shown in ERTEL & ROSE (1997).

### **Iris**

The iris of juvenile GHAL, CAAL and BBAL is dark brown. In CAAL it changes to amber in the second or third year to eventually turn yellow in sub-adult and adult CAAL.



**Figure 3:** Beach-washed BBAL, South Ballina, NSW, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2015, Photograph: Steve Roderick, and GHAL, Stockton Beach, NSW, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014, Photograph: Dean Portelli. Note the different bill shape and structure. The culminicorn is higher all along its length in BBAL (and also CAAL, not shown) and reaches the latericorn both distally and proximally of the nostril. Therefore the ‘membranous naricorn’ is absent in BBAL (and CAAL). In contrast, the culminicorn is shallower in GHAL resulting in two typical features: (1) the ‘ski slope’ or pinched effect and (2) the presence of the ‘membranous naricorn’. Also the pale longitudinal line, which starts at the face and projects outwards along the bottom edge of the ramicorn is visible in the GHAL.



**Figure 4:** Differences in bill shape, bill structure and feathering at the base of the bill of BBAL (top) and GHAL (bottom). Drawing: Allan Richardson.

#### Discussion and analysis of published photographs

HARRISON (1987) shows two photographs of 'classic' individuals: one immature and one adult. Note the classic eye patch shape and prominent white eye-crescent in contrast to the photograph of an immature BBAL on the same page. Also note the difference in overall jizz between the two species. The immature GHAL's bill appears entirely black, as discussed in the accompanying text and also already in HARRISON (1983). 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 my own experience, juvenile BBAL and CAAL show entirely dark charcoal underwings and therefore I prefer not to use this feature as a field mark.

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, are again typical of GHAL. In contrast, the young BBALs (one of which is mislabelled as a Shy Albatross!) show eye patches typical for that species. 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, note overall jizz, eye patch shape and the prominent white eye crescent. 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 with regards to overall jizz, eye patch shape and the prominent 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.

#### Records in QLD and NSW:

There are only few well-documented records of GHAL in QLD and NSW. There are a total of 24 records of beach-washed GHAL in QLD (David Stewart, pers. comm.), some of which are published (ROBERTS 1973; STEWART & HOBSON 2006). There are approximately 30 confirmed records of GHAL that have been reported in NSW but, with the species removed from the Review List for a number of years, it is difficult to be sure of the exact number of valid records (Roger McGovern, pers. comm.).



**Figures 5 & 6:** Stage 1 GHAL off Sydney, NSW, July 2000. Photograph: Murray Lord. Note the stout jizz, the bull neck, the velvety dark grey hood, the pale cheeks, the shadow-like eye-patch, the dull white eye-crescent and the charcoal underwings. The bill appears thick but still shows the pinched and 'ski-slope' effects and the straight vertical border between the facial feathering and the base of the bill. The pale longitudinal line, which starts at the face and projects outwards along the bottom edge of the ramicorn is very conspicuous.



**Figures 7 & 8:** Stage 1 GHAL off Wollongong, NSW, June 2006. Photograph: Brook Whyllie. Note the pinched and 'ski-slope' effects of the bill and the straight vertical border between the facial feathering and the base of the bill. The 'membranous naricorn' and the pale longitudinal line, which starts at the face and projects outwards along the bottom edge of the ramicorn are very conspicuous.



**Figures 9 & 10:** Stage 2 GHAL off Wollongong, NSW, 26<sup>th</sup> August 2006. Photograph: Brook Whyllie. Note the pinched and ‘ski-slope’ effects of the bill and the straight vertical border between the facial feathering and the base of the bill. The ‘membranous naricorn’ and the pale longitudinal line, which starts at the face and projects outwards along the bottom edge of the ramicorn are very conspicuous.



**Figure 11:** Stage 1 GHAL off Sydney, NSW, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2009 (Roger McGovern & Hal Epstein, Eremaea Birdline NSW #50357). Note the stout jizz, the bull neck, the velvety dark grey hood, the pale cheeks, the shadow-like eye-patch, the conspicuous white eye-crescent and the charcoal underwings. The pinched and ‘ski-slope’ effects of the bill and the straight vertical border between the facial feathering and the base of the bill and the pale longitudinal line, which starts at the face and projects outwards along the bottom edge of the ramicorn are very conspicuous.



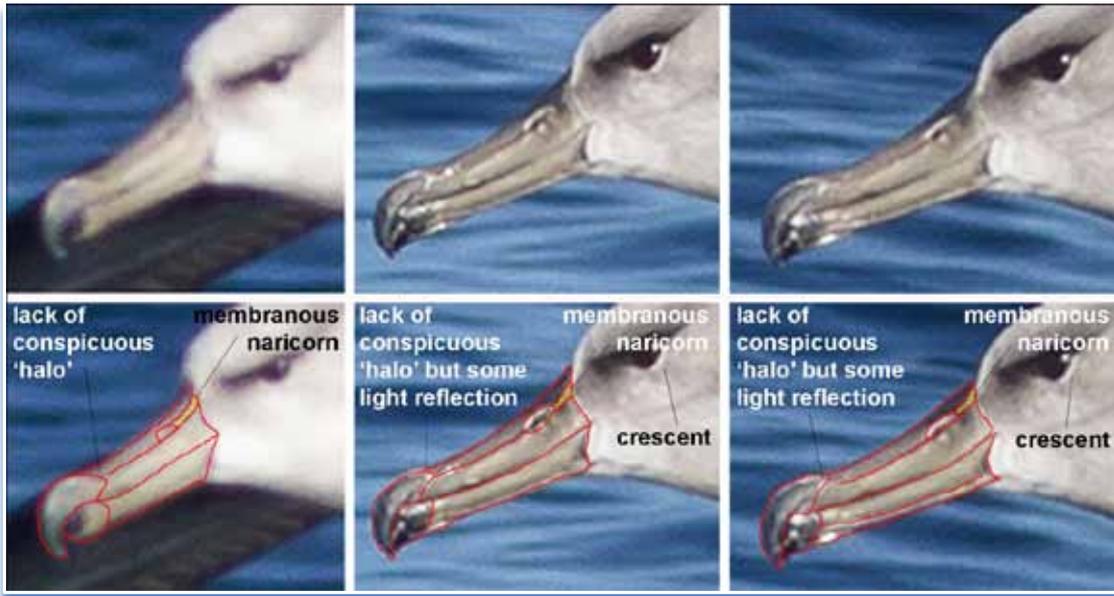
**Figure 11:** Stage 1 GHAL off Sydney, NSW, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2010. Photograph: Raja Stephenson. Note the stout jizz, the bull neck, the pinched ‘ski slope’-shaped black bill, the dark grey hood with pale cheeks, the shadow-like eye-patch, the conspicuous white eye-crescent and the charcoal underwings. This GHAL was accepted by NSW ORAC (Case #621, Haass & Stephenson).



**Figure 12:** Two dead GHAL were found by NPWS rangers and HBOC bird surveyors beach-washed on Stockton Beach (Worimi Conservation Lands), NSW, on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2014. One bird was later revisited by Dean Portelli to confirm ID, whilst the second bird was only seen in images provided by park rangers (see Eremaea Birdline Australia #218326 and #218304). Both individuals were stage 1 GHAL. Note the very conspicuous membranous naricorn; other photographs showed the dark underwings.



**Figure 13:** Unusual mollymawk off Wollongong, NSW, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2012. Photograph: Raja Stephenson. This interesting individual was accepted as a stage 1 GHAL by NSW ORAC (Case #626, Haass & Stephenson). While most field marks matched those of a stage 1 GHAL, bill shape and colour as well as the shape of the facial feathering at the base of the bill caused some debate (HAASS 2012b, online discussion). The consensus is now that it is not a GHAL but it remains unclear what it is really. It may 'just' be an atypical BBAL or CAAL but it is not impossible that GHAL x CAAL or GHAL x BBAL hybrids reach our waters, as evidenced by the close proximity of these species' nest sites at their breeding grounds as well as by the recent occurrence of such a hybrid in VIC and SA.



**Figure 14:** Unusual mollymawk off Wollongong, NSW, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2012. Photograph: Raja Stephenson. Cropped from Figure 13 and two further photographs from the same sequence.



**Figure 15:** BBAL off Sydney, NSW, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2012. Photograph: Raja Stephenson. There was a discussion about the identification of this bird. While some favoured GHAL, the author identified it as a juvenile BBAL based on bill colour, the halo between maxillary unguis and culminicorn/latericorn, the virtual lack of a membranous naricorn, the broad base of the culminicorn and the more BBAL-like eye-patch lacking a crescent.



**Figure 16:** Beach-cast juvenile White-capped Albatross *Th. cauta steadi* found of South Stradbroke Island, QLD, on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 1999 by Ray Evans. Although this bird was initially identified and published as a GHAL (Toohey 1999), this photograph clearly rules out this identification. Note the entirely white underwing with clearly defined narrow leading and trailing edges and the ‘mono-brow’ of the Shy-type Albatross complex. Date and age imply that this bird is a juvenile White-capped Albatross *Th. cauta steadi* rather than a Shy Albatross *Th. c. cauta*.

### Conclusion

The identification of the majority of GHAL is straight forward, regardless of their age and even at a distance. However, misidentifications of the GHAL/CAAL/BBAL complex are still common. This is mainly due to the suboptimal coverage of the different plumages of this complex in the regular field guides. However, there are a few individuals in this complex that cause a debate even amongst experienced pelagic birders (e.g. Figs. 13 & 14). The bird in these figures may ‘just’ be an atypical BBAL or CAAL but it is not impossible that GHAL x CAAL or GHAL x BBAL hybrids reach our waters, as evidenced by the close proximity of these species’ nest sites at their breeding grounds as well as by the recent occurrence of such a hybrid in VIC and SA. Moreover, while we have reasonable knowledge about different age groups of both GHAL and BBAL, more research needs to be done to understand the identification of stage 1 CAAL.

### Acknowledgements

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

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Errata

PRION PROFILES



Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata*



Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata*



Salvin's Prion *Pachyptila salvini*



Salvin's Prion *Pachyptila salvini*



Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata*



Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata*



Slender-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*



Slender-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri*



Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur*



Fairy Prion *Pachyptila turtur*



Fulmar Prion *Pachyptila crassirostris*



Fulmar Prion *Pachyptila crassirostris*

This is something that I referred back to a while ago and then forgot about and with several debates this winter, regarding prion species, particularly the whale birds, I decided to revisit an earlier debate. I refer to a record in The Petrel the Southport Annual Report for 2011 of a sighting of three Salvin's Prions, sighted off Southport on 17/7/2011, pages 4, 10 and 15. At the time the identification was based on the quite massive bulkiness of the three individuals plus some plumage characteristics, compared to the many Antarctic Prions present on the day but whilst the general opinion seemed to be in agreement of the initial ID, there wasn't an overall consensus. The following notes hopefully, will put the issue to rest but also invoke some discussion as to the birds origin.

Over the years, particularly during the so called Prion years, during severe frontal systems in the Southern Ocean many prions of several species have found themselves coming to grief, due to a combination of lack of food and exhaustion and beach washed on the east coast of Australia as far north as Fraser Island Queensland and beyond. In fact, every species of prion except Fulmar Prion *Pachyptila crassirostris* has occurred in Queensland waters.

During a period of several weeks in January/February 2012, myself, Brian Russell and Dr David Stewart visited the Queensland Museum, to obtain to an extent, controlled photographs of profile and dorsal views of the heads of all the known Prion species, according to current taxonomy. Two specimens of Fulmar Prion were sent to us from the Victorian Museum on loan and represent the taxa found on Heard Island, not the New Zealand population. We aimed as much as possible to keep the photographs to scale but due to poor taxidermy and subsequent distortion of specimens, this was not entirely possible. However, despite this and the normal shrinkage and discolouration over time, it is still possible to get an overall impression. It must be added the dorsal and profile views were of the same individual specimens in each case.

Back to the original debate, size of bill, overall bulk and certain plumage characteristics at the time were used to argue the point that the three birds in question were Salvin's Prion *P. salvini*. Antarctic Prion *P. desolata* is the most widespread and numerous of the prions and quite probably the species most open to variability. A plumage characteristic brought up at the time and apparently still referred to was the presence of chevron like markings on the undertail coverts, attributed to Salvin's Prion. Over the years during several prion beach washed episodes, Dr David Stewart noted that, after precise measurements, to determine either Salvin's or Antarctic Prions, these markings could be attributed to both species.

If you study the above QM specimens there is one consistent difference between the two even allowing for a fair amount of size variance. The bill of Salvin's Prion is not only longer in proportion to the head but has a flatter profile than that of Antarctic Prion. No matter the bulk or apparent width of an Antarctic Prions bill, it has a different shaped profile, that is the culmen slopes from the bill base down to bill tip at a greater angle than for Salvin's Prion. Adding to this is the maxillary unguis on Salvin's Prion is thinner, less deep than in Antarctic Prion, further accentuating the apparent flatness of the bill. So, the three birds recorded as Salvin's Prion on 17/7/2011 were in fact unusually bulky Antarctic Prions, quite possibly from the same population. There was another Antarctic Prion influx in June 2015 and with all the photographs taken of a wide range of bill sizes, none approached the bulk of the 2011 birds. The record has been corrected in the Brisbane Seabird Study Group database.

Paul Walbridge – Editor

## **Acknowledgements**

First of all of course, I would like to thank all the patrons that braved the conditions throughout the year and would hope that they enjoyed themselves out in the vast Blue Paddock enough to come out again. Despite what that pie-chart suggests, there is a core of enthusiasts here in SEQ (some, SOSSA members) that have participated in the pelagics for some years. I would also like to thank the continued support of SOSSA, both with the website and the showing of patrons our way, also with technical support when needed. Finally but not least, the continued, tireless support from our skipper, Craig Newton, who takes great effort in making sure our trips go ahead, even when the conditions are less than favourable. His vessel the 'Grinner' is a reliable, well appointed, stable vessel that can move at speed if we need it to.

I would also like to thank the Queensland Museum for its ongoing support and making available its archived specimens for the groups perusal when needed, as shown in the photographs above, one can't thank its staff enough. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Victorian Museum for entrusting us with and loaning us two of its specimens for a period of time. I would encourage birders, when finding a dead seabird on a beach, to first of all take the specimen home and freeze it and then contact the relevant state Museum or National Park authority as to what to do next. However, different laws apply to different states re; removal of specimens, so please check with your local state authority, in this regard.