



The Albatross

**SOUTHERN OCEAN
SEABIRD STUDY
ASSOCIATION INC.**

Issue No. 58

May 2017

Storm Brings Rare Petrel Ashore

By Lindsay Smith

Points of interest:

- Kerguelen Petrel
- Lots of Buller's Albatrosses
- Band Recoveries
- Visiting Christmas Island
- White-chinned Petrels

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Betty Spilstead from the Australian Seabird Rescue, South Coast Branch called me for assistance in identifying an unusual petrel that had been found ashore on the south coast of NSW on June 6th 2016. Betty is familiar with many of the seabirds found along our coast, as a member of the Australian Seabird Rescue Betty has rescued many of them, this however was something quite different.

From Betty's description, I surmised that the bird may well be a Kerguelen Petrel. This bird was an all dark petrel with a very large head and was not a shearwater.

A Seabird Rescue volunteer, Lisa Hood, had rescued the bird from a back yard in Callala Bay NSW after a severe winter storm on June 5th 2016. Lisa sent some images to me for identification. The images confirmed that the bird was a Kerguelen Petrel, *Aphrodroma brevirostris*.

Understanding the importance of this recovery, I drove down the coast to Bomaderry where I met up with Lisa who had brought the bird up from Callala Bay for identification and possible rehabilitation.

The Kerguelen Petrel is regarded as being circumpolar in its distribution, mostly at higher latitudes below the Antarctic convergence south to the pack ice (where it is common).

Kerguelen Petrels breed on remote islands in the South Indian Ocean, just north of the Antarctic Convergence. These islands include Prince Edwards and Marion

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The Kerguelen Petrel in care.
Photo: Janice Jenkin-Smith

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Grey-faced Petrel released with help from Maritime Services



Grey-faced Petrel. Photo: Betty Spilsted



The handover. Photo: Betty Spilsted

PELAGIC REPORTS

***** Please note *****

Pelagic reports will no longer be printed
with the newsletter.

You will need check to the reports on the
web site .

Letter to the Editor

Dear SOSSA,

I was on a birding trip to Australia last month and was fortunate to take a pelagic cruise out of Kiama. I have always wanted to see albatross and was certainly not disappointed not only did we see several species of albatross but the views were amazing with birds on the water alongside the boat, something I wasn't expecting. The supporting cast of petrels and shearwaters made it a great day. However what made it even more memorable was the presence of the SOSSA rep Lindsay Smith who gave a running commentary throughout. To say he is a character would be an understatement but in addition to this he is extremely knowledgeable on seabird identification and biology and was happy to share his knowledge with those on board. He answered all the questions, even the most basic ones with good grace and humour and kept us entertained during the day.

Thanks for a wonderful day.

Joe Carroll UK

DONATIONS

Thank you to the people below for
their very kind donations over
\$100.

Donations are integral to allowing
the continuation of the valuable
work on our precious wildlife. So
thanks again to:

Joanne Katsikaros
Ron & Margaret Broomham
Pauline & Mark Duncan
Tess Brickhill
Roslyn Hanson (twice again !)
Alan & Elizabeth Rogers
Joseph Carroll

Banding Buller's Albatrosses

By Lindsay Smith

A record number of Buller's Albatrosses *Thalassarche bulleri* were captured and banded on the June 25th Pelagic Trip from Kiama 2016. The number of Buller's albatrosses observed on the day is unprecedented in NSW. There were estimated to be 40+ Buller's albatrosses present around the boat at times.

Fortunately the SOSSA banding crew were able to catch and band 12 individual birds on the day. It appeared that the Buller's Albatrosses present were a cohort group, as all that were observed around the boat were adults.

The previous record number of Buller's albatrosses observed off NSW was 16 together off Wollongong on June 3rd 2012 and of these, 7 were captured and banded by the SOSSA banding team. See the Albatross Newsletter No 49 June 2012.

As was the case in June 2012 several individuals had ticks attached to the skin around their

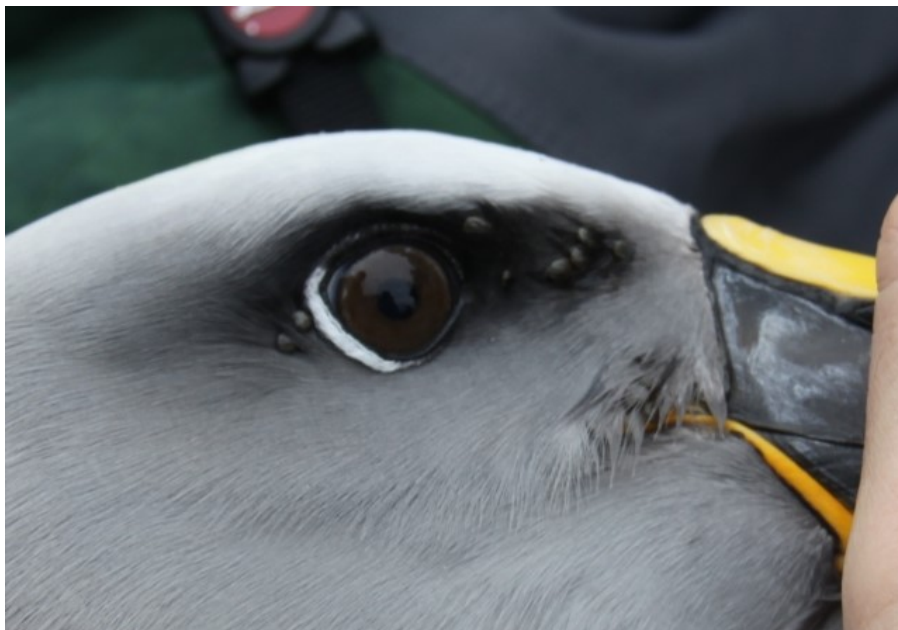


Photo: Tobias Hayashi June 3rd 2012 Wollongong

eyes. These ticks may be an indication that the birds had recently been on their breeding islands. The birds were possibly foraging to feed dependant young. The ticks ranged in size from about 1mm across to over 5 mm across, one specimen was retained for identification.

As was the case in 2012, it is not possible to determine for certain from which breeding colony these particular birds had come. The most likely source is the colonies on the Snares or Solander Islands south of New Zealand. Unfortunately we have neither recovered any New Zealand banded birds nor have we had any Australian banded Buller's Albatrosses recovered on the known breeding grounds in New Zealand.

SOSSA began banding Buller's Albatrosses off the South Coast of NSW in 1994. To date, SOSSA has captured and banded 51 Buller's Albatrosses at sea.



Buller's Albatross at sea, 25th June 2016. Photo Brook Whyllie

Storm Brings Rare Petrel Ashore, continued from page 1

Islands (tens of thousands of pairs) and further south at the Crozet's (tens of thousands of pairs) and at the Kerguelen Islands (c 50,000 pairs).

In the South Atlantic Ocean this species breeds at Gough Island and the Tristan da Cunha Islands group (tens of thousands of pairs). World population probably numbers several hundred thousand individuals.

This species ranges eastward in autumn and may be quite numerous in the Tasman Sea during some winters (Falla et al 1979). Most records from the western Tasman Sea are from along the Tasmanian, NSW and south-east Queensland coasts. They are usually beach-washed specimens or birds driven inland by severe winter storms. The first documented account of the species occurrence in eastern Australia is that of a live bird collected at Hoxton Park some 40 kilometres west of Sydney and 32.19 Kilometres from the coast in July 1954 (Hindwood K.A. and A.R. McGill 1958. *Birds of Sydney*). This specimen is now held in the Australian



Kerguelen Petrel - head profile

Photo: Lisa Hood ASR

Museum Collection Reg No O39282 Skin Collected / Donated by a Mr Malin.

McGill 1960, describes it as very rare, only four records- the one at Hoxton Park and three from localities in the Wollongong area (July to October 1945)

McBride and Hobcroft 1984 concluded the species may thus occur in waters off New South Wales more commonly than records suggest, with 10 records from New South Wales (Alan K Morris A.R. McGill Glenn Holmes 1981).

Since the early 1980s many pelagic boat trips have been run from several locations along the NSW coast. The Kerguelen Petrel has only very rarely reported in the last 30+ years. It is very doubtful whether the species is as common in NSW waters as McBride & Hobcroft suggest.



Kerguelen Petrel - underwing. Photo: Lisa Hood ASR

Band Recoveries

By Lindsay D. Smith

Consecutive bands, 121-40243 & 121-40244 recovered thousands of miles apart!

Band 121-40243. This band was placed on a Brown Skua (Lonnbergs), *Stercorarius antarcticus lonnbergi*, on July 16th 2011 by the SOSSA banding team aboard the Sandra K in the



Tasman Sea east of Wollongong. Latitude: 34-25-0sec S. Long. 151-0-0sec E. Sighted on 9 November 2016 at Island Lake, Macquarie Island. Latitude: 54deg 31min 47sec S. Longitude. 158deg 53min 27sec E by staff members of the Department of Primary Industries Parks Wildlife and Environment. The bird had moved a distance 2,317km with a bearing of 167 degrees.

A Brown Skua, taken off Wollongong NSW.

Band 121-40244. This band was placed on an Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche carteri* on July 24th 2011 by the SOSSA banding team aboard the Sandra K in the Tasman Sea, east of Wollongong. Latitude: 34-25-0sec S. Long. 151-00-0sec E. The bird was aged fourth year or older and believed to be female. Band No 12140244 was sighted



on 1 October 2016 at Amsterdam Island Antartiques, France. Latitude; 37deg 51 00S, Longitude 77deg 31 min 0 sec E. The time between banding and recovery was 5 years 2months 7days.

Bands and recovery data supplied by the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme Canberra.

A Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, taken off Wollongong NSW.

A white chinned White-chinned Petrel By Brook Whylie

White-chinned Petrels are not a common bird on the SOSSA pelagic trips, with only a handful being sighted in the past several years.

It has been noted that most White-chinned Petrels in the Tasman Sea lack an extensive white chin/throat patch, quite often the white is limited to just a few feathers. It is thought this is a geographic variation (Shirihai, 2002), although juvenile birds also have little to no white under the bill.

SOSSA captured two White-chinned Petrels on the 26th November 2016 trip, one of which, as per the photo, having a distinctive white chin.

Little is understood about why there is so much variation in the amount of white on the chin/throat of these birds, however it is likely this bird was not from the same breeding islands as other White-chinned Petrels found in the Tasman Sea.



A White-chinned Petrel with a defined white chin.
Photo: Brook Whylie



Above: A more typical Tasman Sea White-chinned Petrel. Taken off Eden, NSW.



Left: A White-chinned Petrel photographed off Tasmania, with more white under the chin.
Photos: Brook Whylie

An unexpected holiday experience - May 2016

Text and photos by Narelle Swanson

It was a photographic safari on Christmas Island, something different for me. I chose it because it was a small group tour of just 10 guests. I wasn't aware of how good the sea-bird observation opportunities were going to be till I got there. It was a holiday where I didn't have to think about accommodation, meals transport or the places to go. I could even relax in ordinary outdoor clothes, not resort wear. The only fancy gear I packed were my cameras.



Beachwashed plastics are a huge problem

The itinerary was quite varied, from sun rise to sunset. All day the sky was filled with birds coming and going. On the ground it was about avoiding the crabs, which were everywhere. There were Golden Bosun birds flying into the trees around buildings and all around the cliff edges there seemed to be birds nesting. Red-tailed Tropicbird nests were tucked under bushes, with Brown Booby adults on nests and older chicks just waiting around, they were easy to photograph.

The hosts Chris and Jess Bray were true to their word and 'worked flat-out' to get us to all the best places, at the best times, for the best photos possible. An area that had obviously been the survey area for the Brown Boobies still had nest tags amongst the very sharp coral rock. I discovered I had photographed a banded bird when I checked my work.



A location for the Red Footed Booby's was where a road cut through forest. There were birds sitting around in smaller trees near the road and some waddling on the ground searching for the right stick for their nest. With a bit of waiting whilst the bird got the balance right of the rather long selected stick, I got a good video shot. Similarly, the Abbotts booby was nesting high in forest trees at another location.

A half day boat trip for snorkelling was an opportunity to observe the frigate birds and a sea view from the cliff tops. An activity in the heat of the day, was visiting fresh water puddles around the phosphate mine area, where the frigate birds, were dipping into the water.

The seabird rehabilitation facility at feeding time was the opportunity for close ups, mostly juvenile frigate birds. The star attraction was feeding the one Abbotts Booby in care.

Continued page 8

Abbot Booby in care

Long Lost Wanderer Returns

By Lindsay D. Smith

Band No 140-39870 was fitted to an adult Wandering albatross *Diomedea exulans* by Harry Battam (New South Wales Albatross Study Group) at Belambi NSW on August the 10th 1987.

The bird was recaptured off Kiama NSW on November 26th 2016 by the SOSSA banding team. The bird had not been recovered or recaptured any where since it was originally banded almost 30 years ago.

The bird was released alive and well with the existing band. The origins of this bird remain unknown.



The Wandering Albatross prior to re-capture. The band can be seen on the left leg. Photo: Brook Whyllie

An Unexpected Holiday
Experience continued from page 7

About three quarters of the island is National Park, with signage and constructed walkways to blow-holes, waterfalls and look-outs. Visitors were encouraged to fill a bag to help in the removal of the never-ending arrival of plastic objects onto the small beaches. Parks officers spoke about their projects and problems. Problems included introduced pest cats, rats, snakes and ants, rehabilitation of mine areas and people living with crabs.



Weather wise it was the end of the wet. There were a few short rain events, but nothing to really restrict the activities. The heat was probably the greatest problem, with visibility problems from glasses fogging up.

I enjoyed the seabird experiences. I did not have to venture far from the land. Facilities were sufficient for a comfortable holiday, with few other tourists on this Australian territory in the Indian Ocean.

SOSSA Kiama - recent unusual sightings

Photos: Brook Whyllie

December 2016

A number of Sooty Terns (below) and a Gould's Petrel (right) were the highlights of the December 2016 trip.

**January 2017**

Notable sightings on the January 2017 trip were a White-tailed Tropicbird (left) and a Grey Ternlet (below).

**March 2017**

The March 2017 was a very good trip. Along with sightings of a number of Gould's Petrels, there was also a South Polar Skua (below left) and a Kermadec Petrel (below).





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ASSOCIATION INC.**

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Newsletter Contributions

All are invited to contribute to our newsletter 'Albatross'. We do prefer electronic copies of any material. Send it by email to

sossa@tpg.com.au

Alternatively mail it to us on a disk, which we will return.

We're on the web!
www.sossa-international.org

New Members...

Joseph Carroll UK
Akos Lumnitzer
Craig Newton

NEXT SOSSA MEETING

26th August 2017 AGM

6.30 pm Saturday
held at HQ

Plus Sausage Sizzle
10 Jenkins Street - Unanderra.
NSW.

We only supply the Coffee or Tea!!!

PELAGIC TRIP

PRICES 2017

Current price is:

Members: \$130

Visitors: \$130

Australian Dollars

Price is subject to change.

BOOKING NOTE:

Please be sure to add your contact phone/mobile number, plus the names of any additional passengers.
Thank You.

The editor welcomes (is desperate for!) articles from members and friends on issues relating to pelagic seabirding, seabird research and marine conservation. Please advise the editor if you intend to submit an article and submit the piece at least two weeks before the start of a publication month. Thank you!

To save SOSSA postage costs and receive 'The Albatross' as a colourful pdf or web file then please send your email address and current membership number to : sossa@tpg.com.au

WOLLONGONG/KIAMA PELAGIC BOAT TRIP DIARY DATES 2017

****** Please Book Early As Trips Fill**

Up Very Quickly ****

***Addition Dates will be added to the Website**

27th May (Saturday) 7.30am-4.00pm
24th June (Saturday) 7.30am-4.00pm
22nd July (Saturday) 7.30am-4.00pm
26th August (Saturday) 7.30am-4.00pm

26th August (Saturday) SOSSA AGM
6.30pm

27th August (Sunday) 7.30am-4.00pm
23rd September (Saturday) 7.30am-4.00pm
9th October (Monday) Inala Tours 7.30am-4.00pm

28th October (Saturday) 7.30am-4.00pm
29th October (Sunday) 7.30am-4.00pm
25th November (Saturday) 7.30am-4.00pm
9th December (Saturday) 7.30am-4.00pm

(December Trip will be the 2nd Saturday not the usual 4th due to Christmas).



A juvenile Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross from the September 2016 Kiama trip.

Please help...

SOSSA membership fees remain unchanged even though costs have increased greatly across the board. We would really appreciate any donations from those whom may be able to afford it.

Thanks again for your support!!