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PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDS OF GREY-BACKED STORM-PETRELS *GARRODIA NEREIS* IN SOUTH AFRICAN WATERS

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An estimated 200,000 Grey-backed Storm-Petrels *Garrodia nereis* breed on islands in the sub-Antarctic (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992; Brooke 2004; , Ryan and Bester 2008; Taylor 2012). Breeding is primarily between October and April, at colonies on the Falklands/Las Malvinas, South Georgia, Gough, Prince Edward, Crozet, Kerguelen, Auckland, Antipodes, Chatham, and possibly Macquarie island groups. Most individuals remain close to these islands, with smaller numbers occurring seasonally off south-eastern Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania and the southern coast of Argentina (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992, and references within).

Stark and Sclater (1906) included this species on the South African list, and Roberts (1940) and Vincent (1952) followed Stark and Sclater. Clancy (1980) subsequently removed it from the regional list due to a lack of specimen records. Ryan and Rose (1989) did not list Grey-backed Storm-Petrels in their synopsis of southern Africa



Fig 1 - First record of a Grey-backed Storm Petrel in South African waters. Seen c. 20 nautical miles south-south-west of Cape Point, South Africa on 14 April 2007. © Graham Searll

seabirds. It was included in the review of unconfirmed southern African species in Hockey *et al.* (2005). Sinclair *et al.* (2011) indicated two records within the 200 nautical mile (nm) South African Economic Exclusive Zone. This note presents details of three photographic records in South African waters, around those in Sinclair *et al.* (2011).

The observations were made over the shelf-break south-west of the Cape Peninsula, South Africa, during pelagic seabirding day-trips departing from Simonstown or Hout Bay .



Fig 2 - Second South African record of the Grey-backed Storm Petrel. Seen c.16 nautical miles south-west of Cape Point, South Africa on 27 December 2009. © Rob Leslie.

Periods of high winds and rough seas preceded each record, but conditions on the day were calmer. It is assumed that a single individual was present on each occasion. The first record was during the non-breeding season, suggesting it was of either a recent fledgling or non-breeding adult. The second and third records were during peak breeding, and were likely of young, non-breeding individuals.

The first record was on 14 April 2007, on a trip led by John Graham and co-guided by Barrie Rose, Alvin Cope and Clifford Dorse (Fig. 1). This sighting was made behind a hake trawler c. 20 nm south-southwest of Cape Point. The bird was first seen amongst



Fig 3 - Third South African record of the Grey-backed Storm Petrel. Seen c. 40 nautical miles south-west of Hout Bay, South Africa on 11 January 2014. © David Christie.

1000+ Wilson's Storm-Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* and European Storm-Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus*. A further three sightings were made over a period of an hour.

The second record was on 27 December 2009 on a trip guided by Rob Leslie (Fig 2). The bird was seen amongst a flock of Wilson's Storm-Petrels feeding at a hake trawler c. 16 nm southwest of Cape Point. Two sightings were made over 20 minutes.

The most recent record was on 11 January 2014 on a trip guided by Vincent Ward and Dave Christie (Fig- 3). This bird was seen 40 nm south-west of Hout Bay. It was feeding with c. 100 Wilson's Storm-



Petrels and 50 European Storm-Petrels behind a long-line fishing vessel. Multiple sightings were made over a period of two hours.

Grey-backed Storm-Petrels are rarely seen more than 500 km from the nearest breeding colonies on the Prince Edward and Gough island groups (PG Ryan pers. comm.). There are unlikely to be many individuals near the South African mainland coast. The three records are from an area with good observer coverage. There are regularly scheduled pelagic trips, in addition to observers aboard fishing vessels. By comparison, the rest of the coast has little to no observer coverage. This disparity prevents any broader assessment of the occurrence of this species in South African waters.

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