

NOTES

FIRST RECORD OF A GREATER SHEARWATER IN ALASKA

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The Greater Shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*) breeds in the southern Atlantic Ocean and disperses after breeding to the North Atlantic. On 3 August 2001, I observed and photographed an unidentified shearwater (Figure 1) in the Gulf of Alaska, about 30 km off the southern coast of Montague Island (59° 50' N, 148° 00' W). The bird was subsequently identified as a Greater Shearwater. This observation and photographic documentation provides the first Alaska state record (D. Gibson in litt.) and one of very few records for the North Pacific (see Table 1). This is the 464th bird species to be recorded in the state of Alaska.

At the time of the sighting, several Fork-tailed Storm Petrels (*Oceanodroma furcata*) and Northern Fulmars (*Fulmarus glacialis*) were near our boat, while Sooty Shearwaters (*P. griseus*) and/or Short-tailed Shearwaters (*P. tenuirostris*) were seen in the distance. The unknown shearwater flew in, landed 50 feet away, and quickly swam to within 20 feet of the boat. It dove and swam underwater to forage, using its wings for propulsion, a common behavior among shearwaters (Burger 2001). At times, the shearwater swam directly under the boat.

Figure 1 clearly shows the bird to be a Greater Shearwater, a species that averages slightly larger than the Northern Fulmar (also shown). All other shearwater species with similar markings are smaller than Northern Fulmars. The bird was reminiscent of a Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) in that it had a dark cap extending below the eye and becoming faint over the nape, giving way to a nearly white neck and throat. The shearwater also had mottled light brown flanks and buffy sides. The photo also shows the bird's brown wings with paler edging, dark undertail coverts, and a long thin blackish bill.



Figure 1. Greater Shearwater with Northern Fulmar in the Gulf of Alaska, 3 August 2001.

Photo by John M. Pearce

NOTES

Table 1 Sightings of Greater Shearwaters in the North Pacific

Date	Location	Record status	Citation
24 Feb 1979	Monterey Bay, California	not accepted	Erickson and Terrill (1996)
1-2 Oct 1994	Monterey Bay, California	accepted	Howell and Pyle (1997)
15 Oct 1995	Gulf of the Farallones, California	not accepted	McCaskie and San Miguel (1999)
13-15 Jan 2001	Monterey Bay, California	pending ^a	<i>Winging It</i> , Jan 2001
3 Aug 2001	Montague Island, Gulf of Alaska	accepted	this paper
8 Oct 2001	Santa Cruz, California	pending ^a	<i>Winging It</i> , Nov 2001

^aUnder review by California Bird Records Committee (G. McCaskie pers. comm.).

Greater Shearwaters have been reported five times off the Pacific coast of California (Table 1) and once off extreme southern Chile (Harrison 1983). No records are known from pelagic surveys conducted on the high seas of the Pacific (A. Jaramillo pers. comm.). The latitude of the Alaska observation (60° N) is not atypical for a Greater Shearwater in early August. Nearly all of the world's Greater Shearwaters spend the austral winter in the North Atlantic between 45° and 51° N latitude (del Hoyo 1992, Huettman and Diamond 2000) after dispersing from South Atlantic breeding colonies on the islands of Tristan da Cunha. Small numbers of nesting birds (<15 pairs) have also been observed on Kidney Island in the Falklands since the 1960s (Woods 1988). On the basis of molting birds in the area, Watson (1971) suggested that an undiscovered breeding colony may exist around Tierra del Fuego.

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