

Two records of Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* from Thai waters

The Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* is known in Thailand only from two specimens collected from fishermen off Phuket Island by C.B. Frith (FRITH 1978). This note details two further sightings.

On 13 April 1991, PJH noticed a dark, medium to large shearwater, in flight, approaching the boat on which he was crossing from Thab Lamu, Phang-Nga Province, to the Similan Islands. The sighting was made roughly one hour out of Thab Lamu. The bird approached head-on, eventually passing only a few metres in front of the bow, and continued southwards until lost from view. The weather conditions were a calm sea with light winds.

Description: A medium-sized, dark brown shearwater with long, narrow wings. General size and shape similar to Sooty Shearwater *P. griseus*. Flight action typical for the genus, with wings held straight, only slightly bowed. Bird in mainly level flight, only *ca.* 2 m above the water, with occasional wing beats and very little banking. Entire upperparts uniform dark brown; flight feathers and tail slightly darker, blackish-brown. Underparts slightly paler, smoky-brown, relieved only by paler greyish underwing coverts. Tail short and rounded. Bill relatively short, appearing blackish. Leg colour not noted.

On the afternoon of 2 May 1991, RO and JN observed a shearwater sitting on the surface of the sea while crossing between Ko Phi Phi Don and Ko Maa, Krabi Province. The bird was in the process of swallowing a fish and allowed a close approach. After its meal it seemed satiated and was reluctant to fly. It raised its wings several times while resting on the surface of the sea, allowing the underwing pattern to be seen. The bird finally took flight when the boat had approached to within 5 m, though landed again after flying only a few hundred metres.

Description: A medium-sized, dull sooty-brown shearwater with few obvious plumage features apart from a narrow greyish line on the underwing coverts. Short rounded tail with protruding feet obvious at close range. Flight strong and direct with stiff-winged glides. Bill short and blackish; dark eyes and pinkish legs.

Several other species of medium to large all-dark shearwaters are known from S.E. Asian waters, and could occur off Thailand. Flesh-footed Shearwater *P. carneipes* differs from Short-tailed Shearwater in its larger size and diagnostic yellowish-pink or flesh-coloured bill and legs. The wings are also broad with a more uniformly dark underwing. The dark morph of Wedge-tailed Shearwater *P. pacificus* (with which PJH is familiar) shares a dark bill with Short-tailed, but it too has dark underwings. The tail is wedge-shaped, appearing long and pointed when not fanned, giving a skua-like appearance. Sooty Shearwater is the most similar to Short-tailed and separation can be problematical, but it differs in having a longer bill, a less steeply rising forehead and a usually more extensive and whiter (silvery) area on the underwing coverts. Two other dark shearwaters, Christmas Shearwater *P. nativitatis* and the largely sedentary Heinroth's Shearwater *P. heinrothi* are far smaller. (HARRISON, 1985).

Although size is difficult to judge on lone birds, in both sightings the birds were thought to be roughly similar in size to *P. griseus*, with which all observers were familiar from European waters. The bird seen by PJH was identified as *tenuirostris* by its short, almost stubby black bill and the limited area of grey on the underwing coverts. That seen by RO and JN was thought to be slightly paler brown than *P. griseus* with greyer, less

contrasting underwing coverts and similarly had a short, dark bill.

Short-tailed Shearwaters breed in huge numbers in south-east Australia and Tasmania, primarily on islands in the Bass Strait, from September to May. Breeding adults depart in mid-April; non-breeders from early February to early March. The chicks leave in late April and virtually all have gone by 4 May. They then undertake a rapid eight to twenty day passage north to the Pacific Ocean to the north-west pacific, extending north of the Bering Strait. Presumed non-breeders arrive first in the Gulf of Alaska, in late April, with breeders arriving in a second peak in May. They return to their breeding grounds southwest through the central Pacific (MARCHANT & HIGGINS, 1990).

Records of birds to the west of this region are sparse. Apart from those of Frith, there are records from the Makran Coast, Pakistan, in May 1889 (JOUANIN, 1957) and from southern Sri Lanka in May 1949 (PHILLIPS, 1978) and more recently in June 1994 (KARUNARATNE ET AL. 1994). Such birds have generally been considered vagrants or strays (BOURNE, 1976; ROBERTSON, 1994). However, MARCHANT & HIGGINS (1990) considered that Frith's and the other Indian Ocean records were more likely to have derived from a small, and little known population of *P. tenuirostris* which breeds off the coast of Western Australia, birds from which they thought "...probably travel to the north Indian Ocean between Oman and Thailand". Hence Short-tailed Shearwater may be a regular visitor in small numbers to the Andaman Sea off peninsular Thailand.

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