

BROOKLINE BIRD CLUB EXTREME PELAGIC TRIP MAGIC
AUGUST 23, 24, 2014
JEREMIAH TRIMBLE

A few days out, I think (and hope) that we have all recovered from yet another fantastic Brookline Bird Club Extreme Pelagic trip. It was truly a trip to remember. A total of 50 BBC members and guests boarded the Helen H in Hyannis on a calm mild day this past Saturday at 5:30am. With some trepidation we set off for the warm waters tucked up against and overflowing onto the Continental Shelf some 90 miles away to the south. The trepidation generated by the potential for rough sea conditions did nothing to quell the excitement of those on board. Leading the trip, spotting birds, keeping detailed records and working the microphone on this trip were Nick Bonomo, Ian Davies, Mark Faherty, Marshall Iliff, Luke Seitz and myself. I am deeply appreciative of the monumental efforts of the leaders on this tough trips, and I'd like to single out the efforts of Nick and Marshall. I would also like to thank Ida Giriunas and Naeem Yusuff who were responsible for putting this trip together and to the Brookline Bird Club for sponsoring it. Also, especially in conditions such as we had, the successes of this (and all) trip was made possible only by the skilled, generous and impressive efforts of Captain Joe Huckemeyer and his crew on the Helen H. Finally, a big thanks to all the participants on the trip for being a part of such a great weekend.

Here are some links to images from the trip as well as a map of the route we took:

<http://www.shorebirder.com/2014/08/aug-23-24-bbc-extreme-pelagic-wfsp-rbtr.html>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jrtrimble/>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/9191812@N02/>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/uropsalis/>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/rjm284/>

Narrative:

The first few hours of the trip were fairly pleasant and by the time we were skirting the eastern shores of Nantucket, we began to see our first pelagic birds. Given the way the pelagic scene has been going the last few years, we were not surprised that our first pelagic birds were Cory's Shearwaters. In the area of Nantucket Shoals, with slightly building seas, we began to encounter more birds including good feeding groups of Cory's and Great Shearwaters and at least one (and the only one of the trip) Manx Shearwater. There were also a few Wilson's Storm-Petrels, a good number (a few hundred at least) phalaropes (all that were seen well enough were confirmed as Red-necked). We had brief and somewhat distant views of all three jaegers this morning, including a very distant full adult Pomarine Jaeger.

Not wanting to limit our time in the warmer waters to the south we did not linger and began the long trek towards Hydrographer Canyon and the Continental Shelf. Building winds and seas made for a

difficult ride and Captain Joe Huckemeyer was forced to direct the boat more to the east to make the trip more bearable. As such we actually ended up a bit further east than intended and would miss the northern tip of Hydrographer Canyon. This did not negatively affect our excitement when Marshall spotted a White-faced Storm-Petrel hopping along the surface of the water. The bird disappeared quickly **but** Captain Joe, incredibly in my opinion, maneuvered the boat to just the right position and a few moments later, as we were distracted by some Audubon's Shearwaters close by the boat, the White-faced Storm-Petrel reappeared very close and put on a great show for all to see.

Audubon's Shearwaters would become a feature of this trips with a two day total of 100 birds or more, close to 50 each day. These totals represent the highest for any effort in Massachusetts and are very high for anywhere in the United States. Indeed throughout this afternoon we encountered good numbers along our route. At a few dedicated chumming efforts, building numbers of Wilson's Storm-Petrels were joined by a handful of Band-rumped Storm-Petrels, another specialty of these deeper, warmer waters. As we made our way over the shelf edge, just to the east of Hydrographer Canyon we were extremely lucky to encounter one of the most exciting animals of the trip, a Whale Shark, the largest fish in the world! Captain Joe kept us on this beautiful shark as it swam around us, eventually cresting the surface with its large flat head and beautifully spotted dorsal fin. At one point, a few lucky observers watched as a Band-rumped Storm-Petrel flew right between the exposed dorsal and caudal fin of the Whale Shark.

At one point, an interesting small shearwater crossed the bow. The leaders alerted the boat that we should all get on this bird. Even with the naked eye, the bird stood out for the patterning on the upper wings. It showed two obvious lines formed by pale tips on the secondary coverts. This feature is a key character for Barolo Shearwater and all those who were able were paying close attention to this bird. Unfortunately, photo review of the bird seemed to (and still seems) to point to this bird not being a Barolo and perhaps a very oddly plumaged Audubon's Shearwater. The taxonomy and field identification of the small "black-and-white" shearwaters is still very much being worked out. We will continue to research this bird and report any conclusions we can make. In the mean time, if anyone has additional images of this bird that they can share, please send them along. It would be particularly helpful to have some shots of the undersides of the bird showing the underwing pattern and the undertail coverts.

After this sighting, we made an effort to make our way to the east as far as possible, hoping that we could make it close to Oceanographer Canyon by dark. The seas had other plans. The Helen H beat its way into the heavy seas and wind but we could not make much headway slowing us down to a quarter of our potential cruising speed and making it a very uncomfortable ride. However, our spirits were lifted when the call came out that a Black-capped Petrel was spotted in the wake. This bird gave views to many on board but disappeared rather quickly. Diagnostic photos were obtained by a few on board. Given the conditions and the fading light, instead of trying to make it further east (which was nearly impossible) Captain Joe decided to find an anchoring spot nearby to hunker down for the night. As we were nearing a likely spot, another Black-capped Petrel was sighted coming up the stern. Luckily, this one continued right up the port side of the boat giving great views before disappearing to the north.

We anchored up for the night and some of the crew set up some fishing gear and began chumming. The sea and wind conditions made for a very difficult and bumpy night but Captain Joe set us up as comfortably as possible. Those checking the chumming and fishing efforts after dark witnessed a few interesting sightings including a Tiger Shark and storm-petrels including at least one Band-rumped!

The morning provided continued heavy seas but a fair number of birds in the chum slick that had been laid out all night. A dawn sighting was made of another Black-capped Petrel that zipped by on the horizon but unfortunately did not stick around or return. We lingered here for a few hours before making our way towards the north a bit. There was still some warm water to be had and we did our best to scan the angry ocean for interesting birds. Incredibly not too far north we encountered a bird on the water and as soon as we got within a reasonable distance realized that we were looking at a tropicbird! Closer inspection revealed the bird as an immature Red-billed Tropicbird.

Captain Joe positioned the boat perfectly and the wind and waves pushed the boat close to the bird and great views were had by all within 50 feet of the boat. When the bird took off it peeled down the port side of the boat towards the stern. As we followed its track we noted a bird approaching at lightning speed from further down our wake. The tropicbird recognized it a bit quicker than we did and went into evasive maneuvers. It came back up our port side from stern to bow giving incredible views as it was chased by a beautiful Pomarine Jaeger. The tropicbird even vocalized as it flew passed. The chase lasted for a few minutes before the tropicbird disappeared to the north but we were treated to another close pass by the Pomarine Jaeger.

From this point on, we general made our way back towards Nantucket Shoals hoping for lessening seas and more birds. We found both. Some of the more noteworthy sightings on the way back were good numbers of Red-necked Phalaropes with some Red Phalaropes mixed in! These birds were often quite close to the boat and in mixed flocks which provided great comparisons and a chance to get to know the differences between these species. And the highlights kept coming. At one point, a shout went up as a skua was sighted off the stern. While distant, the bird was observed for a minute over the wake and many images were taken confirming this to be a South Polar Skua, a lifer for even one of the leaders! The ride back was capped off by a very fresh juvenile Long-tailed Jaeger. While this bird lazily kept just ahead of the boat (which was at full speed), Captain Joe kept us on the bird for several minutes and lots of great images and views were had by those on board.

We arrived back into port with a final new bird greeting us for the day list, a noisy flock of Canada Geese. Despite the trying weather and sea conditions, the trip proved to be one of the most successful we have ever run. The Red-billed Tropicbird is only the 6th record ever for the state. Prior to the three Black-capped Petrels seen on the trip, Massachusetts had only 6 previous records! We managed great view of White-faced Storm-Petrel one of North America's most sought after pelagic species and saw all three jaegers AND South Polar Skua! And the Whale Shark was only the second ever for the many trips we have run.

Again, thanks to all those who participated in this trip and made it such a success. A special thanks to Ida Giurnas and Naeem Yusuff, the Brookline Bird Club and the Helen H!

Trip List (NOTE: eBirders who requested will have the official 1/2 hour lists or a summary list shared with their accounts very soon):

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) 20
Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) 2
Black-capped Petrel (White-faced) (*Pterodroma hasitata* (White-faced)) 3 #
Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*) 283 #
Cory's Shearwater (borealis) (*Calonectris diomedea borealis*) 227 #
Great Shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*) 273

Cory's/Great Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*/*Puffinus gravis*) 7 #
 Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*) 5
 Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) 1
 Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*) 100 #
 black-and-white shearwater sp. (*Puffinus* sp. (black-and-white shearwater sp.)) X
 Wilson's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*) 552
 Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) 46 #
 Band-rumped Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*) 7 #
 White-faced Storm-Petrel
Oceanodroma sp. (*Oceanodroma* sp.) 1 #
 Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) 1 #
 Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) 3
 Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) 30
 Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) 2
 Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) 1
 Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) 349 #
 Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) 9 #
 phalarope sp. (*Phalaropus* sp.) 200 #
 South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*) 1 #
 Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) 2
 Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) 2
 Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) 2 #
 Parasitic/Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus/longicaudus*) 1 #
 jaeger sp. (*Stercorarius* sp. (jaeger sp.)) 4
 Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) 2
 Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) 18
 Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) 2
 Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) 27
 Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) 8
 Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) 166
 Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) 1

large whale - 4+

Atlantic Spotted Dolphin - 1+

Bottlenosed Dolphin - 1+

unidentified dolphin sp. - 20+ (photo review needed)

Tiger Shark - 1+

Whale Shark - 1

Mola mola - 2

flying fish sp. - 15+

We have an opportunity to run another Pelagic trip to the Continental shelf at the end of September. Please let us know if you would be interested. We need enough people registered by 9/6 to plan to do so. If you want to join us, contact Ida Giriunas at ida8@verizon.net (781-929-8772) for further information and waiver forms and send in a signed waiver form along with your check made out to the 'Brookline Bird Club Agent' to Ida at 83 Summer Ave, Reading, MA 01867 ...If the trip does not go, you will get a full refund.

SEPTEMBER 27,28, 2014: HYANNIS TO HYDROGRAPHER, VEACHES, ATLANTIS CANYON area:

5:30 AM SATURDAY – 6PM SUNDAY. COST: \$295 BBC MEMBERS, \$310 NON-MEMBERS

for WHITE-FACED STORM PETREL, Band-Rumped and, Leach's Storm-Petrel, 5 Shearwater species (including possible BAROLO), 3 Jaeger species, terns, gulls and sea ducks, possible Tropicbird, bridled tern, other rarities.

Good birding,
Jeremiah Trimble
Cambridge, MA

--

Jeremiah Trimble
Curatorial Associate - Ornithology
Museum of Comparative Zoology
Harvard University
26 Oxford Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
phone: 617-495-2471
fax: 617-495-5667
email: jtrimble@oeb.harvard.edu