

BBC PELAGIC 7.21.12

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The Brookline Bird Club's annual July pelagic trip departed on 21 July 2012 for the deep water off the Continental Shelf. We were fortunate this year in that we were able to shift the departure time to 1:00a.m. (with an earlier evening return to port) that allowed us to be farther offshore and near the more interesting habitat in the early morning hours. This paid clear dividends with bird activity, and most of our best sightings were before 10:00 a.m., which is usually the time we would first be arriving in those deep waters on this trip.

We were less fortunate with the weather. Although we knew we might be in for heavy seas, initial forecasts suggested that these would die down by late morning. Instead, we encountered 4-8 ft seas for our entire time in the deep water and upwards of 10-11 foot seas at times, which was very hard on everyone on board. It only started to die down at about 4pm, when we were in rather dull inshore waters. Even for the minority of the boat that did not get sick, spotting and staying on birds was significantly more difficult, and the turbid seas made for very bad conditions for finding things other than birds (like sea turtles, sharks, and cetaceans). To look on the bright side though, the fairly strong winds kept shearwaters and other birds up in the air where they could be spotted. Better yet, it dispersed the scent of our chum much better than it would have on a calm day, and the results were striking. Difficult though the birding was, our chum slicks attracted a great number of storm-petrels and shearwaters, along with a few of the highlight birds. The best bird of the day, a BLACK-CAPPED PETREL, was likely attracted to the scent of the chum as it made two passes by the boat.

With Jeremiah Trimble, James P. Smith, Naeem Yusuff, Luke Seitz, and myself on board as leaders, we departed Hyannis aboard the Helen H with Captain Joe Huckemeyer at the helm. We headed for an area of warmer water near Atlantis Canyon, but got steered a bit off course by the heavy swells and wind. When we finally crossed the continental shelf, we were about 24 mi west of Atlantis Canyon and in about 74.5 F water. As we started across the shelf edge, we started chumming, and had a great group of birds with us for the next two-and-a half hours or so (7:30-10:00) as we slowly worked our way south across the shelf edge, chumming all the way. Wilson's Storm-Petrels and a few Great Shearwaters were the commonest species, and were with us all day. LEACH'S STORM-PETRELS were common from this point onward, and gave some epic good looks. Two first-cycle LONG-TAILED JAEGERS came into our chum slick and spent the next 90 minutes right off the stern, providing fantastic photo ops. A Pomarine Jaeger joined and briefly wrangled with the Long-taileds, giving great looks. Sporadic CORY'S SHEARWATERS drifted through, as did a few SOOTY SHEARWATERS.

The day's highlight came just after 9:00 when word trickled down to me that James P. Smith had just seen a likely Black-capped Petrel cross in front of the boat. I had the microphone, and sprinted forward to get a look at it. As soon as I put up my binoculars, I found the bird and fortunately it was angling back towards us. I began screaming BLACK-CAPPED PETREL!!! as did others on the upper deck, and the bird made a fairly leisurely (for a Pterodroma) pass along the starboard side. Most of those already outside got a good look at the bird, and a few even managed to burst forth from inside the cabin to see it as well. Unfortunately, it kept going past us and did not double back on our chum slick. We continued chumming, but didn't find anything new for a while.

Deciding to head out to deeper water (the Black-capped was over 2500 ft of water, but we wanted to head for 5000 ft) we went deeper and did a couple chumming stands to try for Band-rumped Storm-Petrel and other deepwater specialties. We had no luck on rarities, but a PARASITIC JAEGER did dash by. Amazingly, Parasitic is BY FAR the rarest jaeger in these offshore waters in mid-summer, and although our previous July trips usually seem to record Long-tailed and Pomarine, this was the first July Parasitic we have seen. The deep water chumming got us many more Leach's, all of which we checked carefully.

After chumming for a while, we headed back towards the Continental Shelf and saved some time to chum over the drop-off. This proved worthwhile, with a nice group of storm-petrels and shearwaters here, as well as another immature POMARINE JAEGER, this one a light morph. While out over the deep water we managed 4 species of cetacean: SHORT-BEAKED COMMON DOLPHIN, OFFSHORE BOTTLENOSED DOLPHIN, RISSO'S DOLPHIN, and FIN WHALE.

The trip back in was long and slow, but had a few notable highlights. Fortunately, the waves slacked off a bit and many folks started bouncing back from a day of seasickness. A few observers got our fourth shearwater of the day, with a lone Manx. Around the same time, James P. Smith got a look at a Scopoli's Shearwater, the small, Mediterranean-breeding form of Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea diomedea*) that some consider a distinct species. Compared to the commoner Cory's Shearwater form, this one tends to be smaller, slimmer, and slimmer-billed. Most importantly, it has variable white tongues extending onto the primaries from below, unlike *Calonectris diomedea borealis* which has all dark undersides to the primaries (most of the time). James took note of the odd molt in the midwing on the Scopoli's, and later when we saw a group of 8-10 Cory's on the water, and noticed this same molt pattern, we stopped to check them out. Amazingly, almost all proved to be Scopoli's. Photographers were standing at the rail photographing as many as

possible as we approached a few small flocks on the water, and photos confirm that most of the birds were Scopoli's, although at least a few were borealis.

Our final estimates were 13 Scopoli's and 3 borealis. On past trips we have confirmed this form only twice before, and our high count is only two or three, so this was highly noteworthy.

As we passed through Great South Channel, we saw our first terns and gulls of the day and the pelagic birds dropped off, signaling the end of the trip.

TRIP LIST: Below are the totals for the trip. I provide links to eBird checklists for photos of key birds:

BLACK-CAPPED PETREL - 1, white-faced:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=3DS11246540>

Cory's Shearwater - 24, including 6 definite borealis and ~13 apparent SCOPOLI'S:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=3DS11246532>

subID=3DS11246532

<<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=3DS11246532>>

Great Shearwater - 77

Sooty Shearwater - 5

Manx Shearwater - 1 (seen by a few)

Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 602

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL - 112 (great looks, e.g.,

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=3DS11246538>

peep sp. - 1 (Ryan Schain only)

Great Black-backed Gull - 1

PARASITIC JAEGER - 1 (subadult;

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=3DS11246544>)

POMARINE JAEGER - 2 (first-summer birds, one dark, one light:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=3DS11246540>

LONG-TAILED JAEGER - 3 (first-summer, one light, two intermediate morph; photos:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=3DS11246539>)

dolphin sp. 5 (dashed under bow at about 5:25)

Common Dolphin 28 (groups of 20 at about 6:15 and 8 at about 14:30)

Bottlenosed Dolphin 4 (came in to boat at about 7:20)

Risso's Dolphin 12 (one group seen at about 11:00)

Fin Whale 1 (one seen well at about 13:15; also at least one large whale sp.)

The below were all seen only in the nearshore waters:

Northern Gannet - 1 (nearshore; seen by a few)
Double-crested Cormorant - 1 (nearshore)
Herring Gull - 6 (nearshore; Great South Channel)
Great Black-backed Gull - 2
Roseate Tern - 1
Common Tern - 85
Least Tern - 15
sterna sp. - 8

BLACK-CAPPED PETREL: This bird represents the second ever photographed in Massachusetts and should provide the fourth accepted state record. Full details are available here:

<http://www.maavianrecords.com/home/annual-reports/report-14-1>, although that text leaves out the report from George's Bank from 23 Mar 1977 (discussed here: <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/NAB/v031n05/p01056-p01057.pdf>).

The record from Stellwagen Bank from 22 Apr 1991 was re-reviewed and determined

to be identifiable only as *Pterodroma* sp., with some Records Committee members considering it most likely to have been a Bermuda Petrel based on the blurry images! In any event, this bird is probably best considered the sixth for Massachusetts.

Of particular interest is that this Black-capped Petrel, and the one photographed

18 July 2009 (see photos here

<http://www.maavianrecords.com/home/annual-reports/report-14-1>) both pertain

to the recently-described 'white-faced' form. It is unclear still if this represents a subspecies, well-marked morph, or even a separate species. Howell and Patteson discussed it in a recent article and Steve Howell's new "Petrels, Albatrosses, and Storm-Petrels of North America" guide discusses it and illustrates it at length. It is thought that birds of this type breed in the Windward Islands (i.e., Dominica, Guadeloupe, and possibly Martinique), but birds are largely extirpated from there and may persist only on Dominica. The dark-faced birds are thought to come from the 'core' range on Hispaniola. Dark-faced birds outnumber white-faced ones off north Carolina, but white-faced birds seem to be more common early in the season (May), while dark-faced predominate from July onwards. Interestingly, several of the vagrants to the north and east have been white-faced birds, including a UK and an Azores record.

EBIRD LISTS: Importantly, the leaders kept detailed bird lists for every

half-hour period of the day, providing a detailed snapshot of where and when the pelagic life was occurring relative to geography and water conditions. These lists have been submitted to eBird and we can share these detailed lists, or a single list for the day's totals, to anyone who would like copies of those lists. Whether you already have an eBird account or not, this checklist sharing process can copy these lists to your account, and once there, you can modify them as needed to reflect the birds that you did or didn't see at various points during the trip. To receive copies of those lists, please email me and tell me if you'd like the detailed lists, summary list, or both. Please provide either an eBird username (preferred) or an email address. (The eBird username is the name you use to log in to eBird with; if you don't have an account yet, just provide an email address).

****Again, if you want the eBird checklists, please email me, tell me what lists you want (half-hourly counts or composite list, or both).****

PHOTOS: As always, many photographers aboard got incredible images. At least

Ryan Schain, Jeremiah Trimble, and Jeff Offermann have nice sets on Flickr including images of most of the day's highlights:

Ryan Schain: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ryser915/sets/72157630696138406/>

Jeremiah Trimble:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jrtrimble/sets/72157630717413032/>

Jeff Offermann:

http://www.flickr.com/photos/jeff_offermann/sets/72157630703515196/

Thanks as always to the Brookline Bird Club for organizing and running this trip. In particular, Naeem Yusuff and especially Ida Giriunas deserve our thanks for their roles in making this trip a success. Captain Joe Huckemeyer and first mate Matt deserve special recognition as well for their superb boat driving, excellent help chumming (especially on so rough a day), fixing toilets and cleaning the deck, and overall incredibly hard work and professional approach to these trips.