

## Sunshine Coast Pelagic Report, 24th November 2019

Another full boatload of birders gathered expectantly at the Sunshine Coast Afloat jetty early in the morning of Sunday 24th November 2019. Several fruiting trees in the area meant that a number of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos and Pacific Koels among other frugivores were much in evidence. An Oriental Cuckoo even did a brief fly-by as we were setting up on the boat! Everyone filed on board, and the burley barrels were duly loaded, this time with a nally bin lashed to the railings to hopefully reduce the mess! After the safety briefing, we motored down the river with the wind in our faces, and glad to be heading out into the deep blue yonder once again.

Rather few seabirds were apparent as we crossed the seaway and began heading offshore, although we did bump into a few small flocks of up to 20 Short-tailed Shearwaters, which was nice to see after their near-absence last month. Far fewer Short-tailed Shearwaters have arrived back on their southern Australian breeding grounds this year, tying in with the fairly thin and fairly late southerly passage that we have been seeing off the Sunshine Coast. These birds were on their return migration from Alaska and far eastern Russia, where they



*Oriental Cuckoo, which flew over the jetty as we were getting set up, photograph by Richard Fuller.*



*Immature Long-tailed Jaeger. Note the white shafts restricted to only three of the primaries (often up to five in Arctic), overall slimmer build, smaller head flatter belly profile, and shorter, stubbier bill than Arctic or (especially) Pomarine. Photo by Richard Fuller.*

spend the non-breeding season before returning to the southern hemisphere to breed.

Soon after we passed into Brisbane waters, we noticed a small jaeger. Quickly shouting for the boat to be stopped, we were struck by the bird's light and buoyant flight, and quickly determined that it was either an Arctic or the much rarer Long-tailed. Unfortunately the bird didn't hang around, but we managed a few photos, which were sufficient to nail the identification as an immature Long-tailed Jaeger. There are only two previous eBird records of this species in Brisbane, the first off Cape Moreton on 2 Nov 1991 (Seb Buckton) and the second on the Sunshine Coast pelagic on 4 Mar 2018. It was a very welcome sight for many observers on the boat, being a lifer for several, an Australian tick for many, and a great

Sunshine Coast and Brisbane record for all those keeping local life and year lists, or doing the Sunshine Coast photographic challenge. With the first Australian record as recently as 1930, this species was once considered a vagrant to our waters, but with better identification criteria and the advent of high quality at-sea photography, it is now known to be a scarce summer visitor to the east coast. This species is a trans-equatorial migrant, breeding all around the Arctic, and migrating to the southern ocean where it spends the non-breeding season.

Buoyed by this success, we continued to the continental shelf, noting a Tahiti Petrel along the way, and eventually arriving at the shelf and starting our drift at 0928. Almost immediately a few Tahiti Petrels, Wedge-tailed and Short-tailed Shearwaters came in, but although birds generally lingered around they didn't seem to be enormously hungry, unlike last month when birds were voraciously feeding. Short-tailed Shearwater flocks were still going through at a rate of about 75 per hour, and good numbers of Tahiti Petrels

visited, but diversity was disappointingly low. Finally, a Wilson’s Storm-petrel broke the monotony, but it was clear this wasn’t going to be a record-breaking drift – we had had the major bout of excitement for this trip already, on the journey out! At 1214 we started the engines and began making our way back to port, noting several more flocks of migrating Short-tailed Shearwaters, and a small group of terns (four Little and a Common) prior to gaining the sea-way.

Another great bird notched up, and wonderful to spend another day on the ocean with the majestic and massively migratory seabirds. The first three trips of 2020 are on 2 Feb, 29 Mar and 26 Apr. Contact Richard Fuller on [r.fuller@uq.edu.au](mailto:r.fuller@uq.edu.au) if you interested in coming along.

*Story by Richard Fuller*



*Migrating Short-tailed Shearwaters on their journey from the northern Pacific. Photograph by Richard Fuller.*

**PARTICIPANTS:**

Chris Attewell, Shinead Ashe, Louis Backstrom, Tyde Bands, Sarah Beavis, Ed Benbow, Ka Tai Chang, Mandy Cheung, Yi Fei Chung, Richard Fuller, Brian Johnson, James Kennerley, Rob Kernot, Sue Lee, Mu-ming Lin, James Martin, Nicole Richardson, Raja Stephenson, Rebecca Stroud, Jamie Walker, Chris Wiley, Matt Wright

**SPECIES: Total (max. at once)**

Long-tailed Jaeger 1 (1)  
 Little Tern 4 (4)  
 Common Tern 1 (1)  
 Crested Tern 2 (1)  
 Wilson's Storm-petrel 1 (1)  
 Tahiti Petrel 27 (5)  
 Wedge-tailed Shearwater 23 (5)  
 Short-tailed Shearwater 300 (80)



*Tahiti Petrels made several close passes by the boat. Photograph by Richard Fuller.*



*Short-tailed Shearwater. Note short, weak bill, and rounded crown profile to separate from Sooty Shearwater. Photo by Richard Fuller.*