

## Sunshine Coast Pelagic Report, 14th February 2021

Our 6th December trip was cancelled because of severe weather. Between bad weather and the pandemic, we had only managed three trips during 2020. In the lead-up to our first trip of 2021 we watched with some dismay as continuous easterly winds give way to northerlies, although the forecast southerly change and squalls predicted for the day kindled some hope that we might see a good variety of birds.

We got underway at 0630 and motored down the river. The weather was rather calm, with a light northerly wind blowing and a light swell. Onboard, our burley barrel contained 12.5kg chicken mince, 5L tuna oil, 2kg of pulverised fresh pilchards and 2kg of chopped squid. We laced the mixture with dried mealworms out at sea.

Just beyond the seaway was a group of about 10 Common Terns, and with them was a single White-winged Tern. Fairly low numbers for both species, which often occur in much bigger summer flocks. Wedge-tailed Shearwaters accompanied us on the journey out to the shelf, with a few Crested Terns (scarce at this time of year). Suddenly a Flesh-footed Shearwater was amongst the Wedgies, alt-



*Fluttering Shearwater, showing pale “saddlebags” on the flank sides, and shortish bill, photograph by Daniel Townend.*



*Flesh-footed Shearwater. A nice study by Cheryl Ponter, showing the thick pale bill with a dusky tip, pale feet and blunt tail. Noticeably thicker-necked than Wedge-tailed Shearwater.*

though it didn't stay around for long.

A distant jaeger briefly distracted us, but was too far off to be identified; suddenly we noticed a couple of frigatebirds high in the sky. Stopping the boat, several folks managed photographs, and these showed both birds to be Lesser Frigatebirds, despite some initial excitement that one might have been a Great Frigatebird. Soon after entering Brisbane waters off Cape Moreton, a nice Long-tailed Jaeger did a reasonably leisurely fly-by posing for photos, but a very distant booby was too far off for safe identification.

The first Tahiti Petrels began to appear, and we eventually cut the engines over about 300m of water on the shelf break, and began drifting while deploying burley. The sea was churning and we barely moved, drifting north-east at about half a kilometre per

hour. Almost immediately a couple of Sooty Terns flew by, but the stars of the show were the Tahiti Petrels continuously streaming in to check out the slick. They didn't stay long around the boat, but the sheer numbers were impressive, with 82 birds logged in total during the course of the day—very healthy numbers indeed!

Presently, the second Flesh-footed Shearwater of the day showed up close to the boat, and a couple of Hutton's Shearwaters also flew by. With reasonably choppy seas ahead of us we upped sticks and began the journey back towards land.

Small numbers of Tahiti Petrels continued to appear, and several Hutton's Shearwaters were seen. Before we left Brisbane waters, a Lesser Frigatebird appeared, perhaps one of the birds we had seen on the way out. Further inshore a couple of jaegers did close but brief fly-bys, one of which was an Arctic and the other an Arctic or a Pomarine.

The final seabird of the day was a Fluttering Shearwater photographed by Daniel Townend

Overall, a reasonably good trip, with Long-tailed Jaeger and Lesser Frigatebirds being the standout birds, along with amazing numbers of Tahiti Petrels. Conditions were pleasant for the most part, and an enjoyable day was had by all. The remaining trips in 2021 will be on 4th April, 11th July, 31st October (extended 12 hour trip going into deeper water beyond the shelf) and 14th November. Contact Richard Fuller on [r.fuller@uq.edu.au](mailto:r.fuller@uq.edu.au) if you interested in joining us for any of these trips.



*Tahiti Petrel, undoubtedly the bird of the day, with 82 birds logged—a very high count for the Sunshine Coast pelagic. They were continuously streaming in while we were drifting. Photograph by Cheryl Ponter.*

*Report by Richard Fuller*

**PARTICIPANTS:** Samuel Adams, Louis Backstrom, Andrew Christodoulou, Detlef Davies, Michael Dawson, Angela Farnsworth, Rick Franks, Richard Fuller, Madelon Lane, Richard Maarschall, James Martin, Braden McDonald, John O'Shea, Dan Pagotto, Cheryl Ponter, Trevor Preston, Karen Rose, Lynn Scott, Carolyn Stewart, Daniel Townend, Graham Townend, Peta Townend, Kye Turnbull.

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

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|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Booby sp. 1 (1)          | Tahiti Petrel 82 (37)          |
| Lesser Frigatebird 3 (2) | Flesh-footed Shearwater 2 (1)  |
| Jaeger sp 2 (1)          | Wedge-tailed Shearwater 52 (7) |
| Arctic Jaeger 1 (1)      | Hutton's Shearwater 3 (2)      |
| Long-tailed Jaeger 1 (1) | Fluttering Shearwater 1 (1)    |
| Common Tern 10 (10)      | <b>NON-BIRDS</b>               |
| Crested Tern 6 (2)       | Common Bottlenose Dolphin      |
| White-winged Tern 1 (1)  | <i>(Tursiops truncatus)</i>    |
| Sooty Tern 2 (2)         |                                |



A spectacular cloud-laden front barrelled into us during the trip, releasing plenty of rain, but making for some wonderfully atmospheric views of the brooding sky. *Photograph by Kye Turnbull.*