

## Sunshine Coast Pelagic Report, 17th July 2022

With stiff south-easterlies in the run-up to the trip, we were a little disappointed to wake to light north-westerlies on the morning of the trip, a brief window of relatively poor seabird weather before the south-easterlies would return a few days later. Nevertheless, our indefatigable group of pelagic birders set off at 0630 under the capable captainship of Zoe. We set a course just south of east, to try to get into deep water NE of Cape Moreton.

We motored down the Mooloola River from our mooring, and crossed the bar into a rather easy-going ocean. The winds were about 10 knots, but there was almost no swell to speak of, and conditions were good for boating. No-one was seasick all day.

Good numbers of Australasian Gannets were loafing and feeding just offshore; this species only really builds up big numbers in SE Queensland in Jul-Aug. Several groups of Hutton's Shearwaters whizzed about, including one knot of 12 birds. Several Humpback Whales were moving close to the boat, giving good views. Eventually a good candidate for Fluttering Shearwater zipped by, but we weren't able to get enough on it to be sure. The numbers of Crested Terns and Australasian Gannets



*A Humpback Whale splashing about, with Moreton Island in the background. Photograph by John*



*Fairy Prion, the star bird of the day. A winter visitor to SE Queensland, this species has been scarce in recent years. Note the distinct M-pattern on the upperwing, extensive black band spanning the full tail width, small bill and steep forehead. Photo by Richard Fuller.*

dwindled, and there were several quiet spells with no birds visible. Just after we had passed into Brisbane waters, a Fluttering Shearwater arced by, showing clear white saddlebags, striking white underparts, pale primary coverts, and an axillary bar as opposed to a triangle.

As we began to approach the shelf break, a straggly flock of Crested Terns turned out to have a Sooty Tern mixed in, and was briefly visible off the back of the boat, although it never showed especially well. The first Providence Petrels appeared soon after, and it's always a thrill to see these superlative seabirds winging their way across the ocean in complete mastery of the elements. We clocked their double white underwing flashes and marvelled at their rapid scything flight action.

New Providence Petrels kept appearing, and we eventually cut the engines in about 500m of water at 0945. We deployed burley from the back of the boat, although all we could see for the first half hour or so were small numbers of Providence Petrels. We scrutinized each bird carefully, but try as we might, we could not turn any of them into a different species! Presently an extremely scruffy moulting Wilson's Storm-petrel appeared and began feeding in the slick. A small group of Risso's Dolphins swam by giving good views. Numbers of Providence Petrels swelled, but then dropped to almost nothing.

By 1130 the sun was getting warm, the atmosphere was soporific, and few birds were around. We decided to motor slowly up the slick, but saw only one Providence Petrel in about three miles. Convinced that there was relatively little point in staying at the shelf break, we began heading back inshore, planning to stop a bit closer in. There were basically no birds on view for most of the journey back. Eventually, and despite not having seen any birds in the vicinity, we stopped at 1310 for one last

drift. Almost immediately the shout went up for a bird in attendance, and we were delighted to see a Fairy Prion on the water close to the boat, feeding on the burley. It put on a great show for about 15 minutes, allowing all on board to take in all the key ID features. This species is seen reasonably frequently by boat operators, but often on pelagic trips we whizz past their usual inshore haunts in our desire to get out into deeper water. Breeding in southern Australia and on several Subantarctic Islands, this species is a scarce winter visitor to SE Queensland, although there have been very few records in the past few years and we were very happy to see this bird.

Another Fluttering Shearwater flew by giving reasonable views, and an adult Brown Booby was seen. Eventually at 2pm we continued the journey back, and didn't see much of note until we approached the shore, where there were big numbers of Australasian Gannets around—a count of 54 birds in the last 7.3 km of the journey, something of a local record count.

We motored back up the Mooloolaba River slightly disappointed with a day that didn't quite live up to its promise, although very grateful for wonderful views of Humpback Whales and a Fairy Prion, and good numbers of Providence Petrels and Australasian Gannets. We have additional trips this year on 14th Aug, 23rd Oct, 13th Nov. The trips are regular 9-hour journeys, with the exception of 23rd Oct, which is an extended 12-hour trip. Contact me on [r.fuller@uq.edu.au](mailto:r.fuller@uq.edu.au) to book.

*Report by Richard Fuller*

**PARTICIPANTS:** Megan Adams, Nat Aurisch, John Aven'el, Mauroveen Aven'el, Michael Dawson, John Francis, Jo Fryer, Richard Fuller, Brandon Hewitt, Geoff Lee, Jenny Lee, Helen Leonard, Fiona Leyden, Nicola Lord, James Martin, Chays Ogston, Cheryl Ponter, Wendy Powe, Alex Rossi, Xu Shi, Pablo Silber, Richard Simmonds, Lisa Turner.



*A total of 37 Providence Petrels were logged during the day, a respectable tally. Photograph by Richard Fuller.*

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

Australasian Gannet 106 (54)  
 Brown Booby 1 (1)  
 Crested Tern 49 (20)  
 Sooty Tern 1 (1)  
 Fairy Prion 1 (1)  
 Wilson's Storm-petrel 1 (1)  
 Providence Petrel 38 (18)  
 Hutton's Shearwater 21 (12)  
 Fluttering Shearwater 2 (1)  
 Fluttering / Hutton's Shearwater 1 (1)

**NON-BIRDS**

Risso's Dolphin (*Grampus griseus*)  
 Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

See eBird Trip report at <https://ebird.org/australia/tripreport/68313>



*An unusually high count of 54 Australasian Gannets was logged in a 7.3 km distance just off Mooloolaba on the return journey. Photograph by Pablo Silber.*