

Sunshine Coast Pelagic Report, 14th August 2022

Once again we were dismayed to have the winds change from nice easterlies to horrible westerlies on the day before our trip, and so it was without much optimism that we set out from Mooloolaba at 0630. However, there were many people on board experiencing a pelagic for the first time, so at least some lifers were guaranteed! The relatively light swell and 10-knot winds made for gentle seas, and we made excellent speed heading due east towards the shelf break.

The big numbers of Australasian Gannets present last month had all but disappeared, with just a few individuals remaining. A few flocks of Hutton's Shearwaters whizzed about, but there were no Fluttering Shearwaters mixed in. This is a bit strange, since there are large numbers of the latter wintering off Bribie Island this year. Clearly they don't wander far! The first Wedge-tailed Shearwaters of the season soon appeared, but the main interest was non-avian on the outward journey, with a lucky few getting brief views of a Hammerhead Shark *Sphyrna* species. Humpback Whales were passing aplenty, and we slowed to appreciate a number of these majestic animals.

Just after passing into Brisbane waters, a couple of Sooty Terns appeared, and the first Providence



Humpback Whales performed excellently today. Photograph by Geoff Dennis.



Bridled Tern, the star bird of the day. A rare visitor to SE Queensland despite breeding on the Great Barrier Reef. Note the brown upperparts contrasting with the black nape and the strong supercilium behind the eye. Photo by Geoff Dennis.

Petrel showed up. We reached the shelf break at 0940 and began our drift in 750m of water. Relatively few birds were around, but we gradually accumulated several Common Noddies, small numbers of Hutton's Shearwaters and a feeding flock of Crested Terns. The best bird of the trip then put in an appearance, with a Bridled Tern joining the Crested Tern flock for a few minutes. Although breeding in good numbers in the Great Barrier Reef, this species is rather rare in SE Queensland, and so we were very pleased with this record.

With very few new birds appearing, we decided to cut our losses and leave slightly early, to allow us time to stop for anything interesting on the way home. We hadn't really lingered to appreciate the Humpback Whales, so that was definitely part of our decision.

Sure enough, before too long we came across a very active group of Humpback Whales, and we went into full whale-

watching mode, marvelling at the sheer size and power of these magnificent animals! The ever-vigilant Kye Turnbull noticed a group of smaller cetaceans associated with the Humpbacks, and it quickly became apparent we were dealing with blackfish, i.e. one of a group of smaller delphinids that are rather difficult to identify. Aware of the importance of getting a good impression of head shape, we focused on trying to get photographs—Louis Backstrom managed a great series of pics that confirmed the identification as Pygmy Killer Whales, an absolutely excellent record of a species that is very rarely recorded anywhere in the world! The whale-watching had buoyed the group considerably, and there was a jovial mood on board as we finished our journey landward.

We motored back up the Mooloolah River happy with the cetaceans seen during the day, albeit slightly disappointed with the birds aside from the nice record of a Bridled Tern. Our next trip is on 23rd Oct, which is an extended 12-hour trip. It is currently fully booked, but contact me on

r.fuller@uq.edu.au to join the wait list. Cost \$260.

Report by Richard Fuller

PARTICIPANTS: Eric Anderson, Louis Backstrom, Nathan Beil, Stuart Beil, Sheila Bowker, Arwel Davis, Michael Dawson, Geoff Dennis, Anai Fien, Richard Fuller, Brandon Hewitt, Angus Innes, Wayne Kroll, Helen Leonard, Maureen Madsen, James Martin, John McGill, Leander Mitchell, John O'Shea, Roland Odsey, Richard Simmonds, Kye Turnbull, Russell Woodford.

SPECIES: Total (max. at once)

- Silver Gull 1 (1)
- Common Noddy 4 (2)
- Sooty Tern 2 (2)
- Bridled Tern 1 (1)
- Crested Tern 63 (16)
- Providence Petrel 5 (3)
- Wedge-tailed Shearwater 14 (4)
- Hutton's Shearwater 115 (60)
- Australasian Gannet 15 (4)
- Pied Cormorant 1 (1)

NON-BIRDS

Risso's Dolphin
Grampus griseus (3 probable)

Humpback Whale
Megaptera novaeangliae (29)

Pygmy Killer Whale
Feresa attenuata (c. 10)

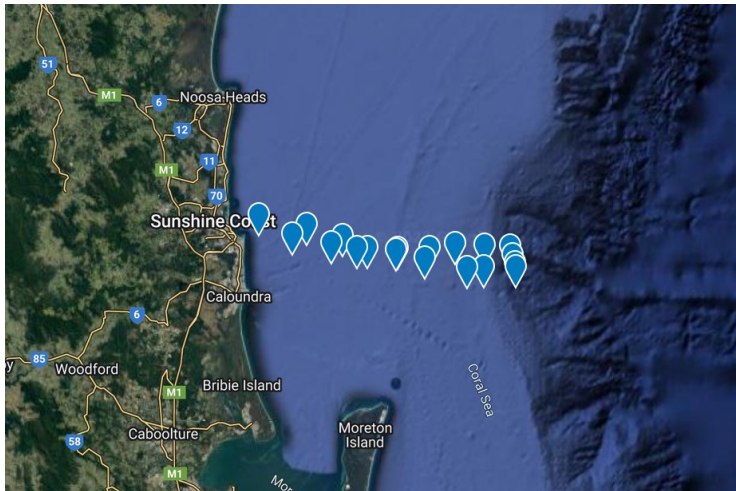
Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin
Tursiops aduncus (4)

Common Bottlenose Dolphin
Tursiops truncatus (5)

See eBird Trip report at <https://ebird.org/australia/tripreport/71973>



Pygmy Killer Whale, showing characteristic rounded head and grey cape. The small dolphin-size of the animals was apparent in the field. Photographs by Louis Backstrom.



Our journey on the day. Route map courtesy of eBird and Google Maps.



A lovely study of a Hutton's Shearwater by Geoff Dennis.