

More Trindade Petrels around the Atlantic

Bob Flood

The foraging range of the Atlantic form of Trindade Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana* is poorly understood. What is known was summarised in *Birding World* recently (Flood & Danzenbaker 2009), with a map of the species' possible range based on the limited number of documented sightings, including just one record for the central south Atlantic. This note reports sightings of a minimum of four, probably six and possibly more Trindade Petrels in the central south Atlantic in April 2010, supporting Flood & Danzenbaker's supposition that Trindade Petrels may regularly forage in these waters.

During the 2010 'Atlantic Odyssey', first thing in the morning on the 13th April, I was lying comfortably in my bunk on the MV *Professor Molchanov*. It was the second day steaming north from Tristan da Cunha. On the equivalent day during the 2006 Atlantic Odyssey, we saw and photographed a dark morph Trindade Petrel in the wake before breakfast, and this remained the only documented record of the species for the central south Atlantic. I was thinking about Bill Oddie's landbirder quirk – having found a rare bird in a bush one year, the finder cannot resist returning to the same bush on the same date the following year to look for 'it'. I began

to succumb to a similar seabirder compulsion, having spotted the Trindade Petrel in 2006.

About 15 minutes later, at 7.50am, I was on the Bridge Deck scanning the wake for Trindade Petrels. It was just a matter of moments 'of course' before one winged across the wake. I experienced a sense of incredulity and a second of speechlessness, but then screamed, "Trindade Petrel in the wake!", hoping birders on the Monkey Deck above would hear. They did. The pale morph Trindade flew away from the ship, but no other birder had good enough views to agree with my identification. An agonising four or five minutes passed as the Trindade lingered some considerable distance off, and then steadily worked its way back to the ship, finally revealing its identity to all others present. There were great celebrations. News was dispatched to the breakfast room – bowls of porridge and plates of bacon and eggs were instantly abandoned. Over the next half-hour, the Trindade Petrel ranged far and near, but could be seen much of the time and everyone enjoyed good views.

At about 8.30am, Simon Cook and I noticed that the Trindade Petrel in the wake was obviously paler than the original one – it was a second bird. Then two were together in the

Plates 1 & 2. Pale morph Trindade Petrels *Pterodroma arminjoniana*, about 500 nautical miles NNE of Tristan Island, South Atlantic, April 2010 (*Graham & Shirley Muir*, left, and *Phil Palmer*).

Plate 1 shows a typical pale morph. In the South Atlantic, Kermadec Petrel *P. neglecta* could possibly occur and look similar, but a dorsal view of Kermadec Petrel would reveal white skua-like flashes on the outer upperwing; even with this ventral view, Kermadec can be eliminated on structure, because Kermadec has a fuller, more rounded head and a thicker, shorter neck, a relatively short and stubby bill, and a shorter and broader tail. Plate 2 shows a pale morph with much darker underwings, yet it still has a clean white breast to vent area, tempting identification as Atlantic Petrel *P. incerta*, especially in this case just 500 nautical miles north of its breeding islands, but Atlantic has a uniformly dark underwing and dark undertail-coverts; and it is larger, with a heavier, slower, less dynamic flight.





Plates 3 & 4. Pale morph Trindade Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana*, about 500 nautical miles NNE of Tristan Island, South Atlantic, April 2010 (Phil Palmer). The masterful dynamic flight that enthralled birders aboard the MV *Professor Molchanov* is captured superbly in these two images that also illustrate well the structure. Trindade Petrel is a largish *Pterodroma* with long and slender wings, with pointed wing-tips, long tapering tail, a slim, slightly 'chesty' body that gradually attenuates to the tail-end, and a small, rounded head with a trim bill.

wake. Shortly afterwards, I looked across to Andy Marshall who mouthed, "three". I checked the wake and, sure enough, three Trindade Petrels were wheeling around together, all pale morphs and all paler than the first individual. They put on a great show, with one or two hanging around the ship until 12.45pm. The last sighting will remain imprinted on my mind forever. We were watching a pod of Orcas, when a huge male surged out of the surf whilst a Trindade Petrel circled over him. Contra to several publications, then, we witnessed Trindade Petrels associating with the ship and associating with cetaceans.

Next day, 14th April, there were two sightings of Trindade Petrel separated by half-an-hour around breakfast time, possibly one individual, and one more sighting just before midday involving what was presumed to be a different individual. All sightings again involved pale morphs, but nobody witnessed all three sightings to assess plumage differences and no photographs were taken. These birds were presumed different ones from the previous day.

The ship's position was logged as follows: 13th April 08.25 29°05'S 09°42'W (490 nautical miles NNE of Tristan Island); 10.50 28°34'S 09°33'W; 12.28 28°18'S 09°27'W; 14th April 07.35 24°35'S 08°19'W; 12.30 23°40'S 08°02'W. The course was 015° and the speed was at or near 11.6 knots. The ship's chart showed sea depth at 3,800 metres with no undersea features, leading to the suspicion that sea currents might explain these records.

Since the publication of Flood & Danzenbaker (2009), the range of Trindade Petrel in the northeast Atlantic has also become a little clearer. There have been three new sightings of

Trindade Petrel off the Azores (so now a total of seven there) and two old records have come to light, one off the Azores and the other off the Cape Verde Islands:

2007 Off Corvo, Azores, dark morph, 31st October (*Birding World* 20: 455 & birdingazores.com)

2008 0.5 miles south of Brava, Cape Verde Islands, Pale morph, 5th October (oceanwanderersnews.blogspot.com)

2009 1-2 miles north of Faial, Azores, dark morph, 20th August (*Birding World* 22: 330)

2010 8 miles off Pico, Azores, pale morph, 24th April (birdingazores.com)

2010 between Pico & Faial, Azores, dark morph, 8th May (birdingazores.com)

These records support the suggestion by Flood & Danzenbaker (2009) that Trindade Petrels may regularly forage in the central north Atlantic and range in small numbers as far east as the Macaronesian islands.

Also, two more south Atlantic records have come to light: a dark morph seen on 14th March 2005, 205 nautical miles east of Port Stanley, Falkland Islands, at 52°17'S 051°47'W (S. Cook *in litt.*) – the third record for that general region; and a dark morph in the mid south Atlantic at roughly 25°S 24°W on 19th August 1983 (W.R.P Bourne *in litt.*)

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Reference

Flood, B. & Danzenbaker, M. 2009. Identification of Trindade Petrel and its status in the North Atlantic. *Birding World* 22: 162-166.

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