

# Identification of Short-tailed Shearwater in the North Atlantic Ocean

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**Abstract** The Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris* is an abundant species of the Pacific Ocean. We reviewed records for the Indian and Atlantic Oceans and suggest that a regular pattern of movement in these oceans is hitherto unrecognised. It follows that the vagrancy potential of Short-tailed Shearwater to the North Atlantic probably is greater than suggested by the few documented records. Short-tailed may have been overlooked or confused with the similar-looking Sooty Shearwater *A. grisea* and, in the northeast Atlantic, dark-plumaged Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*. Criteria for the separation of these three species at sea are presented in a bid to establish a clearer picture of the status of Short-tailed Shearwater in the North Atlantic. Separation of Short-tailed from Sooty Shearwater builds on existing criteria; characters for separation from dark-plumaged Balearic Shearwater are new.

The Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris* is an abundant species of the Pacific Ocean, where its trans-equatorial migration from breeding colonies in Australia (occupied during October to May) to the Bering Sea is well understood, but it is considered 'exceptional' in the Atlantic Ocean (Howell 2012). There were just two published records before 2017: one found moribund in July 2000 off Florida, USA (Kratter & Steadman 2003), the other found recently dead in May 2005 off Salvador City, Brazil (Souto *et al.* 2008). Identification of the carcasses was straightforward based on biometrics and plumage. Four sightings, probably involving at least two individuals (based on progression of primary moult and the fact that many thousands of shearwaters were present during this period; table 1), between August and October 2017 off the coast of Massachusetts, USA, were thus a

major surprise. The identification involved careful analysis of photos (e.g. plates 139–142). In addition, a Short-tailed Shearwater was photographed 55 nautical miles (102 km) south of Cape Point, South Africa, in August 2014 (plate 143), while there is a published record of an individual on 18th January 1998 off Virginia, USA (Brinkley *et al.* 2001), although it was later withdrawn by the observers primarily because the sighting lacked photographic documentation (N. Brinkley *in litt.*). Are these records the tip of an iceberg?

## Short-tailed Shearwater vagrancy potential

Data logging and satellite tracking of Short-tailed Shearwaters has revealed movements of breeding birds from Australian colonies to high latitudes of the southeast Indian Ocean, with the westernmost record at 64°S 37°E