

Notes

Wilson's Storm-petrel with white stripes on the underwing

European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* is separated from Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* by several key features (flight behaviour, structure, plumage) but field guides typically emphasise its white underwing-covert panels. These are formed by white greater coverts and primary median coverts, and the longest axillaries, which are dark with white tips (there is some variation). These white feathers stand out from the rest of the dark brownish-black underwing, giving narrow white panels. The panels are eye-catching, even at long range, though less obvious with wear. In contrast, the underwing of Wilson's is typically brownish-black with median and greater coverts faintly paler.

However, in the Atlantic, Wilson's Storm-petrel can (rarely) show white underwing stripes across the coverts (Flood & Thomas

2007), and a Wilson's with such underwing stripes could be mistaken for a European. This note documents three cases of this with photographs: 4th March 2005, off Cape Horn, Chile; 12th March 2006, at sea, off South Georgia; 14th August 2008, at sea, off the Isles of Scilly (plates 138–140). Plates 138 & 139 show stripes formed by white median underwing-coverts. The underwing stripes visible in plate 140 are in the region of the median underwing-coverts and may result from missing feathers or white in the feathers.

The origins of these birds is unknown. They may be rare variants from Atlantic populations or come from Chilean populations. White in the underwing is a characteristic of Wilson's that breed in Chilean fjords and these smaller birds are recognised by some authorities as a distinct taxon, Fuegian (Wilson's) Storm-petrel *O. o. chilensis*. Their non-breeding range is unknown. The status of *Oceanites* storm-petrels off Chile is currently under review following the discovery of a distinct population (in terms of both plumage and biometrics), perhaps a new species (following Dowdall *et al.* 2009); this has white in the underwings, but populations are thought to be localised. Elliot's Storm-petrel *O. gracilis* also has white in the underwings, and on the vent, but breeds much farther north in the Pacific and is extremely unlikely to find its way to the Atlantic. The taxon *O. o. magallanicus* from the Falklands and Tierra del Fuego, no

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138. Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, off Cape Horn, Chile, 4th March 2005.

Marc Guyt



139. Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, off South Georgia, 12th March 2006.

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140. Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, off the Isles of Scilly, 14th August 2008.

longer recognised, may be linked to *O. o. chilensis* and might warrant reinvestigation.

References

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Spring feeding assemblies of the Hobby in Britain

The Hobby *Falco subbuteo* arrives in southern Britain from its African winter quarters from mid April onwards but the nesting period is from early June. During the pre-breeding period, Hobbies gather in flocks of varying size to feed on concentrations of insects, predominantly over wetlands. On the basis of a literature review and consultation with local observers, we tried to quantify the location, size and timing of these assemblies, and to identify the chief prey items of the falcons.

The most recent year for which data were available for all counties of England and Wales was 2007. In that year at least 30 sites in southern England and the Midlands had five or more Hobbies at any one time during the pre-breeding period. The sites are, with one exception (Whixall Moss, Shropshire), to the south of a line between the Severn and the Wash. Three (Shapwick Heath in Somerset, Lakenheath Fen in Suffolk and Stodmarsh in Kent) had exceptional numbers, not matched at other locations in Britain.

Peak numbers of Hobbies at all sites occurred between 24th April and 14th June, with the majority in the last week of April and

the first week of May. Most of the sites consist of open water (notably flooded gravel-pits or peat workings) and/or reedbeds, with a few wet grasslands and lowland mires.

Peak counts during the years 2001–10 for a selection of the larger sites are given in table 1. No trend is evident except for Shapwick Heath and Lakenheath Fen, where numbers have increased steadily.

To what extent do these gatherings involve immature Hobbies?

It is often difficult to identify first-summer birds in flight, particularly at a distance or in unfavourable light, but the regular observations of NPW at Shapwick Heath suggest that first-summer probably form less than 5% of the total present. It also appears that they generally arrive later than adults and sometimes remain after the main assembly of adults has dispersed.

Do they comprise local birds, passage migrants or a mixture?

During the breeding season, the Hobby's feeding range has been estimated to be chiefly

Table 1. Peak counts of Hobbies *Falco subbuteo* at key sites for pre-breeding gatherings in Britain, 2001–10.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	mean
Fen Drayton Lakes, Cambridgeshire	8	14	18	20	16	16	16	20	14	19	16
Marston Vale Pits, Bedfordshire	n/r	10	n/r	7	5	6	8	16	n/r	21	7
Shapwick Heath, Somerset	12	30	40	43	56	41	52	47	68	84	47
Lakenheath Fen, Suffolk	12	12	19	36	35	37	27	32	40	65	31
North Warren, Suffolk	6	7	6	2	6	12	9	20	18	12	10
Woolhampton GP, Berkshire	n/r	4	2	3	7	10	17	20	10	8	9
Moatlands/Theale, Berkshire	7	11	6	13	6	8	11	5	16	10	9
Amwell NR, Hertfordshire	5	9	4	12	10	9	5	14	6	13	9
Stodmarsh, Kent	29	27	52	70	38	20	28	36	39	35	37
Wilstone Reservoir, Hertfordshire	8	11	7	7	18	6	6	12	6	13	9
Dungeness, Kent	16	15	15	24	10	10	8	8	7	15	13
Whixall Moss, Shropshire	10	18	5	2	5	7	5	24	1	14	9
Totals	113	168	174	239	212	182	192	254	225	309	
n/r = not recorded											