

Judy Report to Oregon records Committee, OBRC

Date written: Sept 29, 2010

Date of sighting: September 27, 2010

Optics: Leica 8/32, Kowa scope 20-60 zoom.

Bird: Black Storm Petrel

No photos.

Location, $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ way through Coos County, heading south, approximately 40 miles off shore. Ship was travelling at about 24 miles per hour. Birds came off the bow to the starboard side of the ship but I lost sight of it in a few seconds when it doubled back a different direction. Looking in the scope at the bird, there was no horizon in my Scope and other birders estimated the distance of similarly distant birds at 200 yards. I would say it could have been farther away, like 250 or yards but I am not really able to give an accurate measurement at sea. View was crisp, no heat waves, good light, a dark bird on well lit sea.

Conditions - aboard a cruise ship with 14 other birders, we were spread along the bow at 70 feet above the surface of the water. The fog had cleared and there was sunshine and also bright light with thin, scattered, high clouds. Estimated time of day was about 3 -3:30 pm, and looking south at the bird. Using scope at 25 power, I was scanning for birds. Because the cruise from a week ago had reported Black Storm Petrel, I was watching near water more than far distant water. I was on the starboard side of the bow with several other birders close by. We had been seeing dozens of Fork-tailed Storm Petrels.

While scanning with my scope, I spotted two dark Storm Petrels near each other and called out "Dark Storm Petrel". I was NOT able to get any other birders on the two birds and they were soon out of sight although I followed the one that I believe was a BLACK STORM PETREL for approx 3 or 4 seconds. I was able to observe it flying and noted the distinctive flight style and also the shape of the wings, much longer in proportion to the Fork Tails we had been seeing and very long appearing in proportion to the body size. I looked in the books after the sighting to check the size relative to wing length of Ashy,

Leaches, and Black. The books by themselves didn't convince me, they show field marks that can't be seen on the ocean. The wings on the bird I watched were very long. The flight was graceful, but I can't say I specifically noted repeated wing beats going high above horizontal on that bird but I had that impression. I was reluctant at the time to put a name to the bird based on the books not being very helpful. But the next day when we saw dozens of Blacks and a few Ashy Storm-Petrels while in California waters, and observed them at length through the scope under poorer light conditions, I was convinced that the bird on Sept 27th had to be a Black Storm Petrel. For the California birds, the water was smoother with only low "wavelets" but on 27th the sea was a bit rougher with a few occasional white-caps present. Viewing from 70 feet above however, does give a good vantage point to look down on birds that when seen from a normal fishing boat type of pelagic, would tend to get lost behind waves or down in any shallow trough etc.

Description of the bird.

All black appearing. I did not see any brown or gray carpal bar area. No white or light on the rump or upper tail. Flying close to water, skimming, not erratic but it did double back and sideways a bit.

Flight style was graceful, with slower wing beats and a tipping motion at times versus what I would describe as choppy flight on a chunkier appearing bird when compared the next day with Black versus Ashy.

Seeing both Ashy and Black the next day and picking out each by flight style, not color or carpal bar was NOT difficult. The flight style and the shape with the longer wings proportionately, tapered to a point at the end and broader near the body, seemed the ideal way to identify them. With the California birds, occasionally it was clear that Blacks were lifting wings above horizontal and gliding but although I did not specifically see that in the Oregon Black, the basic flight style, shape of the bird and shape and length of the wing was exactly the same. Seeing multiple birds the next day and identifying them in this manner is what convinced me that I should write up a report and that the bird off Coos County WAS a Black Storm Petrel. (there were two birds initially but I followed only one, they were likely the same species.)

Experience

A year or two ago I did a cruise like this and we had 10,000 dark storm petrels in a loose flock that lasted 20 minutes as we cruised through them. I believe the number specifically of each was 9500 Ashy and 500 Blacks. I do not recall seeing any Leaches in that group. That 20 minutes was great practice for sorting out which was which. I have seen Blacks on a D Shearwater trip or two, Leaches on Greg Gillson trip in Oregon, but most of my experience was on the 5 day Searcher trip in California in September 2006 when we had storm petrels daily and close to the boat, as the chummer put out chum day and night throughout the trip. We had hours and hours with storm petrels close to the boat and a lot of opportunity to study them. We did not have Ashy on that trip but many Leaches including the subspecies from Guadalupe Island, as well as many Blacks and one Least. That practice left me with the sense that shape and flight style is the backbone of identifying these birds as far as I can tell. Leaches and Blacks are differ in body shape, flight style, wing length, and that white on tail of most Leaches of course makes it simple. The Oregon bird I am describing did not look like a Leaches SP, did not fly like a Leaches.

Even if this record is not accepted, I feel it is important to report it. There are not that many trips out that far off shore from Oregon and a pattern of reports could be interesting information.

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