

## NOTES ON SEA-BIRDS 75

### A sight-record of a White-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta grallaria* in the western Palearctic

In August and September 1986 the last of seven Dutch scientific expeditions to the West African coast took place (CANCAP VII). During the outward voyage of the research vessel H.M.S. Tydeman to the Cape Verde Islands, which took ten days, continuous bird observations were carried out for almost ten hours every day. Apart from the commonly occurring species which can be seen on this route, a White-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregetta grallaria* was seen on 17th August, north of the Cape Verde Islands (23°48' N, 22°01' W).

Accompanying two Madeiran Storm Petrels *Oceanodroma castro*, an unusual, strikingly black-and-white coloured storm petrel draw the attention. The lower breast, flanks and ventral parts were pure white, in contrast to the completely blackish head, upper breast and dorsal parts. The rump was white, contrasting with the dark back and tail feathers. The underwings were white in the centre with broad dark margins on the fore wing, and the black flight feathers formed a contrasting trailing edge. A light patch on the upperwing was caused by the clearly white-fringed wing-coverts. During its zig-zagging flight the bird progressed steadily, pushing the water aside with its long legs, swinging from one side to the other, allowing a very good view of the dorsal and ventral parts. Thus it was possible to notice the total absence of black feathers on the belly between the legs. During several minutes the storm petrel, which was observed under excellent light conditions, flew along with our ship at a distance of only 30 m. This bird certainly belonged to a species of the genus *Fregetta*, for it missed the diagnostic facial pattern and the grey-brown wing coverts of the White-faced Storm Petrel *Pelagodroma marina*.

Identification of the two *Fregetta* species is not always easy, due to the fact that some White-bellied Storm Petrels have black-tipped feathers on the abdomen. On the other hand Black-bellied Storm Petrels *F. tropica* sometimes show black feathers on the belly with an extremely white edge, which could induce an observer to think he was seeing a white belly. This may cause misidentification (Harrison 1985, Bourne 1962). The bird of

17th August had a clearcut black breast band, a completely white belly, and also showed more contrast on the upperwing than the Black-bellied Storm Petrel. In the latter species this contrast is hard to be seen in the field (pers. obs.).

Besides this record, only two records of birds of the genus *Fregetta* are known from the northern hemisphere in the Atlantic Ocean. Bourne (1962) mentions the unusual catch of not less than seven White-bellied Storm Petrels on board a ship in the harbour of St. Marks, Florida. The only specimen that was collected seems to have disappeared. Bourne classified these birds as *F. tropica*, which cannot be verified anymore. The second record can be found in the recent reports in British Birds 73 (1980); this pertains to an undocumented sight-record of a White-bellied Storm Petrel passing by Seascale (Cumbria) on 23rd October 1979.

The White-bellied Storm Petrel breeds in the southern hemisphere and is known to occur in the northern hemisphere only in the Arabian Sea (Bailey 1968). In the Atlantic Ocean the northern most known breeding places are on Tristan da Cunha. Its wintering range in the Atlantic Ocean, according to Harrison (1985), extends to the equator. The record mentioned in this article indicates that White-bellied Storm Petrels at least occasionally reach the coast of Northwest Africa.

#### REFERENCES

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