

Band-rumped Storm-petrel
Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County, Pennsylvania, 9/20/03
Rick Wiltraut

With winds exceeding 155 mph, Hurricane Isabel will be known as one of the strongest hurricanes ever to threaten the U.S. Isabel made landfall during the early afternoon of September 18, 2003 between Cape Lookout and Ocracoke Island, North Carolina. Fortunately, by the time it reached land, it had weakened from a Category 5 hurricane to a Category 2, with sustained winds near 100 mph. Despite weakening in strength, Isabel caused major damage and power outages in North Carolina and many other states. The projected path was for the eye to pass right through Pennsylvania, so many PA birders were gearing up for a search of wayward oceanic birds. Jason Horn and I had planned to get together on Friday, September 19th as the storm was passing through Pennsylvania and head down to the lower Delaware River near the Philadelphia International Airport area in hopes of finding some good birds. At the last minute, Jason had heard that the eye of the storm was to pass further west than what we expected, so we decided on Long Level in York County as being our best bet. We wanted to be at what we felt was the best location possible east of the eye and Long Level offered an excellent view of the Susquehanna River. We left around midnight. The trip down wasn't too bad until we got close to the river. Then it started to get a little hairy. The storm was definitely moving through as we crossed the Wrightsville Bridge at around 2 a.m. (Friday morning). The wind and rain was blowing across the bridge and my car was shaking as The Beatles "I Should Have Known Better" blasted from my speakers. I never experienced anything like it and, at the time, I wasn't sure that I wanted to. On our way down along the river we had to dodge numerous branches and large limbs, some of which had to be moved out of the way. Downed power lines and large trees crushing our cars were definitely on our minds as we worked our way down to Long Level. When we arrived at Long Level, waves were smacking against the shore. After awhile, Dave Wilton pulled in, making us feel a little better knowing that we weren't the only birders crazy enough to be out in these conditions. Despite the anticipation, we managed to get some sleep.

It wasn't long before daybreak and we were scanning the river. During the morning Eric Witmer, Tom Garner, Jerry Book, Randy Miller, Deuane Hoffman and Dan Heathcote joined the search. The morning was rather slow except for a few Laughing Gulls, but as the day progressed lots of terns and gulls were piling up on the "flats" on the Lancaster side of the river. Unfortunately none of us had a boat to get out there and one can only guess at what we missed. At some point during the morning I said something to Jason like, "I wonder what's happening up at Bald Eagle" (state park in Centre County), knowing that it was a large body of water smack in the middle of the state with the potential for something rare. During the day there was a continuous flow of reports of sightings coming in from all parts of the state. Eric lifted our spirits when he spotted two adult Sooty Terns flying downriver. Before the day was over we had also seen a Pomarine Jaeger and three juvenile Sabine's Gulls! In the evening, Jason and I decided to head up to Yellow Creek State Park in Indiana County in hopes of seeing a Leach's Storm-petrel and a juvenile Sabine's Gull that was reported there during the day. We woke up the next morning with high hopes, but we struck out on the petrel and the gull. As we headed out, we heard that Dave Wilton and Peter Robinson had just seen an adult Sabine's Gull on the beach at Bald Eagle State Park, so I talked Jason in to going for it. Who doesn't want to see an adult Sabine's Gull, right? Actually I didn't have to do that much convincing since neither one of us had ever seen an

adult Sabine's in PA and we both thought there was always the possibility we might luck into something else.

Things seem pretty quiet when we arrived at the beach with no sign of the gull. We were scanning the lake when Jason yelled something like, "RICK, STORM-PETREL!" I couldn't believe it! The bird appeared to our left heading right and it flew past us low over the water. The bird was obviously a storm-petrel, small and blackish-brown with a conspicuous white rump. The upper wings were blackish-brown with grayish greater coverts forming a pale diagonal bar on each wing. It was constantly flying back and forth on steady, shallow wing beats, with low, banking turns in a zigzag course, interrupted by shearwater-like glides on bowed wings. It often fed in the wakes of motorboats that were passing by. After studying the bird for several minutes, we decided that it wasn't a Leach's Storm-petrel based on the fact that the bird was not flying with the bounding flight style of a Common Nighthawk, a behavior very useful in picking out Leach's at sea. Also the carpal bar on the upper wing formed by the grayish greater coverts did not extend all the way to the leading edge of the wing as in a Leach's Stormpetrel. The tail did not appear to be forked and we could not detect a dark line dividing the white rump patch (usually hard to see on many birds unless at close range). Also, the shape of the patch itself looked wrong for Leach's (Leach's has a somewhat "V" shaped patch). The patch on this bird seemed more evenly cut. It was hard to determine the amount of white extending on to the undertail coverts. We also ruled out Wilson's Storm-petrel based on the flight behavior (Wilson's is direct and fluttery like a swallow) and the shape of the wings. Wilson's has rather short, broad wings which lack the sharp bend at the carpal, thus making the edges of the wing look straighter and less angled. The wings on this bird were somewhat intermediate between Leach's and Wilson's. Also, the feet did not extend beyond the end of the tail. We concluded that the bird was a Band-rumped Storm-petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*). We watched the bird for about an hour, sometimes as close as approximately 200 feet. Viewing conditions were excellent under mostly clear skies. Optics included Leica 10 x 42 binoculars and a Leica 20-60x spotting scope. Both Jason and I had previous experience with Band-rumps on pelagic trips in the Gulf Stream off North Carolina where the species is regular during the summer months. We have also seen thousands of Wilson's Storm-petrels on trips off New Jersey and North Carolina, and hundreds of Leach's, mostly on the ferry to Newfoundland, but also off New Jersey and North Carolina. Dave Wilton and Peter Robinson also observed the bird and Jason took extensive video footage. As we were watching the storm-petrel, Jason spotted an Arctic Tem flying over the lake and we also saw the adult Sabine's Gull fly past several times. Pending acceptance by P.O.R.C., the Band-rumped Storm-petrel, Sabine's Gull, and Arctic Tem would be the first records for Centre County.

Apparently, unknown to us, a Band-rumped Storm-petrel had been reported at the lake the day before and another one was found alive at a pancake house in Bellefonte! The only other state records are of one found dead at Chambersburg, Franklin County, 4/15/12 and one picked up at Manchester Beach, Erie County, 2/24/98.

References

Grant, P. J., K. Mullarney, L. Svensson, and D. Zetterstrom. 1999. *Birds of Europe*. Princeton University Press.

Harrison, Peter, 1983. *Seabirds: an identification guide*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

Jonsson, Lars. 1992. *Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*. Princeton University Press.

McWilliams, J. and D. Brauning. 2000. *Birds of Pennsylvania*. Cornell University Press.

National Geographic Society. 1999. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America Third Edition*. Washington, D.C.

Sibley, David A. 2000. *The Sibley Guide To Birds*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York.

*Jacobsburg EE Center
835 Jacobsburg Road
Wind Gap, PA 18091*

PENNSYLVANIA RARE BIRD REPORT FORM

This form is presented as a convenience and guide. It can be used if desired, but is not necessary for submitting a report. Species requiring documentation are those on the Review List or not on the Official List of Birds of Pennsylvania. Send documentation to:

Nick Pulcinella, Secretary
Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee
613 Howard Ave.
West Chester, PA 19380
nickpul@bellatlantic.net

052-01-2003

SPECIES (common and scientific name) Band-rumped Storm-Petrel Oceanodroma castro
Subspecies, if known _____

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS 1 SEX(ES) _____

AGE(S) AND PLUMAGE(S) (e.g. immature; adult in breeding plumage; year for gulls; basic or alternate if you prefer those terms; state of molt if applicable): _____

DATE OF OBSERVATION Sept 19, 2003 TIME ~ 6:00 EDT (p.m.)

LOCATION (city, borough, township) near Howard, Centre Co.

EXACT SITE (e.g. name of park, lake, road) Bald Eagle State Park

OBSERVER REPORTING:

Name Greg Grove
Address R.D. 1 Box 483
City Petersburg State Pa ZIP 16669
e-mail (optional) gug2@psu.edu phone (optional) 814 667 2305

OTHER OBSERVERS (only those who saw and identified the bird with you):
Deb Grove

HABITAT (e.g. mowed field, woodland edge, any other details) _____
Over large lake

DISTANCE TO BIRD 50 yards

VIEWING CONDITIONS (sky, weather, position of sun relative to you) _____
cloudy, good visibility

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT USED Swarovski EL 10 x 42

DESCRIPTION (Include as much detail as you observed – size relative to other species present; “jizz”= e.g. posture, body shape, and proportions; colors and patterns of plumage; bill, eye, and leg characteristics; other features relevant to this individual): _____

Size - Wingspan estimated 15-20 inches

Overall coloration - Dark (Black or dark brown)

- only field mark (color) was obvious white rump patch

- Underside may have been less dark (than top) - some gray area(s) on belly - but not bright white
~~(but this may have been pale)~~

Tail squared - not obvious forking in flight

Legs - did NOT visibly trail behind tail

(Please use an additional page if necessary.)

BEHAVIOR (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing) _____

Flight - ~2 feet above water -

- Several flaps would be followed by short, stiff winged glide

- Relatively straight-ahead flight - no sharp turns

3 times - lit briefly on water, holding wings up (like SOST or VPSA)

VOCALIZATIONS _____

no pattering on water with legs

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE IF ANY:

Photograph _____ Video recording _____ Audio recording _____ Drawing _____

Photographer/recorder/illustrator:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

e-mail (optional) _____

phone (optional) _____

Please include a copy of the photograph or recording with your report, and accompany it with a complete written documentation if the identification is obvious to you. If you made a drawing, please include it.

IF THIS IS A DEAD BIRD:

General condition _____

If collected (by permit), location of specimen if known _____

SEPARATION FROM SIMILAR SPECIES (how you eliminated others) _____

- Clearly a storm-petrel
- Elim. Leach's as tail was not forked
- Elim. Wilson's - legs did not trail
- Elim. Leach's + Wilson's - based on flight character (see dis →)
- Elim. White-faced - Under sides not really extensively white
- no trailing legs, no patter over water

DISCUSSION - Anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it

Isabel related

Flight was not erratic as described for Leach's } Nat Geog. reference
 " " " swallow-like " " " Wilson's }

Following day - this species was seen by several mne burders in same general area

(Please use an additional page if necessary)

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS AND/OR SIMILAR SPECIES _____

None - flight characteristic assesment based on Nat. Geog. descriptions

ARE YOU POSITIVE OF YOUR IDENTIFICATION? (why or why not) _____

Essentially positive - though admittedly I have no experience with BRSP + little with other storm-petrels

REFERENCES CONSULTED:

During observation _____
 After observation Nat. Geog. guide

DATE OF THIS REPORT: September 27, 2003

SIGNATURE OF OBSERVER Shelley Wilson

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round Two

Species: Band-rumped Storm-petrel (Oceanodroma castro)

Date of Sighting: 19 September 2003 to 19 September 2003

Location: BALD EAGLE STATE PARK

County : CENTRE

Observer(s): Greg Grove et al.

Date of Submission: 2003

Submitted by: Greg Grove, Rick Wiltraut

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

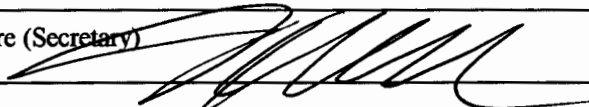
Specimen: No

Recording: Yes

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut	X							
A. Guarente	X							
P. Guris	X							
J. Stanley	X							
E. Witmer	X							
J. Heller	X							
M. Sharp	X							
TOTALS	6							
DECISION	0							

Comments: DVD viewed by group attending July 2006 meeting.

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

9/17/02