

DRAFT - SHORT NOTE

The presence of collars and breast-bands on black-winged petrels (*Pterodroma nigripennis*)

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The field identification of many of the *Pterodroma* petrels provides a challenge to researchers. For example, in the last few years a number of black-winged petrels (*Pterodroma nigripennis*) have been photographed showing unfamiliar features that have resulted in uncertainty and misidentification. This note describes two plumage features, and discusses the implications for identifying the species versus some other gadfly petrels.

In 2006, a photo was published showing a *Pterodroma* petrel photographed off the Kermadec Is (Fig. 1; Wood 2008). It had a pale, virtually white, nape that separated the crown from the mantle. In effect, the bird appeared to show an almost complete white hind-collar (Fig. 1). With such an apparent feature it was not surprising that some suggested the bird was a white-necked petrel (*P. cervicalis*) however that species has various differences from black-winged petrel, including its overall shape particularly in the wing and tail proportions, thinner underwing carpal bar and, in the field, a much larger size. At the time, even the little-known Vanuatu petrel (*P. occulta*), principally a smaller version of white-necked petrel, was considered by others (Wood 2008). Websites and seabird newsgroups referred to the photo and a letter from the photographer was published (Wood 2008) asking for comment. Separately Hadoram Shirihihi and myself submitted replies that went unpublished, though independently we had concluded that the photo by Wood (2008) showed a black-winged petrel with a whitish nape.

Further black-winged petrels showing obvious paler napes have since been recorded and photo-documented (Figs. 2-4). All the birds in these images show varying degrees of plumage wear, and were photographed during Mar or Apr when chicks are being reared and when adults were likely to start, or be in, moult. Thus, the pale nape appears to be an effect of wear and fading in birds with worn plumage. In some photos the presence of the pale nape is probably accentuated by glare from the sun, light reflection at sea, or overexposure by the photographer, as the colour varies through pale brown, grey-brown, pale grey, to bright white (Figs. 2-4).

The second plumage feature, and an example of mistaken identity, concerned a *Pterodroma* observed 19 Mar 2009 during a cruise from New Zealand to Japan. The ship was north of New Zealand, within territorial waters, when the bird was observed, photographed and confirmed as a collared petrel (*P. brevipes*). I saw the photographs some months later (Figs. 5,6), and considered the bird to be a black-winged petrel, even though it showed a complete breast-band, and a pale brownish nape as described above.

There have been other gadfly petrel species that have showed distinct and atypical full breast-bands, where the breast side patches extend to join, or virtually join, at the centre lower neck or upper breast, so forming a noticeable collar. In the example above the confusion species was collared petrel, and this record was to be submitted as a first for New Zealand. In contrast, collared petrels (Fig. 7) have white

foreheads with dark hoods, the edge of which continues beneath the eye to join the breast-band (very different to the capped appearance of black-winged petrel) and they are less compact, showing a longer rear body beyond the trailing edge of the wing, with the tail nearly always pointed. In my experience they can show an underwing carpal bar just as broad and pronounced as black-winged petrel *contra* many field guide illustrations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LITERATURE CITED

Wood, S. 2008 Problematic Pterodroma. *Birdwatch* (192:21)

Photo captions

Figure 1 Black-winged Petrel showing a white nape. This bird was considered to be a White-necked Petrel by some, and Vanuatu Petrel by others. (Off Kermadec Islands, March 2006, Steve Wood)

Figures 2-4 Black-winged Petrels with pale and contrasting napes, varying in colour from light brown to grey-white. (Top, New Zealand, April 2008, Brent Stephenson. Centre, Between New Zealand and Norfolk Island, April 2008, Tony Quinn. Lower, New Zealand, March 2009, Geoff Jones)

Figures 5,6 Black-winged Petrel showing a complete breastband, a potential pitfall with Collared Petrel. Note, this individual shows a pale nape also. (New Zealand, March 2009, Mark Yates)

Figure 7 Collared Petrel. This pale morph individual shows an archetypal and obvious collar. (Off Gau, Fiji, May 2009, H. Shirihai, copyright The Tubenoses Project)

**Below - Photos and captions shown here for illustrative information only
(larger size photographs herewith submitted)**



Figure 1 Black-winged Petrel showing a white nape. This bird was considered to be a White-necked Petrel by some, and Vanuatu Petrel by others. (Off Kermadec Islands, March 2006, Steve Wood)





Figures 2-4 Black-winged Petrels with pale and contrasting napes, varying in colour from light brown to grey-white. (Top, New Zealand, April 2008, Brent Stephenson. Centre, Between New Zealand and Norfolk Island, April 2008, Tony Quinn. Lower, New Zealand, March 2009, Geoff Jones)



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Figure 7 Collared Petrel. This pale morph individual shows an archetypal and obvious collar. (Fiji, May 2009, H. Shirihai, copyright The Tubenoses Project)