

## Sight record of Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus* for Costa Rica

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Cotinga 18 (2002): 98–99

Se describe el posible primer registro de *Puffinus puffinus* en Costa Rica. El 2 de noviembre de 1997 un pequeño petrel apareció en las costas de Tortuguero (c.10°55'N 83°50'W). Observaciones a 30–50 m de distancia permitieron ver varias características diagnósticas, incluyendo el tamaño mediano, subcaudales blancas, patas rosa claras y dorso negruzco. En combinación con otros caracteres, fue posible eliminar todas las otras especies de *Puffinus*. Otros registros extraliminales de Belize y el Golfo de México sugieren que la especie puede aparecer más regularmente en aguas centroamericanas de lo que se pensaba.

### Introduction

I lived in Tortuguero, Costa Rica (c.10°55'N 83°50'W), a coastal Caribbean town c.50 km south of the Nicaraguan border, in October–December 1997. At 15h45 on 2 November 1997, I observed a small procellariid in the breakwater c.50 m from shore. It washed ashore briefly, but retreated quickly seawards when I approached to examine it. I assumed it was an Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*, which breeds in the Caribbean, particularly Bermuda and the West Indies, as well as off Bocas del Toro, Panama, and is considered 'rare but probably regular off [the] Caribbean coast'<sup>10</sup> with sightings in Costa Rican waters<sup>9</sup>. However, I deliberately paid close attention to the undertail-coverts when it was lying on its side after beaching, as this is crucial in separating *P. lherminieri* from Manx Shearwater *P. puffinus*. I noticed that they appeared completely white which, along with other characteristics, established the identity as *P. puffinus*<sup>3</sup>.

### Description

I observed the bird for five minutes at distances of 30–50 m, and noted the following. Typical shearwater shape and medium body size. Upperparts entirely blackish, except a small, diffuse white crescent extending from white throat onto post-auricular area but not above eye. Top of crescent pointed forward toward eye, with a black area between eye and crescent tip. Medium-length thin bill entirely dark with pronounced hook and tubes. Underparts entirely white, including undertail-coverts, which reached nearly to tail tip. Upper- and underparts merged along length of body (i.e. no sharp demarcation between black and white) and underwings whitish with dark grey primaries and secondaries. Contrast in underwing coloration obvious but not dramatic. Legs pale pink. In flight, it flapped steadily 3–4 times, then glided a short distance and flapped again, repeating the sequence several times until out of sight.

### Separation from similar species

In the west Atlantic, *P. puffinus* is most easily confused with *P. lherminieri*, as other *Puffinus* are

much larger and either have a very striking plumage (Great Shearwater *P. gravis*) or are entirely darkish (Sooty Shearwater *P. griseus*). Superficially, *P. puffinus* and *P. lherminieri* are similar in size and plumage, but several key characteristics are diagnostic when identifying an individual of this group.

In general, *P. puffinus* is of small to medium body size (length 30–38 cm) with blackish upperparts, while *P. lherminieri* is smaller (30 cm) and has brown upperparts<sup>3</sup>. These attributes are, probably at best, rarely observable in pelagic conditions (i.e. distant views, rolling waves, suboptimal lighting, etc.). More often, observers on pelagic trips use flight pattern and body shape as indicators. The individual I observed at Tortuguero permitted close observation of the upperparts and provided an excellent view of other subtle plumage characteristics. I considered body size to be larger than in *P. lherminieri* but no other bird species were nearby for direct comparison.

Three *Puffinus* species of the Pacific Ocean should also be considered but are only remotely possible: Townsend's *P. auricularis*, Black-vented *P. opisthomelas* and Newell's Shearwaters *P. newelli*. *P. auricularis* and *P. opisthomelas* can be eliminated as they have very dark undertail-coverts. *P. newelli*, however, has a variable undertail-covert pattern, intermediate between *P. auricularis* and *P. puffinus*, with some individuals approaching *P. puffinus*<sup>4</sup>. Importantly these still have a broad, dark distance between the tail tip and white central undertail-coverts (the lateral and most distal coverts are black), which is not exhibited in *P. puffinus*<sup>4</sup>.

Mediterranean Shearwater *P. yelkouan*, which was formerly treated as conspecific with *P. puffinus*, comprises two forms, east Mediterranean *yelkouan* and west Mediterranean *mauretanicus*. Western *mauretanicus* has brownish upperparts and usually 'dusky undertail-coverts'<sup>7</sup>. Eastern *yelkouan* is closer to *P. puffinus*, but most have 'upperparts brownish-black, undertail-coverts brownish-grey, underwing, flanks and sides of neck all washed dirty brown'<sup>1</sup>. *P. yelkouan* is not a long-distance migrant, unlike *P. puffinus*, mostly dispersing within the

Mediterranean post-breeding, and some *mauretanicus* moving north to west Europe and Britain<sup>1</sup>.

### Extralimital records

This appears to be the first record of *P. puffinus* for Costa Rica<sup>10</sup> and the second for the Caribbean coast of Central America. A beached carcass was found near Dangriga, Belize, in February 1990<sup>9</sup>. French & White<sup>2</sup> report that *P. puffinus* 'occurs regularly in the Caribbean in November–March' with four records from Trinidad and Tobago. There are six accepted records for Texas<sup>6</sup> and reports from Louisiana waters<sup>8</sup>, suggesting the species is more regular in the Gulf of Mexico and near the Central American Caribbean coast than previously thought.

### Acknowledgements

I thank George Armistead and Tony Leukering for their helpful comments and reviews of early drafts. Steve N. G. Howell refereed the manuscript and provided valuable insights on shearwater identification. Mark Lockwood and Greg Lasley furnished information concerning Texas records. Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory staff and Larry Semo permitted access to their libraries and assisted with a literature search for extralimital records. I also thank all those associated with the Tortuguero Integrated Bird Monitoring Program, especially C. J. Ralph, his staff, and the Caribbean Conservation Corporation, for the opportunity to work at Tortuguero.

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