

## MORE PELAGIC BIRD SIGHTINGS OFF DOMINICA

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**Abstract.**—We report the first documented records of Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*) and of probable Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) for Dominica on 7 December and 8 December, 2002, respectively. Both birds were seen over deep water off the southeast coast of the island. The available records of both species from offshore French Guiana north to the Bahamas are summarized. Notes on several other pelagic species are also included.

**Key words:** *Calonectris diomedea*, *Cory's Shearwater*, *Dominica*, *Manx Shearwater*, *pelagic birds*, *Puffinus puffinus*

**Resumen.**—REGISTROS ADICIONALES DE AVES PELÁGICAS EN DOMINICA. Reportamos los primeros registros documentados de la Pardela Cenicienta (*Calonectris diomedea*) y una probable Pardela Pichoneta (*Puffinus puffinus*) para Dominica el 7 y 8 de diciembre de 2002, respectivamente. Ambas aves fueron vistas sobre mares profundos cerca de la costa sureste de la isla. Se sumarizan los registros disponibles para la especie desde la Guayana Francesa hasta las Bahamas en el norte. También se incluyen notas sobre varias especies pelágicas.

**Palabras clave:** *aves pelagicas*, *Calonectris diomedea*, *Dominica*, *Pardela cenicienta*, *Petrel blanquinegro*, *Puffinus puffinus*

THERE CONTINUES TO BE a shortage of consistent observations of marine seabirds in offshore waters in the Lesser Antilles. However, the pace of observations and the amount of data accumulated has picked up in the last few years. Here we report observations made in deep offshore waters (200–1000 fathoms) off the west coast of Dominica during a Boston University Marine Program Marine Mammals of the Caribbean class led by Dr. Kevin Chu during 3–13 December 2002. The main purpose of the class was to collect data on the occurrence, behavior and distribution of marine mammals in the area. The junior author served as a course consultant and made a special effort to record and photograph any birds of interest that came close enough to identify.

The following bird species were recorded:

**Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*).**—Two birds were seen on 7 December, one of which was photographed by LWK. The photograph shows the diagnostic large pale bill, gray neck, and broad pale underwing of this species in contrast to the small dark bill and patterned underwing of Greater Shearwater (*Puffinus gravis*), the only other species with which it would be likely confused. A copy of the photo has been placed on file at VIREO (ref. V06/46/003). This apparently is the first docu-

mented record for Dominica waters.

**Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*).**—One bird came close by the boat 8 December and two photographs were taken by student Josiah Sewell. One photo shows the dark black back and noticeably longer wings of a typical darker adult Manx in contrast to the browner mantle and shorter wings observed in most members of the local population of Audubon's Shearwater (*P. lherminieri*). The second photo clearly shows clean white undertail coverts, a distinct dark line across the underwing coverts to be expected in dark adult Manx, distinctly longer bill than Audubon's, a pale crescent behind the auriculars of a darker adult Manx, and a smudged dark area below the eye rather than the crisper line between the cheek and face to be expected in Audubon's at this season. Taken together, these field marks satisfy the senior author that the bird was a Manx Shearwater. Copies of both photos have been placed on file at VIREO (ref. V06/46/001 and V06/46/002). On the assumption that it was a Manx, this is the first documented record of this species for Dominica. (It should be noted that the two photos of this bird were posted by Floyd Hayes on the ID Frontiers website; several commentators agreed that the bird was a Manx though others thought it was an Audubon's on the basis of a longer tail [not all agreed with this view], longer bill

[which is incorrect since Manx definitely has the longer bill], and different opinions about the underwing and facial patterns.)

**Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*).**—Three were observed on 5 December, two on 6 December, and eight on 9 December. Several photographs were taken by LWK.

**Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*).**—One adult of the dark form seen and photographed 5 December, and one adult of the white form photographed 6 December, both by LWK.

**Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*).**—A common species seen almost every day in the period: seven on 5 December, about 15 on 6 December, about 20 on 7 December, about 10 on 8 December, and about three on 9 December. In some cases four or five birds were in sight at once; several photographs taken by LWK.

**Royal Tern (*Sterna maxima*).**—About 15 birds were seen together 5 December feeding in Roseau harbor. About six more birds at a distance that were possibly this species were seen offshore 8 December.

**Noddy (*Anous* sp.).**—Two birds were seen in a feeding flock but not close enough to photograph on 5 December. Though it is most likely that the birds were Brown Noddies (*A. stolidus*), the possibility of Black Noddy (*A. minutus*) could not be ruled out. LWK has had extensive field experience with Noddies in both the tropical Pacific and the Dry Tortugas.

**Other species.**—Magnificent Frigatebirds (*Fregata magnificens*) were seen every day in numbers ranging from two to about 20. Notable for their absence were Audubon's Shearwater (*P. lherminieri*), Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*), and White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*) because all three were found in this same area 15 to 23 January 1997 (Keith and Ward 1997).

#### DISCUSSION

The discovery of Cory's Shearwater is a surprise in December at Dominica because it is primarily known as a spring migrant in the Lesser Antilles. For perspective, very large numbers (20,000–30,000) of this species were observed off the mouth of the La Plata River in Uruguayan waters on 8 December 1973 (Gore and Gepp 1978:62), suggesting a major wintering ground for the species. Sick (1993:117) noted that it regularly occurs on the high seas off the coasts of Espírito Santo, Bahia and Per-

nambuco Provinces of eastern Brazil, in May. In addition, birds banded near Madeira were found dead on the Ceará Province coast of northeastern Brazil, in December and on the Rio Grand do Sul Province coast at Tramandaí, southeastern Brazil, in February. This species has also been recorded three times in the offshore waters of French Guiana from December to early February (Tostain *et al.* 1992:25). At Trinidad, French (1973:43) reported dead or exhausted birds found on beaches 21 June 1955, 19 February 1956, and 29 April 1961. Petersen and McRae (2002:204) report at least 15 at Trinidad on 30 December 1991, and Murphy (2002:106) reports two near the Paria Peninsula, Venezuela, and one near Tobago, all on 27 February 1997. There also exists another extralimital record by D. D. Gibson at 11° 50' N, 55°00' W, or about 415 km ESE of Barbados, on 10 June 1965 (M. Frost, pers. comm.). At Barbados, there are three known records (M. Frost, pers. comm.): (1) one found exhausted on Morgan Lewis Beach, St. Andrew, by D. Hunte and identified by M. B. Hutt in March 1966 was restored to health and later released (Bond 1967:12); (2) one seen just off Rockley Beach, Christ Church, 11 November 1966 by D. I. Smith; and (3) one observed about 5 km off East Point, St. Philip, 16 November 2002 by R. W. Burke. There are previous records for Dominica for March and December (Evans and James 1997:14), but no more specific data are available and none are documented. Feldmann *et al.* (1999:81) reported records from Guadeloupe on 16 May 1992 and 22 May 1993, and A. Levesque (pers. comm.) observed birds migrating past Petite Terre, Guadeloupe, as follows: one on 4 May 2001, two on 9 May 2001, one on 25 May 2001, and one on 13 May 2002, 68 on 7 June 2003, and 111 on 8 June 2003. It is known as a vagrant at Antigua: one seen by F. Sladen between there and St. Croix on 16 May 1984 (Norton 1984), and one found there between August 1993 and April 1994 (Raffaële *et al.* 1998). White (in prep.) described it as fairly common in Bahamian offshore waters from May to July, once in September, once in December, and once in "winter." There are three records for the open ocean off northeastern Cuba: 26 November 1951, 3 May 1965, and in December 1966 (Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000:24). All this suggests that this species is probably a routine seasonal transient over the open ocean through the Lesser Antilles north primarily around the outside of the arc of the Caribbean Islands to the Bahamas and then north along the coast of the United States. It apparently ventures seldom,

if ever, into the waters of the central Caribbean Sea as it is still unreported from Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, the Caymans, or the Virgin Islands. Whereas it is most often found in the Lesser Antilles in spring from March through June, the growing body of records suggests that stragglers can occur at other times, even in fall and winter.

Manx Shearwater is another surprise in December at Dominica, and less is probably known about its status in the West Indies than the previous species. Also for perspective, it occurs routinely off the southeastern coast of Brazil from late September at least into November; in 1962 alone nine banded birds were recovered off Rio Grande do Sul Province and by 1975 a total of 80 birds banded in England had been recorded in Brazilian waters, two having come all the way from Skokholm, Wales, in 45 and 26 days, respectively (Sick 1993:117). Tostain *et al.* (1992:26) provides the following reports for French Guiana: one found dead on the beach 2 January 1985, and from 11 to 15 March 1990, a total of 26 birds were seen as singles and small flocks 70–150 km off the coast, all flying northwest. In Trinidad, an exhausted bird was found inland on 29 March 1958, two birds were found dead on the beach 6 December 1958, and a bird banded at Skokholm, Wales, on 30 August 1967 was found dead on Manzanilla Beach on 10 November 1968 (French 1991:41). In addition, one was seen off the northern coast on 23 February 1997 (Hayes and White 2000), single dead individuals were found at Manzanilla Beach on 14 November 1997 (White and Hayes, in press) and 19 October 2002 (F. Hayes pers. comm.), one was seen off Galera Point on 9 April 1999 (F. Hayes, pers. comm.), and up to five per day were seen off Galera Point, Trinidad, from 5 October to 7 November 2002 by M. Kenefick. In the Lesser Antilles, a bird banded in Pembrokeshire, Wales, on 9 September 1969 was recovered on a ship 13 km off Grenada on 24 November 1970 (J. Clark, pers. comm.). It is known as a vagrant at St. Vincent (Raffaele *et al.* 1998). The first record known for Guadeloupe is a bird banded at St. Kilda, Scotland, on 6 July 1978 which was recovered at La Desirade on April 30 1997, over 18 years later! The next known Guadeloupe records are those of A. Levesque (pers. comm.), migrating past Petite Terre as follows: one on 3 May 2001, three on 25 May 2001, three on 12 December 2001, remarkable numbers of 80 on 11 March 2002 and 225 on 12 March 2002, one on 1 April 2002, three on 7 April 2002, and five on 13 May 2002. It was found once at Puerto Rico on 5 September 1975 (Raffaele 1983:195), and two that

had been banded on Skomer Island, Wales, were found dead on the beach of the easternmost province of the Dominican Republic on 28 June 1980 (Keith *et al.*, in press). White (in prep.) mentions one possible record of three among a large flock of Audubon's Shearwaters in Bahamian waters on 11 February 1988. A bird banded on Bardsey Island, Wales, on 14 May 1986 was found dead on 17 April 1989 near Little Harbour, Great Abaco Island, Bahamas (J. Clark, pers. comm.). Taken together, especially the recent Guadeloupe data, these reports suggest that Manx Shearwater occurs more commonly in West Indies waters than heretofore thought. As suggested by van Halewyn and Norton (1984:179), "Manx Shearwaters nested in Bermuda until [the early 1900s, and it] is likely that birds from both west and east Atlantic breeding populations occur as migrants in the Caribbean region when on their way to and from wintering grounds off northern Argentina and southwestern Africa." Given the recent data, especially of banded birds, van Halewyn and Norton's suggestion is now confirmed.

Lee (1995) reviewed the occurrence and status of Manx Shearwater off the southeastern United States but had essentially no data for this species in the Greater and Lesser Antilles, a matter corrected above. However, Lee (1995) provided 11 records for the Gulf of Mexico: five for western Florida, one off Alabama, and five along the Texas coast. A record for Louisiana waters has been accepted by that state's rarities committees (A. White, pers. comm.). Lee (1995) also provided 25 records for the eastern coast of Florida, three of which are specimens, some of which were banded in the British Isles (Robinson and Woolfenden 1992). In addition, Lee (1995) also listed eight records off Georgia, five off South Carolina, 38 off North Carolina, 11 off Virginia, and 22 off Maryland. He also showed that this species occurs off the coast from Florida to Maryland in greatest numbers from mid-March to mid-June on its northward migration to breeding grounds in western Europe, Newfoundland, and possibly elsewhere in the western Atlantic. Southbound migration occurs from mid-October to January by which time most birds that nest in the eastern Atlantic are believed to be wintering in the southern hemisphere. Lee further suggested that birds found in the Maryland to Florida area in summer are probably non-breeding juveniles and that the increase in reports since about 1980 along the eastern coast of the United States may be due to increased breeding in the western Atlantic as well as more fieldwork being done. Since it is believed that

birds breeding in the eastern Atlantic migrate south by way of West Africa and do not cross to the western Atlantic or to the West Indies north of the Equator (Brooke 1990), southbound migrants off the eastern coast of the United States and in the West Indies appear likely to be western Atlantic breeding birds primarily, whereas numbers of eastern Atlantic breeders may be among the northbound birds passing through the West Indies in spring. Data from the West Indies agree well with the patterns suggested by Lee (1995), particularly regarding the timing of northbound migration in spring. It is now also clear that some birds from the eastern Atlantic population occur in the West Indies regularly in winter and spring, and that some birds from the growing population known to be breeding in the northwestern Atlantic probably winter in offshore waters of the Lesser Antilles or farther south. Reports from the Gulf of Mexico also suggest that this species may also occur more widely in the West Indies than has been thought before.

Pomarine Jaeger is known now to be a regular and occasionally common fall transient to, winter resident in, and spring migrant in the Lesser Antilles, particularly over deeper water. In Barbados waters there are three known records (M. Frost, pers. comm.): (1) at least seven seen 8–16 km NW of the island on 12 December 1994 by E. Massiah, (2) eight just off the western coast on 24 April 2000 by M. Gawn, and (3) two seen 11–16 km SW of the island on 29 April 2000 by M. Frost and M. Gawn. At Dominica, seven were seen just off the SW coast on 7 February 2001 by E. Massiah, and six were seen in the same area on 18 February 2001 by M. Frost. Evans and James (1997:22) describe it as an “Uncommon though regular passage migrant,” primarily from October to December and March to June when 10 to 20 birds per day are not exceptional, but regularly seen at all other times of year (P. G. H. Evans, pers. comm.), suggesting that some non-breeding birds may frequently spend the northern hemisphere breeding season in the area. Observations at Petite Terre, Guadeloupe, in 2001 and 2002 (A. Levesque, pers. com.), show this jaeger to be a regular northbound migrant in April, occurring often until mid-May. This confirms its status as described by Feldmann *et al.* (1999:87) as “regular and probably common in winter and as a spring transient in offshore waters” of Guadeloupe and Martinique. White (in prep.) reports it to be a “Fairly common winter and spring visitor,” twice recorded in fall in the Bahamas. The new data from Dominica confirm that the large numbers reported there by Keith and Ward (1997) should no longer be

considered exceptional.

Red-footed Booby is only an occasional visitant to Dominica waters between October and April (Evans 1990, Evans and James 1997:14), so additional observations are of interest. Feldmann *et al.* (1999:81–82) noted that a few have bred nearby at Les Saintes, Guadeloupe, for some years, which colony is likely to be the source of birds seen in Dominica waters.

None of the 2002 Dominica tern observations are surprising, and Frigatebird numbers appear to be normal for this time of year.

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