

## SHORT NOTE

### Unusual bird records from the Antarctic Peninsula

MANUEL MARIN

Section of Ornithology, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 900 Exposition Boulevard, Los Angeles CA 90007, USA

The Antarctic Peninsula is located about 900 km south of the southern tip of South America. It has a limited breeding avifauna, consisting primarily of seabirds (Procellariiformes and Sphenisciformes). Through the years a number of avian vagrants have been recorded on the peninsula and these have been summarised by Watson (1975) and Shirihai (2002). Here I describe additional unusual bird records for the Antarctic Peninsula and Drake Passage or new data on birds that have reached the area as vagrants. All records were documented while working on expedition cruises to the Antarctic Peninsula from 2002 to 2014.

#### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

##### Northern giant-petrel (*Macronectes halli*)

The foraging distribution of this species during the breeding season is generally described to be north of the Antarctic Polar Front (or Antarctic Convergence) between 50° and 60° S latitude (e.g., Watson 1975; Brooke 2004). South of the Antarctic Convergence the dominant species is the southern giant-petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*). Further south there are few published observations of *M. halli*. For example, Coria *et al.* (2011), in a summary of birds observed at Laurie Island, South Orkneys (60°45'S

44°39'W) mentioned a single individual sighted on 15 January 1997 and Starck & Wyrzykowski (1982) mentioned observing this species on the southern end of the Drake Passage and also a couple of individuals on the Bransfield Strait near the South Shetland Islands. On 5 February 2012, while visiting Half-Moon Island (62°36'S 59°53'W) between Livingston and Greenwich Islands, I found an individual northern giant-petrel (Fig. 1) among 10 southern giant-petrels. It was eating a young chinstrap penguin (*Pygoscelis antarcticus*). Between 2002 and 2014, I completed nearly 100 trips between southern South America and the Antarctic Peninsula and frequently observed *M. halli* along the middle and southern portions of the Drake Passage. It is a rare bird south of 60-61° S, although it seems that occasionally the species wanders south to 62-63°S. However, I found no published records of this species for the Antarctic Peninsula.

##### Rockhopper penguin (*Eudyptes chrysocome*)

This species is circumpolar in distribution and a subantarctic breeder with individuals rarely venturing south of 56° S (Watson 1975; Marchant & Higgins 1990). For South Georgia, the rockhopper penguin is considered a rare local breeder (Prince & Payne 1979; Prince & Croxall 1996). There are few records south of 56° S. For the South Orkneys, there are at least 5 records at Laurie Island (60°45'S 59°53'W): Marchant & Higgins (1990) reported 2 occurring in January and 2 in February, and Coria

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Current address: Casilla 15 Melipilla, Chile

Correspondence: [mma95@hotmail.com](mailto:mma95@hotmail.com)



Fig. 1. Northern giant-petrel (*Macronectes halli*) at Half-Moon Island on 5 February 2012.



Fig. 2. Rockhopper penguin (*Eudyptes chrysocome*; on left) at Half-Moon Island on February 2013.



Fig. 3. Common diving petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*) from near Cape Renard on the Bismarck Strait on 19 February 2010.

*et al.* (2011) found an individual on 23 January 1997 in a chinstrap penguin colony. There are at least 4 published records for the Antarctic Peninsula. The first and southernmost rockhopper penguin was reported by Matthew (1982), which was an individual with a broken wing collected on Cormorant Island (64°8'S 63°58'W) near Palmer Station on 29 December 1980. Trivelpiece *et al.* (1987) reported 3 records of rockhopper penguins for King George Island, 1 bird observed on 2 November 1985, a second individual appeared among chinstrap penguins on 24 December 1986, and a third individual that proceeded to molt in a small chinstrap penguin colony on 25 January 1987.

Here I report 3 new records for the Antarctic Peninsula, 1 at King George Island and 2 at Half-Moon Island (62°36'S 59°53'W), located between Livingston and Greenwich Islands, in the South Shetlands Islands. On 12 January 1988, K.L. Garrett photographed 1 individual near the Arctowski Station, Admiralty Bay on King George Island (62°10'S 58°30'W), in the general area previously reported by Trivelpiece *et al.* (1987) and it may have been one of the previously known individuals (K.L. Garrett, *pers comm.*). While conducting a landing on 3 January 2005, J. Garlinghouse observed 1 individual rockhopper penguin come ashore where the landing was being conducted. The second bird was observed and photographed (Fig. 2) on 3 February 2013. It appeared that this second individual was getting ready to molt. It is interesting to note that the 2 new encounters reported here and at least 3 of the records mentioned in the literature, were birds that associated with chinstrap penguins. All records reported so far were also of single individuals. Similarly, macaroni penguins (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*), a close relative of the rockhopper penguin, in the Antarctic Peninsula are often associated with and breed near chinstrap penguins.

#### Common diving petrel (*Pelecanoides urinatrix*)

Diving-petrels usually remain in waters near their breeding grounds through most of the year, with little known about their movements. Marchant & Higgins (1990) indicate that movements away from breeding areas are unknown but possibly they are relatively near to the breeding areas. Marchant & Higgins (1990) and Brooke (2004) give the distribution of common diving petrel as circumpolar between 35° and 55° S and immediately north of the Antarctic Polar Front. Beck (1968) reported an individual south of 55° S, found dead on a beach at Signy Island (60°43'S 45°38'W) on 12 February 1967. I had 2 encounters with this species in Antarctic waters; the first individual on 15 February 2008 landed on board our ship in the morning upon arrival to the

Nelson Strait (ca. 62°20'S 59°30'W) between Nelson and Robert Islands, and the second individual came on board on the night of 19 February 2010 (Fig. 3), near Cape Renard on the Bismarck Strait (ca. 65°00'S 63°40'W). These 2 cases might represent the first records for this species in the Antarctic Peninsula and it may be significant that all records south of 55°S are in the month of February. These records might give a glimpse on potential post-breeding movements of the species.

In the general area of the southern tip of South America there are 3 species of diving petrels: Magellan (*Pelecanoides magellani*), Georgian (*P. georgicus*) and common (*P. urinatrix*). The first is different from the other 2 by a distinctive half-white collar that is present on the different age classes and can be easily ruled out. The other 2 are extremely similar, however, by comparing photographs from the different species and sites to the Antarctic birds, the relatively thinner and larger shape of the bill, the darker underside of the wings and inner web of the primary feathers, and the darker facial pattern, I concluded that the Antarctic individuals I observed were common diving petrels. Nevertheless, I do not have measurements of the birds, which is probably the best way to separate them, so I cannot rule out completely the Georgian diving petrel.

#### Cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

This species occasionally reaches the Antarctic Peninsula, with birds observed and photographed on 17 March 1979 and 26 April 1979 by D. Salas on Greenwich Island on the Chilean Base Arturo Prat (62°30'S 59°41'W; Schlatter & Riveros 1979). Prince & Croxall (1983) reported the most southerly individual for the species, a bird found dead in December 1979 at 65°15'S 64°16'W. During the 1980s and 1990s a series of individuals were recorded in different areas on the South Shetland Islands. During 1984 at the same site as the initial record on Base Arturo Prat, an individual arrived on 6 April 1984 and died on the 9<sup>th</sup> of the same month and was preserved as a specimen: later at the same site another individual was found on 17 April 1985 and stayed for a while on the base before departing (Torres *et al.* 1986). Trivelpiece *et al.* (1987) reported 4 dead individuals found on different beaches on Admiralty Bay, King George Island (ca. 62°11'S 58°27'W) during the austral summers of 1984-5 and 1985-86 [no specific dates given]. Silva *et al.* (1995) report further records for King George Island at 62°14'S 58°35'W on December 1983: a dead individual and remains of at least 2 more birds. The same authors reported 2 birds found on 4 January 1994 at Nelson Island (62°19'S 58°48'W). On 23 February 2004 I found a dead cattle egret on Yankee Harbor, on Greenwich Island (62°32'S 59°45'W); the body of the bird was torn apart, probably by skuas.



Fig. 4. Least seedsnipe (*Thinocorus rumicivorus*) on board of *MS Fram* on 24 November 2007.

Interestingly, most records reported in the literature are from late 1970's into the mid 1990's, with none reported in recent years.

#### Least seedsnipe (*Thinocorus rumicivorus*)

Seedsnipes are an endemic group in the southern Neotropics; this species is locally common in southern South America, its southern most populations being in southern Isla Grande, Tierra del Fuego (Humphrey *et al.* 1970). Previously, Favero & Silva (1999) reported an individual of this species at Harmony Point, Nelson Island (62°19'S 59°10'W) in the South Shetland Islands, the only record in Antarctica. While crossing the Drake Passage on 24 November 2007 at about 57°28'S 64°12'W a bird came on board (Fig. 4). The previous night there was a storm which probably pushed the bird toward the sea. However, the bird remained on board through the trip, reaching the South Shetlands Islands and riding back north where it abandoned the vessel in Ushuaia (Argentina) 8 days later; its survival was aided by provision of food by humans during the trip.

#### House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

While conducting a landing in Yalour Islands (65°14'S 64°10'W), on 17 January 2013 a female house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) arrived on board *MS Fram* and perched on deck (Fig. 5). The individual stayed on board for most of the morning and then disappeared. It is an unusual record and I suspect the bird traveled south on board a larger vessel and somehow departed and reached our vessel. It is not uncommon for large vessels to cruise to this part of Antarctica directly from Ushuaia, Argentina, where there is a stable population of house sparrows. While possibly a ship-transported individual, this would seem to establish the first record of this species for the Antarctic Peninsula.



Fig. 5. House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) on board *MS Fram* at Yalour Island on 17 January 2013.

Land birds are extremely rare as vagrants this far south: however, a literature search produced at least 4 cases of passerine bird species reaching the Antarctic Peninsula: (1) Chilean swallow (*Tachycineta meyeni*) on 4 December 2006, at Wilhelmina Bay (64°33'S 61°59'W; Marin 2007), (2) barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) on 13 November 2006, at Arctowsky Station on King George Island (62°09'S 58°40'W; Korczak-Abshire *et al.* 2011), (3) austral thrush (*Turdus falklandii*) on 18 September 2002, at Potter Peninsula, King George Island (62°14'S 58°40'W; Santos *et al.* 2007), and (4) an austral negrito (*Lessonia rufa*) in November 1999 off Adelaide Island (ca. 67°34'S 68°08'W) that landed on a ship during a blizzard, from an unknown source (*in* Shirihai 2002). All 4 bird species are migratory in their normal range thus the probability of vagrancy is high and perhaps further records are to be expected.

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