

# First record of Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau* for Namibia, South Atlantic

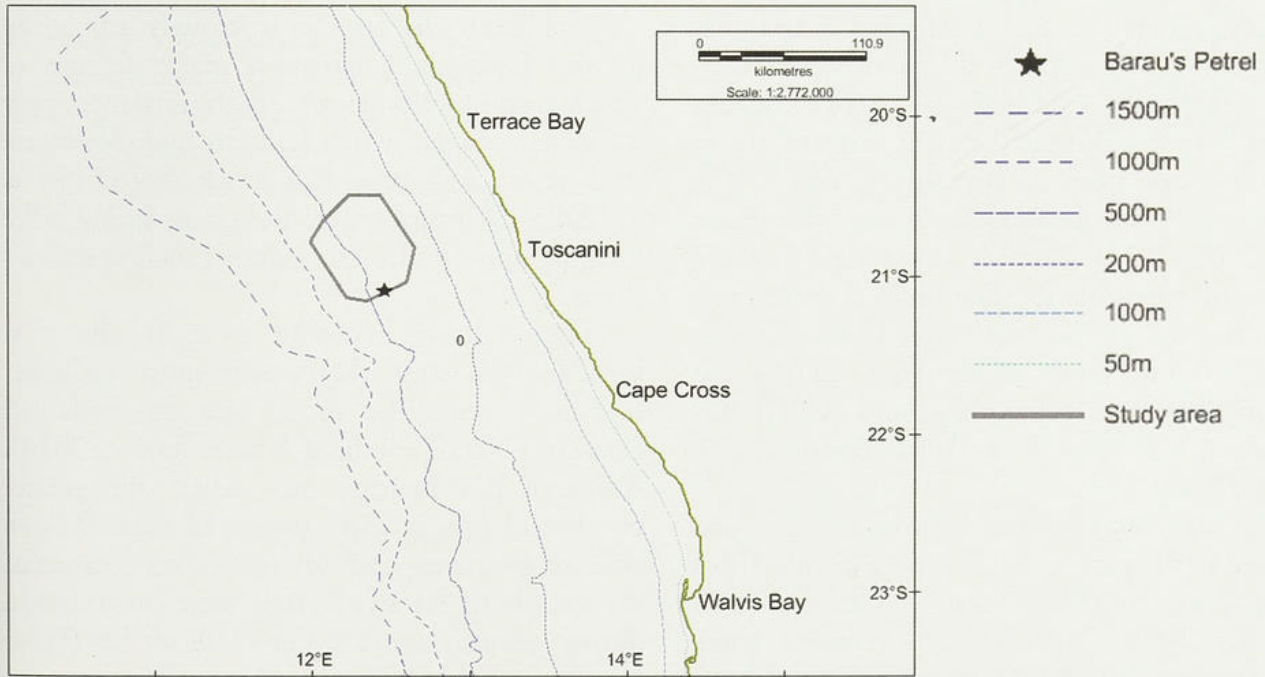
Marijke N. de Boer

**Première observation du Pétrel de Barau *Pterodroma barau* en Namibie, Atlantique sud.** Un Pétrel de Barau *Pterodroma barau* a été photographié à environ 96 km au large du nord de la Namibie (21°05'S 12°30'E) le 4 février 2014. C'est la première donnée pour la Namibie et seulement la deuxième pour l'Océan atlantique. C'est aussi la plus occidentale et, avec les observations récentes au large de l'Afrique du Sud, elle pourrait indiquer une extension de l'aire de distribution vers l'ouest de l'espèce.

Between 10 January and 6 March 2014, dedicated marine fauna observations were undertaken 64–130 km off the coast of Namibia from a geophysical survey vessel. On 4 February 2014 at 07.46 hrs a grey-and-white gadfly petrel *Pterodroma* sp. was observed c.96 km off the coast (21°04'83"S 12°29'62"E; Fig. 1). The weather was fine with slight cloud cover, a light south-westerly wind (9 km/h) and a gentle swell (<2 m). The sea surface temperature was 21.5°C, air temperature 22°C, and the water depth at this location was 478 m.

The petrel approached from the stern and was first observed flying high and directly over the vessel. It was rather long-winged and the dark black cap contrasting with the white forehead

was immediately obvious. It was estimated to be slightly smaller than Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*, which was regularly seen throughout the survey. The photographs (Figs. 2–3), supplemented by the features noted at sea, identify the bird as a Barau's Petrel *P. barau* based on the following features: (1) distinct black cap and white forehead; (2) pronounced broken neck collar; (3) white belly and underwings; (4) dark tips and distinct blackish margins to the underwings; (5) carpal bar extending across 75% of the 'arm' on the underwing; (6) grey upperparts with blackish M-shape across the open wings (not clearly visible from the angle at which the photographs were obtained); and (7) a rather long-winged appearance.



**Figure 1.** Location of the sighting of Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau*, the study area and bathymetric contours. Carte indiquant la position de l'observation du Pétrel de Barau *Pterodroma barau*, la zone d'étude et les contours bathymétriques.





**Figures 2–3.** Barau's Petrel *Pterodroma barau*, c.96 km off Namibia, 4 February 2014 (Marijke N. de Boer)  
Pétrel de Barau *Pterodroma barau*, à environ 96 km au large de la Namibie, 4 février 2014 (Marijke N. de Boer)

Several dark *Pterodroma* spp. with pale bellies and white underwings can be confused with Barau's Petrel (Harrison 1987, Flood & Fisher 2013). Juan Fernández *P. externa*, Hawaiian *P. phaeopygia*, White-necked *P. cervicalis* and the smaller Vanuatu *P. oculata* and Black-winged Petrels *P. nigripennis* were eliminated because of the petrel's diagnostic underwing pattern in combination with overall greyish-brown upperparts, a dark cap and no distinct collar. The long-winged appearance and the bird's estimated size helped to eliminate other similar but smaller 'Cookilaria' petrels. The lack of a white hindneck combined with the extent of black on the underwing ruled out any remaining contenders.

Barau's Petrel is an Endangered petrel that breeds only on Réunion in the south-west Indian Ocean (BirdLife International 2014). Recent studies have demonstrated that it migrates up to 5,000 km east from its breeding colony to the central and eastern Indian Ocean in winter (Pinet *et al.* 2009, 2011). Records at sea tend to show a seasonal variation in distribution, with most birds observed in the south-west Indian Ocean, 200–2,000 km south of Réunion, during the breeding season in September–April (Gill 1967, Jouanin & Gill 1967, Frost 1981, Bourne 1989, Stahl & Bartle 1991).

The first Barau's Petrel for Mozambique was recorded in November 1987 and for South Africa off northern KwaZulu-Natal in October 1988 (Lambert 2001), with a further record there in November 2003 (Sutherland 2005). On 5 January 2000, one was observed between Cape Town and Marion Island at 40°40'S 26°55'E (B. Dyer pers. comm.). More records were made in

November 2005 off KwaZulu-Natal (Ryan *et al.* 2006) and in September 2007 off Richard's Bay (Southern African Rarities 2014). Since then there have been more records (Southern African Rarities 2014), especially off KwaZulu-Natal and during the breeding season: 10 October 2008 off Durban ( $n = 14$ ); November–December 2010 off Richard's Bay and Kosi Bay ( $n = 33$ ); 7 May 2012 off Durban ( $n = 1$ ); 21 January 2013 off St. Francis Bay ( $n = 1$ ); 5 October 2013 off Durban ( $n = 1$ ); and 22–24 November 2013 off Durban ( $n = 8$ ). On 8 December 2008, the first Atlantic Ocean record of Barau's Petrel was made at the Subtropical Front (39°S 17°20'E), south of Cape Town (Joiris *et al.* 2013).

The ocean off Namibia is strongly influenced by the Benguela Current, a major feature of which is an upwelling with a high nutrient supply to surface waters, which leads to high biological production and large fish stocks (Shannon *et al.* 2003). Consequently, this area should offer foraging opportunities to vagrants such as Barau's Petrel.

The sighting reported here is the first for Namibia and the westernmost to date. It complements the recent records made off KwaZulu-Natal (Southern African Rarities 2014). Although this increase may reflect the greater number of pelagic trips, improved identification skills or awareness and the use of digital cameras, no records of Barau's Petrels were documented during pelagic surveys in the 1970s off KwaZulu-Natal (I. Sinclair pers. comm.). The increase in sightings therefore may indicate a westward movement of the species as previously suggested by Lambert (2001).



## Acknowledgements

These observations were made during a geophysical survey by Tullow Kudu. I thank Dave Bolger (Tullow Oil) for his support. Special thanks to Bob Flood (Scilly Pelagics) who identified\* the petrel and to Andy Williams for recognising the importance of this observation. Peter Ryan (Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town) and Trevor Hardaker (South African Rarities Committee) provided valuable information regarding the KwaZulu-Natal records; the former also made useful comments that improved the accuracy and presentation of this note.

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Received 28 June 2014; revision accepted 11 September 2014.



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De Boer, Marijke N. 2015. "First record of Barau's Petrel for Namibia, South Atlantic." *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* 22(2), 211–213.

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