British Birds
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FROM THE RARITIES COMMITTEE'S FILES

'The *Chalice* petrel'

Every year, thousands of birds must be seen, but not identified, by good birdwatchers. Few get so far as to be photographed and to have pictures and descriptions circulated around the BBRC and its Seabirds Advisory Panel, yet still remain unresolved years later. One such report is that of an undoubtedly remarkable seabird, popularly known as 'The *Chalice* petrel' after the name of the vessel from which it was observed.

On 3rd August 1988, a dark-rumped storm-petrel of the genus *Oceanodroma* was seen from the MV *Chalice* southwest of the Isles of Scilly. Descriptions were submitted to the BBRC by Peter Charles, Keith Cutting, T. M. England, Peter Harrison, H. W. Wallis, J. R. Ward and S. A Young, and photographs were submitted by John Hall and HWW. These constituted a claim of Matsudaira's Storm-petrel *O. matsudairae* in an area south of 'The Wilson's Triangle' (an area of sea in which Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* had been found to occur regularly).

The notes and photographs were circulated around the Seabirds Advisory Panel, whose members at that time were P. R. Colston, W. F. Curtis, PH and B. A. E. Marr. There were two recommendations for acceptance as Matsudaira's and two conclusions that the mystery storm-petrel was either Matsudaira's, Tristram's *Oceanodroma tristrami* or Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *O. monorhis*. The BBRC came to no firmer conclusion, despite detailed examination of the files and photographs on a number of occasions. By this time, S. A. Young and J. R. King had compiled a paper entitled 'The *Chalice* petrel revisited' (see pages 329-335). Some transparencies and notes were then sent to Michael Force in Vancouver, Canada, for expert comment; his reply was received in December 1995 (see pages 339-342). The original, vital photographs by JH had been retained by the BBRC's Secretary, M. J. Rogers.

A further, parallel development, in line with the interest shown in Swinhoe's Storm-petrels following the unprecedented series of trapped individuals in northeast England (see *Brit. Birds* 88: 342-348), was a request by Stephen Morrison for details of all sightings of dark-rumped storm-petrels off UK coasts for summary in a paper for *British Birds*.

In order to bring all these together, R. A. Hume, as Chairman of the BBRC, has compiled brief details from the original submission and pieced the story together, incorporating some comments from SM.

The original sighting

PH sent photocopies of his notes to illustrate the identification process at the time. The MV *Chalice* approached a French trawler and crossed behind it. A large, rakish, dark petrel with a pale wing-bar crossed the wake; it looked long-tailed and had long, angular wings. It dwarfed nearby European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus*, and PH quite reasonably pronounced it to be a Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* while it was still some 500 m away and the tail could not be seen. It then approached as close as 20 m and clearly had a forked tail, so it could not be that species after all. PH repeated that he would unhesitatingly have claimed this bird as a Bulwer's had it not been seen close enough to discern the tail fork.

Nevertheless, it looked like Bulwer's Petrel in some ways, having an unhurried, circling flight up to 3 m above the water surface, jinking downwards at intervals; its wingbeats were rhythmic, interspersed with level glides. It lacked any erratic, bounding actions. It also appeared to have twice or more the length and span of a European Storm-petrel: an 'enormous' storm-petrel, emphasised repeatedly by PH, but in shape obviously an *Oceanodroma* species, with long wings held slightly raised and bent at the carpal joints. The rear body/tail projection was unusually long, but the tail fork looked relatively shallow, although, as the tail was frequently spread, this was difficult to judge. The legs, seen briefly, were short and black, and the bill and eyes black.

General coloration was a soft, velvety brown, the head a shade darker, the underwings greyer and paler. There was no hint of paleness on the rump or uppertail-coverts, and the most noticeable feature was a pale brown band on the upperwing, curving in a broad arc to reach the leading edge. The flight feathers and primary coverts looked uniformly dark.

PH quickly ruled out a dark-rumped Leach's Storm-petrel *O. leucorhoa* by the size, the lack of a pale 'comma' on the upper primary coverts, the flight, and the proportionately much longer wings. Bulwer's Petrel was eliminated by the forked tail. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel was considered, but Tristram's, being the larger species, seemed more likely. PH recalled that on one species the upperwing-bar reached the leading edge of the wing (as on the individual in question), but on the other fell short. As Swinhoe's has often been considered to be merely a dark-rumped Leach's, the huge size of this bird seemed to rule out Swinhoe's; subsequently, the upperwing pattern was found to do so, too.

The bird looked like a Markham's Storm-petrel *O. markhami*, except that the tail seemed less deeply notched and there was no sign of the pale 'comma' on the primary coverts so obvious on Markham's (which PH had seen annually for some years).

The identification therefore rested between Matsudaira's and Tristram's: almost identical in the field but for the former's white primary shafts. As no white primary shafts were ever seen in the field, PH concluded that he had seen a Tristram's Storm-petrel.

On 1st September 1988, however, PH saw the photographs taken on 3rd August by JH and commented: 'one of them shows clearly that our suspected Tristram's was, in fact, a Matsudaira's.' The photographs revealed white on the primary shafts, despite the failure of 12 observers to see this in the field. It was,

as PH said, a million-to-one chance that the 12 had found the lone Atlantic Matsudaira's that had been 'trapped in the Salvages earlier in the summer'; but they apparently had done so.

Comments from Seabirds Advisory Panel

WFC said that he struggled to see the white primary shafts on the transparency supposedly showing them, and could see no sign of them at all on the other photographs. Without these, he felt that identification could not be regarded as 100% certain. In the field, he had found little difficulty in seeing the white 'flash' on Matsudaira's Storm-petrels at a range of 100 m.

BAEM agreed that the bird had been well seen and well described, was reasonably well photographed and was, beyond doubt, 'a really terrific bird', but he had misgivings about the identification. At 20 m, for 12-14 minutes, the white primary shafts should surely have been seen? Three clear sketches and full descriptions revealed no evidence of white; in fact, the observers emphasised its total absence. The transparencies seemed of little real help. BAEM was not satisfied that they really showed such white primary shafts, either. He expressed the view that was later supported by members of the BBRC that, in the one transparency in which white appeared to be present at the correct place on the wing, the effect was most probably due to a reflection of light from a wave immediately behind the bird: the white highlight appeared to create a 'notch' in the wing, purely an optical or photographic effect. He also clarified the 'Matsudaira's trapped on the Salvages': this was, it later transpired (though PH could not have known it at the time), actually a Swinhoe's Storm-petrel.

PRC looked very carefully at the photographs and found the 'white triangle' to be in precisely the right place for white primary shafts, and he felt that it was, indeed, a genuine feature and not due to any reflection or translucency. His examination of skins at the Natural History Museum, Tring, was restricted to a single poor specimen in the case of Matsudaira's, but he found that it was necessary to separate the outer primaries individually to see the shafts properly; he also found that the shafts were duller below, and the underwing of the *Chalice* petrel shown in the photographs would be quite typical of Matsudaira's. Together with the descriptions and arguments from PH, PRC felt that the photographs supported the identification as Matsudaira's.

Further comments

The paper by J. R. King and S. A. Young, submitted independently, is presented below (pages 329-335) almost unedited; this discusses the dilemma in greater detail. This is followed (pages 339-342) by a slightly shortened version of the comments made by Michael Force, who supplied detailed notes and discussion on the troublesome group of storm-petrels that includes Matsudaira's and Tristram's.

SM's wider review of dark-rumped storm-petrels in the UK will be presented separately, as it involves so many records other than the single *Chalice* sighting to which the rest of this paper refers. Nevertheless, he has found that descriptions appear to fall into two categories: 'Swinhoe's types', and 'others, perhaps Matsudaira's, always described as "like no other seabird I have seen before"'.

In conclusion, this is an intriguing story and perhaps the greatest 'one that got away' of all time. It is a great pity: clearly, the bird involved was new to the Western Palearctic, altogether unexpected, and destined to be a sensation. In the end, it seems that it can never be more than an 'either/or': one of the most frustrating and unsatisfying results for any observer, particularly in view of the undoubted quality of the documentation and exceptional abilities and experience of the senior observer involved.
RAH

Notes were submitted to the BBRC by seven of the 12 observers who saw this bird. These are published here in almost unedited form, as documentation for posterity to judge.

SPECIES Matsudaira's Storm-petrel.
PLACE South of Wilson's Triangle, Cornwall.
DATE 3rd August 1988; 18.05-18.50 (about 5 minutes total viewing).
OBSERVER P. Harrison.
OTHER OBSERVERS H. W. Wallis, Keith Cutting, Peter Charles, T. M. England, J. R. Ward, S. A. Young, *et al.*
FOUND BY PH, HWW & J. Hall.
FIRST IDENTIFIED BY PH (as Tristram's in the field as no white shafts noted, but photos show diagnostic white shafts of Matsudaira's).
OPTICAL AIDS 10 × 40B Zeiss.
PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE OF THE SPECIES Yes, about 400 sightings last year.
EXPERIENCE OF SIMILAR SPECIES All storm-petrels.
WEATHER CONDITIONS 2-3 wind, 4/10 cloud cover.

A series of photos by Hall shows (1) size (rules out Swinhoe's), and (2) shallow fork to tail, grey underwing and white primary shafts (rules out Markham's and Tristram's).

As this record is so well documented, I have simply photocopied my notes at the time so that the Seabirds Advisory Panel can see the identification process: first (long range) thought to be Bulwer's; then thought to be a Tristram's. The photos, however, show the bird to have the *diagnostic* white shafts of Matsudaira's.

Notes taken at the time: 18.00-18.50. 49°10'N 07°33'W. MAYHEM!!

Approached a French trawler; crossed behind in wake, approximately 400 yds [365 m] away when a large, rakish petrel, wholly dark except for pale wing bars, crossed wake. It appeared long-tailed and had long angular wings. Size dwarfed [European] Storm-petrel and I had no hesitation in pronouncing it a Bulwer's Petrel, the Atlantic's only all-dark petrel. It was seen independently by John Hall and Wally Wallis, who both agreed that it was a Bulwer's. However, we were wrong! It had a forked tail.

General impression: A very large, dark-rumped petrel, originally identified as a Bulwer's Petrel due to all-dark coloration, pale wing-bars and extremely large size when compared with the British [i.e. European] Storm-petrels, over which it was flying, and dwarfed. In some ways it was like a Bulwer's, the flight unhurried, circling at up to 10 feet [3 m] above waves and then 'jinking' down to water, rhythmic beats interposed with level glides. Flight looked [like] Leach's except [for] bounding quality; and size disparity with [European] Storm-petrel was, to say the least, astounding, appearing at least twice if not 2½ that species' length and wing span. It cannot be emphasised enough that this was an ENORMOUS storm-petrel.

1st September 1988. It has taken this long for the photographs, taken by John Hall, to arrive. One look at them shows clearly that our suspected Tristram's was, in fact, a Matsudaira's Storm-petrel!

Despite looking for the diagnostic pale primary shafts, they were not visible to me (or I think any person during the period of observation—I can offer no reason for this as it is usually an easy point to see). Because of the lack of this feature, Matsudaira's was not considered a contender. The photographs, however, reveal that we were not the careful observers we thought—it shows well in the photos (considering the smallness of image and darkness of the photos). Apparently a suspect Matsudaira's was captured from a burrow in the Salvages this summer and photographed. It

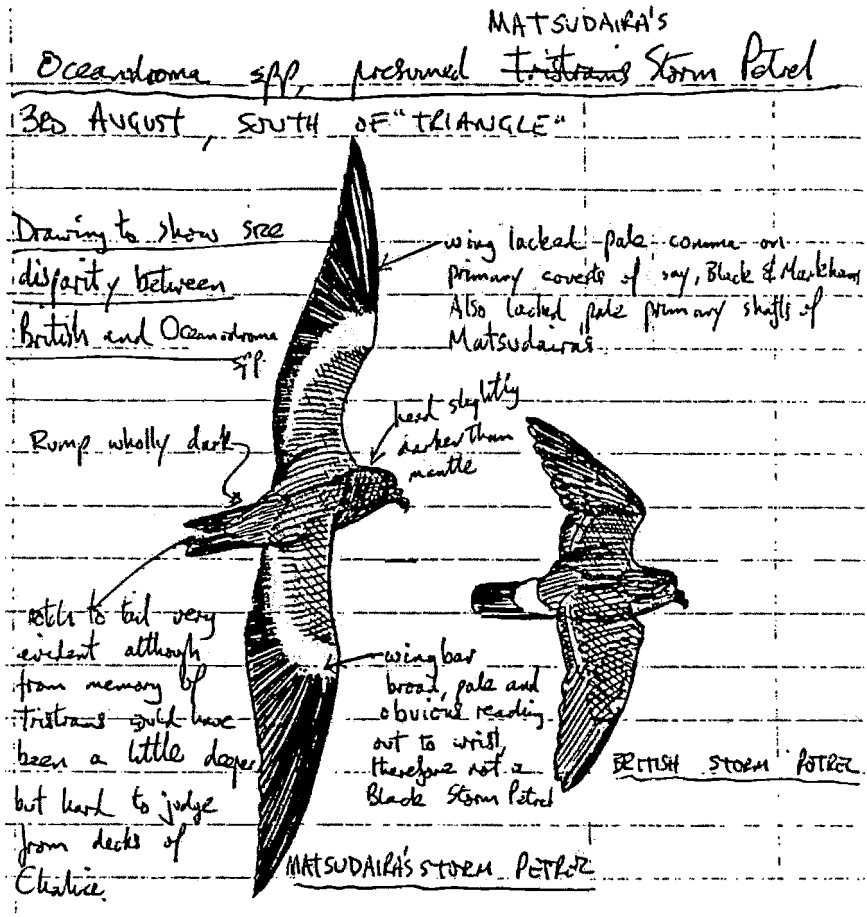

Fig. 1. Drawings submitted to the British Birds Rarities Committee *(Peter Harrison)*

seems a million to one chance, but 12 lucky birders found this lone Atlantic individual south of 'the Triangle', on 3rd August 1988.

General shape obviously an *Oceanodroma* with long angular wings, held slightly raised and bent at carpals. Compared to shape of, say, a Leach's Storm-petrel, wings proportionately longer [in relation] to body length, with rakish look recalling Black Storm-petrel of North America, although differing in wing pattern, etc.—see later notes. Once again—size was huge, with more projecting beyond the wing's rear edge than a Leach's and fork to tail was, I thought, much shallower than, say, a Leach's, although tail often spread when changing position so this could have been an illusion.

Legs were short and black—seen briefly—usually carried hidden. Bill black, eye black.

Plumage: General coloration a soft, velvet brown, head perhaps a shade darker, underwings greyer and paler. No hint of paleness on rump or uppertail-coverts whatsoever. The most noticeable feature was the pale brown upperwing bar, about 1"-1½" [2.5-3.8 cm] wide, curving in a broad arc and reaching the leading edge of the wing. Primary coverts and primaries plus secondaries uniformly dark (cf. Black, Markham's).

Considerations:

1. The most obvious thought must be a dark-rumped Leach's Petrel. This can be ruled out by:
   (a) Huge size of 'suspected Tristram's', easily twice or 2½ length of Storm Petrel, 3-4 times wing span.

(b) Lacked the pale 'comma' on upperwing-coverts of Leach's.
(c) Flight incorrect for Leach's.
(d) Proportions of wings to body length markedly wrong for Leach's.

2. Bulwer's Petrel. First thought to be one at 500 yards [460 m] range when tail 'end' could not be discerned. It was the size of this species—or appeared so, easily dwarfing the British [European] Storm-petrels. If the bird had not come back to within 20 yards [18 m] of us off the stern of the *Chalice* when we chummed to entice it, I would have been 100% certain on size alone that this was Bulwer's Petrel. The forked tail obviously ruled out this species.

3. Swinhoe's Petrel. I knew that it was either Swinhoe's or Tristram's and, at the time of observation, plumped for Tristram's knowing it to be the larger. I also remembered that in one (I couldn't remember which) the upperwing bar reached to the edge of the wing, whereas in the other it fell far short. In our bird, it clearly reached the edge of the wing without any 'narrowing' of width.

   Also, size was so much larger than Swinhoe's, which is often regarded as dark-rumped race of Leach's. Flight also slower and more languid than what I remember for Swinhoe's.

4. Markham's Storm-petrel. Looked 'exactly' like a Markham's Storm-petrel, except for two important points. Firstly tail not nearly so deeply notched (see photo in *Seabirds—a photographic guide*). Secondly, Markham's, which I see every year and know well, has the pale 'comma' across primary coverts which Tristram's lacks (in the field).

5. Black Storm-petrel. Can be ruled out by size of pale upperwing bar which reached leading edge of the wing (it doesn't in Black, giving shorter bar).

6. Matsudaira's Storm-petrel. Tristram's and Matsudaira's are virtually identical in the field and differ in Matsudaira's having obvious white primary shafts, which I did not notice in this bird. Clearly it is between Matsudaira's, Tristram's and Swinhoe's.

Swinhoe's can be eliminated on size alone, Matsudaira's due to lack of white on primaries—verdict: TRISTRAM'S pending the photos.

Weather: force 2-3 wind, slight swell, therefore favourable conditions for 'at sea'. Cloud cover 4/10; sun not shining during observation period, being somewhat dull, flat, light but 3 hours 19 minutes before sunset so more than adequate. In fact no glare from the sea.

First found by three of us independently and claimed as a Bulwer's by all three of us independently from the rest (we all met on the bows, in disbelief!), time 18.03-18.04—seen very briefly.

Refound at 18.20 and watched down to 20 yards [18 m] over chum for 12 or 14 minutes by all 12 observers (these times supplied by ship's mate, who is instructed to record all positions of 'important birds' and duration of observation). (By the language he guessed this was something special!)

P. Harrison

SPECIES Large storm-petrel seen from MV *Chalice* on 3.8.88
OBSERVER H. W. Wallis.
TIME First seen very briefly at approximately 6.05 p.m. Relocated and seen for several minutes at 6.25 p.m.
WEATHER High clouds but good visibility, light NW wind, calm sea conditions.
METHOD 10 × 40 binoculars, bird was seen as close as 15-20 yards [14-18 m]. Seen initially and briefly from upperdeck and then from the stern of MV *Chalice*.

General appearance: Appeared very large compared with adjacent British [European] Storm-petrels (approximately twice the size of [them]). The bird was long winged and the body and tail also appeared long and narrow. Colour sooty-brown except for 'bright' white wing patches and a 'greyish' hue to head and shoulders.

Head: Dark, sooty-brown with 'greyish' hue. Bill appeared black.

Upperparts: Mainly sooty-brown but shoulders and head had a 'greyish' hue. Wings long, wingspan approximately twice the length of body and tail. Bright white wing-bars, diagonal, reaching the carpal joint. No other markings on upper wings. Body and tail appeared long and narrow. No white on the rump, and tail was clearly forked (see sketch [fig. 2]).

Underparts: Mainly sooty-brown but underwing coverts were paler and greyer, an effect which might have been exaggerated by the light conditions.

Behaviour: The bird was seen feeding with a

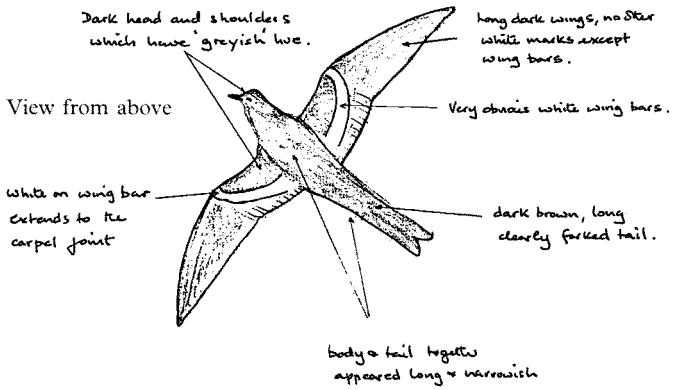

Fig. 2. Drawings of 'The *Chalice* petrel' submitted to the British Birds Rarities Committee (*H. W. Wallis*)

large group of British [European] Storm-petrels and at least one Wilson's Storm-petrel. The flight pattern included long glides and appeared quite strong.

Comments: The *Chalice* party were watching a largish gathering of seabirds, mainly gulls, storm-petrels and Fulmars [*Fulmarus glacialis*] which were feeding in the wake of a French trawler. Just after 6.00 p.m. Peter Harrison shouted that there was a large petrel amongst the storm-petrels. At this time I had a very brief view of a large storm-petrel with long wings and a long forked tail without a white rump.

It took a further 15-20 minutes for the MV *Chalice* to manoeuvre back towards the petrels feeding on the slick left by the trawler. The bird was relocated by another member of our party and we were able to get good, close views. A number of photographs were taken.

Subsequent comparison of notes and sketches made at the time with illustrations in *Seabirds: an identification guide* by Peter Harrison indicates a petrel of the genus *Oceanodroma*. The overall size of the bird, brightness and completeness of the wing-bar (up to carpal joint), the depth and shape of tail fork and greyish hue of head and shoulders indicate that the bird was Tristram's Storm-petrel rather than Markham's or Swinhoe's Storm-petrels.

I have previous experience of British [European] Storm-petrels and Leach's Storm-petrel. Experience of Wilson's Storm-petrel was gained on the above voyage.

H. W. WALLIS

SPECIES Tristram' s Storm-petrel.
OBSERVER Keith Cutting.
PLACE South of 'Wilson's Triangle' off Cornwall.
DATE 3rd August 1988.
TIME 6.20 p.m. DURATION 10-15 minutes approx.
OTHER OBSERVERS Peter Harrison and 10 other birdwatchers aboard the *Chalice*.

The bird was found by Peter Harrison. He first observed it around 6.05 p.m. as the *Chalice* drew close to a trawler. The bird was only seen briefly at first by Peter Harrison and one other observer, but after 'chumming' the bird was relocated after about 15 minutes, when all aboard—myself included—saw it and watched it for ten minutes or so. Particularly good views

were obtained.

The bird was identified by Peter Harrison as a Tristram's Storm-petrel and I understand Peter will be sending a full report to the Rarities Committee. The only other bird considered was Swinhoe's Storm-petrel, but the bird seen was clearly larger than the Swinhoe's Storm-petrel.

I watched it through a pair of Zeiss West 10 × 40 BGAT binoculars. It was flying with circa 50 British [European] Storm-petrels and looked almost twice the size of the 'Stormies'.

Flight appeared to me to be very dashing and erratic, rather reminiscent of a swift [*Apus*].

The Tristram's came as close as 20 yards [18 m] at one stage but for most of the time was at a range of 100 yards [90 m] or so. Photographs were taken by two members of the group.

It was a fine evening with bright sunshine, no noticeable cloud and just a slight NW breeze. The bird was noticeably dark overall, but, when the sun shone on it, it looked very sooty brown in colour. What was immediately obvious was a pale white bar across the upperwing-coverts. The bird had a forked tail. Wings were long.

I have no previous experience of this species or similar species as this was my first pelagic trip, but I have no reason to doubt Peter Harrison's identification.

KEITH CUTTING

SPECIES Tristram's Storm-petrel.
OBSERVER S. A. Young.

Observed on the evening of 3rd August 1988 for approx. 10-15 mins at distances between 20 and 50 yards [18-46 m] in good light.

The initial impression was of a large bird of dissimilar appearance and behaviour to any of the other storm-petrels present (predominantly European *Hydrobates pelagicus* but including one or two Wilson's *Oceanites oceanicus*). This was so much the case that this individual could be easily picked out by naked eye. Its size was the most striking aspect, being about that of a small tern [*Sterna*] and appearing about twice the size of the other storm-petrels present.

Whilst the group of storm-petrels 'fluttered and pattered', moving only slowly across the area of the 'chum' slick, this individual flew in long glides from end to end and around the slick at some speed. Its flight seemed to use comparatively few wing-beats and it was not observed 'fluttering' in a storm-petrel-like manner at all. During this period, at no time did it rise more than a few feet above wave level.

The structure of this individual was also distinct from either of the other two species present, in that it had proportionately much longer and narrower wings and a distinctly forked tail (the tail fork did not appear especially deep, being about ⅓ of overall tail length, *but* at no time was the tail observed fully 'open').

Above, the bird was uniformly coloured darkish neutral brown, the only exceptions to this observed were broad buffish wing-bars and a *slight* darkening of the tail. The wing-bar on each wing extended from the inner secondaries to the carpal joint and was strikingly obvious (much more so than on Wilson's); the upper wing otherwise appeared unmarked (even at close range). The head, back and rump of the bird appeared the same brown as the upper wing, the bill and eye colour only noted as 'dark'. At no time did I see the underside of the bird clearly. I could also not determine any signs of moult on this individual.

S. A. YOUNG

SPECIES Large petrel south of Wilson's Triangle on 3rd August 1988
OBSERVER Peter Charles.
TIME Bird first seen by three observers, at 18.05. Lost, but relocated, and seen by this observer between 18.20-18.30.
DISTANCE 20-25 yards [18-23 m]. LIGHT Good. WEATHER Fine, sea calm.

Large petrel seen in association with 30+ British [European] Storm-petrels. The bird appeared to be approximately twice size of British Storm-petrel, being both longer and bulkier in body and longer in the wing.

The bird was a uniform brown in colour except for a significant paler wing-bar on the upper wing reaching from the front of the wing at the bend of the wing to the body at a point forward of the trailing edge of wing.

The rump was brown, and the underside of the bird was a pale brown, lighter than above. The tail was forked.

The flight of this bird was strong, and often glided with only a few wing beats. In complete contrast to British [European] Storm-petrel, there was little fluttering flight.

PETER CHARLES

SPECIES Tristram's [crossed out before submission] Matsudaira's [substituted before submission] Storm-petrel
OBSERVER T. M. England.
LOCATION The Wilson's Triangle.
DATE; TIME 3rd August 1988; 6.05 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. approx.
WIND/WEATHER Westerly 4, sea moderate, visibility good.

Size: A large storm-petrel when directly compared with European Storm and Wilson's Petrel in immediate vicinity. Realistically up to 60% larger.

Flight: [Recalling] that of Nightjar [*Caprimulgus europaeus*] or Common Nighthawk [*Chordeiles minor*]. Flight pattern comprising of steep arcs, sweeps and glides albeit the more retarded, fluttery and bat-like motions completely absent as with near species. Appearing generally rakish in flight, very similar to swift.

Wings: Distinctly narrower or slender, not dissimilar to a hirundine. Wing shape accentuated by lack of broadness to base of wing and general bluntness to outer-wing.

Tail: Cigar shaped and heavily forked clearly displayed in flight, conceivably appearing long due to all-dark rump.

Plumage: A solidly all-dark sooty brown petrel on head, back, rump and tail, including upperwing. Total absence of whitish or otherwise paler areas on upper surfaces save for buffish crescental wing bars on upperwing extending to carpal joint. Underwing rather nondescript, appearing greyish/brown in colour.

The petrel was observed down to a distance of 20-25 yards [18-23 m] at best. Associating with other species as follows: [European] Storm-petrel, Fulmar, Sooty Shearwater [*Puffinus griseus*], Wilson's Storm-petrel and Kittiwake [*Rissa tridactyla*].

T. M. ENGLAND

SPECIES Tristram's Storm-petrel.
OBSERVER J. R. Ward.
PLACE Off Cornwall, in area of 'Wilson's Triangle', seen during Cornish Pelagic aboard MV *Chalice*.
DATE 3rd August 1988. Seen for a few minutes at around 18.15.
OTHER OBSERVERS Peter Harrison and ten others.

Circumstances: The bird was first located in the wake of a French trawler which we approached, and was tentatively identified as a Bulwer's Petrel. It was not seen by me at this stage. Shortly afterwards, it was relocated astern of the *Chalice*, where a number of birds, including many [European] Storm-petrels, were feeding in the wake, and was seen well by myself and 11 other observers at ranges down to about 20 yards [18 m]. The bird was photographed. I observed it through Zeiss Dialyt 10 × 40BGA. I had no previous experience of this species or any other dark-rumped storm-petrel. I was, however, familiar with [European] Storm-petrel, Leach's Storm-petrel and (since earlier that day) Wilson's Storm-petrel. Weather conditions were good: clear and bright; wind light and from W; slight swell only.

Description: Overall impression gained of a large, elegant, dark-rumped, fork-tailed storm-petrel, relatively long-winged and long-tailed, and with a swift, easy flight-action quite unlike that of any storm-petrel with which I was then familiar. This bird was much larger than the (British or European) Storm-petrels which were present for comparison; I estimated it to be at least half as long again and approaching twice the wingspan. It had long, relatively narrow wings and a long, neatly forked tail (which quickly dispelled any thoughts of Bulwer's Petrel). Upperparts wholly darkish brown—albeit distinctly paler than [European] Storm Petrel—except for fairly broad, pale brown wing-bar extending right across upperwing-coverts to carpal. I gained the impression of at least partially palish underwings, but did not see this feature well, and cannot be certain about it. The bird's flight was quite swift and direct, for all that its flight action appeared easy and unhurried.

J. R. WARD

R. A. Hume, P. Harrison, H. W. Wallis, Keith Cutting, S. A. Young, Peter Charles, T. M. England and J. R. Ward, 15 Cedar Gardens, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1EY

Comments on the identification of 'The *Chalice* petrel' are provided later in this issue, by Steve Young & Jon King (pages 329-335) and by Michael Force (pages 339-342).