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DOES HUTTON'S SHEARWATER CIRCUMNAVIGATE AUSTRALIA?

Halse (1981, Emu 81: 42-44) reports seeing several hundred Hutton's Shearwaters Puffinus huttoni about five kilometres offshore and some twenty-five kilometres north of Point Cloates, WA, at 22°30'S, 113°40'E. In conjunction with other recent sightings round Australia this report suggests that part of the population of this Shearwater may circumnavigate Australia in a counterclockwise direction.

Halse's birds were seen between 31 July and 6 August 1978 and 30 July to 9 August 1979. All were travelling south. The identification was clinched by the collection of a specimen now in the Western Australian Museum. However, between June and September 1965-70 Shuntov (1974, Seabirds and the biological structure of the ocean. Translation; US Dept. of Commerce) recorded 'small sized white-bellied shearwaters' as common over the continental shelf off north-western Australia. He provisionally identified them as P. gavia. It now seems possible that they were the very closely related P. huttoni. The only banded bird recorded from Australia seems to be the one marked near Christchurch, NZ, on 31 March 1969 and found dead at Hopetoun, WA, on 11 December 1970 (1973, Aust. Bird Bander 11: 85).

On the other side of the continent sightings off Queensland as far north as 17°S by Corben et al. (1974, Sunbird 5: 55-56) in May, June and August suggest that Hutton's Shearwaters are more common off eastern Australia than has hitherto been supposed. Now comes D. P. Vernon's record (1977, Sunbird 8: 92) of a specimen from Booby Island, Q, and another from the same place found weak but alive on 5 May 1976 which show that the species may penetrate Torres Strait. Both specimens, collected by A. Hersom, are in the Queensland Museum.

The bird is known to breed only in the mountains inland from Kaikoura where it was discovered in 1965 by G. Harrow. He reported (1976, Notornis 23: 269-288) its occurrence in New Zealand waters throughout the year and suggested that birds in Australian seas belonged to the pre-breeding part of the population. The purpose of the present note is to draw attention to the possibility that such birds may circumnavigate Australia during their pre-breeding years and for the need for further sightings, specimens and even nil reports from the coasts and seas off northern Australia.

The timing of such a movement could possibly be unravelled from the dates of sightings at different places along the migration path but, should the birds remain overseas before returning to the colonies (probably not before they are two years old), then the pattern may be hard to resolve.

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UNEQUAL SEX RATIOS AMONG SEABIRDS FOUND BEACH-WASHED

Examples of unequal sex ratios among seabirds found beach-washed have been explained by segregation of the sexes at sea (e.g. Dell 1952; Hindwood and McGill 1953; Serventy 1967). A possible example of such segregation was described for Wilson's Storm-Petrel Oceanites oceanicus by Huber (1971). He collected birds at sea on their post-breeding migration in the central western Pacific Ocean; females appeared to be more abundant in