

FIRST RECORD OF A TAHITI PETREL (*PTERODROMA ROSTRATA*) FROM HAWAIIAN WATERS

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The Tahiti Petrel, *Pterodroma rostrata* (Chesser et al. 2011) or *Pseudobulweria rostrata* (Bretagnolle et al. 1998, Birdlife International 2012, Howell 2012, Dickinson and Remsen 2013), breeds in the Society and Marquesas islands, New Caledonia, and other islands in the South Pacific Ocean (Villard et al. 2006). It ranges widely in the tropical central Pacific and is considered a nonbreeding vagrant in Hawaiian waters (Pyle and Pyle 2017). Three of this species' close relatives of the genus *Pseudobulweria* are "critically endangered," and the Tahiti Petrel itself is listed as "near threatened" on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (Birdlife International 2012). The Tahiti Petrel is very similar in appearance to the endangered Phoenix Petrel (*Pterodroma alba*), which has made it difficult to establish the Tahiti Petrel's distribution in the north-central Pacific (King 1970, Spear et al. 1992, 1999, Spear and Ainley 1998, BirdLife International 2016). Early unsubstantiated sight reports of Phoenix or Tahiti Petrels near the Hawaiian Islands include four birds seen during cruises by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1964 and 1965 (King 1970) and one or two Tahiti Petrels seen southeast of Hawai'i Island on 5 November 1984 (Spear et al. 1999). The first Tahiti Petrel record accepted by the American Ornithologists' Union for North America was based on photographs taken in 2009 off Costa Rica (Obando-Calderon et al. 2010, Chesser et al. 2011). Because of identification difficulties in the field, the Tahiti Petrel had been previously identified in Hawaiian waters with the Phoenix Petrel as part of a "species pair" (King 1970, AOU 1998, Pyle 2002).



Figure 1. Close-up view of the head and bill of the Tahiti Petrel that came aboard a ship off Kaula'i, 26 January 2012.

Photo by Emily Haber

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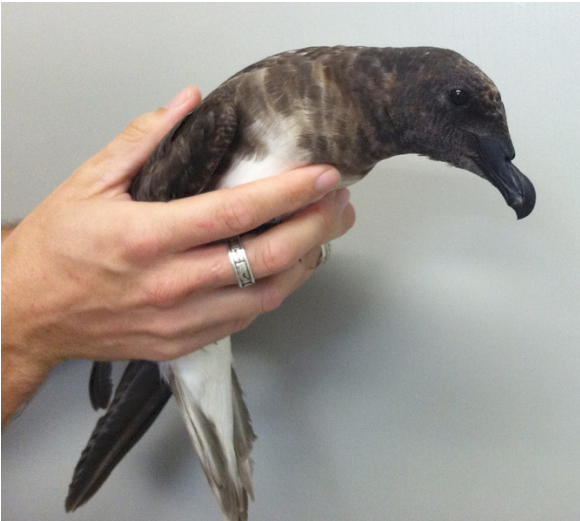


Figure 2. Side view of head and body of the Tahiti Petrel.

Photo by Emily Haber



Figure 3. Ventral view of the left wing of the Tahiti Petrel.

Photo by Emily Haber

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Figure 4. Ventral view of the Tahiti Petrel, including one foot.

Photo by Emily Haber

On the morning of 26 January 2012, a Tahiti Petrel landed on the cruise ship *The Pride of America* 2 km west of Nā-wiliwili Harbor on the island of Kaua'i (21.9562° N, 159.3541° W). Torres, the ship's environmental officer, retrieved the bird from a lifeboat side deck (to which mandatory safety lighting may have attracted it), and delivered it to the harbor security agency, who ultimately passed the bird on to personnel with Save Our Shearwaters (SOS). The ship's pick-up form identified the bird as a Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*), a species commonly rehabilitated by SOS, but the bird's head made it evident immediately (Figure 1) that it was not that species.

We photographed the bird and took standard measurements: unflattened wing chord 294 mm, length of the tarsus to the notch 48 mm, tail length 114 mm, back of the head to the tip of the bill 84 mm, bill length 36.5 mm, bill width at nares 12.2 mm, width of bill at tip 6.6 mm, and depth of bill at tip 13.2 mm. The behavior of the bird was judged as bright, alert, and responsive. It weighed 379 g, and had a keel score of 2+, indicating that it was in good general body condition. This weight appears to be toward the lower end of the spectrum for the Tahiti Petrel (Kimball L. Garrett, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, pers. comm., 2013). The bird was sturdy and robust, with dark grayish-brown to brown upper surface. There was a strong demarcation between the dark head and upper chest and the white underbelly. The chin was not white (Figure 2). The ventral surface of the wing was generally dark but slightly lighter and more silvery in color along the midline (Figure 3). The tail was wedge-shaped. The tarsi were pink, and the feet were black with a "dipped in ink" look (Figure 4). The bird had prominent eyes and a very heavy, strong, dark beak.

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This petrel's measurements fall within the zone of overlap of the two subspecies *rostrata* and *trouessarti* (Villard et al. 2006). Gangloff et al. (2012) did not find support for a distinction between these subspecies in the sequences of one nuclear and two mitochondrial genes. The measurements are too large for a Phoenix Petrel (Gangloff et al. 2009). The similarly plumaged and critically endangered Beck's Petrel (*Pseudobulweria becki*) is 25% smaller overall and has a bill more slender than the Tahiti Petrel's (BirdLife International 2015).

After measuring and photographing the bird, we banded its right tarsus with a metal band supplied by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (number 1064-02628). Raine and Haber released the Tahiti Petrel at Salt Ponds Beach Park on the south shore of Kaua'i in the afternoon of the day it was found, and the bird flew off to the ocean without incident.

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