

Wedge-tailed Shearwater

Ardenna pacifica

#9 SEPTEMBER 2020



Hunter Bird
Observers Club

Affiliated with BirdLife Australia



Dark morph Wedge-tailed Shearwater (Photo: Mick Roderick)

Description

A medium-sized lightly-built seabird with dark upperparts, pale legs and feet, slender dark bill and long tail extending well beyond the feet. The tail is strongly wedge-shaped but in normal flight is tightly folded giving the impression of a long, pointed rear end. No sub-species are recognised, but it occurs as three morphs: dark, pale and intermediate. The latter two morphs, which have varying amounts of off-white underparts, are uncommon in eastern Australia (whereas they comprise 20-30% of the western population). Dark morph birds are chocolate brown, with very little contrast between their upper and lower parts.

Wedge-tailed Shearwaters fly seemingly effortlessly, travelling low to the water in calm conditions and progressing in steep arcs when the winds are stronger. Their wings are broad, and the carpal joints (“wrists”) of the wings are noticeably more forward than for most other seabird species. They fly with unhurried wingbeats, in contrast to some similar-looking shearwaters (e.g. Short-tailed) which have stiff straight wings and fly with bouts of rapid wingbeats.

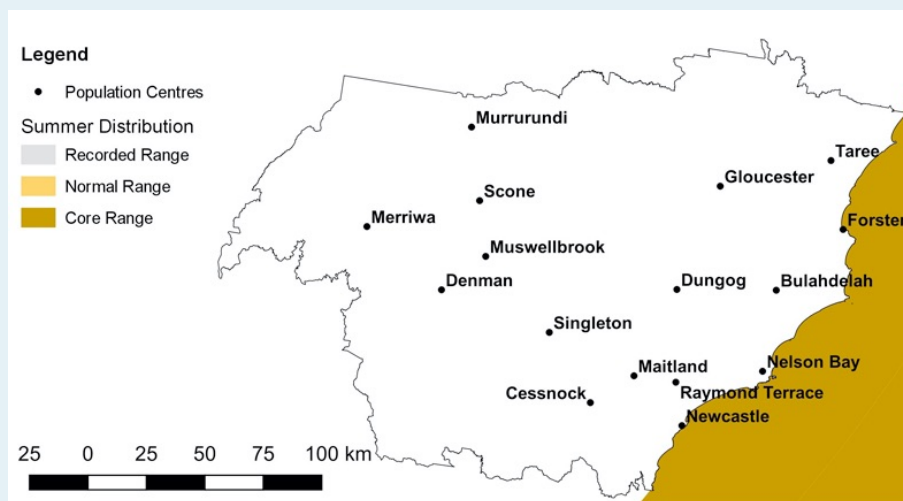
Males and females look alike, and both sexes incubate. Birds begin breeding when they are five years old.



Pale morph Wedge-tailed Shearwater off Swansea (Photo: Mick Roderick)

Regional Status

This is easily our most common seabird, and arguably is the most abundant of any species found in our region. Approximately 100,000 pairs breed on our offshore islands, principally Broughton Island (c. 55,000 pairs) and Little Broughton Island (c. 35,000 pairs); there also are substantial colonies on Boondelbah and Cabbage Tree Islands and North Rock, as well as several smaller colonies elsewhere.



Distribution map for Wedge-tailed Shearwater (map prepared by Dan Williams).

A migratory species, Wedge-tailed Shearwaters depart from here in autumn and they begin to return towards the end of August onwards (as the timeline shows). Geolocator studies have found that they migrate to waters offshore of the Philippines (S. Callaghan pers. comm.). From mid-August to May, large numbers of birds are regularly seen foraging in our coastal waters and can occur all the way to the continental shelf.



Timeline for Wedge-tailed Shearwater (prepared by Dan Williams).

About the name

Wedge-tailed Shearwater

“Wedge-tailed” is descriptive; our bird’s tail is long and tapering. “Shearwater”; a term first used by the English biologist John Ray in the 17th Century, also is descriptive, all species of this genus exhibit superbly controlled flight often with a wing tip almost cutting the water.

Ardenna pacifica

Pacifica (Latin for peaceful) reflects the Pacific Ocean where the species first was recorded (and named as the Pacific Petrel). The genus name *Ardenna* stems from Ardena, which is the name used for Cory’s Shearwater by inhabitants of the Tremeti Islands (in the Adriatic Sea). Somewhere down the line, the “t” became a “d”. Cory’s Shearwaters have bred on those islands for hundreds of years.



Wedge-tailed Shearwater outside its burrow on Broughton Island (Photo: Alan Stuart)

Design Rob Kyte at Conservation Matters 0420 821 460 **Text** by Alan Stuart based on information mainly sourced from • HBOC’s Hunter Region annual bird report series • Volumes 1-7 of HANZAB (the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) • Bird in the Hand (ABSA information sheet series) • Ian Fraser & Jeannie Gray (2013). Australian Bird Names. A Complete Guide .
Information in this fact sheet is provided exclusively to members of the Hunter Bird Observers Club

© Copyright [year] Hunter Bird Observers Club www.hboc.org.au

You are receiving this email as you are a member of the Hunter Bird Observers Club

[Unsubscribe](#) • [Update Email Address](#) • [View Online](#)