

THE LARGER SHEARWATERS



- *Short-tailed Shearwater leaving its breeding island.*

Photo: V. N. Serventy

The Larger Shearwaters *Puffinus* spp.

The following diagnostic features should help to distinguish the chicks and adults of the all-dark Wedge-tailed, Short-tailed and Sooty Shearwaters. The average dimensions of the eggs of each species are also given, as these may be a useful guide to the species present on a breeding site.

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER

Puffinus pacificus

Legs and feet: Predominantly pale, flesh-coloured.

Tarsus: Slender, more or less rounded in cross section.

Toe nails: White.

Adult

A slim bird with a large wedge-shaped tail.

Mass: 300-450 g

Tail: 125-140 mm

Culmen: 33-42 mm

Tarsus: 45-51 mm

Culmen/tarsus ratio: 0.66-0.83

Chick

Culmen: 32-42 mm*

Tarsus: 45-52 mm*

Egg

Width: 39-43 mm; *Length:* 57-64 mm

SOOTY SHEARWATER

Puffinus griseus

Legs, feet and toe nails: As in Short-tailed Shearwater.

Adult

In all respects a larger version of the Short-tailed Shearwater.

Mass: 650-970 g

Tail: 80-94 mm

Culmen: 38-45 mm*

Tarsus: 53-61 mm*

Culmen/tarsus ratio: 0.66-0.75

Chick

Culmen: 38-45 mm*

Tarsus: 53-61 mm*

Egg

Width: 44-52 mm; *Length:* 72-83 mm



Wedge-tailed



Short-tailed



• *Wedge-tailed Shearwater.*



• *Short-tailed Shearwater.*

Photos: V. N. Serventy

SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER

Puffinus tenuirostris

Legs and feet: Predominantly dark grey.

Tarsus: Stout, distinctly flattened from side to side.

Toe nails: Dark grey.

Adult

A heavily built, stubby looking bird with a small fan-shaped tail.

Mass: Usually well over 450 g.

Tail: 75-86 mm

Culmen: 28-36 mm

Tarsus: 48-56 mm

Culmen/tarsus ratio: 0.56-0.68

Chick

Culmen: 28-36 mm*

Tarsus: 48-56 mm*

Egg

Width: 43-50 mm; *Length:* 68-76 mm

NOTE: The only other all-dark shearwater that breeds in Australia is the Fleshy-footed *Puffinus carneipes*. This species is readily distinguished by its strong, distinctly coloured pale straw bill with dark tip, flesh coloured legs and feet, and tail 100-115 mm long.

Possible confusion could arise between the species already described and the similar Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*. When in the hand, however, the latter has the characteristically shaped black bill of a Gadfly Petrel, grey-black legs and feet and tarsus more rounded than is usual in shearwaters (see Slater 1970, for extra details).

This guide is a revision of an earlier account by van Tets, Robinson and McKean (1964).

References

- Slater, P. (1970), A Field Guide to Australian Birds, Non-Passerines. Rigby, Adelaide. 428 pp.
- van Tets, G. F., Robinson, F. N., and McKean, J. L. (1964), 'Bird in the Hand'. *Aust. Bird Bander* 2: 82-83.

* These measurements apply only to chicks weighing more than 300 g or to those examined after about mid-March.

