

**NEW BREEDING RECORD FOR
WHITE-FACED STORM-PETREL
Pelagodroma marina
AT THE HOUTMAN ABROLHOS,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

The White-faced Storm-Petrel *Pelagodroma marina* is a regular visitor to the Houtman Abrolhos, breeding on the islands in small numbers between August and February (Storr *et al.* 1986). The numbers breeding have been recorded only on Morley Island (300 burrows, Johnstone 1992) and Pelsaert Island (250 burrows, Burbidge and Fuller 1991). Storr *et al.* (1986) also listed several other islands throughout Houtman's Abrolhos where the species is known to breed but the status of some of the populations remains unclear. It is recorded breeding on only two islands in the Wallabi Group, West Wallabi Island and Sandy Island. Records from West Wallabi Island are based on observations by Storr (1966), who located a few burrows among those of Little Shearwaters *Puffinus assimilis* in April 1959. R. E. Johnstone (pers. comm.) found two dead adults and several short, partly dug (10 cm long) burrows, presumably made by this species on 13 August 1983.

Beacon Island (28°30'S, 113°58'E) is less well known for seabirds than as Batavia's Graveyard, the site of the grisly mutiny of the ship Batavia. It covers 2.6 ha, some of which is covered by live fishing camps. I visited Beacon Island between 3–9 July 1993, making several walks around the island on each of three consecutive nights, between 19:15 and 21:45. Little Shearwaters and White-faced Storm-Petrels, returning to their burrows, were very common early in the evening. Many White-faced Storm-Petrels were next to, or excavating, burrows, or along man-made paths throughout the colony; they were dazzled with torches and easily captured by hand. All wings were inspected for primary and secondary moult and some birds checked for evidence of defeathered brood patches. Of the 24 White-faced Storm-Petrels captured over three evenings, none showed signs of moult and twelve were examined for brood patches: eight brood patches were bare, three were not located and one was partially defeathered.

Some areas of the colony were also surveyed in daylight, marking off a 20 × 1 m transect and a 6 × 5 m area of saltbush and counting the number of active burrows of each species in each area. Using an aerial photograph of Beacon Island and evidence of the extent of the colony, I was able to estimate colony sizes and areas. Those burrows that were not readily identifiable as belonging to White-faced Storm-Petrels were not included in the results. On this basis, I estimate that there were approximately 1 200 occupied White-faced Storm-Petrel burrows on Beacon Island in July 1993.

Fishermen are absent from the Houtman Abrolhos between July and March each year, which would account for the White-faced Storm-Petrel going unnoticed. It may also breed in small colonies on several other uninhabited islands. Storr *et al.* (1986), Johnstone (1992) and Fuller and Burbidge (1992) all noted that White-faced Storm-Petrels return to the islands to breed around mid-late August, but my observations indicate that they may return to breed earlier in some years than previously thought. More frequent visits between June and March may uncover other unrecorded populations.

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