

Short Communication

The First Report of Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* in Iran

MAYSAM GHASEMI, FAHIMEH GOUDARZI & MOJDEH RAM

Wildlife & Aquatic Organisms Unit, Hormozgan Provincial Office of the Department of the Environment,
Bandar Abbas, Iran.

Received 22 June 2008; accepted 3 August 2008

On 12 June 2008, Mr Safar Askari - a teacher - found a bird on the coastline of the city of Bandar Abbas, Persian Gulf. It was not able to fly due to it being covered with oil. The bird was more or less unconscious and its feathers were stuck together; it was taken to the Hormozgan Office of the Department of the Environment in Bandar Abbas but died due to the high level of toxicity less than one hour later. In order to identify the bird, the colour and the appearance of the feathers, wings and the bill were noted and biometry was done. The body length was 43.5 cm and the wingspan was 100.5 cm. The colour of the body was dark grey to brown, the tail and primaries being darker; the underwing coverts were white to silver, the bill long and dark as were the feet. After consulting Porter *et al.* (1996) the bird was identified as Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*.

R. Porter (pers. comm.) indicated that further measurements should be taken in order to eliminate Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* which has been recorded in Pakistan and which could conceivably occur in the northern Indian Ocean in Iranian waters as well as in the Persian Gulf. The bill from tip to skull measured 39.85 mm (Fig. 2) which are within the range of the measurements for Sooty Shearwater (38–44 mm), whereas with Short-tailed Shearwater the bill length is between 31–33 mm.

However D.A. Scott (pers. comm.) considers Sooty Shearwater as 'Hypothetical' and a rare bird for Iran on the strength of a report from an English bird-watcher, C.D.R. Heard, who spent four months travelling all over Iran from 25 March to 25 July 1978. His hand-written report of his observations include a single Sooty Shearwater seen at Chahbahar on 4 May 1978: "Sooty Shearwater: Chah Bahar, 1 flew past

close heading west on 6 May". Unfortunately no further details of the sighting could be obtained. Since Scott & Adhami (2006) did not consider the evidence sufficient enough for the record to be accepted as a new species for Iran (partly because of possible confusion with other all-dark shearwaters possible in Iranian waters *e.g.* Wedge-tailed *Puffinus pacificus* and Short-tailed *Puffinus tenuirostris*) they did not include it in the updated checklist of the birds of Iran (Scott & Adhami 2006).

Sooty Shearwater is described by Porter *et al.* (1996) as regular, but scarce in the north Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba and a vagrant to Oman, UAE and Eastern Mediterranean. However, Ian Harrison (pers. comm.) reports that increased observer activity, particularly on pelagic boat trips, has revealed that this species seems to occur more regularly than had been previously thought off the coast of Oman, mainly in spring. In 2008, for example, there were two records in Oman, one off Muscat on 30 May and one off Mirbat in the south on 5 Jun (9th and 10th records respectively). In the United Arab Emirates there have been twenty-six records and is now regarded as a "rare to very uncommon spring visitor, ranging from 4 March to 29 May with one October record. A single sighting was from Umm Shaif offshore oilfield on 16 April 2001.). Might prove to be regular in spring from March to the end of May." (UAE Birding website).

What is unusual about this first record for Iran from Bandar Abbas is that it is from the Strait of Hormuz rather than from the Arabian Sea coast. In the light of the above records, it would seem likely that this species may well occur regularly off the Iran coast from March to June – more sea-watching or pelagic boat trips may prove that this is indeed the case.



Figure 1. Underparts of Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*, Bandar Abbas, 12 June 2008.



Figure 2. Bill measurements of Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*, Bandar Abbas, 6 July 2008.

REFERENCES

Porter R.F., Christensen S. & Schiermacker-Hansen P. 1996. *A field guide to the birds of the Middle East*. T. & A.D. Poyser, London, 460 pp.

Scott D.A. & Adhami A. 2006. An updated checklist of the birds of Iran. *Podoces* **1(1/2)**: 1–16. UAE Birding Website. <http://www.uaebirding.com/Resources/UAE-checklist.html>

