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## Recent records of Sooty Shearwater Ardenna grisea and Short-tailed Shearwater A. tenuirostris from Sri Lanka

The Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* is a widely distributed dark shearwater, mostly recorded from the Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Southern Ocean. It is not encountered frequently in the Indian Ocean (especially in the north), and most of the records are from the southern parts of the Indian Ocean (Harrison 1983; eBird 2021). The Short–tailed Shearwater *A. tenuirostris* is abundant in the northern Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea, migrating to breed in the southern Pacific Ocean off Australia. It is rare in the Atlantic and there are few records from the Indian Ocean (Harrison 1983; Flood & Fisher 2019; eBird 2021).

Both, Sooty, and Short-tailed Shearwaters are included in the Ceylon Bird Club's Sri Lankan avifaunal list as vagrants (Ceylon Bird Club 2020a), and Warakagoda et al. (2012) include the former as a vagrant to Sri Lanka, while the latter is considered a rare migrant.

From August 2020 onwards we carried out regular land-based sea-watches, mainly from several locations along the western coast of Sri Lanka (see Allport et al. 2021 for more details). Most of these observations were made during periods of onshore winds when birds were pushed relatively closer to the coast. Land-based sea-watches were carried out during the first few hours in the morning, generally 0600 h to 0900 h and during the evenings, from 1630 h to 1830 h. Several pelagic trips were also undertaken off the coast of Mirissa (5.82°N, 80.36°E), southern Sri Lanka. Boats cast off around 0630 h, sailing until noon, covering up to *c.*20 nautical miles off the coast, concentrating on possible upwelling areas underlain by sea mounts, and the break in the Continental Shelf.

During land-based sea-watches, the identification of distant Sooty or Short-tailed Shearwaters was a challenge, as both are very similar in plumage and are hard to, confidently, distinguish at long distances, and in poor visibility (Flood & Fischer 2019). Therefore, such sightings were recorded as Short-tailed/ Sooty Shearwater species pair. During pelagic trips we had the advantage of getting closer to the birds for observation, and for photographic records for further verification.

Our first confirmed Sooty Shearwater was observed by GA and MK during a pelagic trip off Mirissa on 27 March 2021. Our initial impression, as soon as we saw and photograph the bird, was of a Short-tailed Shearwater, as it was the commoner and more probable species of the two as per the knowledge at the time. But the prominent white patches on the underwings, and the unusually longer bill for a Short-tailed Shearwater made us uncertain of our identification. Hence, we sent the photographs for identification to Robert Flood, who identified the bird in them as a Sooty Shearwater, rather than a Short-tailed (129; R. Flood, in litt. 2021). The bird was separated from a Shorttailed Shearwater by its much bulkier, athletic build, with longer wings, long neck, and heavier rear body. The wings are shorter and more compressed in carriage in a Short-tailed Shearwater, which is compactly build. A diagnostic character in this bird is its long bill, too long for Short-tailed Shearwater. The mid-section of the bill looks proportionately longer than the nostril section and maxillary unguis lengths. On Short-tailed each of these sections is evenly proportioned giving a fine, short bill. Also, the longer neck, sloping forehead, and long bill gives a "snouty" appearance, where the Short-tailed Shearwater has a "cuter" face, owing to the shorter neck, steeper forehead, and smaller beak. This bird has an underwing pattern, with silvery-grey up to greater primary coverts (in a shape of a pale "knife") and contrasts with the darker remiges. On Short-tailed Shearwater the paleness is more greyish rather than silvery-white, and is more diffused over the underwing, paler towards the inner underwing coverts with the underwing primary coverts lacking clear contrast, especially with the primaries (Flood & Fisher 2019).



**129.** Sooty Shearwater, Mirissa, Sri Lanka. 27 March 2021. Note the diagnostic, prominent silvery white underwing patch in a 'butter knife' shape, contrasting well with the primaries. Also note the athletic build with a long neck and the long bill with comparatively longer bill mid–section.

These images are probably the first photographs of Sooty Shearwater from the Indian Subcontinent, and we believe is the first documented record with photographic evidence of this species for the region. On the subsequent pelagic trips on 10 and 24 April 2021, two Sooty Shearwaters were seen on each day in the same area, showing similar features to the bird seen in March, with prominent silvery white underwing patches contrasting well with primaries, long-necked athletic bodies and long bills with longer mid sections separating them from Shorttailed Shearwaters. All were photographed, and identities were confirmed **[130, 131]**. Interestingly, on 24 April 2021 we had the opportunity to approach one bird resting on the water and feeding on an unidentified squid or an octopus, and we were able to observe it closely and in detail **[131]**.



**130.** Sooty Shearwater, Mirissa, Sri Lanka showing prominent silvery white underwing. Also note the longer bill with comparison to Short–tailed Shearwater. 24 April 2021.



All: Moditha Kodikara Arachch

131. Sooty Shearwater from Mirissa, Sri Lanka, feeding on a squid or an octopus. 24 April 2021.

We first observed Short-tailed Shearwaters during the passage of Cyclone "Amphan" over the Bay of Bengal in mid-May 2020, which brought westerly winds across the Lakshadweep Sea, pushing seabirds shoreward. Records of Short-tailed Shearwaters and Short-tailed/Sooty type shearwaters during this study are given in Table 1 (see Fig. 1. and **132** also).

Table 1. Short-tailed Shearwaters and Short-tailed/Sooty type shearwaters observed during this study				
Observer	Date	Location	Short-tailed Shearwater	Short-tailed/Sooty type shearwater
GA	16 May 2020	Dikkowita	-	3
GA	16 May 2020	Mt. Lavinia	1	-
GA	17 May 2020	Mt. Lavinia	1	5
GA, MK	20 May 2020	Mt. Lavinia	1	-
GA	24 May 2020	Mt. Lavinia	-	1
GA, MK	14 June 2020	Kalpitiya	-	3
GA	11 April 2021	Nilaweli	-	1
GA, MK	18 April 2021	Negombo	-	1
GA	24 April 2021	Negombo	3	-
МК	24 April 2021	Mirissa (pelagic)	2	-



Fig. 1. Sooty, Short-tailed and Sooty/Short-tailed type Shearwater sightings reported in this study.



**132.** Short-tailed Shearwater Ardenna tenuirostris from Mirissa, Sri Lanka. 24 April 2021. Note the more compact built than Sooty, greyish white, diffused underwing patch, less contrasting with the primaries. Also note the two toned head with pale chin and comparitively shorter bill.

All previous Sooty Shearwater records in Sri Lanka were sight records. The first record of 15 birds (Sinclair 1978) was accepted by the Ceylon Bird Club Rarities and Records Committee (CBCRRC) (Henry1998). The next record appears in Pepper (2007) and Pepper & Hettige (2008), but this record has not been submitted to CBCRRC (CBCRRC in litt. e-mail dated 22 July 2021). Sight records of Sooty Shearwaters off southern Sri Lanka by Imberti (2015) and Anderson & Alagiyawadu (2022) have also not been submitted to CBCRRC for evaluation (Ceylon Bird Club 2019; Ceylon Bird Club 2020a; Ceylon Bird Club 2020b). The Sinclair (1978) and Pepper & Hettige (2008) records possibly lacked adequate description and/or further confirming evidence, causing subsequent authors to consider these records unconfirmed (Colston & Gallagher 1983; Robertson 1995; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen et al. 2013). Also, Imberti's (2015) record lacks adequate details to support the identification, and so stands unconfirmed. The account by Anderson & Alagiyawadu (2022) describes a single bird and notes how it was distinguished from Short-tailed Shearwater. None of the aforementioned records have photographic evidence. Thus, our photograph of the Sooty Shearwater on 27 March 2021 is the first from Sri Lanka.

Sooty Shearwater was only recently accepted to the South Asian Checklist (Praveen et al. 2019) owing to several detailed sight records from the Maldives by Anderson et al. (2016). Though these are detailed reports, they also lack any additional supporting evidence such as photographs, thus, our Sooty Shearwater sighting on 27 March 2021, is also the first photographs of this species in the Indian Subcontinent, and further validates its occurrence in the region.

We observed Sooty Shearwaters on three consecutive pelagic trips on 27 March, 10 April, and 24 April, (single on the first and two each in the last two trips). The sight record by Anderson & Alagiyawadu (2022) off Mirissa, and all sight records in Anderson (2016) from the Maldives are also in April, suggesting this species may be more regular during this period across the Lakshadweep Sea. Nevertheless, we think further scrutiny is required to fully understand its occurrence in the Indian Ocean and to identify its spatial and temporal distribution.

Considering the Short-tailed Shearwater reports in Sri Lanka, all except the first report, which was an exhausted bird found beached (Phillips 1951), are sight records. One report has a detailed description (Karunaratne et al. 1994) but the remainder do not (Hettige 2012; Seneviratne 2020; Johansen 2021). Although Short-tailed Shearwater is included as a vagrant in the CBC bird list (Ceylon Bird Club 2020a), it is not in the list of rarities (Ceylon Bird Club 2020a), which might have compelled observers not to submit rarity reports for evaluation. Being rare, difficult to identify, and a confusing species we suggest it to be included as a rarity to ensure further records are verified to a high standard.

Our observations suggest that the Short-tailed Shearwater is scarce, but apparently regular in Sri Lankan waters. Even though we noted most sightings of distant birds as 'Short-tailed/Sooty', most of them tended to be Short-tailed rather than Sooty but were kept as a species pair to be cautious. Our sightings also indicate Short-tailed Shearwater to be more abundant around April–May, which also agrees with previous sightings from the region (Giri *et al.* 2013; Thompson *et al.* 2013; Adak 2020; De 2020; Khan 2021).

Most of the records in this study are from the western coast, with only one Short-tailed/Sooty type shearwater from the eastern coast (Table 1, Fig. 1). There are fewer birders on the eastern coast, but they could be regularly occurring in the Bay of Bengal, especially considering recent multiple sightings, of stormdriven birds, from India and Bangladesh (Adak 2020; De 2020; Khan 2021). We believe further studies, with better coverage, is necessary to understand Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters of the region.

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## A sight record of the Japanese Thrush *Turdus cardis* from western Arunachal Pradesh

On the afternoon of 21 May 2022 at approximately 1600 h, we sighted a male Japanese Thrush *Turdus cardis* near Dirang Village in western Arunachal Pradesh (27.339°N, 92.322°E). The bird was first noticed by KN when it took flight from the ground and perched on a low hanging branch of a pine tree. He initially mistook the bird for a Pied Thrush *Geokichla wardii* given the