

## ~Summertime Offshore~



© Brian Patteson

Dark Trindade Petrel August 8, 2010 Summer 2011 could be another great season to see them!

Summer 2011 is upon us already! We wanted to remind everyone why it is such a great time of year to be offshore. Summer is perfect for any level of seabirding from the novice to the salty, seasoned passenger. Why?

1. The number of birds we encounter are high for those just starting out to get familiar with the typical species we see offshore.
2. The chance for rarities is there, as always!
3. It's great for anyone interested in the subtle differences seen in Cory's Shearwater (Atlantic vs. Mediterranean types), studying the different "types" of Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, or getting a handle on the variation seen in Black-capped Petrels.
4. And if you're a photographer, well, there are more chances to get great photos in a huge, feeding shearwater flock!

## Wanchese, NC for Late Summer Trips in 2011

Although our trips from Hatteras offer some of the most consistent Gulf Stream birding year round, there are times when we want to go a bit farther north and explore cooler waters for White-faced Storm-Petrel and a variety of marine life that is infrequently found in the hot, late summer water off Cape Hatteras. For this reason, we have decided to offer several trips in late August from Wanchese, North Carolina. Wanchese is a commercial fishing village at the southern end of Roanoke Island (Manteo occupies the northern end.) By water, Wanchese is about 40 miles north of Hatteras and it is situated to the west of Oregon Inlet.

The Gulf Stream current generally takes an easterly tack to the east- southeast of Oregon Inlet, such that the deep water due east of the inlet is typically blended blue-green water. This water is a few degrees cooler than the Gulf Stream water found southeast of Hatteras Inlet. This area is also the southernmost point where White-faced Storm-Petrel is found with any consistency in the western North Atlantic, yet it is close enough to the Gulf Stream proper that Black-capped Petrel is a regular visitor. The cooler water often holds large aggregations of squid and baitfish which at times are chased to the surface by a variety of billfish and tunas, and this activity can attract hundreds of shearwaters and a few jaegers and skuas. The sight of shearwaters feeding over a bait-ball which is being worked over by a handful of White Marlin at the surface (and dozens more below) is a sight you'll never forget. With the proximity of the shelf break to the slope waters at this latitude, there is the chance to wander out just a couple of miles and find hundreds of storm-petrels and dozens of Pilot Whales, and maybe even a Trindade Petrel or a Sperm Whale, without leaving the shearwater action far behind. This can also be a good place to find water fronts and weed-lines and their attendant terns and phalaropes. Bridled and Sooty Terns tend to reach peak numbers in late summer and these will be adults and their begging young. This activity can also attract the attention of young Long-tailed Jaegers pushing south, fresh from the tundra, on their long trans-equatorial fall flight. None of these birds are particularly timid so the photo ops can be exceptional.

Compared to the spring off Hatteras, these late summer trips should offer the second best seabird diversity of the year, along with possibly the best warm weather seabird numbers. Unlike the spring trips, where we can take generally the same course most days and see a fresh batch of birds pushing through, we are more likely to run some different routes different days off Wanchese depending on the location of Gulf Stream eddies and the location of the baitfish, squid boats, storm-petrels, etc.

White-faced Storm-Petrels are rarely found very far south of Oregon Inlet, NC during their visits to the western North Atlantic; they are rare but regular visitors from this area northward. Although we are not specifically targeting the White-faced Storm-Petrel, it could occur on any of the Wanchese departures.



copyright Steve N.G. Howell

## Expectations for new Seabirders!

While it can be downright hot on land in the summer, we typically find a bit of a breeze offshore and while it is warm (bring sunscreen & water!) in the Gulf Stream, there is usually a bit of shade to be found and always great expectations! We expect to see our usual species in July & August. Black-capped Petrel is our expected *Pterodroma* and they are seen in larger numbers in the summer than any other time of the year. We also have seen all of the rare gadfly petrel species - Bermuda, Trindade, and Fea's Petrels – in the summer. Cory's and Great Shearwaters are typically found in large, feeding flocks visible from afar as "beehives" over feeding fish. In these flocks we sometimes find Audubon's Shearwater and overhead, Sooty Terns swirl around with their begging young close behind. The Audubon's more typically are found along "grass lines" formed by a combination of wind and current and composed of sargasso –

a type of brown algae with round air floats that exists entirely on the surface. Bridled Terns and Red-necked Phalaropes are also associated with these lines. On calm days we will find huge mats of Sargasso and can scoop some up to examine in buckets of sea water on the boat. The diversity of life found camouflaged in the gold colored Sargasso is amazing! It is nothing less than its' own floating ecosystem! Wilson's Storm-Petrels are still around in the summer and it is a great time for studying Band-rumped Storm-Petrels with the record high number of 234 individuals seen in August! Pictured above is a Sargassum Fish, *Histrio histrio*, (yes, it's alive!) which has specialized pelvic fins that can actually grasp the sargassum to help keep it in place on the algae.



© Brian Patteson

Pictured below, Bridled Terns (adult & young) perched on flotsam in the Gulf Stream.



© Steve N. G. Howell

## See "Typical" Species in a New Light

**Band-rumped Storm-Petrel** – Summer is a great time to see Band-rumped Storm-Petrels with record high numbers seen on August 6, 2000. A paper was recently published in North American Birds discussing in detail our thoughts about which types we see off of North Carolina. The type we see most commonly is what we call "type 1" from a winter breeding population showing a molt pattern that reflects this. Occasionally we see fresh individuals that are generally smaller than "type 1" birds, possible indication that they are from summer breeding populations. Come out and help us work on this field identification challenge!

**Cory's Shearwater** - For practicing Cory's vs. Scopoli's, summer is the best time! While these two subspecies have not been given species status, it is worth noting that Cape Verde Shearwater (regarded as a full species *Calonectris diomedea edwardsii*) has only been found here in August. For those new to this complex, the Cory's Shearwater, *Calonectris diomedea borealis*, breed in the Atlantic and the nominate race, Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea diomedea*, breed in the Mediterranean. While many individuals are difficult, if not impossible, to separate at sea, photos help and when you have a definite of either type, the differences stand out with practice. The Cory's type are larger, bulkier birds with broader wings and fly as such, they also have dark underprimaries. The slimmer, smaller Scopoli's type can be obvious in their lighter, more buoyant flight on narrower wings. When seen well, you can see white tongues on the underprimaries of these individuals. To date, we not only see more Cory's Shearwaters in the summer, but also more of the Scopoli's type.

**Black-capped Petrel** – We see at least two or three different "types" on our trips, what we call white-faced and black-faced. Those that do not fall into either are intermediates, and we have yet to really sort those out! While the only known breeding population of *Pterodroma hasitata* is on Hispaniola, we hope that this variation indicates undiscovered colonies of this species. The white-faced type is generally seen in higher numbers in the spring. They have a smaller black cap with a broad white supercilium and a broad, bold white hind collar. In contrast, the black-faced individuals have a black cap that extends down the sides of the head enveloping the eye and the hind collar is reduced or even absent on some individuals. We encounter higher numbers of these smaller, darker individuals in the summer. The black-faced birds also molt later than the white-faced birds, another indication that we are dealing with more than one breeding population.

The two "types" of Black-capped Petrels: black-faced above sitting on the water, and a white-faced below in flight.



© Steve N. G. Howell



© Steve N. G. Howell



**Summer Rarities**



© Kate Sutherland

Black-bellied Storm-Petrel August 14, 2010

Black-bellied Storm-Petrels have been seen in the summer three times out of the four North American records! It is worth mentioning that while the first was seen May 31, 2004, it was on a trip from Oregon Inlet, where we will be for the end of August this year. The others were July 16, 2006, June 23, 2007, and most recently last year on August 14, 2010. Since 1999 we have seen 6 Bermuda Petrels, 9 Fea's Petrels, and 26 Trindade Petrels during the summer months. White-tailed Tropicbirds are typically seen in higher numbers in the summer and we've already had the highest numbers for the spring, so hopefully things are looking up for a better than usual summer! Red-billed Tropicbirds are also possible, but not expected. Masked Booby can be found in the summer, and we have even seen a couple of Brown Noddys and a Magnificent Frigatebird. The first North American record for Cape Verde Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea edwardsii*) was found on August 15, 2004! Summer is a great time to find something unexpected, but you have to be out there to find it!

**Private Charters**

We have great rates for groups of birders wanting to get offshore. The boat will be just your group, so if you have some who might want to reel in a fish, we can accommodate! In summer of 2011 we are adding our "little" boat, a 31' BHM, to the possibilities. We will take six passengers or less on this boat and its low profile is great for getting even closer to the birds for better views and photo ops! Typically it is best to sign on to a trip that is on our regular schedule, but sometimes a private trip may be a better option. If you have a date you are interested in going out, and have a few people interested, let us know and we can post it on our schedule and see if we can recruit more for that date! Otherwise, here are our charter fees for full day trips in 2011~

*Stormy Petrel II* \$1,500 for 8 or fewer passengers, \$100 per each additional passenger

*F/V Skua* \$950 for 6 or fewer passengers



© Brian Patteson

Cape Verde Shearwater with Cory's August 15, 2004

**Photo-ops**

I know we've said it before, but now that we run trips on our own boat, the *Stormy Petrel II*, they are better than ever for taking photographs! Brian is an expert at handling the boat with photographers in mind when possible, chum slicks have brought the birds in closer than ever, and we limit the number of passengers for each trip so that there is space for everyone, and their cameras (with respect for fellow passengers, of course!). We also would like to ask anyone who is interested to send us identifying images of Black-capped Petrels, Cory's Shearwaters, and Band-rumped Storm-Petrels to add to our collection of data about occurrence and identification regarding these species.

**Summer 2011 Trip Dates & Prices**

July 16 & 17 from Hatteras, NC  
 July 30, 31, & August 1 from Hatteras, NC  
 August 6 & 7 from Hatteras, NC  
 August 13 & 14 from Hatteras, NC

Above dates \$160 per person per day or \$150 per person both days

August 20 & 21 from Wanchese, NC  
 August 26, 27, & 28 from Wanchese, NC

Above dates \$170 per person per day or \$160 per person more than one day

August 22 ~ 25 Free Range Adventure from Wanchese, NC  
 \$480 per person, 3 out of 4 day set, limit 18 participants

Cuvier's Beaked Whale pictured to the right. Summer is a good time to see cetaceans & these are possible from Hatteras & Wanchese. Far right, participants on the *Stormy Petrel II* taking photos of some Atlantic Short-finned Pilot Whales.



**Seabirding**  
**P.O. Box 772**  
**Hatteras, NC 27943**  
**(252) 986-1363**  
**www.seabirding.com**