

SHORT NOTE

Westland petrels (*Procellaria westlandica*) off the coast of Chile

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During a voyage aboard the *MV Polar Star* from Callao, Peru, to Islas del Horno, Chile, from 5-23 Nov 2005, I observed a large number of Westland petrels *Procellaria westlandica* in the area of the Golfo de Penas and Canal Messier, Aisen, Chile. This paper details the results of these observations and summarises the status of the Westland petrel on the coast of Chile.

Details of sightings

At least 4 individual Westland petrels were seen between 5 and 17 Nov on the voyage south from Callao, Peru, to Fiordo Aisen (Table 1). Observations on 17 Nov began at dawn following an overnight sailing from Fiordo Aisen (dawn position 47°27.2215' S, 075°03.8222' W) in the Golfo de Penas. The weather was WNW wind force 6 with occasional squalls of rain. It was immediately apparent that there were many thousands of Wilson's petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* and sooty shearwaters *Puffinus griseus* present with many black-browed albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*. Smaller numbers of giant petrels *Macronectes* sp., Antarctic fulmars *Fulmarus glacialisoides*, and cape petrels *Daption capense*, were also observed, along with a few Magellanic diving-petrels *Pelecanoides magellani* and 1 Salvin's albatross *Thalassarche salvini*.

Also present were a large number of large all dark petrels of the genus *Procellaria*. From birds which came close enough to the ship to determine bill-tip colour, a number were Westland petrels. During the period in the Golfo de Penas (dawn until

c. 8.00 am), the total number of *Procellaria* present was estimated, and on the basis of bill-tip colour, the fraction of these which were Westland petrels. During the next 5 hours, as the ship steamed south through the Canal Messier, periodic timed counts of *Procellaria* were made. The Canal Messier is just narrow enough to be able to see birds sitting on the water all the way to land on each side.

It was estimated that 80% of *Procellaria* in the Golfo de Penas were *westlandica*, leaving around 100 white-chinned petrels *Procellaria aequinoctialis*. This percentage increased in the Canal Messier. Here, the birds were very typically in flocks numbering approximately 25, sitting on the water, and spaced out at intervals along the Canal.

Moult state

The Westland petrels seen in the Golfo de Penas were in heavy primary moult. This can be used as an identification tool, but it must be noted that the existence of moult in a *Procellaria* in Chile in Nov is not sufficient to identify Westland petrels (Brinkley *et al.* 2000). Nevertheless, the absence of moult at this time of year can almost certainly eliminate Westland petrel, though I did see a few individual white-chinned petrels with some missing primaries. Flocks, rather than individuals, of *Procellaria* in primary moult in the austral spring can be considered Westland petrels.

Status of the Westland petrel in South American waters

Brinkley *et al.* (2000) tabulated sightings of Westland petrels off South America up to 1998. A distribution map of these records, as well as a map of sightings made on the voyage of the *MV Polar Star* is shown in figure 1.

Table 1. Records of Westland petrels off the west coast of South America in 2005.

Date	Grid reference	Number	Nearest location
09 Nov	18;49.00S+70;27.00W	1	3 h S. of Arica at 18.00 h
11 Nov	28;42.00S+71;41.00W	1	21 h N. of Valparaiso
12 Nov	32;29.00S+71;40.00W	1	2 h N. of Valparaiso
12 Nov	33;20.00S+71;56.00W	1	2 h S of Valparaiso
17 Nov	47;27.00S+75;03.00W	400	Golfo de Penas
17 Nov	48;15.00S+74;10.00W	850	Canal Messier

The numbers of Westland petrels seen in the Golfo de Penas and Canal Messier, from the MV Polar Star during Nov 2005, is far greater than that reported in South American waters previously. Published records include 340 birds to the south-east of Isla de los Estados, off Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, on 16 Dec 1992 (Brinkley *et al.* 2000). The total population of Westland petrels may be approximately 20,000 birds with 2,000 pairs breeding annually (Brooke 2004). The sighting reported here may represent up to 10% of the world population of this species.

LITERATURE CITED

Brinkley, E.S., Howell, S.N.G., Force, M.P., Spear, L.B.; Ainley, D.C. 2000. Status of the Westland petrel *Procellaria westlandica* off South America. *Notornis* 47: 179-183.

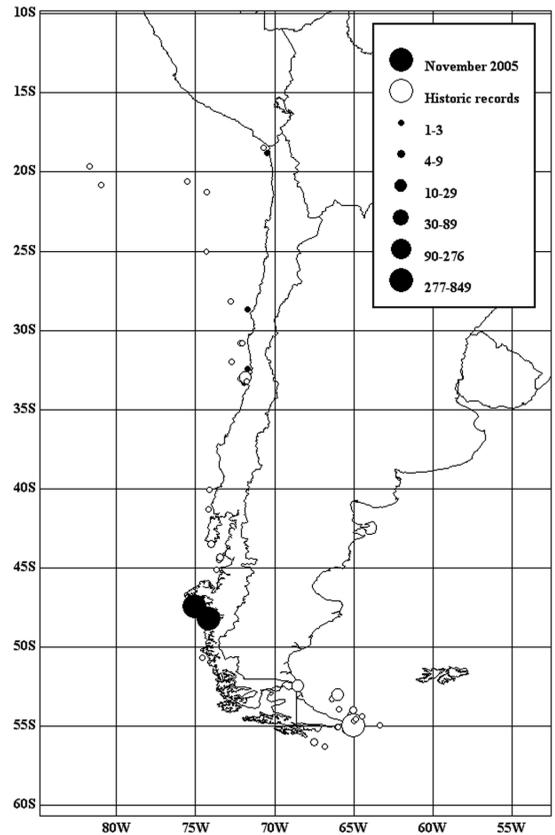


Fig. 1. Location of sightings of Westland Petrels *Procellaria westlandica* in Chilean waters, Nov 2005.

Brooke, M. 2004. *Albatrosses and petrels across the world*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Keywords Westland petrel; *Procellaria westlandica*; Chile; at-sea distribution