

**MULTIPLE SIGHTINGS OF A ROYAL ALBATROSS *DIOMEDEA EPOMOPHORA* IN THE
SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN**

E.J. WOehler, R. GRAHAM & C.L. HODGES

*Australian Antarctic Division, Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories,
Channel Highway, Kingston, Tasmania 7050, Australia*

Received 3 August, 1990 accepted 10 January 1991

The two subspecies of the Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora* are known to breed only in the New Zealand region (Robertson & Kinsky 1972, Watson 1975). The Northern Royal Albatross *D. e. sandfordi* breeds at the Chatham Islands, and on the South Island of New Zealand, whereas the southern form *D. e. epomophora* breeds at the Auckland Islands and Campbell Island (Harper & Kinsky 1978). Records of Royal Albatrosses in the Indian Ocean are few; observations at sea off southern Africa and near Marion Island were presented by Enticott (1986), and recoveries of banded birds from the Indian Ocean by Robertson & Kinsky (1972) and Stahl (1987).

Despite Royal Albatrosses being described as circumpolar (Harper & Kinsky 1978, Harrison 1983, Enticott 1986), there are only nine previously published records of Royal Albatrosses from the Indian Ocean; consisting of five banded birds recovered from Japanese tuna boats (Robertson & Kinsky 1972), and four observations at sea (Enticott 1986, Stahl 1987). Given the low numbers of vessels present in the higher latitudes of the Indian Ocean during the winter months, we believe the paucity of published records of Royal Albatrosses (of either subspecies) from this region is due to the lack of observers, rather than to the absence of Royal Albatrosses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

K. Green, C.J.R. Robertson, P.G. Ryan and V. Wong made useful comments on drafts of this note.

REFERENCES

- ENTICOTT, J.W. 1986. The pelagic distribution of the Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora*. *Cormorant* 13: 143-156.
- HARPER, P.C. & KINSKY, F.C. 1978. Southern albatrosses and petrels. An identification guide. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- HARRISON, P. 1983. Seabirds. An identification guide. London: Croom Helm.
- ROBERTSON, C.J.R. & KINSKY, F.C. 1972. The dispersal movements of the Royal Albatross (*Diomedea epomophora*). *Notornis* 19: 289-301.
- STAHL, J.C. 1987. Distribution des oiseaux marins dans le sud-ouest de l'Océan Indien: données

Here we report multiple sightings of a Southern Royal Albatross from the general vicinity of Heard Island and Îles Kerguelen, southern Indian Ocean. Twelve sightings were made between 26 May and 24 June 1990 from the R.S.V. *Aurora Australis* between 49 07 - 52 33S and 70 38 - 75 50E. All sightings were of a Stage 4 to Stage 5 bird (Harrison 1983) and are conservatively assumed to be of the same individual. The identification was originally based on the plumage, but on one occasion the bird approached the ship close enough to see clearly the black cutting edge of the mandible. The entire upper surface of the bird was white except for a dark trailing edge to the primaries, with an all-white tail. The face, neck, chest, stomach and underwings were all white. The bill was pale pinkish in colour, with a slightly yellow unguis.

preliminaires de la campagne ASPARA II -
ANTIPROD III. *Com. Nat. Franc. Rech.*
Antarct.: 175-190.

WATSON, G.E. 1975. *Birds of the Antarctic and
Sub-Antarctic*. Washington D.C.: American
Geophysical Union.