

FIRST RECORD OF A GREYHEADED ALBATROSS *DIOMEDEA CHRYSOSTOMA* IN THE  
TROPICAL PACIFIC OCEAN

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In the morning of 22 May 1989, a Greyheaded Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma* was found, sitting on the water, near an islet located in the vicinity of the Commune of Hitiaa (17°34'S, 149°17'W) on the eastern coast of Tahiti, French Polynesia. It died the next day. The specimen was in juvenile plumage and was identified by its underwing pattern and bill colour (Figs. 1 & 2, Harrison 1983). The normal distribution of the Greyheaded Albatross is circumpolar between 35° and 65°S (Harrison 1983). This species has not been previously reported from eastern Polynesia (Holyoak *et al.* 1984). This record is the most northerly to date (Harrison 1983, W.L.N. Tickell *in litt.*). The bird was in very poor physiological condition since its mass was only 1.25 kg, whereas the average for the species is 3.48 kg (Weimerskirch *et al.* 1986).

The unusual presence of the species so far north may be partly explained by the exceptional meteorological conditions (Fig. 3) prevailing at that time in the southern Pacific region. Two occurrences were observed: on 18 May, southwesterly winds gained strength between 40° and 50°S behind a low pressure area from the Southern Ocean which dissipated the area towards the east. Simultaneously, a subtropical low pressure area appeared to the southeast of Kermadec, moving towards the southeast and strengthening. Behind this low pressure, the southwesterly to southerly winds were considerably

reinforced by winds attaining speeds of 60 to 80 km/h and drained cooler air masses which reached 25°S by the morning of 21 May. On 21-22 May, Tahiti was in an area without wind. During those two occurrences, the movement of the winds was characterized by meridian components and the duration of these southern meridian components was exceptionally long.

On January 1990, this specimen was deposited in the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle de Paris.

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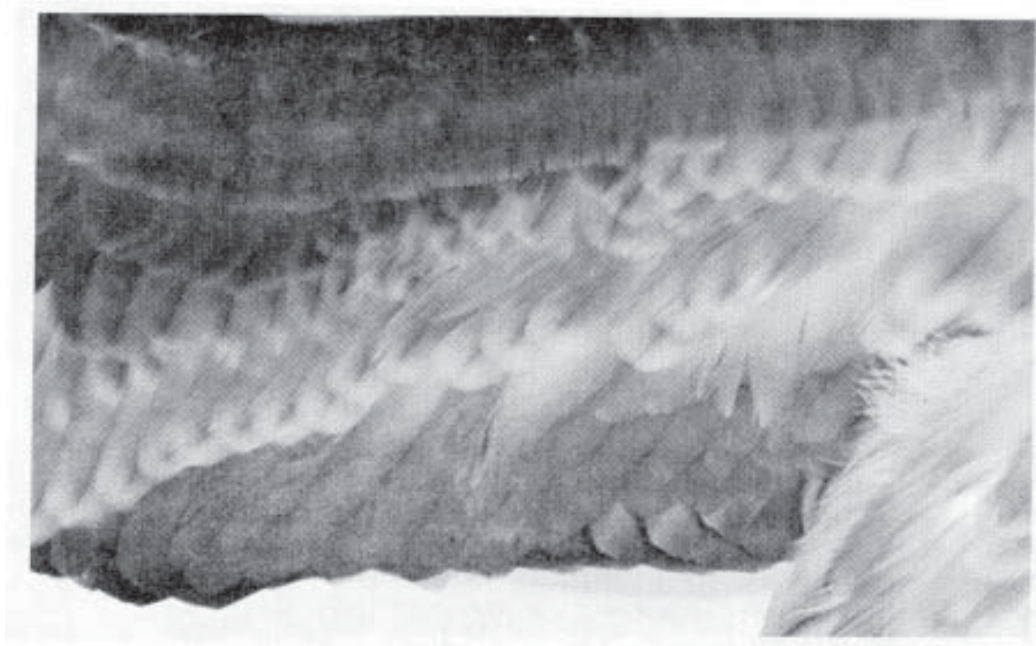


Figure 1

Greyheaded Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma*, Tahiti, French Polynesia, 22 May 1989: underwing pattern.

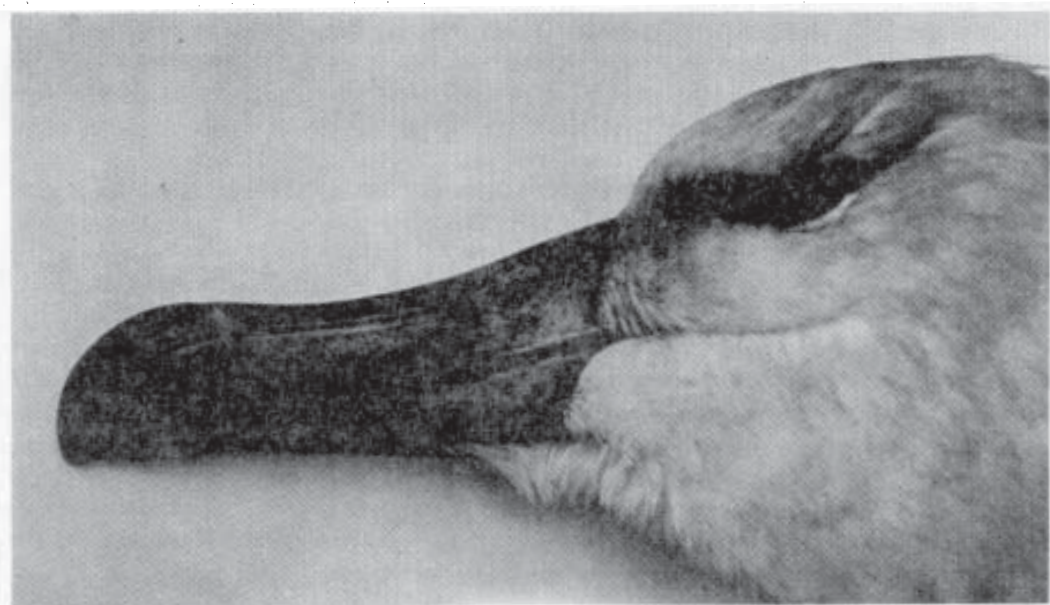


Figure 2

Greyheaded Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma* Tahiti, French Polynesia, 22 May 1989: head and bill.

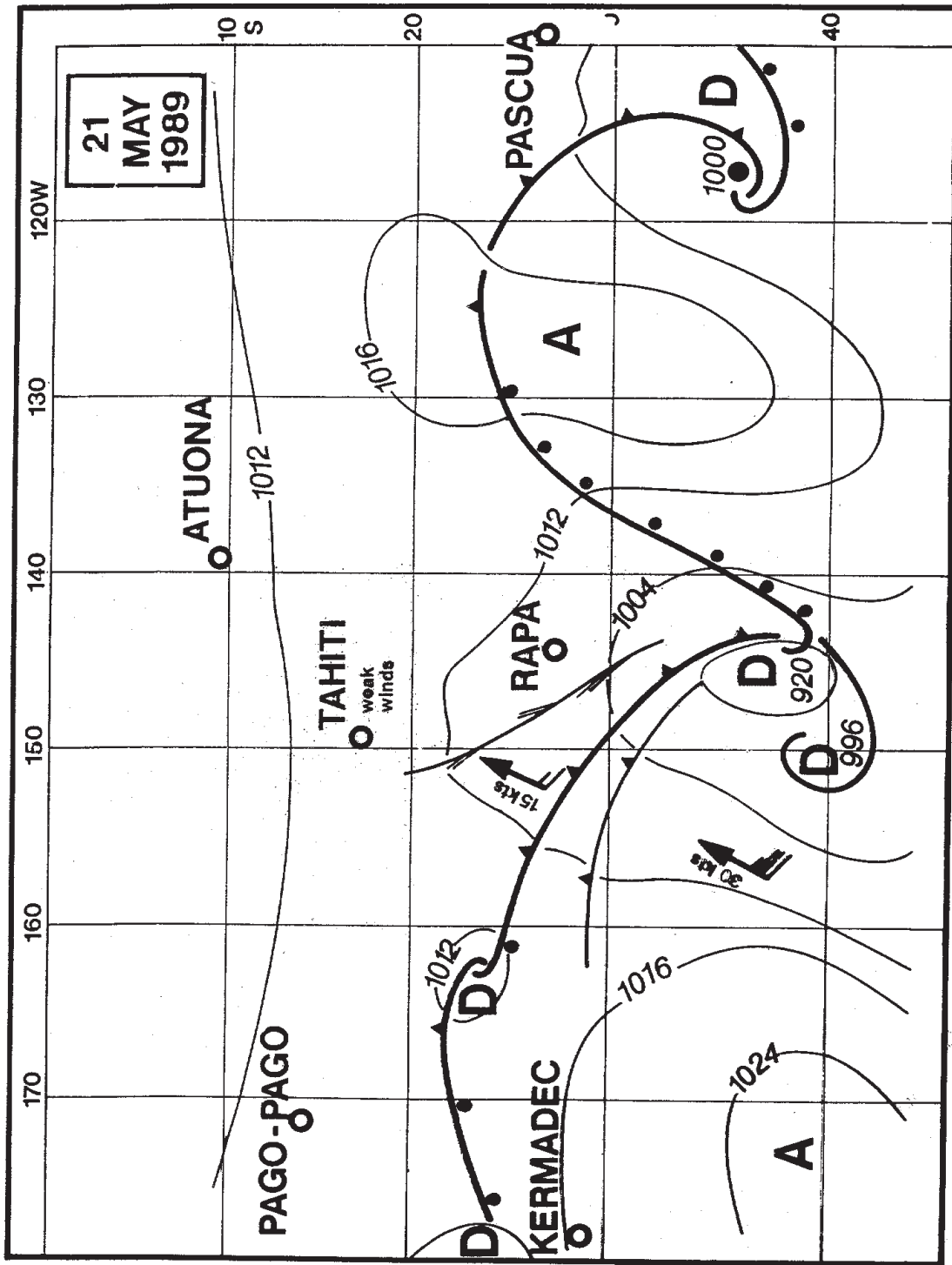


Figure 3

Synoptic meteorological chart for 21 May 1989 in vicinity of Tahiti, French Polynesia.