

# AN ADDITIONAL RECORD OF BULWER'S PETREL *BULWERIA BULWERII* OFF THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TODD HASS

*Department of Biology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill,  
North Carolina 27599-3280, U.S.A.*

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Although there are only two previously published reports (Taylor 1972, Haney & Wainright 1985) of Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* for North America, there are a growing number of reports and records from the western North Atlantic. Taylor (1972) reported a Bulwer's Petrel between Key West and the Dry Tortugas, Florida, USA, on 14 May 1969. Haney & Wainright (1985) observed an individual off the north-eastern coast of Florida on 1 May 1984. As reported in Haney & Wainright (1985), D. S. Lee also briefly observed a bird fitting the description of Bulwer's Petrel off North Carolina (6 June 1979; North Carolina State Museum of Natural History records). In the eastern Caribbean the species' occurrence has been documented by a specimen (American Museum of Natural History 763839) from Saldado Rock off the southwestern tip of Trinidad, West Indies, on 23 January 1961 (French 1963). Voous (1983) reported a sighting on 13 May 1970, four nautical miles northeast of Klein Curaçao, and another was seen off French Guyana on 9 July 1986 (Tostain 1987). Excluding the January Trinidad record, the reports from the western North Atlantic range from early May through July, a seasonal period when other eastern Atlantic species are regularly encountered off the southeastern United States of America.

On 1 July 1992, I saw a small, all-dark petrel while counting seabirds about 75 km east-northeast of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, at 35°29'N, 74°47'W. At approximately 15h25 EDT, an all-dark procellariid seabird crossed the bow of the r.v. *Edwin Link*, at a distance of about 60 m (one ship-length). I watched it continuously for approximately 90 s until it disappeared from view at a distance of over 300 m.

My field notes taken immediately after the observation noted that both the upperparts and underparts of the bird were uniformly sooty or blackish brown. The head of the bird appeared small and the dark bill was proportionately longer and stouter than the bill of a Wilson's Storm

Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*. The wings were long, narrow, angled forward and bent sharply at the wrist. No pale carpal bar was visible. The bird appeared to be slightly smaller than Audubon's Shearwaters *Puffinus lherminieri* seen immediately before and after the petrel. The wings of the petrel appeared 50% longer than those of a Wilson's Storm Petrel seen in the same field of view at 60 m. The tail was long for a procellariid seabird and tapered to a moderate point. The legs and feet were not seen.

The distinctive flight of the petrel was apparent before I raised my binoculars. The bird flew northwest in a 24-knot southwesterly wind, whereas almost all other seabirds were flying with the prevailing wind to the northeast. The bird flew in long, shallow arcs, between one and three metres above the surface of the water. At the peaks of these banks the wings were nearly vertical. I did not see the bird flap, although it is possible that it could have during a few of the low passes it made through wave troughs. The bird maintained its cross-wind course with ease.

The nearest breeding colonies of Bulwer's Petrels to North America are in the eastern North Atlantic. The species breeds in the Azores (islets off Santa Maria and Graciosa, and the main islands of Graciosa and Santa Maria), Madeira (Desertas), the Salvages Islands (Selvagen Grande, Selvagen Pequena and Fora), the Canary Islands (Montana Clara and Tenerife) and the Cape Verde Islands (Razo and Cime) (Le Grand *et al.* 1984). Except for the Salvages Islands and Desertas, where the species is reported to be "very common" (Jouanin *et al.* 1979, Le Grand *et al.* 1984), the population sizes are generally unknown but are thought to be small. For example, although Bannerman (1914) stated that these petrels breed commonly in the Canary Islands, only small, isolated colonies are now known, with the stronghold on Montana Clara where there are only about 100 pairs (Lovegrove 1971). In the Cape Verde Islands, De

Naurois (1969) estimated the total population to be about 10 pairs. Owing to its largely nocturnal habits, however, it is possible that the population estimates from the eastern Atlantic are unreliable. It is likely, though, that the entire Atlantic population is less than several thousand pairs.

In the Canary Islands the breeding season extends from May to September (Bannerman 1914). The summer occurrence of Bulwer's Petrels off the southeastern United States of America corresponds with the regular appearance of other seabirds that breed on various eastern Atlantic islands (North Atlantic Softplumaged Petrels, *Pterodroma mollis* complex, of which most are believed to belong to the Cape Verde or Salvages populations; Cory's Shearwaters, *Calonectris diomedea*; Little Shearwaters, *Puffinus assimilis*; Bandrumped Storm Petrels, *Oceanodroma castro*; and Whitefaced Storm Petrels *Pelagodroma marina* (Haney *et al.* 1993, NCSM specimen records, Lee 1984, Lee 1988, Watson *et al.* 1986). The relative abundance of these eastern North Atlantic species in the western North Atlantic closely parallels their documented population sizes in the eastern Atlantic. Cory's Shearwaters are present off the southeastern United States during the species' breeding period (Lee 1986). In a series of specimens collected off North Carolina, all individuals are young nonbreeding birds (D. S. Lee pers. comm.). This same pattern may also hold for the other eastern Atlantic seabirds visiting the western North Atlantic during the northern summer.

The recent sightings in the western North Atlantic and Caribbean make D.S. Lee and J.V. Remsen's prediction (in Roberson 1989) of this species' eventual documentation by photograph or specimen in North America more promising than ever.

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