

FIRST RECORDS OF THE NORTHERN GIANT PETREL *MACRONECTES HALLI* ASHORE ON GOUGH ISLAND

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The Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli* (NGP) and Southern Giant Petrel *M. giganteus* (SGP) are two distinct species differing in breeding schedules, morphology and genetics (Bourne & Warham 1966, Hunter 1987, Kennedy & Page 2002, Nunn & Stanley 1998, Techow *et al.* 2010). Their breeding locations are also geographically separated: NGPs breed on sub-Antarctic islands between 44°S (Chatham Island) and 55°S (Macquarie Island), while SGPs breed both further north (40°S, Gough Island) and further south (>60°S, South Shetland Islands, Antarctic Peninsula region and continental Antarctica; Patterson *et al.* 2008, Techow *et al.* 2010). However, overlap does exist: both species breed sympatrically and occasionally hybridize at South Georgia, the Prince Edward Islands, Macquarie Island and Crozet Islands (Burger 1978, Johnstone 1978, Hunter 1982, Cooper *et al.* 2001, Techow *et al.* 2010).

Gough Island is a small (65 km²) volcanic island in the South Atlantic (40°20'S, 09°54'W) that forms part of the United Kingdom's archipelago of Tristan da Cunha. NGPs do not breed on the archipelago; the closest known breeding colony is at South Georgia, 2 500 km southwest of Gough. However, non-breeding NGPs have been regularly observed in the archipelago's inshore waters, including around Gough, at times preying on Northern Rockhopper Penguins *Eudyptes moseleyi*, Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses *Thalassarche chlororhynchos* and Great Shearwaters *Puffinus gravis* (Ryan 2007, Ryan *et al.* 2008, K.B. & S.D. pers. obs.). An immature NGP has been observed roosting ashore on the

Tristan island of Nightingale, while other individuals were hunting Northern Rockhopper Penguins close inshore (Ryan *et al.* 2008). NGPs have not been previously reported ashore on Gough Island, which supports the most northerly breeding population of the SGP (c. 250 pairs; Cuthbert & Sommer 2004, Cooper & Parker 2011; Fig. 1). Here we report the first two records of NGPs ashore on Gough Island.

On 1 November 2005 J.W.W. observed a single NGP on the rocky shore of Seal Beach on the southeast coast of Gough (Fig. 1). Although no external trauma was observed, the bird, identified by its reddish bill tip, was emaciated and presumed sick, as it was possible to approach it to within approximately 2 m before it attempted unsuccessfully to take flight. The bird was observed repeatedly over the next few days until it was found dead close to where first seen.

On 8 January 2012 K.B. and S.D. photographed a NGP roosting among SGPs at their breeding site below Low Hump on the southwestern part of the island c. 500 m inland (Fig. 1). The bird was nervous in comparison to the breeding SGPs, taking flight as we approached (Fig. 2).

Given that NGPs are regular non-breeding visitors to the archipelago's inshore waters, the observation of NGPs ashore on Gough Island was expected; some individuals are likely to rest or even search for carrion while hunting nearby. However, the NGP observed in association with Gough's SGP colony, near active breeders and nests, is of considerable interest as it indicates the possibility of hybridization in the future, if not already, between the two Giant Petrel species on this island.

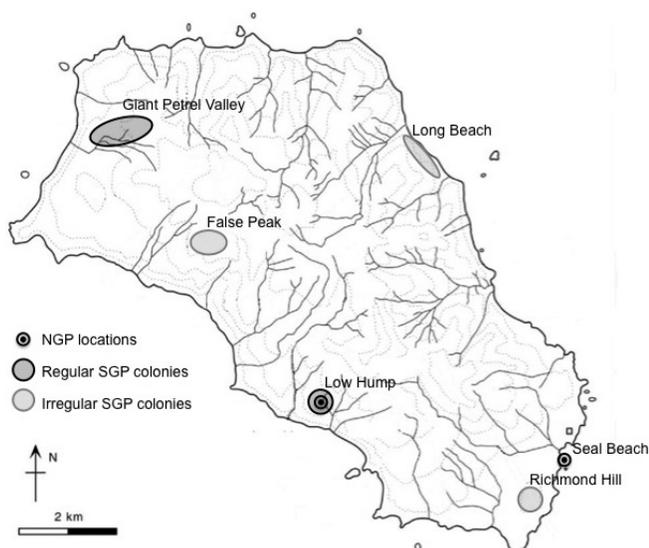


Fig. 1. Location of Northern Giant Petrel sightings and Southern Giant Petrel breeding sites on Gough Island.



Fig. 2. Northern Giant Petrel (pale individual with reddish bill tip, centre) among breeding Southern Giant Petrels below Low Hump on Gough Island.

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