
CONCENTRATIONS OF WINTERING STREAKED SHEARWATERS OFF THE NORTHERN COAST OF WEST PAPUA

by

Jim C Wardill & Tisna Nando

(Received 20 April 2000)

On 30 December 1999, we observed large numbers of Streaked Shearwaters *Calonectris leucomelas* off the north coast of the Bird's Head peninsula, West Papua. The observations were made from the large passenger ferry K. M Dobon3olo as it cruised 2-3 km off shore on its west to east passage from Sorong (0°54'S; 131°16'E) to Manokwari (0°56'S; 134°3'E), between 07hr30 and 11hr30. Almost all birds passed the ship in a westerly direction—both those passing 1-2 km further out to sea and those being put off the sea by the ship itself. Repeated counts gave an average of 100 birds passing each Me of the boat every three minutes, leading us to arrive at a rough estimate of 16,000 birds in the period of observation. Approximately 30% of birds were on the sea in rafts of up to 400 individuals. These observations appear to represent the highest numbers of Streaked Shearwaters recorded in Indonesian waters to date.

Other seabirds were seen with the shearwaters during the same time period including two Pomarine Jaegers *Stercorarius pomarinus*, nine unidentified Skuas *Stercorarius* sp., 26 Brown Boobies *Sula leucogaster*, a single Tahiti Petrel *Pterodroma rostrata* and a single unidentified small Shearwater *Puffinus* sp.

Interestingly, a return eastward journey from Manokwari to Sorong through the same waters on 19 January 2000 yielded no more than 50 Streaked Shearwaters in the same time period.

It has long been assumed that the focal point of the Streaked Shearwater's wintering grounds lies off the north coast of New Guinea, in the region of origin of the equatorial counter current (Bourne in White & Bruce 1986). Morzer Brityns (1965) recorded similar numbers each day in autumn 1960 along the 7°N line north of New Guinea (approximately 850 km to the north of the coast). The presence of large numbers of shearwaters on 30 December 1999, but their absence from the same waters 20 days later, suggest that the large groups of wintering birds roam the seas off north New Guinea, occasionally straying into Indonesian waters off the province of West Papua. The reasons for these movements are not known, but it seems unlikely that they relate to migratory movements in this particular case, as the dates of observation fall in the middle of the northern winter. It is more likely that they relate to changing distribution of food sources, possibly in connection with cold water currents.

References

- Morzer Bruyns, W. F. J. 1965. Birds seen during west to east trans Pacific crossing along the equatorial counter current around Latitude 7°N in the autumn of 1960. *Sea Swallow* 17; 57-66.
- White, C. M. N. and Bruce, M. D. 1986. *The Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, The Moluccas and Lesser Sunda Islands)* London: British Ornithologists' Union (Checklist No. 7).