

Band-rumped Storm Petrel

Oceanodroma castro/
jabejabe/monteiroi

Category N/A

No longer accepted.

0 records

World/British distribution (Snow & Perrins 1998):

Breeds widely on oceanic islands in the Atlantic and Pacific, including the Azores, Canary Islands, Cape Verde Islands, Ascension Island, St. Helena, Galapagos Islands, Hawaii and off Japan. It is thought to winter in the surrounding seas.

Kent status (KOS 2022):

It has not been recorded in the county.

British (BBRC) records to end 2020:	1	
Kent (KOS) records to end 2020:	0	

Ticehurst (1909) wrote that “the only two specimens of the [Madeiran Fork-tailed Petrel (*Oceanodroma castro*)] hitherto recorded from the British Islands were obtained in Kent”.

He provided details of both records as follows: “the first, a female, was picked up like so many petrels are, during the prevalence of strong north-westerly gales on the beach close to Littlestone on the 5th December 1895. It was taken the next day to Mr. Bristow, the taxidermist of St. Leonards, in whose shop it was seen in the flesh by Mr. Boyd Alexander, and later by myself. Mr. Alexander describes it as poor in condition and clearly in appearance a storm-beaten victim. It was exhibited by Howard Saunders at a meeting of the British Ornithologist's Club on the 15th April 1896.

As Mr. Boyd Alexander points out in his article on this bird in the *Zoologist* for 1896 (p. 167), it is easily mistaken for the Fork-tailed [Leach's] Petrel and it is quite possible that others have occurred in this country and been passed over as belonging to the more common species. Certainly the present specimen was unidentified both by Mr. Bristow and myself, and I believe I am correct in saying that it was not really identified with certainty until Howard Saunders saw it in Mr. Boyd Alexander's collection and picked it out as a bird new to Britain.

Profiting by our previous fault both Mr. Bristow and myself were ready when, nearly eleven years later, the second specimen turned up. This bird, also a female, was shot on the 8th November 1906, while flying along the shore in a tired manner a short way to the west of Hythe, and therefore only a few miles from where the first specimen was found. Heavy south-westerly gales had been blowing for the previous three days. Mr. Bristow received it the following day and kindly brought it to me in the flesh. It was wet and somewhat draggled, perfectly fresh, and the legs and webs between the toes were quite soft. It had the characteristic petrel odour well-developed. I had the pleasure of exhibiting it as a meeting of the British Ornithologist's Club on 21st November 1906”.

One had also been found dead at St Leonards-on-sea in East Sussex on the 26th November 1905 and a further British record soon followed, when one was found dead on the beach at Milford-on-Sea in Hampshire on the 19th November 1911 and was later identified by W. R. Ogilvie-Grant (Munn 1912), whilst a female was found dead at Blackrock Lighthouse in County Mayo, Ireland on the 18th October 1931 and later passed to the National Museum in Dublin (Tarsiger, no date).

In August 1962, an issue of *British Birds* (vol. 55, no. 8) was devoted to a review of the unprecedented quantity of records and specimens of rarities from the Hastings area in the last decade of the nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth century, in a case to become known as “The Hastings Rarities” (Nicholson & Ferguson-Lees 1962). The authors listed 542 specimens obtained within 20 miles of Hastings which they recommended should be deleted from the annals of British Ornithology as being frauds.

Taylor *et al.* (1981) considered that “it is likely that some, at least, of the records from the area during the critical period were genuine, but for the sake of clarity, safety and scientific integrity, Nicholson & Ferguson-Lees erred deliberately on the side of caution when setting the record straight, suggesting rejection wholesale”.

They continued to state that “their opinion, backed by complex statistical evaluation of probabilities and some careful detective work, was shared by the majority of ornithologists at that time”.

There were, however, notable exceptions including Dr. James Harrison, who “gathered dissenting opinion ... including evidence from Dr. Norman Ticehurst” (Harrison 1968, 1971). Nicholson & Ferguson-Lees responded to “emphasise again that the absurdities of the Hastings Rarities as a whole were the uniquely large proportion of class I [major] rarities, the absence or small numbers of many lesser rarities that one would expect if the policy were to encourage a wide circle of country people to bring in any unfamiliar birds, and the astonishing incidence of multiple records of pairs and parties” (included as a response within Harrison 1971).

Harrop *et al.* (2012) suggested that Harrison’s defence of the taxidermist at the heart of the affair (George Bristow) “may represent loyalty to an old friend from whom he had bought numerous specimens which he did not want discredited; and also wishful thinking that the species claimed at Hastings were plausible in light of subsequent records”. They also noted that similar arguments about plausibility have been given by later authors and stated that “it is true that most of the species deleted from the British List following exposure of the Hastings Rarities fraud have occurred subsequently. Such arguments, however, ignore the fact that the patterns of records from Hastings remain unique and implausible, and that there is a telling correlation between what we know was being imported at the time and what was being claimed”.

The Madeiran Storm Petrel has had a protracted and complex relationship with the British List. Following the removal of the “Hastings Rarities” records, this left the tideline corpse from Hampshire in 1911 and the specimen from County Mayo in 1931 as the surviving examples. The British Ornithologists’ Union Records Committee (BOURC) reviewed its approach and disaggregated the British and Irish Lists in 1998 (Holmes *et al.* 1998), which left the Hampshire bird as the sole occurrence.

However, the BOURC then undertook a review of the Hampshire record and deleted it from the British List, noting that “the Committee was unable to locate any published description of the bird and, as the specimen was untraceable, its identification was not verified. Furthermore, there was no indication whether or not the bird, found dead on the beach, had actually died in British waters” (BOURC 2008). BOURC later commented (in response to a letter from Combridge & Wiseman 2009) that “the taxonomy of the ‘Madeiran petrel’ complex is likely to change and we have absolutely no way of checking which taxon was involved”.

This species had a further dalliance with the British List when a ‘Madeiran Storm Petrel’ seen off the Isles of Scilly on the 28th July 2007 was added to category A by the BOURC in their 40th report in 2011, only to be removed in the 41st report the following year.

The 40th report did warn that “the subspecies was undetermined” and “based on genetic, ecological, behavioural and reproductive data, it is likely that several cryptic species exist within the complex”. Furthermore, it stated that “the International Ornithological Congress (IOC) has recognised the split of the Cape Verde subspecies as *O. jabejabe* (Cape Verde Storm Petrel), and the population that breeds during the hot season in the Azores as *O. monteiroi* (Monteiro’s Storm Petrel)”, whilst noting that the bird observed off Scilly may have belonged to any of the taxa and the current BOU classification as *O. castro* does not imply that it belonged to Band-rumped Storm Petrel *O. castro* as delineated by IOC”.

Following the acceptance of the IOC delineations, it was then removed in the subsequent report on the basis that “the sole British record of ‘Madeiran Storm Petrel’ ... cannot be assigned to any of the species *O. castro*, *O. jabejabe* or *O. monteiroi* on the basis of the descriptions or photographs”. It is currently the only accepted record of the Band-rumped Storm Petrel complex in Britain. Whilst it is now somewhat unimportant, it is worth noting that it is not known to which species the Hythe specimen belonged.

References

BOURC 2008. British Ornithologists’ Union Records Committee: 37th Report. *Ibis* 151: 224-230.

BOURC 2011. British Ornithologists’ Union Records Committee: 40th Report. *Ibis* 153: 227-232.

BOURC 2012. British Ornithologists’ Union Records Committee: 41st Report. *Ibis* 154: 212–215.

- Combridge, P. & Wiseman, E. 2009. The curious case of the disappearing storm-petrel. *British Birds* 102: 213-215.
- Harrison, J. M. 1968. *Bristow and the Hastings Rarities Affair*. Privately published, Sussex.
- Harrison, J. M. 1971. The Hastings Rarities: further comments. *British Birds* 64: 61-68 (including response from Nicholson & Ferguson-Lees).
- Harrop, A. H. J., Collinson, J. M. & Melling, T. 2012. What the eye doesn't see: the prevalence of fraud in ornithology. *British Birds* 105: 236-257.
- Holmes, J., Marchant, J., Bucknell, N., Stroud, D. & Parkin, D. T. 1998. The British List. *British Birds* 91: 2-11.
- Munn, P.W. 1912. Madeiran Fork-tailed Petrel in Hampshire. *British Birds* 5: 252-253.
- Nicholson, E. M. & Ferguson-Lees, I. J. 1962. The Hastings Rarities. *British Birds* 55: 299-384
- Snow, D. & Perrins, C.M. 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Oxford University Press.
- Tarsiger no date. Band-rumped Storm Petrel records in the Western Palearctic. www.tarsiger.com (accessed 2023).
- Ticehurst, N. F. 1909. *A History of the Birds of Kent*. Witherby, London.