

## Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* in the Drake Passage, South Atlantic, March 2008

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### Introduction

The 'Atlantic Odyssey' is the annual repositioning trip of the *Professor Molchanov*, a small Expedition Cruise ship that spends the austral summer in Antarctic waters and the northern summer in the Arctic. For enthusiasts of seabirds, cetaceans, islands, and photography, the voyage from Ushuaia in Argentina south to the Antarctic Peninsula, and thence north to Cape Verde via South Georgia, the Tristan da Cunha group, St Helena, and Ascension Island provides a superb opportunity to view marine life across 70 degrees of latitude. On the morning of 11 March 2008, we were heading south on our second day in the Drake Passage, with a moderate northwest wind, two-metre swell, high thin overcast skies, and excellent visibility. At 11.20 hours (ship's time, position 60°17'S 69°44'W) we were observing from the sun deck above the bridge when a medium-sized petrel flew close across the bow from east to west. Similar sized seabirds seen that morning were Cape Petrel *Daption capense*, Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata*, Thin-billed Prion *P. belcheri*, and Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*.

### Description

The bird was similar in size to Soft-plumaged Petrel, but gliding more directly. The underwing was white with a bold black bar

('shaped like a boomerang' - PE) running diagonally backwards from the centre of a dark forewing bar to the armpit. The belly was a smudgy grey, contrasting with the rest of the underparts, which were white. On the upperparts, the back was pale grey, contrasting with darker grey upperwings, which had an even darker grey bar running at an angle from the rump area forwards towards the leading edge of the wing. The upper tail was pale grey, with no black terminal band. The crown was dark grey, there was a distinct dark smudgy area behind the eye, and the bill appeared all black. The bird was in sight for about a minute.

Field guides were immediately to hand (Jaramillo *et al.* 2003; Onley & Schofield 2007; Shirihai 2007), and after consulting them as soon as the bird was out of sight, we concluded that the combination of features on the underparts could only fit Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata*. This species breeds on islands off New Zealand, and migrates through the North Pacific to the Bering Sea in the northern summer. There have apparently been several recent records of Mottled Petrel from the waters between South America and the Antarctic Peninsula (C. Savigny pers. comm.), some published (Meltofte & Horneman 1995) but others not (e.g. [www.quarkepeditions.com/downloads/Vavilov08.12.07.pdf](http://www.quarkepeditions.com/downloads/Vavilov08.12.07.pdf)), and one south of the Falkland Islands (Curtis 1995), but this was the first seen on the 'Atlantic Odyssey' cruises, which have run since 1998. This was also the first record of the species in the area in March, all others (at least six known) having been in December (C. Savigny pers. comm.). To help clarify its status in the southwest Atlantic, we thought it appropriate to publish this sighting, and would encourage others to do likewise in future.

### References

- Curtis, W. J. 1995. Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* near the Falkland Islands. *Sea Swallow* 44: 63–64.
- Jaramillo, A., Burke, P. & Beadle, D. 2003. *Field Guide to the Birds of Chile, including the Antarctic Peninsula, the Falkland Islands and South Georgia*. Christopher Helm, London.

**Meltofte, H. & Horneman, C. 1995.** Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* off Tierra del Fuego. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists Club* 115: 71–72.

**Onley, D. & Schofield, P. 2007.** *Field Guide to the Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World*. Christopher Helm, London.

**Shirihai, H. 2007.** *A Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife. The Birds and Marine Mammals of the Antarctic Continent and the Southern Ocean*. 2nd edition. A. & C. Black, London.

**Footnote:** *This note was withdrawn from SEABIRD 21 because of lack of space. Since submission, we learned of another Mottled Petrel seen on the 2009 Atlantic Odyssey cruise by Ken Shaw, Robert Tizard and others, again on the second day heading south in the Drake Passage (Figure 1).*



**Figure 1.** Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* in the Drake Passage, 20 March 2009. © Robert Tizard