

LBRC Report Form

1. English and Scientific names: “Scopoli’s” Cory’s Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea diomedea*)
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage): One individual—unknown sex; age unknown (presumed adult?)--difficult to ascertain evidence of wing molt from photographs.
3. Parish:
Terrebonne Parish
4. Specific Locality:
Gulf of Mexico (26.375735, -91.112317) – water depth approximately 2,100 meters prior to reaching the Sigsbee Escarpment.
5. Date(s) when observed: June 21, 2024
6. Time(s) of day when observed: 0700
7. Reporting observer: Aaron Boone
8. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird(s):
none
9. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):
none
10. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): Light was clean even early morning light under overcast skies. The bird immediately caught my attention when it flashed its bright white underparts on a ventral facing flight arc. Heavy shadowing on the bird did not create issues for viewing plumage details.
11. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Zeiss Victory SF 10x42 binoculars (near mint with mint glass); Canon 7dMk2 with 100-400mm IS2 lens (good condition with mint glass)
12. Distance to bird(s): Difficult to ascertain in the field, but my gut impression even considering the wide open seas and no references was that I first detected the bird at approximately 500 meters. Over the course of the entire observation (approximately

five minutes of observation time), the shearwater may have approached to within 350-400 meters of my position.

13. Duration of observation: Observed the bird through binoculars and DSLR camera viewfinder over the course of five total minutes.

14. Habitat: Open ocean – pelagic environment close to deep water off the Sigsbee Escarpment.

Observation Overview

Original eBird checklist:

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S182840609>

From starboard side of front of the cruise ship Mariner of the Seas (Royal Caribbean) – Deck 4. Over the course of this pelagic protocol checklist, the ship crossed the Sigsbee Escarpment traveling at a southeast bearing. The seas were not what I would consider to be calm, but the ship was stable enough that I could have used a spotting scope if needed. Wind gusts prohibited me from setting the scope up, but I had a very stable view of this bird through binoculars.

15. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): Bird was in arcing typical shearwater flight during the entire observation. Bird was in flapping flight on occasion but never put down on the water.

16. Description (include only what was actually seen, not what "should" have been seen; include if possible: total length/relative size compared to other familiar species, body bulk, shape, proportions, bill, eye, leg, and plumage characteristics. Stress features that separate it from similar species):

When I first detected the bird, I spotted it as a bright white flash with my unaided eyes. When I glassed the bird, my first view of it was of the dorsal side and I immediately noticed the mottled tones of the upperparts, which were not exceptionally dark but rather gray suffused with brownish tones. The wings were not “uniform” dark but rather giving a faint “M” type pattern. This was the point at which I also noticed a faint narrow rump patch. When the bird banked to show its underparts, I was struck by the extent of white on the body and wings. The darker plumage in the wings gave a narrow border impression. The bird appeared to have white undertail coverts and extensive white that crept far into the hands of both wings. The bill struck me as grayish in color. The head appeared dark gray and helmeted over the eye. The main feature about the size and shape of this bird that struck me as interesting was the angular, pointy-winged gestalt of the bird. The bird gave me a narrow-headed and long-billed impression,

further contributing to the angular gestalt of this bird. This confused me at the time since my past experience with Cory's Shearwater recalled a seabird with more rounded features and broader wings. Quickly recalling some of the taxonomic uncertainty with Cory's Shearwater drove me towards making every possible attempt to get good photographic documentation...I only managed two photographs (originals attached). The bill color did not stand out as yellow, even under the even lighting conditions. I did not discern the color of the feet.

My original notes from my eBird checklist recorded after the observation that morning: "At first impression thought this bird was a COSH—large shearwater the size and shape of a Great/Cory's—long winged with pointy hand giving a narrow-winged and angular flight profile —longish bill and head giving narrow longish impression — white undertail coverts - seen well from approximately 400-500 m; sandy brown upper parts with a hint of a pale rump -- bright white underparts creeping into the primaries with no clear demarcation of dark flight feathers and bright white underwing coverts; hard to determine bill color but photos do not show a bold yellow bill, color dusky with a hint of a dark band/spot near the tip of the bill. Bird observed over waters approximately 2,100 m depth."

17. Voice: None detected.

18. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):

'Pterodroma' petrels – I ruled out petrels, such as Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*), through size and shape, particularly the elongated head shape of the observed bird and the narrow relatively long bill.

'borealis' Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea borealis*) - I observed a couple of 'borealis' birds during this same cross-Gulf voyage and both struck me as larger and bulkier shearwaters. These birds did not exhibit a 'lanky' gestalt, and they had broader wings and a more bull-headed shape. Additionally, they had noticeably yellow bills even at a distance of several hundred meters.

Great Shearwater (*Ardenna gravis*) - I quickly ruled out Great Shearwater because of the extensive bright white underparts on my observed bird, in addition to bright white undertail coverts. My observed bird did not exhibit any semblance of a dark belly smudge, which is corroborated by photographs.

Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) - I briefly considered Manx Shearwater but my observed bird did not have uniform dark upperparts and the shape was wrong for Manx. Photograph does not show a pale mark behind the ear coverts but rather a cleanly lined helmeted appearance. In general, my observed bird is longer winged than Manx

Shearwater.

Cape Verde Shearwater (*Calonectris edwardsii*) - Once I narrowed down the identity of my bird to a *Calonectris* shearwater, I seriously considered Cape Verde Shearwater, especially considering that my observed bird does not appear heavy-billed as expected on a 'borealis' bird and photographs show the bill to be on the darker side. While viewing my observed bird through 10x binoculars, I did not pick up on any color in the bird, unlike the yellow color of other 'borealis' Cory's Shearwaters which stood out even at a distance. I conducted an extensive review of Cape Verde photographs in the Macaulay Library. This coupled with review of published seabird guides (e.g., Howell and Zufelt 2019) lead me to the conclusion that Cape Verde Shearwater does not show white "tongues" that creep into the outer primaries.

Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*) - my observed bird was larger and longer-winged than Audubon's—I ruled out Audubon's based on size.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Ardenna pacifica*) - I considered this rare Pacific shearwater since there are a couple of records from the Gulf of Mexico. My observed bird did not appear disproportionately long-tailed and the undertail was not predominantly dark as is to be expected with Wedge-tailed.

19. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?):

I managed to capture two photographs of this bird. I am uploading both original unprocessed image files. I have uploaded cropped and touched-up images to my eBird checklist.

20. Previous experience with this species: I have no experience with "Scopoli's" Cory's Shearwater, and have seen "borealis" Cory's Shearwater on a handful of occasions off the coast of North Carolina. Shearwaters, in general, is not a species group that I get to observe on an annual basis.

21. Identification aids: (list books, illustrations, other birders, etc. used in identification):

Howell and Zufelt. 2019. *Oceanic Bird of the World: a Photo Guide*

Howell. 2012. *Petrels, Albatrosses and Storm-Petrels of North America: a Photographic Guide*

Dunn and Alderfer. 2017. *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America (7th Edition)*

Sibley Guide iOS app

22. Identification aids used when?

At time of sighting, After observation

23. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain:

Yes, I am 100% positive that this individual is of the Mediterranean "Scopoli's" Shearwater population.

24. Date report completed:

Original observation notes taken down June 21, 2024. Rare bird form revised and completed on July 8 & 13, 2024.

25. May the LBRC have permission to display in whole or in part this report and accompanying photos on the LOS-LBRC website and LBRC Facebook page?

Yes

26. If yes, may we include your name with the report?

Yes



