

FIRST RECORD OF SCOPOLI'S SHEARWATER *Calonectris diomedea* IN SLOVENIA

Prvo opazovanje rumenokljunega vihnika *Calonectris diomedea* v Sloveniji

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Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* breeds in the Mediterranean (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2016A), with isolated cases of breeding recorded on the French Atlantic coast (MAYS *et al.* 2006). Following a recent reassessment at its largest colony (Zembra Island, Tunisia), the global population is estimated at 141,000–223,000 breeding pairs (DEFOS DU RAU *et al.* 2015, BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2016A). Based on limited data, the population appears to be in slight decline, 2% over three generations, but is still evaluated as “Least Concern” (CARBONERAS *et al.* 2013, BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2016A). The majority of the population leaves the Mediterranean to winter in the

Atlantic Ocean, mainly in three areas: the Benguela and Agulhas Currents, the Brazilian Current and the Canary Current (RISTOW *et al.* 2000, CAMPHUYSEN & VAN DER MEER 2001, GONZÁLEZ-SOLÍS *et al.* 2007, PÉRON *et al.* 2012). The autumn passage to the Atlantic takes place between mid-October and late-November, spring passage in the reverse direction between late February and early April (RAMOS *et al.* 2009).

Until recently Scopoli's Shearwater, first described by Joannes Antonius Scopoli in 1769, was considered the nominotypical subspecies of the polytypic Cory's Shearwater, together with *Calonectris (diomedea) borealis* which breeds mainly in the Atlantic Ocean. Field characters to differentiate the two subspecies were described by GUTIÉRREZ (1998) and the split first proposed by SANGSTER *et al.* (1999) based on differences in molecular data, morphology and vocalization. The decision was not universally accepted at the time, but is now more widely adopted (SANGSTER *et al.* 2012, BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2016A).

Because Scopoli was based in Carniola for a significant part of his professional life, his species descriptions are of particular interest for Slovenian ornithologists. The species is named *Procellaria diomedea* (SCOPOLI 1769) and Scopoli refers to Linnaeus's “*Diomedea (exulans)*” (LINNAEUS 1766) and Jonston's “*Diomedea*” (JONSTONUS 1650). He proceeds to briefly describe the species without giving



Figure 1: Map of the key sites mentioned in the text (map: Wikimedia Commons under the Creative Commons Licence, annotation: J. Hanžel)

Slika 1: Zemljevid ključnih lokacij, omenjenih v besedilu (zemljevid: Wikimedia Commons, licenca Creative Commons, pripisi: J. Hanžel)

a type locality and mentions that a specimen is stored in "Museum Turrianum". This account has attracted controversy for several reasons. Firstly, Linnaeus's *Diomedea* is clearly not a shearwater, as it is described as pelican-sized. This may have been an oversight on Scopoli's part as Linnaeus's work lacks illustrations. Scopoli refers to his bird as crow-sized and refers to plate 46 in Jonston's work, where a shearwater is clearly illustrated. Museum Turrianum was a private collection of Count Thurn, where the specimens bore no mention of their origin and are now widely believed to have been lost (HARTERT 1923, GREGORI 2008). Judging by some other species described from the same collection (e.g. Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*), not all the specimens were obtained regionally and it is not entirely impossible that Scopoli described a different species of shearwater. Scopoli's description was disputed and later rejected by the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) (HARTERT 1923, BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION 1933). The BOU revoked its initial decision in 1946 and, through a tenuous indirect reference via Jonston to ALDROVANDUS (1645), determined the type locality as the Tremiti Islands in Italy (Figure 1) (BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION 1946) – which were never mentioned by Scopoli, nor did he refer to Aldrovandus in relation to the shearwater despite quoting him elsewhere in his work.

The breeding grounds nearest to Slovenia are in Italy and Croatia. The Italian breeding population is estimated at 13,344–21,873 pairs (DERHÉ 2012), with colonies closest to Slovenia on the Tremiti Islands (BRICCHETTI & FRACASSO 2003). The Croatian breeding population is estimated at 700–1200 pairs in two SPAs, Lastovsko otočje and Pučinski otoci (Figure 1) (BIOPORTAL 2016). Both the Italian and Croatian colonies are approximately 400 kilometres away from the Slovenian sea. In landlocked central European countries the species was recorded once in Austria (May 1858) (ALBEGGER 2015) and Switzerland (May 1865; two individuals) (MAUMARY *et al.* 2007), while a record from the Czech Republic (May 1936) (VAVŘIK 2015) was not identified beyond Scopoli's/ Cory's Shearwater. Birds from Switzerland (July 1931) and southern Germany (June 1933) were identified as Cory's Shearwaters (MAUMARY *et al.* 2007).

On 16 Jun 2016, I was seawatching in Piran (Northern Adriatic Sea, SW Slovenia) (Figure 1). The weather was mostly cloudy with a south wind of 9 m/s and gusts of up to 12 m/s. At 10.10 hrs, I spotted a large shearwater flying towards NNE about 2700 m offshore. After two minutes of following the bird with my scope a second individual flew into view and both then passed a Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*.



Figure 2: Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*, off Piran, 16 Jun 2016. This individual passed closest to shore, approximately 1300 m from my observation point. Piran's oceanographic buoy is visible in the background. (photo: J. Hanžel)

Slika 2: Rumenokljuni viharnik *Calonectris diomedea*, Piran, 16. 6. 2016. Ta osebek se je najbolj približal obali, približno 1300 m od opazovalne točke. V ozadju je vidna piranska oceanografska boja. (foto: J. Hanžel)

The birds were also observed by Katarina Benulič and record photographs using a compact Nikon Coolpix P610 compact camera were obtained before the birds were lost from sight after a total observation time of 6 minutes.

In direct comparison with a Yellow-legged Gull, the two shearwaters were only slightly smaller. Their flight was characterized by series of 4–7 flexible wingbeats, interspersed with long glides. The upperparts were brownish-grey with a small white patch on the uppertail of one of the birds. The bill was light-coloured, but no further details were noted at this distance. The underparts were clean white and the underwing had a narrow black border. The exact pattern of the primaries

was impossible to assess, nor was it visible in the photographs examined later. Based on these characters I immediately identified the birds as Scopoli's/Cory's Shearwaters. During the course of the day I observed seven more Scopoli's/Cory's Shearwaters, the closest of which I managed to photograph (Figure 2). Unfortunately, the primary pattern was impossible to assess with certainty. I saw another bird from the same observation point a day later, on 17 Jun. A total of up to 10 different individuals were thus observed.

The record was accepted as the first of Scopoli's Shearwater for Slovenia and added to category A by the Slovenian Rarities Committee (KRED). Despite the inability to identify the birds beyond Scopoli's/Cory's Shearwater based on presented evidence, the Committee adopted a pragmatic approach outlined below. The Cory's Shearwater is known to breed within the Mediterranean near Almería (GÓMEZ-DÍAZ *et al.* 2006, BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2016B) and on Las Chafarinas (Figure 1) (AFÁN *et al.* 2014). These two colonies are estimated to hold up to 100 breeding pairs each. Up to two Cory's Shearwaters have also been found on Columbretes Islands (MARTINEZ ABRAIN *et al.* 2002), Giraglia (THIBAUT & BRETAGNOLLE 1998) and Linosa (Figure 1) (LO VALVO & MASSA 1988). No Cory's Shearwaters were ever recorded on the Tremiti or in Croatian colonies. Based on these data, the Committee ruled that it was safe to accept the birds as Scopoli's Shearwaters.

The species has long been expected to appear in Slovenia. Somewhat surprisingly, none had been recorded despite recent systematic boat-based surveys targeting the Mediterranean Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii* and cetacean surveys (T. GENOV, U. KOCE *pers. comm.*). The species appears to be a rare guest in the Italian half of the Gulf of Trieste, with recent records from May and October (PARODI 1999, STANIČ 2014). Croatian data suggest that small numbers appear irregularly in the northern Adriatic between May and October and exceptionally during the winter (STIPČEVIĆ & LUKAČ 2001). The highest daily total from the northern Adriatic is from August 1912 when a raft of 30–40 birds was observed (SCHIEBEL 1914). More recent data obtained by tracking breeders from the Tremiti Islands suggest that the Slovenian sea could be within the range of their foraging trips. Most trips were directed towards the north and the northernmost point reached by birds from the studied sample was off Istria's southern tip (CECERE *et al.* 2013). Birds are probably more likely to be seen in the Slovenian sea in June, rather than July or August given that foraging trips are generally longer during incubation than during chick-rearing.

Povzetek

Rumenokljuni viharник *Calonectris diomedea* gnezdi v Sredozemlju, nam najbližje kolonije so oddaljene približno 400 km na Tremitskih otokih v Italiji in južnodalmatinskih otokih v okolici Visa in Lastova. Vrsta v Sloveniji doslej še ni bila opazovana. Dne 16. in 17. 6. 2016 sem na morju pred Piranom s kopnega opazoval do 10 različnih rumenokljunih viharnikov. Zaradi velike oddaljenosti nedvomno razlikovanje od atlantskega rumenokljunega viharnika *Calonectris borealis* ni bilo mogoče. Nacionalna komisija za redkosti (KRED) je opazovanje kljub temu potrdila kot prvi podatek za Slovenijo (kategorija A). Atlantski rumenokljuni viharniki so v Sredozemskem morju namreč izjemno redki, tako da je mogoče z veliko mero gotovosti zaključiti, da so bile opazovane ptice rumenokljuni viharniki. V severnem Jadranu se pojavljajo predvsem med majem in oktobrom, podatki iz italijanskih kolonij pa kažejo, da tamkajšnji gnezdilci junija dosežejo južne obale Istre.

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