

Aberrantly dark Fea's Petrel trapped in Cape Verde Islands in March 2007

On 21 March 2007, while catching Fea's Petrels *Pterodroma feae* on Fogo, Cape Verde Islands,

Jacob Gonzalez-Solis noticed an odd individual amongst 17 birds trapped for ringing which showed an overall grey cast to the entire underparts. In spring 2008 and 2009, respectively, a further 18 and 19 were trapped but none showed any anomalous coloration. The bird was ringed

002 Fea's Petrels / Gon-gons *Pterodroma feae*, adult, Fogo, Cape Verde Islands, 21 March 2007 (Jacob González-Solis). Note grey wash on whole of underparts of left bird and normally coloured bird with clean white underparts (right).



(5500072 CABO VERDE). It was at least one year old since, in the trapping season, the adults are between the end of incubation and halfway through the growing period of the chicks. As can be seen in the plates, unlike normal Fea's with clean white underparts, the bird showed ashy grey underparts from bill base to undertail-coverts, without any pure white in its plumage. The underwing-coverts did not show any white, unlike normally coloured birds. Although no detailed notes were taken of the upperparts, the photographs show a darker head than in normal birds. The head contrasted with the regular grey mantle showing some diffuse darker smudging, unlike normally coloured birds. The overall facial impression was darker and less contrasting than in normal birds.

Cases of plumage aberration have been described as a rare phenomenon in other large Northern Hemisphere Procellariiformes: mostly albinism or 'partial albinism' in Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis* (Bried et al 2005) and in Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwater *C borealis/diomedea* (eg, Ristow & Witte 2004, Ocio et al 2007) and leucism in Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwater *C borealis/diomedea* (Leopold & Keijl 2004); leucism in Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* (Abad

et al 2007); albinism in Balearic Shearwater *P mauretanicus* (Bried & Mougeot 1994); and albinism in Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* (see Bried et al 2005 for a review). So far, no case has been described for Fea's Petrel and neither for the closely related Desertas Petrel *P deserta* or Zino's Petrel *P madeira*. Melanism, in turn, would be a very rare phenomenon in Procellariiformes; Bried et al 2005 list only five known cases up to 2005: a Manx Shearwater *P puffinus* (Davis & Packer 1972); a Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* (Curtis 1988); a Grey-backed Storm Petrel *Garrodia nereis* (Bried & Mougeot 1994); and two Cory's/Scopoli's Shearwaters (Bried et al 2005). Thus, this Fea's is the sixth-ever known case and the first for a *Pterodroma*.

The observed pattern of coloration would match the eumelanism variation of melanism, in which an increase of eumelanin is recorded. It may also concern a partial melanism not caused by a mutation but by, eg, disease, malnutrition or lack of exposure to sunlight that could be reversed in the bird's next moult (cf van Grouw 2006). Such reversibility is hypothetical as the bird has not been relocated afterwards; however, it may explain the paucity of records of melanistic tubenoses.

001 Aberrant Fea's Petrel / Gon-gon *Pterodroma feae*, adult, Fogo, Cape Verde Islands, 21 March 2007 (Jacob González-Solís). Note grey wash on whole of underparts.





003 Fea's Petrel / Gon-gon *Pterodroma feae*, adult, Fogo, Cape Verde Islands, 21 March 2007 (Jacob González-Solis). Normally coloured adult with spread wings.

Given the subtle differences involved in the field identification of gadfly petrels in the North Atlantic (eg, Harrop 2004, Howell & Patteson 2007), the existence of aberrant birds such as the bird described here may potentially add confusion.

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