

# LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

## REPORT FORM

This form is intended as a convenience in reporting observations of species on the Louisiana Bird Records Committee (LBRC) Review List. The LBRC recommends the use of this form or a similar format when submitting records for review (to assure that all pertinent information is accounted for). Attach additional pages as necessary. Please print or type. Attach xerox of field notes, drawings, photographs, or tape recordings, if available. Include all photos for more obscurely marked species. When completed, mail to Secretary, Louisiana Bird Records Committee, c/o Museum of Natural Science, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-3216.

1. English and Scientific names: *Sooty Shearwater*, *Ardenna grisea*
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):  
*One*
3. Locality: Parish: Terrebonne  
Specific Locality: Whiskey Island, at 29.0505 x -90.8500
4. Date(s) when observed: *15 June 2017*
5. Time(s) of day when observed: *1245-1300 CDT*
6. Reporting observer and address: *Robert C. Dobbs, Lafayette, LA*
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): *none*
8. Other observers who *independently identified* the bird(s): *none*
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light): *Bright sunlight under partly cloudy sky, looking south, with sun nearly overhead. Glare not a particular problem, beyond normal mid-day summer beach/water environment.*
10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): *Nikon Monarch 10x42 binos (good condition), Swarovski 80mm spotting scope (good condition), Nikon AF-S 70-300 mm 1:4.5-5.6 G camera lens (good condition)*
11. Distance to bird(s): *350-400 m (checked w/ rangefinder)*
12. Duration of observation: *15 min*
13. Habitat: *near-shore Gulf of Mexico (near active shrimp trawling)*
14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation (flying, feeding, resting; include and stress habits used in identification; relate events surrounding observation): *Sitting on water in vicinity of, and occasionally flying behind, trawling shrimp boat.*

I was scanning gulls and terns foraging behind a trawling shrimp boat (looking for jaegers), and spotted the bird gliding on stiff wings just above the surface of the water, soon landing on the water on the opposite side of the boat from me. I immediately recognized the bird as an all-dark shearwater based on flight style (and plumage), and switched from binos to spotting scope, waiting/searching for the bird to come into view. I soon found the bird on the water and was able to study it with the scope and attempt photos over the next 15 min, as the bird sat on the water and occasionally made flights behind the boat, presumably to reposition itself in relation to the trawler. It did not seem to spend much time foraging actively, but did make shallow plunges when landing, apparently going after food. The entire observation consisted of several bouts of watching and photographing the bird, losing the bird (e.g., after flights), and re-finding the bird. After the 15 min of observation, I completely lost the bird, and was unable to re-find it in the vicinity of the trawler or around either of the other two trawlers in the area over the next 30 min.

15. 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): Both on-the-water and in-flight, the bird appeared generally similar in size to, or just slightly larger than, Laughing Gulls that were often nearby for direct comparison. The bird's proportions and structure in flight, and the bird's flight style were classic shearwater... long, thin, pointed wings held straight in gliding, arcing flight just above the water surface. In flight the head projected beyond the leading edge of the wing about the same distance that the tail extended behind the trailing edge of the wing. Plumage was uniform, all dark-brownish gray, except for pale underwing coverts, which produced a white underwing flash (clearly visible in two of the photos). At its nearest distance (ca. 350 m), I could actually see the bill reasonably well using the scope's 60x zoom—it was all dark in color, slender and about the same length as the "length" of the head (i.e., the distance from the base of the bill back to the nape). The "tubenose" nostrils were not visible as such, given the distance, but the overall tubenose bill shape was apparent and quite distinctive compared to the nearby Laughing Gulls. The head shape appeared to be more elongate than rounded, with a relatively sloped forehead. (Even at its nearest distance, the bird was beyond the reach of my camera lens to capture any detail about the head or bill, and all efforts to digiscope were abject failures.)

16. Voice: not known to be vocal (but too far to hear, if vocal)

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation): Flight style, behavior, and bill shape clearly place this bird in petrel/shearwater family (Procellariidae). Nevertheless, a dark-morph jaeger sp. may be eliminated by this bird's longer, thinner neck, narrower wings, bill shape, pale underwing coverts, flight style, and general behavior. Heermann's Gull may also be eliminated by this bird's longer/narrower/straighter wings, all-dark bill, pale underwing coverts, flight style, etc.

Short-tailed Shearwater is the primary candidate for confusion (despite that species' north Pacific distribution). Short-tailed Shearwater should have less conspicuous pale underwing coverts, but may be more confidently eliminated by this bird's long bill (relative to head size) and elongate head shape with sloped forehead (Short-tailed would have a relatively shorter bill and more rounded or dove-like head shape). After reviewing Will Selman's 2014 Sooty Shearwater record (as an LBRC member), I was cognizant of Sooty/Short-tailed identification and paid careful attention to bill size and head shape *in the field*.

Other all- or nearly all-dark procellariids may be eliminated by this bird's (1) all-dark bill color (Flesh-footed Shearwater has pale bill), (2) relatively long, narrow bill structure (Trinidad and Murphy's petrels and Northern Fulmar have shorter, stubbier bills), and/or (3) white underwing flash (Flesh-footed, Christmas and Wedge-tailed shearwaters have dark underwings; Wedge-tailed also has notably longer tail). Several other all-dark petrels may be eliminated by all of those characters, as well as size (i.e., relative to Laughing Gull). It is also worth noting that probability strongly favors Sooty Shearwater over other all-dark procellariids in the Gulf of Mexico. Interestingly, Louisiana's only accepted record of Sooty Shearwater was also mid-June (2014), and many other documented Sooty Shearwater records in the northern and western Gulf are also from early-mid summer.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? Attached?): **Yes, photos by Robert C. Dobbs**

19. Previous experience with this species: **Limited... I've seen Sooty Shearwaters on 2-3 occasions on/off the Pacific coast; I have essentially zero experience with any other all- or nearly all-dark procellariids.**

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

a. at time of observation: **none**

b. after observation: **Petrels, Albatrosses & Storm-Petrels of North America (Howell 2012)**

21. This description is written from:  notes made during the observation ( notes attached?);  notes made after the observation (date: );  memory.

22. Are you positive of your identification if not, explain: **Yes. Despite the similarity of Sooty and Short-tailed shearwaters, characters observed strongly favor Sooty (as does probability of occurrence in the Gulf of Mexico).**

23. Date: **\_16 June 2017\_** Time: **\_0955\_**

24. May the LBRC have permission to display this report or portions of this report on its website? Yes  
If yes, may we include your name with the report? Yes





