

IDENTIFYING COOK'S & PYCROFT'S PETRELS



Cook's & Pycroft's Petrels Hadoram Shirihai © Tubenoses Project, A & C Black

This unique photo of **Pycroft's** (*Pterodroma pycrofti*) and **Cook's Petrel** (*P. cookii*) (the bird on the left) together on the water was taken on 3 January 2005 (Outer Hauraki Gulf) during a PTERODROMA PELAGICS trip. It highlights the distinguishing characters of Pycroft's from Cook's already discussed in the *Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife*, H. Shirihai, 2002. This photo is part of a long-term field research for the forthcoming *Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World* (Helm Guides/A & C Black).

When looking at the photo note particularly the following details:

1. The **Pycroft's Petrel** is slightly smaller overall with a shorter/thinner bill when compared to the Cook's, also a somewhat more rounded/smaller head.
2. Plumage overall, including head, appears more dusky-grey.
3. In optimal view shows the species' tendency for lacking or having very short and thin whitish supercilium.
4. Dark ear-coverts patch is usually appears to merge with the crown or often relatively darker and appear as a large oval or triangular patch (with **Cook's Petrel** this patch is usually smaller but bolder and enhanced by longer and thicker whitish supercilium).
5. Note a slight ill-defined pale notch behind ear-coverts (appears as pale extension from rear lower cheeks, but variable, in some almost lacking).
6. Grey neck-sides (collar) better developed and darker.



In addition to these details, in flight (which is when these birds are encountered most often) the shape of the bird is often a good supporting characteristic. The Pycroft's looks shorter, has more rounded wings, with a proportionately longer tail, and a dusky and more solid hood, giving it a more compact appearance than Cook's Petrel. It is interesting to note that the Pycroft's appear to sit on the water lower with less white area of the body being exposed than Cook's, but this should be checked further. In summary, I recommend only trying to identify those with combination of all characters and thus classic individuals, otherwise many birds must be left indeterminate in the field. Above all, beware the effect of light and angle of views which affect strongly the appearance of the above mentioned characteristics.

HADORAM SHIRIHAI