

Notes on seabirds 80

LEACH'S STORM-PETRELS OCEANODROMA LEUCORHOA LANDING ON A RESEARCH VESSEL AT NIGHT

During a research cruise on the *RRS Charles Darwin* in deep waters south of Madeira (31°-33°N and 15°-18°W), from 3-20 November 2004, a total of 17 Leach's Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* were recorded landing on the ships' deck at night. The maximum found on any one night was four on November 6th and 7th (Fig. 1). All but one of the birds was successfully released the following morning after being boxed overnight.



Figure 1. A quartet of Leach's Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* found on the deck of *RRS Charles Darwin* at night. These birds were successfully recuperated and released.

Figuur 1. Een viertal Vale Stormvogeltjes *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* dat 's nachts op het dek van *RRS Charles Darwin* was gevonden. Deze vogels werden met succes opgelapt en vrijgelaten.

All birds arrived while the ship was stationary and the rear deck was lit with high-power floodlights. In addition to those actually found on deck, small numbers were noted flying around or over the ship. All birds found on deck

arrived during calm weather on both clear and cloudy nights, and also at different moon phases; none were picked up on deck during windy nights. Bourne (1992) observed that about half of all records of seabirds picked up on Royal Navy vessels between 1960-1990 related to storm-petrels, with two-thirds of these relating to Leach's Storm-petrels alone.

Both Bourne (1992) and Prendergast (1992) have suggested that birds landing on deck may do so deliberately, in association with social displays. This could explain why none of the recovered birds showed any signs of collision damage, and could occasionally be heard giving the long 'chatter-call' while on deck. Ships operating with high-power floodlights at night in feeding or breeding areas of storm-petrels may have an adverse affect on the birds' behaviour, distracting them from foraging and related activities. In addition, small numbers may perish if they land in enclosed sections of the ship and are not subsequently recovered and released.

Bourne W.R.P. 1992. Leach's Storm-petrels visiting ships at sea. *British Birds* 85: 556-557.

Prendergast H.D.V. 1992. Behaviour of Leach's Petrels at dusk and night around yacht in mid Atlantic. *British Birds* 85: 557-558.

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