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Cover: A female Javan Leopard *Panthera pardus melas* in rehabilitation phase at Cikananga Wildlife Center. © Yayasan Cikananga Konservasi Terpadu.



First Asian record of Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebastria palpebrata* (Foster, 1785) from Rameswaram Island, Tamil Nadu, India

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This is the first documented record of the Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebastria palpebrata* from Rameswaram Island in southern India: an unusual sighting from the region as it has not previously been recorded from either southern Asia or the Oriental region.

Albatrosses (Procellariiformes: Diomedidae) are big birds primarily found in the southern hemisphere (Sick 1997). The Light Mantled Albatross is the most common species in the Antarctic seas (Ainley et al. 1984). It is listed as 'Near Threatened' by the IUCN Red List because of diminishing population mainly due to being trapped as bycatch in longline fisheries and also, perhaps, due to the effects of imported predators (BirdLife International 2022).

With broad pelagic habits, the species maintains a circumpolar distribution in the Southern Ocean, mainly south of the subantarctic convergence between 40° and 60° S (Carboneras 1992; Brooke 2004). In summer, it spreads across frigid Antarctic waters as far south as the pack ice (Weimerskirch & Robertson 1994; Phillips et al. 2005; Terauds & Gales 2006; Lawton et al. 2008; Mackley et al. 2010), but in winter, it ranges north into

temperate and subtropical seas.

The birds breed on several sub-Antarctic islands, including Heard, MacDonald, and Macquarie Islands (Australia), South Georgia (United Kingdom), Prince Edward and Marion Islands (South Africa), Iles Kerguelen and Crozet (France), and Auckland, Campbell, and Antipodes Islands (New Zealand), and forage over cold Antarctic waters as far south as the pack ice in summer (ACAP 2012). This species is a biannual breeder that usually nests alone or in tiny colonies. Most eggs are placed between October and November; hatch between December and January; the chicks fledge between May and June (Croxall & Gales 1998). Breeding birds on Macquarie Island generally feed in shelf seas around the island, but they also use sub-Antarctic and Antarctic waters southwest of the island (BirdLife International 2004). The diet consists primarily of cephalopods and euphausiids but they also consume fish and carrion (Thomas 1982; Cooper & Klages 1995).

The worldwide population was estimated in 1998 to be 21,600 breeding pairs (Gales 1998); 5,000 breeding pairs, 25% of the global population, nest in the Auckland Islands (ACAP 2012), 1,850–2,450 pairs on Macquarie

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Image 1. Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebastria palpebrata* while rescuing from the beach.

Island, 1,949 pairs in the Crozet group, 5,000 pairs on South Georgia, 3,000–5,000 pairs on Kerguelen, at least 1,600 pairs on Campbell Island, and 170 pairs on the Antipodes Islands (Croxall & Gales 1998; Taylor 2000), 350 pairs on Marion Island, and 129 pairs on Prince Edward Island (ACAP 2012).

This note reports the sighting of an adult Light-mantled Albatross bird on 8 September 2020 at 1300 h at Anthoniyapuram beach (9.291806 N, 79.251155 E) at Rameswaram Island in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu state, India. This location is part of Palk Bay and near the Gulf of Mannar, an Important Bird Area (IBA) on India's southeastern coast (Balachandran 2006).

The second author spotted the bird on the seashore. The bird was quite frail, may be dehydrated, and unable to fly, and this was informed to the forest department (FD) by the fishermen. The FD people and the fishermen looked after the bird, rested it, and attempted feeding it before releasing it into the sea.

The Light-mantled Albatross has sooty plumage with a light grey back, a vinaceous dark brown head, darker wings and tail with the contrasting light grey back clearly distinguishing the white crescent framing the top of the



Image 2. Checking the feathers for any damage.

eye and the black bill with narrow pale bluish sulcus and white shafts (Harrison 1983, 1987; Enticott & Tipling 1997; Onley & Scofield 2007). The above description was found to be so fit for our bird that its identification was confirmed (Image 1&2).

The bird has not been previously recorded from southern Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) or the Oriental Region (Inskipp et al. 1996). This is the first

record from the region. It is assumed that the bird was driven to the location by a wind current or a storm; however, there was no storm in the vicinity. Behavioural studies (Spruzen & Woehler 2002) on Light-mantled Albatross found no association with a high or low-pressure system in the atmosphere for movement for foraging. As a result, in addition to pelagic birding, we must maintain close contact with our fellow fishermen to gain more such incredible bird sightings. This find also sheds light on bird migration away from well-known and established routes and sites.

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