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## Cape Town Pelagics Trip Report

8 February 2009

### HIGHLIGHTS

#### Northern Royal Albatross

Mako Shark jumping clear of the water!

A Cape Town Pelagics trip left Simonstown on 8 February 2009 guided by Cape Town Pelagics guide, Dalton Gibbs. The conditions were a bit bumpy to start with, with a south westerly wind crossing False Bay.

In Simonstown harbour were the usual **Cape** and **Hartlaub's Gull** and **Swift Terns**, with **Cape Gannet** and **Cape Cormorant** appearing once we were heading across False Bay. We stopped briefly at Cape Point to take in the view and checked out with the radio operator at the lighthouse. Almost as soon as we left the magnificent sea cliffs of Cape Point we found our first **White-chinned Petrels**, followed by **Sooty Shearwaters** in ones and twos. These were mixed with smaller groups of **Swift** and **Sandwich Terns** catching fish near Bellow's Rock.

The sea at this point was 10 deg C and a green murky colour; an indication of the mixing that had taken place as a result of the strong south-easterly winds that had blown all week. In these cold water conditions, **Cory's Shearwater** appeared in low numbers. These were followed some miles later by a lone **Shy Albatross** that travelled in our wake. We continued further out, crossing a band of low mist and then the shipping lane. Enquiries over the radio gave information of trawlers a long way out at the 30 nautical mile mark. We headed in this direction, picking up **Great Shearwater**, **Parasitic Jaeger** and a few **Sabine's Gulls** en route.

At the 25 mile mark we picked up the trawler on radar and finally got a visualise fix on her at 28 miles. At 33 Nautical miles we found her to be the "Rover" out of Saldanha Bay and she was in the process of lifting her nets. The water at this point was 20 deg C and had changed to the transparent blue green of the open ocean. A mass of several hundred **Black-browed Albatross** and **Shy Albatross** crowded in behind her, with a lone **Southern Giant Petrel** near our boat. Both **Wilson's** and **European Storm Petrels** came past in small groups, with a few **Sub-antarctic Skuas** around. **Cory's** and **Great Shearwater** were mixed into the feeding area, with **Sabine's Gulls** dropping in.

We searched through the hundreds of albatross that were present, eventually finding an **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross**. This individual had a snapped upper mandible, making it initially hard to find. Lunch was served and we worked the flocks of birds that had settled near and around our boat. A larger albatross got our attention as it rose from the water nearby, flying past us and giving great views – it was a **Northern Royal Albatross**. This magnificent adult bird even obliged us with a second view, crossing past the side of our boat so close that the back cutting line on its bill was visible.

After this excitement our trip back was relatively quiet apart from the **Mako shark** that jumped clean out of the water in front of the boat. Back in inside False Bay we viewed the sea cave below Da Gama Peak and then moved across to the Castle Rock colony to obtain views of the nesting **Bank Cormorants**. These rocks provided good comparison views of **Cape**, **Bank** and **White-breasted Cormorants**, with a single **Crowned Cormorant** near by. The adjacent rocks gave close up views of **Cape Fur Seals** that were quite smelly down wind!

A short stop off at the Boulders penguin colony gave us further close views of **African Penguin, Crowned Cormorant, Swift** and **Sandwich Terns** before we returned to Simonstown Harbour.

Bird species seen and approximate numbers:

Swift Tern	coastal
Hartlaub's Gull	coastal
Cape Gull	coastal
Cape Cormorant	coastal
Bank Cormorant	coastal
Crowned Cormorant	coastal - 3
White-breasted Cormorant	coastal
African Penguin	coastal
Cape Gannet	coastal & pelagic - 100
Africa Black Oystercatcher	coastal - 4
White-chinned Petrel	300
Southern Giant Petrel	1
Sooty Shearwater	300
Great Shearwater	200
Cory's Shearwater	100
Shy Albatross	800
Black-browed Albatross	600
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	1
Northern Royal Albatross	1
Wilson's Storm Petrel	100
European Storm Petrel	100
Sabine's Gull	50
Parasitic Jaeger	4
Sub-antarctic Skua	2

Mammals:

Cape Fur Seal	
Humpback Whale	1

**A message from Cape Town Pelagics:** A huge thank you to our experienced skippers who are able to safely lead us to the best birding areas and skillfully manoeuvre the boat into just the best position while all on board are busy concentrating on the birds! Coordinating a pelagic trip over a year in advance with guests from all across South Africa and different countries around the world requires an organised office team. We thank them for their special eye for detail - and for the sometimes last-minute rearrangements and frustration if the weather delays the trip to another day! Our biggest thank-you is to our Cape Town Pelagics guides who take time out of their work, often involving seabirds and conservation, and time away from their families, to provide our guests with a world-class birding experience. Cape Town Pelagics donates all its profits to seabirds, and so all the participants who join the trip make a contribution towards albatross research and conservation – a big thank you from all of us.

By Cape Town Pelagics Tour Leader Dalton Gibbs