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Cape Town Pelagics Trip Report

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A Cape Town Pelagic trip left Simonstown on Saturday 21st November guided by Cape Town Pelagics guide Dalton Gibbs. There was some south-westerly wind as a small low pressure system passed near the Cape.

In Simonstown harbour were the usual **Cape** and **Hartlaub's Gull**, **Swift Terns** and an **African Black Oystercatcher**. Out in False Bay we soon came across **Cape Gannet** and lines of **Cape Cormorant**. We stopped briefly at Cape Point for its magnificent views and checked out with the radio operator at the lighthouse. Soon after leaving the Point we came across 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.

There were obviously large amounts of bait fish in the water and the echo sounder soon showed shoals of what was probably Snoek, a larger predatory fish, below us. On the surface we came across **Parasitic Jaeger** (**Arctic Skua**) that obligingly flew alongside the boat for a bit. The sea temperature at this point was 10.5 deg C and a green murky colour; an indication of deep cold water from the Benguela current that mixed in this area with the warmer Mozambique current. In these cold water conditions, **Cory's Shearwater** soon appeared, followed some miles later by a few immature **Shy Albatross**. Mixed into a group of **White-chinned Petrels** loafing on the water was a **Manx Shearwater**. We continued further out, crossing the shipping lane and started our search for trawlers. Our enquiries over the radio gave no information of trawlers. We continued travelling out, finding numbers of **Sabine's Gull** and **Great Shearwater**. A fine example of a **Sub-antarctic Skua** flew along with us for some way; at times coming almost at arms length above us. For some reason it took exception to the radio antennae and attempted to bite it whilst we were travelling; which was no mean feat with the pitching of the boat. At the 25 Nautical mile mark we still found no signs of trawler boats despite a radar search. At this point the water was a balmy 20,5 degrees with a transparent blue colour of oceanic waters. We took a leisurely morning snack and then proceeded to chum the water with pilchard that we had brought for this eventuality.

Alan cut up the pilchards with the skill of a sushi chef and soon we were rewarded with low numbers of **Great Shearwater**, **Sooty Shearwater**, **Shy Albatross** and an adult **Black-browed Albatross**. Another **Sub-antarctic Skua** fought off **Cape Gull** and both **Wilson's** and **European Storm Petrels** made an appearance in low numbers.

With half a box of pilchards left we decide to try throwing some chum into the colder waters closer to the coast. On the way back we came across two whale blows, but failed on both accounts to find the animals. These were possibly made by Bryde's Whales. At about the ten mile mark we chummed the water and four sightings were made of **Manx Shearwater**, mixed in with **Shy Albatross**, **White-chinned Petrel** and **Sooty Shearwater**. A single immature **Black-browed Albatross** made an appearance with more **Sabine's Gulls** around.

By this stage the wind had picked up and we retired to the shelter of False Bay to eat lunch under the sea cliffs, viewing the sea caves below Da Gama Peak. After lunch we moved across to Castle Rock colony to obtain views of the nesting **Bank Cormorants**. These rocks provided good comparison views of **Cape, Bank and White-breasted Cormorants**. The adjacent rocks gave close up views of **Cape Fur Seals** and close up smells when we were down wind of the colony!

At the Boulders penguin colony we got close up views of the resident **African Penguins** before we returned to Simonstown Harbour. Although this was one of the unusual occasions in which we didn't find a trawler, we never the less picked up a good range of pelagic species with chumming.

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, 1
White-breasted Cormorant	coastal
African Penguin	coastal
Cape Gannet	coastal & pelagic, 150
Africa black Oystercatcher	coastal, 2
White-chinned Petrel	300
Sooty Shearwater	250
Great Shearwater	100
Cory's Shearwater	150
Manx Shearwater	5
Shy Albatross	70
Black-browed Albatross	2
Wilson's Storm Petrel	70
European Storm Petrel	70
Sabine's Gull	100
Parasitic Jaeger	2
Sub-antarctic Skua	2

Mammals:

Cape fur seal

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 bird research and conservation – a big thank you from all of us

By Cape Town Pelagics Tour Leader Dalton Gibbs.