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Cape Town Pelagics Trip Report

4 October 2008

HIGHLIGHTS

Southern Royal Albatross

Wandering Albatross

A Cape Town Pelagic trip left Simonstown on 4 October 2008 guided by Cape Town Pelagics guide, Dalton Gibbs. A light south easterly wind greeted us as we headed out to the trawling grounds, past Cape Point and beyond.

At the harbour entrance we came across our first **Southern Right Whale** as well as the usual coastal **Cape Gannet**, **Swift Tern**, **Cape Gull** and **Hartlaub's Gull**. Groups of **African Penguins** gathered on the rocks at the Boulders Beach penguin colony for the morning's fishing.

We stopped at Cape Point to take in the view and to judge the swell conditions before heading further out. Soon we came across a lone **Parasitic Jaeger** that was harassing **Swift Terns**. This bird was much in the same place as a lone bird the previous week. A few **White-chinned Petrels** appeared flying past and soon we had our first views of **Shy Albatross**.

We passed through the shipping lanes, with several large oil tankers and cargo ships near by as we sought out fishing trawlers. Soon we located two of them on the horizon, some 20 miles west of Cape Point and headed toward them. En route we picked up a few **Sooty Shearwater** and **Great Shearwater**. A single **Southern Giant Petrel** made a close pass at us in the hopes of some food before moving off. As we approached the first trawler, the Saldanha Harvest, **Shy Albatross**, **Black-Browed Albatross** and **Pintado Petrels** started to appear.

The trawler raised her nets at 11:00, drawing in a few dozens **Shy** and **Black-Browed Albatross**. **Pintado Petrels**, **Great Shearwater** and **White-chinned Petrels** were present in numbers, mixed in with comparatively low numbers of **Sooty Shearwater**. **Wilson's Storm Petrels** appeared in numbers, only to temporarily disappear and then reappear throughout the rest of our time at the trawlers. Two **Southern Giant Petrel** made an appearance when a large albatross crossed the group of feeding birds and headed toward the second trawler some distance away. It was a **Southern Royal Albatross** that showed a several times above waves before heading off.

After this excitement we moved toward the other trawler, finding a lone **Subantarctic Skua** sitting on the water in front of us and providing good views. Further sightings of **Southern Giant Petrels** were interspersed with a single **Northern Giant Petrel**. A single pale tern was about, having the characteristics consistent for **Antarctic tern**. We stayed with the trawler for a while, checking the albatross present and found a single **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross**. This bird was seen on several occasions, circling the offal behind the trawler.

As lunch was about to make the rounds, a large albatross was spotted by Thomas Falk and gave views of a young **Wandering Albatross** showing off its wings patches. This bird made a fly past the boat, giving great close up views.

After an excellent lunch we set off for home, checking the birds along the way.

Back in inside False Bay we took a slow tour along the cliffs below Cape Point and had good close up views of **White-Breasted** and **Cape Cormorants**. At the Castle Rock colony we got good views of nesting **Bank Cormorants** and two **Crowned Cormorants**. A pair of **African Black Oystercatcher** was about amongst the colony of Cape fur seals on the rocks. At Boulders we drifted near the rocks and had close up views of **African Penguin** feeding groups. Back in Simonstown we found another **Crowned Cormorant** showing good identification features to round off the day.

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
White-breasted Cormorant	coastal
African Penguin	coastal
Cape Gannet	coastal & pelagic – 100
Africa Black Oystercatcher	coastal - 2
Subantarctica Skua	1
Antarctic Tern	1
White-chinned Petrel	300
Pintado Petrel	300
Southern Giant Petrel	5
Northern Giant Petrel	1
Sooty Shearwater	100
Great Shearwater	300
Shy Albatross	70
Black-browed Albatross	70
Southern Royal Albatross	1
Wandering Albatross	1
Wilson's Storm Petrel	150
Parasitic Jaeger	1

Mammals:

Southern Right Whale
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 albatross research and conservation – a big thank you from all of us.

Trip Report by Cape Town Pelagics guide Dalton Gibbs.