



Director Callan Cohen: [callan@birdingafrica.com](mailto:callan@birdingafrica.com)

mobile: +27 83 256 0491

Pelagic enquiries: [info@capetownpelagics.com](mailto:info@capetownpelagics.com)

office: +27 21 531 9148

fax: +27 21 531 8289

4 Crassula Way, 7405 Pinelands, Cape Town, South Africa

## Cape Town Pelagics Trip Report

16 August 2008

### HIGHLIGHTS

**Wandering Albatross** x 2

**Northern Royal Albatross** x 2

Cape Town Pelagics guide Dalton Gibbs led this trip out of Hout Bay on Saturday 16 August. The boat was virtually brand new and equipped with a great radar navigation system that would help in our quest to find trawlers.

A cold front had just by the Cape and a light south-easterly wind was blowing. There was some in-shore swell as we headed out and the boat was soon drenched in spray as we set out for the deep water. In shore, **Cape Gannet**, **Swift Tern**, **Cape Gull** and **Hartlaub's Gull** accompanied us even though these birds had to contend with a head wind. By the time we reached beyond the Kommetjie and Duiker Points, we had seen our first **White-chinned Petrel** which kept up with us as we moved out at 20 knots. Soon a **Sooty Shearwater** appeared followed by a lone **Shy Albatross**.

By 10 nautical miles out, the skipper quickly slacked off on the engines as we suddenly came across a huge **sunfish**. These are the largest of the bony fish in the ocean, and its size was apparent from its pectoral fin that appeared above the water in our wake!

With the aid of the navigational radar, we soon located a trawler, the "Vera Marine" out of Cape Town. We headed out toward her, on the way coming across a school of **Common Dolphin** that played around the back of the boat for a while. A small group of **African Penguin** also appeared in the ocean, displaying just how far out these birds travel to catch fish.

We found our first **Black-browed Albatross**, an adult, just before the trawler, as well as **Pintado Petrel** and **Wilson's Storm Petrel** that started to appear in small numbers.

At the boat the scene was fairly quiet, with a hundred or so **Shy** and **Black-browed Albatrosses**, **Swift Tern**, **Cape Gull** and **Pintado Petrel** in attendance, waiting for the nets to be lifted and fish processing to start. **Cape Fur Seals** were soon evident, shadowing the boat and waiting for an easy picking when the net surfaced. A dozen or so **Subantarctic Skua** were in attendance, ready to dive on the any food that may appear.

A **Southern Giant Petrel** gave a fly over of our boat, giving a good display of the bill colour to distinguish the species. A second trawler, the Andromeda, passed close by us, drawing behind it a mixed flock of the various pelagic species.

We stayed with the Vera Marine until 10:30 when the nets were hauled in and fish offal was discharged. By this stage several hundred **Shy** and **Black-browed Albatrosses** were behind the trawler, showing all the different age class stages. Travelling behind the trawler, we had ample opportunity to check the identification of birds as they made their way past us. Apart from numerous **Swift Terns** that were out there, a single small tern stayed close to our boat for a while, showing enough features for it to be identified as a **Common Tern**.

After half an hour or so the skipper yelled from behind his new fancy glass wheel house window and those of us on the front bow locked onto where he was frantically pointing. Taking off from the water was a very large

albatross that dwarfed the birds around it. We quickly got onto the birds patterning and it proved to be a sub-adult **Wandering Albatross** with developing wing patches.

No sooner had the “wheehee” and “yahoo” cries of satisfaction ended, when someone called out that the bird was on the water up ahead. We watched as this large bird rose from the water on the left hand side of the boat close past us, only this time the wing patterning showed that it was a **Northern Royal Albatross**.

From the range this huge bird flew past us, the photographers on board were shuffling backwards to fit the bird into the picture and Jan got some excellent photos. A single **Northern Giant Petrel** made a brief fly over and disappeared into a feeding group of birds.

We worked hard at sorting through albatross for the yellow-nosed species, and soon found what turned out to be another **Wandering Albatross**. This bird flew and then repeatedly landed on the water, allowing for excellent views. It turned out to be a different individual and younger than the first bird we had seen. To top this, another **Northern Royal Albatross** was found on the water, allowing close views. This bird also appeared to be a different individual and the cameras clicked away.

We continued our search for yellow-nosed albatross, but unfortunately in the afternoon we had to head for shore as a southern wind had started to pick up. Upon entering Hout Bay, we made a turn past the local seal colony, finding **Bank, Crowned, Cape and White-breasted Cormorants** on the rocks. **Cape Fur Seals** were present in large numbers and covered the rocks like shaggy moss.

Thanks to our skipper for a great trip and for finding those trawlers.

Species seen and approximate numbers:

Wandering Albatross	2
Northern Royal Albatross	2
Swift Tern	coastal
Common Tern	1
Hartlaub's Gull	coastal
Cape Gull	coastal
Subantarctic Skua	50
Cape Cormorant	coastal
Bank Cormorant	coastal
Crowned Cormorant	coastal
White-breasted Cormorant	coastal
Cape Gannet	coastal & pelagic - 40
Northern Giant Petrel	1
Southern Giant Petrel	6
White-chinned Petrel	2000
Sooty Shearwater	1500
Shy Albatross	1000
Black-browed Albatross	1000
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	300

**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.

Trip Report by Cape Town Pelagics guide Dalton Gibbs