



Cape Town Pelagics - Trip Report - Thursday, 22 December 2022

Highlights included: **Northern Royal Albatross**, Sabine's Gull, both Northern and Southern Giant Petrel, Parasitic and Pomarine Jaeger, *chilensis* subspecies of Wilson's Storm Petrel.

Number of bird species: 30



We departed Simon's Town in beautiful summer conditions and made good time on the run south to Cape Point. Along the way we enjoyed a fantastic variety of typical coastal seabird groups including gulls (**Kelp, Hartlaub's**), terns (**Great crested, Common, Sandwich**) and cormorants (**Cape, Crowned, White-breasted**). Good numbers of **African Penguins** were present onshore at the Boulders Beach colony.

After a quick photo stop below the majestic cliffs at Cape Point, our skipper set a course out to the fishing grounds around the Cape Canyon. Our route took us passed several small mixed feeding groups of **Great Crested Terns, White-chinned Petrels**, and both **Cory's** and **Sooty Shearwaters**. All of this activity caught the interest of both **Parasitic** and **Pomarine Jaegers**. Some on board got a very quick view of a fast and distant **Manx Shearwater** darting amongst the larger seabirds. A few **Cape Gannets** were spotted as well.

Away from the coast, the first **White-capped (Shy)** and **Black-browed Albatrosses** were sighted with the former becoming a constant fixture all the way out to the canyon.

At 27 nautical miles offshore, a trawler came into view and we followed it for the rest of the morning. The ship was trailing moderate numbers of **White-capped** and **Black-browed Albatrosses**, **Northern Giant Petrels** and the usual mixed flocks of **White-chinned Petrels** and **Great** and **Sooty Shearwaters**. Both **European** and **Wilson's Storm Petrels** were common, including a few of *chilensis* subspecies of Wilson's. Other notable sightings included a single, distant **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross**, a single **Sabine's Gull**, **Southern Giant Petrel** and **Brown Skua**, and a pair of **Arctic Terns**.

After a slow start, the number of birds sky-rocketed as the ship pulled in its nets in the late morning. After fully enjoying the spectacle on offer, we began to systematically work through the long trail of seabirds behind the trawler. Our efforts delivered a fantastic immature **Northern Royal Albatross**, a rare visitor to the South African coast!! After cracking views of this regional rarity, we made a few more sweeps through the birds before starting back towards the coast.



A Northern Royal Albatross dwarfs a Shy Albatross

Just offshore of Cape Point, we found a massive pod of a thousand plus **Dusky Dolphins**, feeding on a shoal of bait fish. The dolphins were joined by smaller numbers of **White-chinned Petrels**, **Cory's** and **Sooty Shearwaters** and mostly **Great Crested Terns**.

Back in False Bay, we stopped for lunch in the shallows offshore of Buffelsbaai. A noisy pair of **African Oystercatchers** made a quick fly-by. We also added several terrestrial mammals to the trip list, including **Chacma Baboon**, **Eland** and **Bontebok**. From here we made our way north, visiting the

Partridge Point **Bank Cormorant** colony en-route. We made a quick pass of the nearby **Cape Fur Seal** haul-out before heading back to port.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Northern Royal Albatross – 1
White-capped (Shy) Albatross – 300
Black-browed Albatross – 20
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross - 1
Northern Giant Petrel – 15
Southern Giant Petrel – 1
Sooty Shearwater – 500
Cory Shearwater - 650
Great Shearwater – 25
Manx Shearwater - 1
White-chinned Petrel – 500
Wilson’s Storm Petrel – 50
European Storm Petrel - 200
Cape Gannet – 20
Brown (Sub-Antarctic) Skua – 1
Parasitic Jaeger – 3
Pomarine Jaeger - 1
Sabine’s Gull - 2

Coastal species seen and approximate numbers:

African (Black) Oystercatcher - 2
African Penguin – onshore at Boulders
White-breasted Cormorant – 12 breeding pairs
Cape Cormorant – abundant
Crowned Cormorant – 1
Bank Cormorant – 19 breeding pairs
Kelp Gull – abundant
Hartlaub’s Gull – 5
Great Crested Tern – common
Common Tern – 25
Sandwich Tern - 5
Arctic Tern – 2

Marine mammal

Cape Fur Seal – abundant (coastal and pelagic)
Dusky Dolphins – 1000+

A Cape Town Pelagic Trip Report by Tour Leader [Vincent Ward](#)

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.



Northern Royal Albatross glides effortlessly passed our boat.