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Cape Town Pelagics Trip Report

22 July 2008

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Northern Royal Albatross! **1 Spectacled Petrel!**

On 22 July 2008 a small group of birders met Cape Town Pelagics guide Cliff Dorse with the great anticipation of the mid winter Cape Pelagic which lay ahead. It was the first pelagic birding trip for all the guests on board so lifers started to flow with the appearance of the first **White-chinned Petrels** and **Sooty Shearwaters** shortly after we reached Cape Point. This was then followed by **Subantarctic Skua** and our first albatross for the day in the form of an immature **Shy Albatross**. Next on the menu was an adult **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross** and our first **Pintado Petrels**. The first few **Antarctic Prions** were frustratingly fleeting and distant and a solitary **Soft-plumaged Petrel** put in a brief appearance. The very calm conditions were not conducive to these highly specialised seabirds and is probably the reason why this was the only Pterodroma of the day.

At about 20 miles we could see two trawlers in the distance. They were equidistant from us. The skipper decided to head in the direction of the trawler to the north. This proved to be a very wise decision and as we drew closer a second, then a third and finally a fourth trawler came into view. As we approached the closest vessel the numbers of birds started to grow steadily and we added **Black-browed Albatross** and **Wilson's Storm Petrel**.

The sheer number of birds around the vessel was staggering. The **Prions** were relatively scarce but a few birds showed well allowing all on board good views. As we wallowed around in the wake of the vessel we picked up the bird of the day - a young **Northern Royal Albatross**. This magnificent bird was sitting on the water directly in front of the boat. Just as we got everyone on board sighting the bird it took flight and effortlessly glided away. An attempt to follow the Northern Royal was quickly abandoned as the whirling mass of thousands of birds made this impossible!

We then visited a second nearby trawler, which had far less birds behind it. It was interesting to note that proportionately there were far less albatross in attendance. After about 20 minutes we were tempted to a third vessel which was actively trawling a short distance away. We spent some time in close observation waiting for the net to be retrieved, all the while trying to pick out any rarities that might be amongst the large gathering of seabirds. Eventually we were rewarded with a **Spectacled Petrel** which was feeding on the water. The only **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross** of the day also put in a brief appearance. This proved to be the last pelagic species to be added to the day list. After the trawler had hauled its net on board we turned and headed back towards terra firma.

The trip back was uneventful besides a quick stop to view the **Bank Cormorants** at Castle Rock. Thanks to skipper who managed to locate the trawlers and get to them very quickly, which enabled us to spend extended periods birding in the wake of these fishing vessels. It was really a truly spectacular winter pelagic with thousands of birds.

Pelagic birds seen

Northern Royal Albatross	1
Shy Albatross	400
Black-browed Albatross	500
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	30
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	1
Yellow-nosed Albatross (Immature)	5
Southern Giant Petrel	5
Pintado Petrel	1200
Soft-plumaged Petrel	1
White-chinned Petrel	500
Spectacled Petrel	1
Sooty Shearwater	500
Wilson's Storm Petrel	20
Subantarctic Skua	40

The following species were common close to the coast:

African Penguin
Cape Gannet
White-breasted Cormorant
Cape Cormorant
Bank Cormorant
Kelp Gull
Hartlaub's Gull
Swift Tern

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 Cliff Dorse.