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## Cape Town Pelagics Trip Report

28 September 2008

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### HIGHLIGHTS

Northern Royal Albatross

A Cape Town Pelagics trip left Simonstown on 28 September 2008 lead by Cape Town Pelagics guide, Dalton Gibbs. This new boat still had the smell of new resin in her cabin and a radar navigation system that would help in our quest to find trawlers. Fine weather with calm conditions prevailed after a week of cold fronts and much rain in Cape Town.

Just outside the harbour entrance we soon came across our first **Southern Right Whale** for the day; two animals lolled in the water nearby smacking the water with their huge fins. The usual coastal **Cape Gannet**, **Swift Tern**, **Cape Gull** and **Hartlaub's Gull** were about, as well as packs of **African Penguin** gathering on the rocks of the Boulders Penguin colony for the morning's fishing.

The run across False Bay was fairly quiet, with coastal birds appearing from time to time. We stopped at Cape Point to take in the view and soon afterwards came across **Cape Gannet** and **Swift Terns** working a shoal of pelagic fish. Just below the surface **Yellowfin Tuna** were visible as they chased bait fish. A handful of **White-chinned Petrels** appeared amongst this feeding group, with a few **Sooty Shearwaters** a bit further off Cape Point. A lone **Parasitic Jaeger** harassed these birds, much in the same place as a lone bird was seen the week before. As we headed for deeper water, **Shy Albatross** appeared in small numbers.

Over the radio we were given news of a trawler some way out and set off for the deep. This trawler appeared on the radar and we set off toward her, a **Subantarctic Skua** following us for a while. As we approached the trawler, a lone **Sabine's Gull** and a few **Wilson's Storm Petrel** made an appearance alongside.

The trawler was the "Saldanha harvest" that set her nets shortly after we arrived. Here there were birds collecting behind her, with a few dozens shy and black-browed albatross. **Pintado Petrels** were present in numbers, mixed in with **Sabine's Gull**, **Sooty Shearwater**, **Great Shearwater** and **White-chinned Petrels**. A **Southern Giant Petrel** crossed our path, followed shortly by a second bird. **Subantarctic Skuas** shadowed the feeding birds below, swooping down from time to time. A small pale tern appeared amongst the mix of birds with the characteristics consistent for **Antarctic Tern**. We stayed with the trawler for a while, checking the albatross present for yellow-nosed birds. A third **Southern Giant Petrel** made its appearance.

After an excellent lunch we slowing set off for home, checking the birds that stretched out in an extended line behind the trawler. A call went up to check a large bird coming from behind the boat and in came a **Northern Royal Albatross**, giving us a perfect fly by to the left of the boat!

Back at Cape Point a lone **Parasitic Jaeger** was in the area, possibly the same bird that we had seen in this area on the way out earlier in the day. Back 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** as well as terrestrial birds such as rock martin and white-necked raven. At the Castlerock colony we got good views of nesting **Bank Cormorants** and a single **Crowned Cormorant** that unfortunately wouldn't stay put to allow for good views.

A single **African Black Oystercatcher** made a brief appearance near the colony of **Cape Fur Seals** on the rocks. At Boulder's we drifted near the rocks and had close up views of African Penguin feeding groups. A **Southern Right Whale** just outside the harbour appeared near our boat, rolling onto its back and showing us its extensive belly. Back in Simonstown we retired to the Yacht Clubhouse and came across a **Crowned Cormorant** that obediently sat on a rock in front of us whilst we picked up the 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, 1
Subantarctica Skua	10
Antarctic Tern	1
White-chinned Petrel	500
Pintado Petrel	300
Southern Giant Petrel	3
Sooty Shearwater	500
Great Shearwater	30
Shy Albatross	100
Black-browed Albatross	70
Northern Royal Albatross	1
Wilson's Storm Petrel	100
Parasitic Jaeger	1
Sabine's Gull	15

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

Trip Report by Cape Town Pelagics guide Dalton Gibbs.