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## Cape Town Pelagics Trip Report

24 January 2009

A Cape Town Pelagics trip left Simonstown on Saturday January 24<sup>th</sup> guided by Cape Town Pelagics guide Dalton Gibbs. The conditions were near perfect, with a calm over False Bay after strong south easterly winds that had lashed the Cape recently.

In Simonstown harbour were the usual **Cape** and **Hartlaub's Gull**, **Swift Tern** as well **Sandwich Terns** and a single **African Black Oystercatcher** on the floating buoys. A small group of **African Penguins** broke the water near the Boulders penguin colony, along with **Cape Gannet** and **Cape Cormorant** flying out for fishing. We had a brief stop at Cape Point in unusually calm conditions and checked out with the radio operator at the lighthouse. The sea cliffs and scenery were magnificent in the early morning light. As we passed Cape Point and headed for deeper waters we came across occasional mixed flocks of **Swift** and **Sandwich Terns** working shoals of fish near Bellow's Rock.

A few miles passed Bellow's Rock we came across our first **Sooty Shearwater**, which was followed by others in brief intervals. **White-chinned Petrel** followed in small numbers, as well as a patch of a dozen or so **Cory's Shearwater**. We continued outward and came across our first **Shy Albatross** at about the 10 mile mark; soon after we entered warm clear oceanic water and the sea temperature rose to 20 degrees Centigrade. A **Mako Shark** appeared next to the boat and we had brief views of this beautiful open ocean shark with its long tail.

At the 20 mile mark we picked up a distant trawler and headed toward her, finding a lone **Sub-antarctic Skua** and a few **Sabine's Gulls** along the way. Just short of the trawler a few **Shy Albatross** and **Great Shearwater** made an appearance. We met up with the trawler, the "Freesia" out of Cape Town, and travelled with her for the next 2 hours, monitoring the mixed flock that swirled around her stern. Within a short time we picked up **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross** and a **Parasitic Jaeger (Arctic Skua)** that was harassing **Cape Gulls** for their food. A few **Southern Giant Petrels** were about and **Wilson's Storm Petrel's** started to make an appearance in ones and twos.

We travelled along behind the Freesia, enjoying an excellent leisurely lunch, whilst working the flock. Our persistence was rewarded as we picked up **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross** that eventually gave us excellent views as it settled on the water near the boat. We continued to check the **Storm Petrels**, but were unable to locate any **European Storm Petrels**, but found a **Northern Giant Petrel** that gave good views. As the Freesia turned southwards later in the day, we turned for home.

Our trip back was relatively quiet until about 10 miles from land the characteristic forward blow of a **Hump-backed Whale** was sighted. We slowed the boat down and drifted near to this huge animal that ignored our presence, giving us excellent views of the characteristic back and a huge pectoral fin. When the animal finally dived it left a large calm slick of water on the top of the ocean where it had been. Back inside False Bay we viewed the sea cave below Da Gama Peak and then moved across to Castle Rock colony to obtain views of the nesting **Bank Cormorants**. These rocks provided good comparison views of **Cape**, **Bank** and **White-breasted Cormorants**. The adjacent rocks held large numbers of **Cape Fur Seals** that were quite smelly down wind! A short stop off at the Boulders penguin colony gave us further close views of this bird and then on to Simonstown Harbour.

Bird species seen and approximate numbers:

Swift tern	coastal
Hartlaub's gull	coastal
Cape gull	coastal
Cape cormorant	coastal
Bank cormorant	coastal
White-breasted cormorant	coastal
African penguin	coastal
Cape gannet – coastal & pelagic	100
Africa black oystercatcher	coastal, 1
White-chinned petrel	90
Southern giant petrel	5
Northern Giant Petrel	1
Sooty shearwater	100
Great shearwater	50
Cory's Shearwater	70
Shy albatross	150
Black-browed albatross	150
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	2
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	3
Wilson's Storm Petrel	60
Sabine's Gull	50
Parasitic Jaeger	1
Sub-antarctic Skua	3

Mammals:

Cape fur seal	
Humpback Whale	1

**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.