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Cape Town Pelagics Trip Report

13 September 2008

A Cape Town Pelagics trip left Simon's Town on Saturday **13 September 2008** guided by Cape Town Pelagics guide Bruce Dyer. Our destination was about 20-25 miles SW of Cape Point in the Cape Valley trawl ground region. Another Cape Town Pelagics vessel led by Alvin Cope also headed out. The two vessels operated several miles apart but stayed in touch with each other via radio for the rarity that could turn up.

Cape and Crowned Cormorants, Hartaub's and Kelp Gulls, as well as **Swift Tern** were all present in the harbour area and offered good views. En route to Cape Point, several **Cape Gannet** and 3 immature **African Penguins** put in an appearance. A blow was seen some distance away east of Bellows, which Alvin's boat had seen better, and confirmed the whale as a **Humpback Whale**. Our vessel saw a **Southern Right Whale** wallowing off the Cape of Good Hope.

It was not long before several **White-chinned Petrel** were observed circling about which put our group in the mood for better things to come. About 18 NM off Cape Point we were given directions to find a trawler which we headed for and found. We were not disappointed, although the vessel had ceased fishing. Reasonable numbers of birds were attending. Exceptionally good views of all species attending the trawler were had (see list below). The highlight was a single **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross** sitting unobtrusively among a gaggle of **Black-browed** and **Shy Albatrosses**. The single **Northern Giant Petrel** observed was an adult bird, while all the **Southern Giant Petrels** were immature. A "Spectacled" **White-chinned Petrel** was seen and carefully viewed and some eye-ball pictures of it were taken by our group. The "ring" was clear on the left side but not on the right and the white chin was large and quite exaggerated. It however lacked the darkened bill-tip and the distinct white forehead (distinct even with birds that have a poorly defined "ring") of the genuine Spectacled Petrel.

We called it a day at noon as the conditions got balmier and the birds and trawler looking disinterested in any further activity. The lack of birds en route back was indicative of the windless conditions. Near Bellows, we checked out a large flock of **Sooty Shearwater** attending some surface disturbances which we believed to be a school of Atlantic Bonito (local name = Katonkel). Alan took us close to the cliffs from Rooikranz to Smitswinkel Bay where up to 500 nests of **Cape Cormorant** (and 3 **White-breasted Cormorant** nests) were observed. A pod of 3 **Dusky Dolphins** were seen in this area as well. We made a brief stop at Partridge Point Rocks to view the breeding colony of the highly endangered **Bank Cormorant**. One rock in the group had all four species of marine cormorant present. The rock with several dozen **Cape Fur Seal** was also viewed. We made a brief turn to Glencairn where we had a wonderful view of a **Southern Right Whale** before we headed back to the harbour.

Bird List

Cape Cormorant	1000
Bank Cormorant	40
White-breasted Cormorant	30
Crowned Cormorant	5
Hartlaub's Gull	3
Kelp Gull	50
Swift Tern	20
Cape Gannet	10
Black-browed Albatross	100
Shy Albatross	100
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	1
White-chinned Petrel	400
Southern Giant Petrel	3
Northern Giant Petrel	1
Pintado Petrel	10
Great Shearwater	200
Sooty Shearwater	200
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	100
Subantarctic (Brown) Skua	2

Mammals

Humpback Whale	1
Southern Right Whale	2
Dusky Dolphin	3
Cape Fur Seal	100

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 Bruce Dyer.