



## Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Saturday, 16 March 2019

Trip Highlights: Four albatross species, Northern & Southern Giant Petrel, Great Shearwater



Saturday morning saw a group of excited birders assemble at the False Bay Yacht Club for another Cape Town Pelagic Trip. We enjoyed a nice smooth run through False Bay enjoying the spectacular scenery and the usually coastal birds. We encountered our first **White-chinned Petrels** while still in the bay. At Cape Point we stopped to take a few pics of the iconic landmark.

Shortly after the point we started to see more White-chinned Petrels and our first **Sooty** and **Cory's Shearwaters** of the day. A little further out we encountered our first **Great Shearwaters**.

A somewhat unusual sighting at about four miles was of a **Porcupine Pufferfish** floating on the surface. We scooped it up to have a closer look. It showed some signs of life and had a couple of bizarre turquoise eyed crab larvae on it. We returned it to the ocean and continued on our way.

There was a fair bit of low cloud about which affected our ability to scan for fishing vessels in the distance. Luckily our skipper's fishing friends had let us know the whereabouts of a trawler in the deep and we headed in her direction. While there was minimal wind, the sea was rather choppy which slowed down our progress somewhat. At about 14 miles we had our first albatross of the day, an **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross**. This was soon followed by a couple of **Black-browed Albatross**. Next on the menu were **Shy albatross** and both **Wilson's** and **European Storm Petrels**. Eventually we could see the trawler, the '*Freesia*', and we headed in her direction.

The trawler was still busy with her first trawl of the day so was not actively processing any fish. However, the vast number of birds in the vicinity was seriously impressive. Here we picked out a **Spectacled Petrel** in flight which gave reasonable views. We also added **Atlantic Yellow-nose Albatross** and **Brown (Subantarctic) Skua** to the day list.

Cape Town Pelagic guide Vince Ward had also joined on the day, primarily to release a **Leach’s Storm Petrel** which he had rescued behind a trawler from two weeks before. The poor bird was in a water-logged and exhausted state when collected, but had been cared for at SANCCOB where it was nursed back to health. We ran a short distance away from the trawler and found a relatively quiet spot to release the bird. We were very excited to see it fly off strongly. We then returned to the chaos in the vicinity of the trawler.

Soon we saw that the ‘*Freesia*’ was retrieving her nets and we took up our position in her wake as the net arrived at the surface. We enjoyed the spectacle of thousands of birds competing for food as we followed in her wake. The vessel then turned and re-deployed her net. We spent several hours working through her wake and then running back up to the boat. The overall number of birds was impressive with lots of adult albatross in attendance, giving the trip a real winter feel. We had great views of all the birds mentioned above but also eventually managed to see both **Northern** and **Southern Giant Petrel**, as well as several **Arctic Terns**. We also briefly got another **Spectacled Petrel** (possibly the same bird as seen earlier) but were unable to relocate it in the mass of birds behind the trawler. Our decision to drift in the wake and enjoy our lunch paid off when we located our first **Sabine’s Gull** of the day. Unfortunately, it was starting to get late and finally we had to head for home.

The mandatory stop at the Bank Cormorant breeding colony at Partridge Point delivered **Bank, Cape** and **White-breasted Cormorant**. We also managed to find several **Crowned Cormorants** in the harbour. Our only cetacean for the day finally came in the form of a **Bryde’s Whale** off Miller’s Point.

**Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:**

Shy Albatross	200
Black-browed Albatross	80
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	20
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	4
Southern Giant Petrel	1
Northern Giant Petrel	1
White-chinned Petrel	±1500
Cory’s Shearwater	50
Great Shearwater	80
Sooty Shearwater	50
Wilson’s Storm-Petrel	800
European Storm-Petrel	500
Subantarctic Skua	10
Sabine’s Gull	10
Arctic Tern	10

**Coastal Species:**

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

**Mammals:**

Cape Fur Seal	
Bryde's Whale	1

Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide – [Cliff Dorse](#)

**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.