



## Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - 30 May 2021

**Trip Highlights:** Southern Fulmar, Spectacled Petrel, Manx Shearwater, Southern Giant Petrel



**Mass of Black-browed Albatross**

After gathering at the False Bay Yacht Club, we met up with our skipper, boarded our boat and slowly headed out of Simon's Town harbour. The wake control barriers, known locally as "the sausages" held a large flock of resting **Cape Cormorants**; peppered with a few **White-breasted Cormorants, Kelp** and **Hartlaub's Gulls**, and the occasional **Great Crested (Swift) Tern**. The beautifully flat conditions in False Bay made it easy to spot groups of **African Penguins** heading out from their colony at Boulder Beach.



The flat seas allowed us to make a fast run down to Cape Point. En-route we enjoyed a spectacular winter sun rising over the Eastern False Bay Mountains. The quiet run was punctuated by a distant **Humpback Whale** sleeping some distance away, but it sounded before it could be re-sighted. Instead we had to settle for rafts of resting **Cape Fur Seals** dotting the surface of the bay. Close to Cape Point we picked up our first **Cape Gannets**, followed shortly by both **Sooty Shearwaters** and **White-chinned Petrels**.

The seas around Cape Point delivered more "white-chins" and "sooties" and a distant **Giant Petrel**. The low morning light made the silvery underwing coverts of passing **Sooty Shearwaters** stand out very well. Just past the Point we picked up two probable **Common Terns**.

Several sports fishing boats radioed to say they had found a trawler 18 nautical miles offshore and we headed out to its position. Once in deeper waters, the first **Shy Albatross** of the day made a close pass to the boat. We then encountered a succession of additional "Shys" until reaching the trawler. With the trawler in sight, we quickly added a few **Black-browed Albatrosses**, plus our first **Antarctic Prions** and **Pintado Petrels**.

Initially there were very few of birds following the trawler, but never-the-less we picked up a good variety of new species for the day. This included **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross**, both **Northern** and **Southern Giant Petrels**, **Great** and **Cory's Shearwaters**, and good numbers of **Brown (Subantarctic) Skuas**.



**Indian yellow-nosed Albatross**

At mid-morning, the trawler slowed down and started to raise its nets. Consequently there was a sudden rush of seabirds hoping for an easy meal and once the net finally broke the surface there was a frenzy of diving **Cape Gannets**, and seals and albatrosses going after fish poking out of the net.

It was within this chaos that we had the best sea-birding of the day. The first big find was the first of two handsome **Spectacled Petrels** feeding alongside several **White-chinned Petrels**. Although this endangered seabird is becoming a regular in small numbers off the Cape, but it had been a while since our previous sighting.



One of two **Spectacled Petrel** seen on the trip.

The next call to go out was "**Southern Fulmar!**" - we quickly realised that the simultaneous calls were for two different birds! Sometime later we added a third sighting. This winter is shaping up to be a good year for this species. They tend to be sporadic winter visitors, with several seasons passing without any records.

A recent rash of interesting storm petrel sightings meant that we paid very close attention to these tiny seabirds, but sadly the large flocks present the previous weekend were absent. We did however pick up a trio of **Wilson's Storm Petrels** feeding over a slick of fish oil, along with masses of **Antarctic Prions**.

At midday we returned to the coast, stopping to investigate the flocks of terns and shearwaters following the schools of Yellowtail near Bellows Reef. This decision paid off well as we had views of several **Manx Shearwaters** and a young **Humpback Whale**.



**Southern Fulmar**

After a fantastic light lunch under the cliffs at Cape Point, we headed back to port via the cormorant colonies at Partridge Point. There the large granite stacks held good numbers of **Bank, Crowned, White-breasted** and **Cape Cormorants**. The nearby seal haul-out was not as full as previous trips but still held a few dozen resting **Cape Fur Seals**.



**Cape Fur Seals**

Just before the port, we spotted a few groups of **African Penguins** returning to Boulders. Our final "tick" for the trip was a pair of **African Oystercatchers** feeding along the "Sausages" in the yacht basin.

**Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:**

Shy/White-capped Albatross - 40  
Black-browed Albatross - 300  
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross - 3  
Northern Giant Petrel - 3  
Southern Giant Petrel - 2  
Giant-petrel spp - 1  
Sooty Shearwater - 15  
Manx Shearwater - 3  
White-chinned Petrel - 400  
Southern Fulmar - 2-3  
Spectacled Petrel - 2  
Cape (Pintado) Petrel - 300  
Wilson's Storm Petrel - 3

**Coastal species:**

African Penguin - 60  
Cape Gannet - Common  
White-breasted Cormorant - common  
Cape Cormorant - abundant  
Crowned Cormorant - 6  
Bank Cormorant - 30  
Kelp Gull - common  
Hartlaub's Gull - common  
Great Crested Tern - common  
Common Tern - 3  
African (Black) Oystercatcher - 3

**Marine mammal**

Cape Fur Seal - abundant  
Humpback Whale - 2

Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide [Vincent Ward](#)

Photos: Cape Town Pelagics guide [Mayur Prag](#)

**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.