



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Saturday, 10 September 2022

Trip Highlights: Six Albatross species including Tristan and Northern Royal, Cape Petrels, Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, Wilson's Storm Petrels, Soft-plumaged Petrels, Humpback Whales and Dusky Dolphins.



The changing season is a great time to go to sea. The last of the winter species can still be seen and the first of the summer ones will be returning. Plus, throw in a few Cape of Good Hope storms and you have a good chance of seeing something extra special.

It's getting lighter now at the time that we sail out of Simon's Town harbour. The day looked perfect with flat seas and little wind. **Kelp Gulls** called out a harsh departure and we headed off towards Cape Point. We met a wonderfully relaxed raft of **African Penguins** out foraging, saw the white rump of a breeding **Bank Cormorant** as it flew past us, and enjoyed the sharply pointed **Greater Crested Terns** that flew overhead.

Cape Point, ever spectacular from this angle was shrouded in light mist, but we still had great views of **Cape Gannets** and long strings of **Cape Cormorants** heading out to sea and we were soon surrounded by silvery-winged **Sooty Shearwaters**, skimming the waves. A couple of **Common Terns** fished nearby, and **White-Chinned Petrels** soon joined us as we headed out. We were lucky with a **Black-Browed Albatross** not far off Cape Point.

Our excellent skipper Alan, found a trawler which had finished its fishing, but still brought us outstanding close views of **Shy Albatrosses**, **Indian Yellow-Nosed Albatrosses**, **Cape Petrels**, a **Northern Giant Petrel** and one of the first **Great Shearwaters** of the summer. Not bad going for a little patch of ocean.

Nothing further was happening so we moved on to a couple of long-liner fishing boats a few miles away. They weren't bringing up their lines at that point, so we bobbed around for a while, a tactic that proved fruitful as we saw our first **Brown (Subantarctic) Skua** and **Southern Giant Petrel**. There was much excitement as a gorgeous **Soft-plumaged Petrel** circled us several times and a **Wilson's Storm Petrel** appeared briefly, its little feet clearly visible beyond its tail. Interestingly a lot of **Portuguese-Mon-o'-War** jellyfish were floating on the surface and we caught a glimpse of an **Atlantic Blue Shark** thanks to Alan.

We headed back to the long liner and were met with a lot of activity! **Shy**, **Black-browed** and **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatrosses** were everywhere and **Sandwich** and **Common Terns** were dipping in amongst the bigger birds, but there was a bigger, paler animal on the water a few hundred meters away. It seemed unusual – it was definitely a white back – one of the great albatrosses - with a pure white tail and dark wings. There was no defined cutting edge on the bill so Royal Albatrosses were ruled out, but the wings were too dark, with no whitening on the leading edge of the wing or from the body to match a white tail – it was an adult male **Tristan Albatross** – an incredible rarity! Unbelievable. He sat comfortably, guzzling dropped fish and dwarfing the nearby White-chinned Petrels, giving us all a perfect view.

A **Northern Royal Albatross** chose this time to circle us several times and we couldn't believe our luck! Not to be left out, an **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross** flew within meters of us, taking us to a total of six albatross species for the day.

We enjoyed the incredible spectacle for as long as we could but eventually had to head back towards shore.

The day however, was not done with us. Not far off Cape Point we saw a whale's tail in the distance and went towards it. Suddenly two **Humpback Whales** surfaced right next to us – a massive flipper practically spraying us with water. In the distance more humpbacks breached causing huge splashes on the horizon.

As a final treat, a pod of **Dusky Dolphins** guided us back towards False Bay keeping largely submerged, but then unable to resist riding at our bow.

We stopped for a light lunch in the calm waters of False Bay and finally we scanned the rocks at Partridge Point for **Bank Cormorants**, the small population all busy nesting. **White-breasted Cormorants and Cape Cormorants** dotted the rocks around them, but we had to wait until we were back in Simon's Town harbour before finding the smaller **Crowned Cormorant**.

There are no bad days at sea, but these pelagic trips just keep on giving. What an experience for everyone on board.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Shy Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	200
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	200
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche carteri</i>	35
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chlororhynchos</i>	1
Northern Royal Albatross	<i>Diomedea sanfordi</i>	1
Tristan Albatross	<i>Diomedea dabbenena</i>	1
Northern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	6
Southern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	4
White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procelleria aequinoctialis</i>	200
Cape Petrel	<i>Daption capense</i>	15
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardena grisea</i>	150
Wilson's Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	10
Brown (Subantarctic) Skua	<i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i>	25
Soft-Plumaged Petrel	<i>Pterodroma mollis</i>	6
Great Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gravis</i>	1

Coastal species seen and approximate numbers:

Cape Gannet	<i>Morus capensis</i>	50
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	100
White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>	8
Bank Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax neglectus</i>	16
Cape Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>	100
African Penguin	<i>Spheniscus demersus</i>	12
Great Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	10
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	4
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	8

Marine mammals:

Brown (Cape) Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>	20
Dusky Dolphins	<i>Delphinus capensis</i>	150
Humpback Whales	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	5

Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide, [Vanessa Stephen](#)

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.



Tristan Albatross