



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Sunday, 13 November 2022

Trip Highlights: Four Albatross species, Cape Petrels, Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, Wilson's and European Storm Petrels, Great Shearwater, Humpback Whales and Long-beaked Common Dolphins.



Summer is looming and the winds that are typical of the hot season held off nicely for today's pelagic out of Simon's Town and we headed out, with high hopes in early light to fine conditions.

A few **Cape Cormorants** were left to see us off and **Kelp Gulls** wheeled in the sky around us.

We made our way to Cape Point in perfect, flat conditions passing a couple of rafts of **African Penguins** heading out to forage. **Greater Crested Terns** headed out into False Bay, closely followed by snowy white **Sandwich Terns**.

We stopped at Cape Point for a safety check-in and to look and see if any trawlers were around. The Point, ever spectacular from this angle was already lively with long lines of **Cape Cormorants**, flying out en-masse.

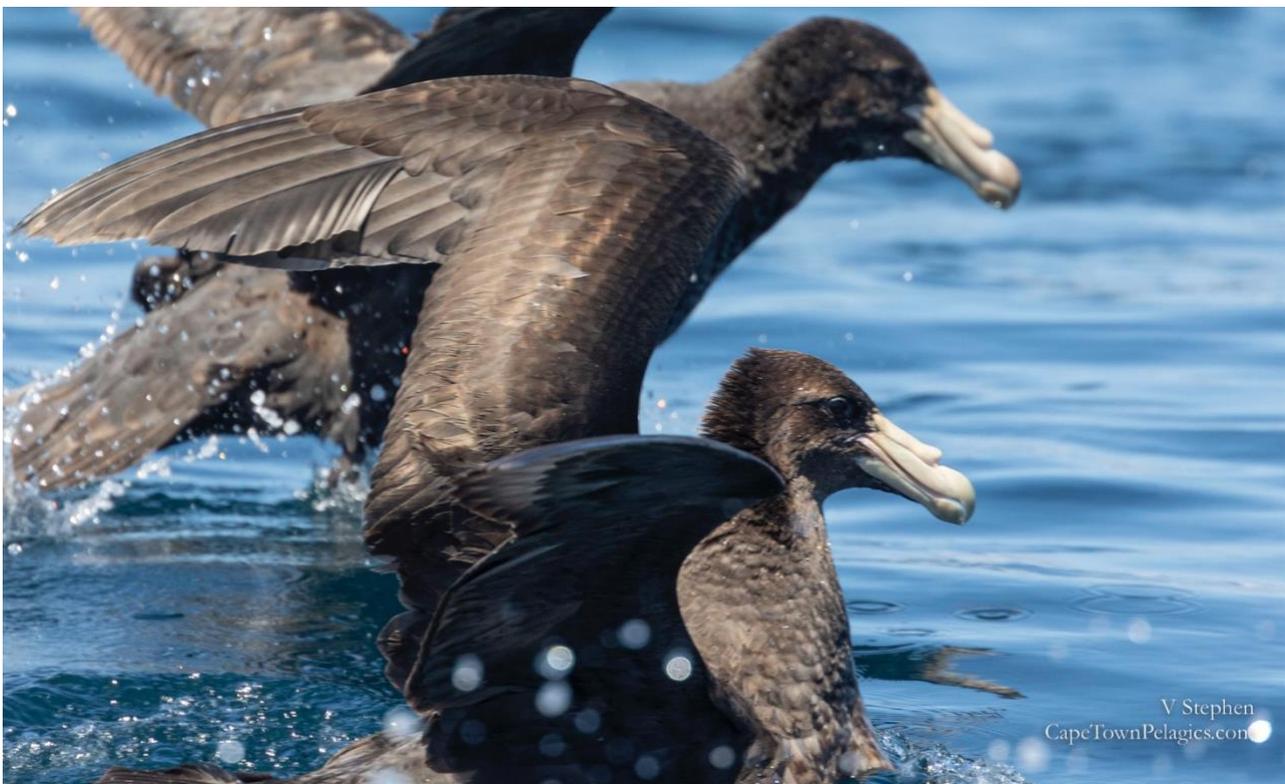
There were no trawlers to be found, but we headed out towards some remote possibilities, trying our luck and soon picked up the solid-bodied **White-chinned Petrels**, who dipped their wings to us on speedy flybys. After a few more miles we had our first frantically fluttering **Sooty Shearwater**, underwings flashing in the sunlight. We're used to seeing many of these birds, but today they kept their numbers low and made us work for them.

As we made our way further out we were suddenly joined by a small pod of **Long-nosed Common Dolphins**, who briefly enjoyed swimming next to our bow.

But the ocean turned quiet, with just the occasional **White-chinned Petrel** flying past us to check what we had to offer in the way of fish. We moved further towards the continental shelf and were rewarded with close views of a young **Humpback Whale**, playing with kelp and close enough for us to smell its breath! When we switched engines off, the head popped out of the water to give us a closer look, and then it was back to playing with kelp.

We headed further out and were rewarded with a fly past of pastel-coloured **Cape Gannets** and finally our first albatross – a juvenile **Black-Browed Albatross**!

But the empty seas persisted. We picked up a single **Shy Albatross** and a **Brown Skua** but not much more. Alan, our skipper found out about a possible trawler right on the limit to how far we could safely go. It was always possible that we could miss the boat if it carried on further South, but we decided to give it a try.



**Southern & Northern Giant Petrel**

And there it was – 40 miles out, a large trawler with a great deal of treasure behind it! The water was filled with large numbers of birds – high numbers of **Northern Giant Petrels** and a few **Southern Giant Petrels, Shy Albatrosses** and wonderful views of both **Indian** and **Atlantic Yellow Nosed Albatross**. **White-chinned Petrels** and **Sooty Shearwaters** skimmed between this mass of bigger birds, all squabbling over fish scraps from the trawler, and suddenly a black and white flash brought in what must be amongst the last of the season's dappled **Cape Petrels**.



**Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross**

We were looking for them and then suddenly, from nowhere, tiny **Wilson's Storm Petrels** appeared on the waves, soon joined by **European Storm Petrels**, newly arrived from their northern breeding grounds. Single **Great Shearwaters** sped past us intermittently, their dark caps contrasting with their white rumps. A big highlight had to be a massive **Sunfish**, casually swimming circles in amongst all these birds.

It was a wonderful spectacle and definitely one that was worth putting in the effort to get to, but far too soon, we had to make the long journey back to land.

The empty seas of earlier seemed to have disappeared and we were accompanied by Gannets, Petrels and Albatrosses most of the way. When we neared area known as The Bellows, we paused to see if we could pick up any jaegers, harassing the terns. We got better than that. A few **Sabine's Gulls** suddenly became a few hundred Sabines Gulls, floating on the water in what must have been a productive seam of water. **Common Terns** were fishing and in the distance we picked up two jaegers, harassing them for their food. We chased after them but could only get a dark outline of what we presume from the behaviour, were Parasitic Jaegers.

The tell-tale blow of whales nearby had us heading off to a safe distance – which the whales promptly ignored. We were suddenly surrounded by at least **10 Humpback Whales**. Everyone had an

astonishing view of a mammoth animal just a few meters from us. Heads and tails and flippers and smelly whale breath and us, open-mouthed in the centre of it all. Utterly miraculous. As we reluctantly left, one of these giants breached – throwing its entire body out of the water – not 50m from us. That’s not something that anyone will likely forget in a hurry.

Back in False Bay, we fell on the delicious sandwiches like gannets, amazed at the huge amount of life we’d seen after a slow start. Finally, we scanned the rocks at Partridge Point for **Bank Cormorants** which were picked out of a group of a 100 or so **Cape Cormorants** and spattering of **White-breasted Cormorants**. A couple of **Crowned Cormorants** were settled by themselves on adjacent rocks, apparently happy to have a little more space around them.

Another remarkable day at sea where the adage of going the extra mile (or 16), can really pay off. A very big thank you to our skipper, Alan for putting in the extra effort to get us those special birds.

**Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:**

Shy Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	50
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	3
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche carteri</i>	10
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chlororhynchos</i>	4
Northern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	20
Southern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	8
White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procelleria aequinoctialis</i>	100
Cape Petrel	<i>Daption capense</i>	4
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>	10
Wilson's Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	4
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>	10
Great Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gravis</i>	4
Brown (Subantarctic) Skua	<i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i>	4
Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	2
Sabine’s Gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>	250

**Coastal species seen and approximate numbers:**

Cape Gannet	<i>Morus capensis</i>	25
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	150
Crowned Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax coronatus</i>	2
White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>	8
Bank Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax neglectus</i>	16
Cape Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>	200
African Penguin	<i>Spheniscus demersus</i>	15
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	20
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	50
Sandwich tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	20

**Marine mammals:**

Brown (Cape) Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>	100
Long-beaked common dolphins	<i>Delphinus capensis</i>	10
Humpback Whales	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	12

**Other Notable Species:**

Sunfish	<i>Mola mola</i>	2
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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.



**Humpback Whale**