



## Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Saturday, 10 June 2023

**Trip Highlights:** Manx Shearwater, Shy Albatross and huge numbers of Sooty Shearwaters.



This trip report is the tale of a salvaged trip, which hovered on the brink of cancellation, but ended up delivering a rewarding and enjoyable day for all. On the morning of Saturday 10 June, we gathered at the False Bay Yacht Club only to receive the disappointing news from our skipper that the weather conditions had deteriorated substantially overnight, and getting to the trawling grounds would be impossible, with winds picking up steeply at midday.

Due to the disappointment all round, clients were offered the option to go out as far as Cape Point where 1000's of birds had been seen the previous day. Barring two guests, all opted for this alternative trip and so we left Simon's Town harbour and headed for Cape Point, to spend time in the vicinity of the Bellows and just beyond, hoping to connect with the large number of birds moving past Cape Point during the last few weeks.

Departure from the harbour delivered the customary enormous numbers of roosting **Cape Cormorants** in the harbour, as well as occasional **Kelp Gulls**, **Hartlaub's Gulls** and **Greater Crested Terns**. The return trip also delivered an **African Black Oystercatcher**, which was enjoyed by all, and particularly by our international clients.

The conditions were mild in False Bay, picking up slightly in terms of turbulence and wind around Cape Point. As per our plan, we spent a decent amount of time in the vicinity of the Point, which offered spectacular views as always. There were numerous fishing vessels around us, and with just cause, because the fish activity and attending bird life were present in very impressive numbers.

We enjoyed incredible numbers of **Sooty Shearwaters**, moving in huge loose flocks, and joined by a couple of **Manx Shearwaters**. This species is difficult to see well, and despite a few early rapid flyby views, it eventually delivered fantastic looks to everyone on board. At one stage we had two birds sitting on the water close to our boat.

Numerous **Cape Fur Seals** were present as usual, and a single brief whale blow was seen.



### **Manx Shearwater**

The Shearwaters were also joined by occasional **White-chinned Petrels**, and we had excellent views of a number of adult and immature **Shy Albatross**. A **Subantarctic (Brown) Skua** made a brief appearance. We also saw at least two individual **Northern Giant Petrels** on the day, demonstrating characteristic darker, reddish bill tip. Large numbers of **Cape Gannets** were seen in both adult and immature plumages.



**Sooty Shearwater**



**Northern Giant Petrel**

Beyond Cape Point, the conditions were initially fairly calm, and we proceeded to approximately 10 nautical miles beyond the Point, putting down oil in the water to draw in the birds. We had good numbers of **White-chinned Petrel** and **Shy Albatross**, but unfortunately we weren't deep enough to be in range of the more diverse and unusual deep water pelagic species. The wind picked up, and as always, safety comes first, and we headed back to the harbour.



**Shy Albatross**

We enjoyed an early lunch at the oil slick site courtesy of Lynn, and then headed back via the Cormorant colonies. We had excellent views of **Bank Cormorant**, with adult birds showing their beautiful multi coloured eyes. An unusual partially leucistic **Bank Cormorant** was also seen, as well as a single **Crowned Cormorant**, with the much more numerous **Cape Cormorants** and **White-breasted Cormorants**.

**Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:**

Shy Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	20
Northern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	
White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procelleria aequinoctialis</i>	50
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna griseus</i>	500
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	4
Brown (Subantarctic) Skua	<i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i>	1

**Coastal species seen and approximate numbers:**

Cape Gannet	<i>Morus capensis</i>	40
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	30
Hartlaub's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus hartlaubii</i>	5
White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>	10
Bank Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax neglectus</i>	15
Cape Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>	300+
Great Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	30
African Black Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus moquini</i>	1

**Marine mammals:**

Brown (Cape) Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>	30+
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Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide, Garret Skead

**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