



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Sunday, 20 February 2022

Trip Highlights: Three Albatross species, Manx Shearwater, Spectacled Petrel, Red Phalarope, Sunfish and Humpback Whale.



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Spectacled Petrel

Our group met at the Simon's Town Yacht Club at 07h00 on Sunday morning before setting off on our pelagic trip. It was mostly cloudy at first, there was barely a breeze worth mentioning and the waters off False Bay was as flat as a pancake. As the *Destiny* set off from Simon's Town harbour towards Cape Point, we soon began to tally up coastal seabird species such as **Cape Cormorants, Kelp Gulls, Common Terns and Greater Crested (Swift) Terns**, as well as a small raft of **African Penguins** just off Boulders Beach.

A quick safety check-in stop at Cape Point didn't immediately add new species to our day list, but shortly afterwards we started picking up a few pelagic bird species in the form of **Sooty Shearwater, Cape Gannet, Manx Shearwater** and a **Giant Petrel** that unfortunately didn't hang around long enough for full identification. Early on in the day we came across a trawler that was just making its way out to the trawling grounds, but as it wasn't actively fishing, no seabirds were yet to be seen in its wake.

Further highlights on our way out were a few breaches by a **Humpback Whale** and slightly further along we also encountered a smallish **Ocean Sunfish**, which obliged by swimming right up to our boat and gave us fantastic views. The rest of our trip out to the fishing grounds was reasonably productive bird-wise and we came across good numbers of **White-chinned Petrels**, **Cory's Shearwaters** and **Great Shearwaters**.

Our on-board Automatic Identification System (AIS), which tracks vessel traffic, picked up a trawler in the Cape Canyon area and upon approach, it was clear that we were in luck – hundreds of seabirds were milling about in the wake of the ship, and once it started pulling in its nets, the catch drew in even larger numbers of both birds and **Cape Fur Seals**. There were hundreds of both **Shy Albatross** and **Black-Browed Albatross**, **Wilson's** and **European Storm Petrels**, **Great Shearwaters**, **Cory's Shearwaters**, **White-chinned Petrels**, a few **Northern** and **Southern Giant Petrels**, a few **Arctic Terns** and **Sabines Gulls**, **Kelp Gulls**, one or two juvenile **Yellow-nosed Albatrosses** and at least two **Spectacled Petrels**.

After enjoying the birds around the boat for a couple of hours, it was time to head northwards again. Between the Cape Canyon and Cape Point, we continued to come across good numbers of birds seen previously during the day, but also managed to add a small flock of **Red Phalaropes** as well as a **Blue Shark** and another **Ocean Sunfish**. Just before Cape Point, we also found three more **Manx Shearwaters** along some **Sooty Shearwaters** and **Cory's Shearwaters**. En-route back to Simon's Town we enjoyed lunch and cold drinks in a relatively calm spot overlooking the Cape of Good Hope National Park. Our last stop was at Partridge Point where we visited the **Bank Cormorant** colony, which also hosted a few **White Breasted** and **Cape Cormorants**, and the **Cape Fur Seal** hang-out, after which we returned to the Simon's Town harbour after a wonderful day of birding out at sea.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Shy Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	500
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	300
Yellow-nosed sp. juvenile	<i>Thalassarche carteri/chlororhynchos</i>	2
Northern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	3
Southern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	3
Giant Petrel spp	<i>Macronectes sp.</i>	1
White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procelleria aequinoctialis</i>	400
Spectacled Petrel	<i>Procelleria conspicillata</i>	2
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris borealis</i>	250
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>	100
Great Shearwater	<i>Ardenna gravis</i>	500
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	4
Wilson's Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	300
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>	300
Parasitic Jaeger	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>	1
Sabine's Gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>	50
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	50
Red (Grey) Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>	30

Coastal species seen and approximate numbers:

Cape Gannet	<i>Morus capensis</i>	5
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	250
African Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus moquini</i>	1
White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>	15
Bank Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax neglectus</i>	30
Cape Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>	300
African Penguin	<i>Spheniscus demersus</i>	200
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	5
Great Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	50
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	80
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegypticus</i>	5
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1

Marine mammals:

Brown (Cape) Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>	150
Southern Right Whale	<i>Eubalaena australis</i>	1
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	1

Fish species:

Ocean Sunfish/Common Mola	<i>Mola mola</i>	1
Blue Shark	<i>Prionace glauca</i>	1

Link for photos: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1x8RyThOvkL3wVJwNGF-ygddzz84-KM2s?usp=sharing>

Trip report and photos: Cape Town Pelagics guide [David Swanepoel](#)

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