



## Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Saturday, 19 August 2023

**Trip Highlights: Four albatross species, Northern & Southern Giant Petrel, Humpback Whale, Common Dolphins.**



The 'Forest Lily' trawler

On the morning of the 19 August 2023 a cold front was approaching the Cape Town; but allowed us a brief window of opportunity to get offshore from the continent before it made landfall. To accommodate the wind, we made a late start and in calm weather eight keen birders boarded a Cape Town Pelagics trip departing from Simon's Town.

Before boarding we picked up **Crowned Cormorant** at the harbour; and after a quick safety briefing we set off to sea. We found coastal species such as **Hartlaub's Gulls** and **Cape Cormorant** as we left the harbour. We headed out into False Bay on calm waters, passing offshore rock stacks with their attendant cormorants.

Our trip across False Bay was quiet with only an occasional view of **Swift Tern** before reaching Cape Point. Here we paused to take in the magnificent view in the soft morning light, took some scenic photos and checked out with radio stations.

We headed out to the deep and after a few miles found our first **Sooty Shearwater** soon followed by **White-chinned Petrel**, while further out long lines of **Cape Cormorant** moved out to sea. We travelled further on, coming across **Shy Albatross** and a large shoal of pelagic fish. These fish were being chased by perhaps 200 **Common Dolphin** which leapt and swirled in the water as they chased after their prey.



Common Dolphin

A **Humpback Whale** rose from the depths and blew large spray columns amongst the dolphins and attendant **Cape Cormorant, Cape Gannets** and **Sooty Shearwaters**. A **Sub-Antarctic Skua** chased **Swift Terns** for food; through the flocks of birds.



Humpback Whale

We left this swirl of activity for a trawler sighting in the distance and at the 28 Nmile mark came upon the “*Forest Lily*” out of Cape Town. There was a small but steady trail of birds behind the ship which was trawling with her nets down. In the trawler’s wake line, we soon came across **Black-browed Albatross, Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel** and **Pintado Petrel**. A few Sub-Antarctic Skua hung about and occasionally landed on the trawler and some time went by before we picked up **Southern Giant Petrel** and **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross** accompanied by large numbers of **Sooty Shearwater** and **White-chinned Petrel**. We stayed with the trawler for the

next hour and had lunch while viewing all the above species swirling around. In due course the trawler lifted her nets and there was a frenzy of birds around the net bag as it was hauled aboard, giving us good close-up views of most species.

With the cold front approaching and the wind picking up we turned for home. Our trip back was uneventful, and we were soon back in the sheltered waters of False Bay and headed across to the Castle Rock cormorant colony. Here we found **White-breasted**, Cape Cormorants, and **Bank Cormorants** on nests. Adjacent rocks also held a colony of **Cape Fur Seals** that loafed about in the sun and dived into the surf.

We made our way back to Simon’s Town harbour, finding **African Penguin** and **African Black Oystercatcher** at Boulder’s Beach before reaching the harbour where a surprised Grey Heron greeted us.

**Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:**

Cape Gannet	50
White-chinned Petrel	300+
Pintado Petrel	3
Northern Giant Petrel	5
Southern Giant Petrel	3
Sooty Shearwater	450
Shy Albatross	150
Black-browed Albatross	120
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	12
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	3
Sub-Antarctic Skua	6

**Coastal Species:**

Swift Tern	
Hartlaub’s Gull	
Kelp Gull	
Cape Cormorant	
Bank Cormorant	
Crowned Cormorant	2
White-breasted Cormorant	
African Penguin	
African Black Oystercatcher	

**Mammals:**

Cape Fur Seal	
Humpback Whale	
Common Dolphin	

Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide – [Dalton Gibbs](#)

**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.