



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Saturday, 11 November 2023

Trip Highlights: Four species Albatross, all four species coastal Cormorants, Great Shearwater, Northern Giant Petrel, Humpback Whales



For the eight passengers who joined a Cape Town Pelagics trip with skipper, Alan and guide Nicholas Fordyce, Remembrance Day 2023 (11 November) will be one that lives up to its title. For all the passengers, this was their first pelagic, an experience which we delight in, as the opportunity to share pelagic wildlife with first time viewers never grows old.

The group all convened early in the morning, at approximately 7am, at the False Bay Yacht Club, to receive a briefing on what to expect for the day. For some, the excitement was such that they had to talk amongst themselves, whilst those a bit more relaxed may have noticed the decent terrestrial birding at the Yacht Club with several species present including **Hadeda Ibis, Pied Crow, Speckled Pigeon, Red-winged Starling, Red-eyed Dove, Feral Pigeon, Egyptian Goose, Cape Canary** and **Helmeted Guinea-fowl** - all recorded within the club grounds.

After boarding our boat, and taking in Alan's safety briefing, we set off from Simon's Town harbour. On the way out Nick alerted the group to three species of gull, all in fairly close proximity; a single **Grey-headed Gull**, several **Hartlaub's Gulls** (a Benguela current endemic) and four larger **Kelp Gulls**.

As with all our pelagic trips, we made fairly speedy headway to Cape Point, taking in the spectacular coastline scenery and enjoying the chance to look up at the point and take photographs while rolling around in the "washing machine".

What followed was an exercise in patience as we had to travel over 30 miles offshore before finally locating a trawler and getting to enjoy decent numbers of birds. Prior to this, the group had enjoyed sporadic views of their first true pelagic species, including **Sooty Shearwater**, **White-chinned Petrels** and a single **Cory's Shearwater**. Other birds that were encountered included numerous **Common Terns**, a single **Arctic Tern** (reported by Alan and seen only by a few on board), many **Kelp Gulls** and 20 or more **Cape Gannets** (another Benguela Current endemic). Throughout this journey numerous **Cape Fur Seals** were seen.

As we approach the trawler, bird activity picked up noticeably, and the group got to experience their first exposure to albatrosses. Numerous **Shy Albatrosses** came in, wowing the group and allowing Nick to inform them that as per Robert Cushman Murphy, "they had all joined a cult of higher men, for having seen the albatross".

The wake of the trawler proved typically productive, with probably more than 100 albatrosses present including representatives from four different species; the aforementioned **Shy Albatross** and **Black-browed Albatross** being the most numerous, with both **Atlantic Yellow-nosed** and **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross** also being present.

Other good birds included a single **Great Shearwater**, a single (and very late) **Cape (Pintado) Petrel** and several **Giant Petrels** (which were all unfortunately a bit too far to discern with certainty) including one individual that was most probably a **Northern Giant Petrel**.

On the way back into the bay, we encountered three **Humpback Whales**, a youngster and two adults, which provided close views before submerging. Additional species seen on the way in included numerous **Cape Cormorants**, breeding **Bank Cormorants**, two **White-breasted** and two **Crowned Cormorants**, numerous **Swift Terns**, **African Oystercatchers** and a herd of **Bontebok** – seen whilst enjoying lunch in the bay just off Buffels Beach! All in all, it was a superb day out at sea!

Ebird Checklists

Simonstown Harbour: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154312281>

Cape trawling grounds: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154313155>

Coastline: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154324985>

SPECIES LIST

Harbour:

1. Canary, Cape
2. Cormorant, Cape
3. Crow, Pied
4. Dove, Red-eyed
5. Dove, Rock
6. Hadedda, Ibis
7. Goose. Egyptian
8. Gull, Grey-heade
9. Gull, Hartlaub's
10. Gull, Kelp
11. Guineafowl, Helmeted
12. Pigeon, Speckled
13. Starling, Red-winged

Cape trawling grounds:

1. Albatross, Atlantic Yellow-nosed
2. Albatross, Black-browed
3. Albatross, Indian Yellow-nosed
4. Albatross, Shy
5. Gannet, Cape
6. Petrel, Northern Giant
7. Petrel, Giant sp.
8. Petrel, Cape (Pintado)
9. Petrel, White-chinned
10. Shearwater, Cory's
11. Shearwater, Great
12. Shearwater, Sooty
13. Tern, Arctic
14. Tern, Common

Coastline:

1. Cormorant, Bank
2. Cormorant, Cape
3. Cormorant, Crowned
4. Cormorant, White-breasted
5. Gannet, Cape
6. Gull, Kelp
7. Gull Hartlaub's
8. Oystercatcher, African
9. Tern, Swift

GALLERY



Shy Albatross



Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross



Bank Cormorant



Cape Cormorant



Cape Fur Seals

Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide - [Nick Fordyce](#)

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 organized 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.