Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Monday, 15 January 2024

Trip Highlights: Three species Albatross, Sabine's Gull

Our group met at 07:00 on a cloudy, yet wind-free Tuesday morning at the Simon's Town Yacht Club before setting off on our pelagic tour. On our way down to the boat, we were welcomed by a group of **Egyptian Geese**, while a **Cape Cormorant** was fishing in the shallows just off a slipway. Setting off from Simon's Town harbour towards Cape Point, we soon added to the coastal species including **White-breasted Cormorant**, **Kelp Gull**, **Sandwich Tern** and **Greater Crested (Swift) Tern**.

Just before our customary safety check-in stop at Cape Point, we encountered our first pelagic species of the day, including **Parasitic Jaeger**, **Sooty Shearwater** and **Cape Gannet**. Afterwards, we slowly headed in a south-westerly direction towards the Cape Canyon area. A large flock of **Cape Cormorants** flew out to sea from the direction of the Cape of Good Hope, while **Greater Crested-**, **Common-** and **Sandwich Terns** were diving for fish and a bunch of **Kelp Gulls** kept milling about,

probably hoping to steal a scrap of food. A bit further on, we found the first flock of **Cory's Shearwaters**, and then soon afterwards a couple of **White-chinned Petrels** and a few **Sabine's Gulls**.

No fishing vessels were found to be present in the Cape Canyon, and we had to rely on anchovy oil and frozen mackerel to entice a few pelagic species to come in closer. The oil did its magic, and a few **White-chinned Petrels** came in, followed by **Shy Albatross**, **Black-browed Albatross**, **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross**, **Wilson's Storm Petrel**, **European Storm Petrel**, **Great Shearwater** and **Brown Skua**. We also picked up a distant white-backed albatross that was unfortunately just too far away to ID to species level.

It finally was time to head northwards again after spending a few hours with the seabirds. Along our trip back towards the shoreline, we continued seeing good numbers of some of the bird species encountered earlier on during the day. Just a mile or two before we got back to Cape Point, a lot of bird activity drew our attention, and when we came closer, we saw that there was also a largish pod of **Dusky Dolphins**. The dolphins put on quite a show for us, swimming alongside the boat, breaching and doing back-flips to everyone's delight. We then headed towards a nice, quiet spot to stop for a lunch break just inside False Bay, while enjoying all the coastal seabirds around the boat, as well as a couple of **Ostriches** and **Sacred Ibises** on the shoreline.

En route back to Simon's Town, we encountered first, a **Humpback Whale**, then a **Bryde's Whale** before making a last stop at Partridge Point where we visited the **Bank Cormorant** colony and the **Cape Fur Seal** rock, which also hosted a few **Cape Cormorants**, **White-breasted Cormorants**, a **Crowned Cormorant** and a few **African Oystercatchers**. Along this stretch we also came across two rafts of **African Penguins**. We then finally returned to the Simon's Town harbour after a lovely day of birding out at sea.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Shy Albatross	12
Black-browed Albatross	2
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	1
White-chinned Petrel	100
Spectacled Petrel	0
Cory's Shearwater	300-500
Sooty Shearwater	100
Great Shearwater	50
Wilson's Storm Petrel	30
European Storm Petrel	15
Cape Gannet	80
Parasitic Jaeger	5
Brown (Subantarctic) Skua	5
Sabine's Gull	5

Rarities / Vagrants

"White-backed" Albatross	1

Coastal Species

Egyptian Goose	8
Kelp Gull	120
African Oystercatcher	3
White-breasted Cormorant	10
Bank Cormorant	10
Crowned Cormorant	1
Cape Cormorant	200
African Penguin	100
Sandwich Tern	10
Great Crested Tern	120
Common Tern	30

Marine Mammals

Brown (Cape) Fur Seal	100
Bryde's Whale	1
Humpback Whale	1
Dusky Dolphin	300+

Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross

Bank Cormorant & Kelp Gull

Black-browed Albatross

Shy Albatross

Black-browed Albatross

Brown (Subantarctic) Skua

Trip report & 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 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 it 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.