



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Saturday, 20 April 2024

Trip Highlights: Four Albatross species, Wilson's and European Storm Petrel, Cape Petrel, large numbers of pelagic birds visiting a trawler, and close-up views of Common Dolphin.



Our pelagic trip departed from Simon's Town at 7am on a calm Saturday morning. Misty conditions from Cape Point created an ethereal atmosphere, as we started to see our first pelagic sea birds, but the mist cleared shortly thereafter, for clear, sunny conditions throughout the remainder of the day. Calm and pleasant conditions were enjoyed throughout the trip.

The harbour delivered the regular and expected birds, with **Cape** and **White-breasted Cormorants** showing well, alongside numerous **Hartlaub's** and **Kelp Gulls**, and **Greater Crested Tern**.

On the way to Cape Point, we enjoyed great views of a small flotilla of **African Penguins**, from the nearby Boulder's Beach colony. This species is critically endangered and always a privilege to see.

Beyond Cape Point, we saw our first **Sooty Shearwaters** and **White-chinned Petrels**, as well as **Cape Gannets**. We headed down towards the canyon, to find an active trawling fishing vessel, with large numbers of birds waiting in the wake for the lifting of the nets. This duly happened and we were treated to the true Cape pelagic spectacle, of thousands of sea birds descending to feast on the bycatch of the trawling.



Harvest Mzansi trawler with many pelagic birds in it's wake.

We had excellent views of **Shy (White-capped)** and **Black-browed Albatross**, whilst **Indian Yellow-nosed** and **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses** were also present in far lower numbers. A few straggler summer visitor **Cory's Shearwaters** were seen, oddly overlapping with an early winter arrival of a **Cape (Pintado) Petrel**. A distant **Manx Shearwater** zipped past at speed, as is often the case, with brief views for some guests on board. A single young **Northern Giant Petrel** was seen, and **Great Shearwaters** were very numerous. Another surprisingly abundant species was **Brown (Subantarctic) Skua**, at one stage with 25 birds seen perching on the Harvest Mzansi vessel!



Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross



Great Shearwater

Wilson's and **European Storm Petrels** were also present, the latter in lower numbers, and occasional **Common Terns** were also seen in the deep.



Bank Cormorant

We enjoyed a light lunch in Buffel's Bay, seeing our first **Crowned Cormorant** of the day, as well as a vocal pair of **African Oystercatchers** which shot past the boat. The Partridge point rocks delivered good numbers of **Bank Cormorant** and **Cape Cormorant**, as well as a few **White-breasted Cormorants**. A single **Crowned Cormorant** was seen on the rocks with the colony of **Cape Fur Seal**.

On the way back to Simon's Town harbour, we enjoyed some great views of a young **Humpback Whale** and a small pod of **Common Dolphins**.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Shy Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	200+
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	300+
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche carteri</i>	4
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chlororhynchos</i>	2
Northern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	1
White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procelleria aequinoctialis</i>	400+
Cape Petrel	<i>Daption capense</i>	1
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna griseus</i>	100+
Cory's Shearwater	<i>Calonectris diomedea</i>	4
Great Shearwater	<i>Puffinus gravis</i>	200+
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	1
Wilson's Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	30+
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>	2
Brown (Subantarctic) Skua	<i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i>	50+

Coastal species seen and approximate numbers:

Cape Gannet	<i>Morus capensis</i>	40+
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	70+
Hartlaub's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus hartlaubii</i>	30+
White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>	50+
Bank Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax neglectus</i>	16
Crowned Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo coronatus</i>	2

Cape Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>	100+
African Penguin	<i>Spheniscus demersus</i>	35+
African Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus moquini</i>	2
Great Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	50+
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	10

Marine mammals:

Brown (Cape) Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>	20
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	6
Humpback Whales	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	1

Trip report & photos: 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.



Shy Albatross