



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Saturday, 8 March 2025

Trip Highlights: Four albatross species, **Spectacled Petrel**, Sabine's Gull, Great, Cory's and Manx Shearwaters.



We departed from Simon's Town harbour on Saturday 8th March, guided by Gabriel Jamie and skippered by Alan Blacklaws. We started an hour later than usual to give time for the strong south-easter that had been blowing the previous day to subside.

As we exited the harbour and proceeded through False Bay, we observed the expected coastal species such as **Swift (Greater Crested) Terns**, **Sandwich Tern**, **Hartlaub's Gull**, **Kelp Gull** and, in the bay, we came across a raft of the critically endangered **African Penguin** on the water. Nearing the point, we saw our first of several **Arctic Skuas** of the trip.

On reaching Cape Point, we saw a flock of **African Black Swifts** foraging high over the water off the point. This is becoming a regular feature having observed the same phenomenon on 22nd February. After a brief stop at Cape Point, we made our way out to the trawling grounds.

As we headed into the waters off Cape Point, we encountered our first tubenoses of the trip with good numbers of **Cory's Shearwaters** along with **Great Shearwaters**, **White-chinned Petrels** and **Sooty Shearwaters**. We also came across large rafts of **Cape Gannets** which provided beautiful spectacles as they flew around the boat. These included many fresh dark juvenile birds. Further out in the pelagic waters we came across a group of five **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatrosses** perched on the waters and also flocks of **Sabine's Gulls**.

Despite, early indications that there might be two trawlers within striking distance they had both unfortunately moved off. However, skipper Alan picked up song long-line fishing boats in the trawling grounds that looked promising, so we headed off to check them out.

As we got closer to the long-liners the numbers of birds began to increase again. We saw our first storm petrels of the trip with both **Wilson's** and **European Storm Petrels** present (the former more common than the latter on this trip, the reverse of the situation a couple of weeks ago). And we picked up our first **Black-browed & Shy Albatrosses**. Around the long liner itself we saw several **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses** too, bringing the day count to of albatross species to four. Among the many hundreds of White-chinned Petrel the call went out for **Spectacled Petrel** at the front of the boat which flew past the port side before disappearing into the melee of birds. We also picked up several **Subantarctic (Brown) Skuas** in attendance.

We decided to wait around the long liner until they began to draw in their catch. As we waited a **Great-winged Petrel** did a close flyby of the boat on at least three separate occasions in the course of an hour or so – possibly relating to the same individual. Also, a **Manx Shearwater** shot past our boat and headed towards the long liner.

And with that it was time to head back to shore, stopping to enjoy the **Bank Cormorant** colony at Partridge Point. Here we picked up some additional coastal species like **African Oystercatcher** and **Crowned Cormorant**.

Overall, another fantastic day out at sea with everybody on board getting at least one lifer and many seeing an albatross for the first time!

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

(larger counts are order of magnitude estimates)

Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) - 5

Subantarctic (Brown) Skua - 3

Sabine's Gull - 40

Common Tern - 50 (seen exclusively in pelagic areas on this trip)

Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross - 6

Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross - 5

Shy Albatross - 70

Black-browed Albatross - 30

Wilson's Storm Petrel - 30

European Storm Petrel - 10

Great-winged Petrel - 1

White-chinned Petrel - 1000

Spectacled Petrel - 1

Cory's Shearwater - 100

Great Shearwater - 500
Sooty Shearwater - 100
Manx Shearwater - 1

Coastal species:

African Oystercatcher - 2
Hartlaub's Gull - 20
Kelp Gull - 80
Sandwich Tern - 2
Swift (Greater Crested) Tern - 100
African Penguin - 20
Cape Gannet - 100
Crowned Cormorant - 1
Bank Cormorant - 8
Cape Cormorant - 500
White-breasted Cormorant - 30

Marine mammals:

Cape Fur Seal

Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide: [Gabriel Jamie](#)

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.