



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Saturday, 20 June 2026

Birding highlights: Southern Fulmar, four species of albatrosses including both Atlantic & Indian Yellow-nosed; Wilson's Storm Petrel, Cape/Pintado Petrel, Antarctic Prion, Manx Shearwater.



Our birding within Simon's Town harbour got our trip list off to a healthy start. We quickly picked up three species of cormorants: **Cape, Crowned** and **Great/White-breasted**; the ever-ubiquitous **Kelp Gull**, roosting **Great Crested Terns**, a single **Grey Heron**, and a surprise **African Darter** (a more typical freshwater species).

As our vessel rounded the breakwater, a curious **Brown Skua** followed our boat for a few entertaining minutes. Offshore of Boulders Beach, we intercepted a feeding group of **African Penguins**. The outbound leg to Cape Point offered repeated views of most of the species mentioned above.

Once out of False Bay, the first true pelagic species made an appearance. Closer to the coast, **Sooty Shearwaters** were abundant. They were then slowly replaced by **White-chinned Petrels** as we traveled further offshore. An adult **Southern Giant Petrel** made a close pass of our boat just past the Cape of Good Hope.

The 17-odd nautical miles of open ocean out to the fishing grounds were dominated by multiple good views of **Sooty Shearwaters**, **White-chinned Petrels** and **Cape Gannets**, with our first **Black-browed**, and **Shy Albatrosses** showing up towards the end of our outbound journey.

The rest of the morning was spent following behind the *Flame Thorn*, a hake trawler. The stream of seabirds in the ship's wake included four species of albatrosses: **Shy, Black-browed**, and both **Indian** and **Atlantic Yellow-nosed. White-chinned Petrels** and **Sooty Shearwaters** were abundant. Other common species included **Cape/Pintado Petrel, Cape Gannet, Brown Skua** and **Antarctic Prion**, with a few **Manx Shearwaters** and **Wilson's Storm-petrels** also recorded.

The species of the day had to be at least two **Antarctic Fulmars**, a usually rare winter visitor to the South African coast; sometimes completely absent in some years. A frustratingly distant and rapid flyby of a **Spectacled Petrel** meant it was missed by most onboard. Despite a concerted effort to relocate this sought-after rarity, it remained hidden within the high volume of similar **White-chinned Petrels** following the trawler. Additionally, we had a brief flyby of a single **Great-winged Petrel**.

At midday we started the return run to the coast. This leg of our journey was relatively quiet apart from a few blows and quick view of a diving **Southern Right Whale**. This species would have just returned from over-summering in the cold, productive waters of the Antarctic.

As we rounded Cape Point, we were greeted by mirror smooth conditions in False Bay. After enjoying a tasty lunch while moored in Buffel's Bay we continued onto to the Partridge Point cormorant colonies. The star species here was the Critically Endangered **Bank Cormorant**. In addition to this rare coastal endemic, we also had great views of **Cape, Crowned** and **Great/White-breasted Cormorants**. A pair of **African Oystercatchers** foraged on some nearby mussel-covered rocks. Our last stop before returning to the harbour was a small **Cape Fur Seal** haul-out.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Shy (White-capped) Albatross – c.50

Black-browed Albatross – c.100

Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross – 5

Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross - 2

Northern Giant Petrel – 2

Southern Giant Petrel - 1

White-chinned Petrel – c.500

Spectacled Petrel – 1

Great-winged Petrel - 1

Pintado Petrel – c.50

Sooty Shearwater – c.250

Manx Shearwater – 2

Antarctic Prion – c.50

Southern Fulmar - 2

Wilson's Storm Petrel – c.15-20

Cape Gannet – c.50

Brown (Sub-Antarctic) Skua – 14

Coastal Species:

African Penguin – 11 (More onshore at Boulders)

African Darter -1

White-breasted Cormorant – (1 nest)

Cape Cormorant – c.500

Bank Cormorant – 39 (21 nests)
Crowned Cormorant – 3
Kelp Gull – c.50
Great Crested Tern – c.25
African Oystercatcher - 3

Marine mammal

Cape Fur Seal – abundant (coastal and pelagic)
Southern Right Whale – 1

eBird ttrip report link with 5 checklists: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/541429>

Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide: [Vince Ward](#)

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.