



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics – Saturday, 18 July 2026

Trip Highlights: 5 species albatross including a **Northern Royal Albatross**, **Southern Fulmar**, both Northern & Southern Giant Petrels and Humpback Whales.



The morning of the 18th of July was grey, with low clouds scudding across the silver sea. These were typical conditions as a small cold front bore down on the Cape. Our birding party boarded our boat at Simon's Town and slowly started our journey out to sea. In the harbour we picked up coastal species such as **Cape Cormorant**, **Kelp** and **Hartlaub's Gulls** with a bonus **Grey Heron**.

Out on False Bay and soon can across a group of **African Penguins** hunting in the calm sea, whilst others clustered on the rocks of the Boulders Penguin colony. Our trip across False Bay was uneventful until we neared Cape Point and a **Humpback Whale** crossed our path, and a few **Sooty Shearwaters**, **Swift Terns** and **Cape Gannets** flew around us. We stopped at the Point itself, taking a group photo with the magnificent landscape as a backdrop and checking out over the radio.

From Cape Point we headed out into the deep, soon finding numbers of **Sooty Shearwater** and **White-chinned Petrels**. At least three **Humpback Whales** were breaching in the area and one landed close with an audible "plop", reminiscent of a giant belly flop! We headed further out, coming across a few **Shy Albatross** and a **Northern Giant Petrel**. We received coordinates for a trawler further out and set our course west and headed out into the deep.



Northern Giant Petrel

The stern trawler was some 25NMiles out and as we got closer we came across our first **Cape (Pintado) Petrels**, which were soon voted as the most charming bird of the trip. Dumpy and with their characteristic black and white markings they circled us as they floated on the invisible currents of air.

Black-browed Albatross appeared and near the trawler we found large rafts of mixed species loafing on the water and waiting for the trawler to pull her nets up. As we reached the trawler we were treated to hundreds of birds circling and resting on the water.

Atlantic and **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross** were soon found, while **Southern Giant Petrel** gave good views; **Sub-Antarctic Skua** hovered above us. A particularly keen **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross** flew alongside us and alighted right next to the boat; so close as to make long lenses redundant – time to break out the cell phone cameras to document this encounter of the albatross kind!



Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross



Shy & Black-browed Albatross

While slowly following on behind the trawler the cry of “White-backed” was called and a **Northern Royal Albatross** flew past us, heading toward the trawler. We had good views of all species that were on offer, with a continuous stream of birds passing us as we stayed behind the trawler. A **Southern Fulmar** put in a brief appearance as the trawler lifted her nets, just as a mass of birds descended.



A subsequent photo of Chris Jones after the trip revealed a lone **Great Shearwater** which went unnoticed in this melee of birds. The trawler did not stay long and headed away from us but left a trail of processed offal that birds descended on. We picked up a second Northern Royal Albatross that alighted on the water to feed, giving good views.

As yet, we had not found any Storm-petrels and so put out a bit of fish oil, which brought in another **Southern Fulmar** but sadly no Storm-petrels. With the cold front rolling in from the west, we turned and headed back to land.



Southern Fulmar



Humpback Whale

We enjoyed a great lunch onboard in the sheltered waters of Buffel's Bay, picking up **Ostrich** to add to our trip list. Yes, an Ostrich on a pelagic trip!

After lunch we headed across the bay to the Castle Rock cormorant colony. Here we found **African Black Oystercatchers, White-breasted, Cape Cormorants, Crowned Cormorants** and a few **Bank Cormorants** on nests. Adjacent rocks hosted a colony of **Cape Fur Seals** which loafed about in the sun and frolicked in the surf. With views of these coastal species, we made our way back to Simon's Town Harbour.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Shy Albatross – 25
Black-browed Albatross – 20
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross – 10
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross – 2
Northern Royal Albatross – 2
Southern Fulmar – 2
Cape (Pintado) Petrel – 750
White-chinned Petrel – 500
Southern Giant Petrel – 15
Northern Giant Petrel – 5
Sooty Shearwater – 200
Great Shearwater – 1
Sub-Antarctic Skua – 10
Cape Gannet – coastal & pelagic – 25

Coastal species:

Swift Tern – coastal 30
Kelp Gull – 60
Hartlaubs Gull – coastal
Cape Cormorant – coastal
Bank Cormorant – coastal
Crowned Cormorant – coastal – 2
White-breasted Cormorant – coastal
African Black Oystercatcher – 2
African Penguin – coastal 20
Ostrich – 2
Grey Heron – 1

Mammals:

Cape Fur Seal
Humpback Whale - 3

Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide: [Dalton Gibbs](#)
Photos: Dalton Gibbs & Chanan Weiss



Northern Royal Albatross dwarfs an immature Black-browed Albatross in the tussle for fish scraps



Cape Petrel

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.