



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Sunday, 23 August 2026

Trip Highlights: 4 albatross species, Spectacled Petrel, Soft-plumaged Petrel, Humpback Whales and Common Dolphins.



Our group met at 07h00 at the False Bay Yacht Club in Simon's Town. We were on one of three Cape Town Pelagic boats heading out for the day. Following introductions and a safety briefing from the skipper Alan, we departed swiftly into beautiful conditions, with the rising sun bathing the smooth waters of False Bay in golden light.

Offshore of Boulders Beach, we encountered a group of 20 **African Penguins** heading to sea to forage. It was a joy to watch these critically endangered tuxedo-wearing torpedoes moving through the water, however our time with them was cut short by news of dolphins further ahead.

We soon arrived on scene to find a pod of more than 50 **Common Dolphins** feeding on a bait ball, accompanied by many **Cape Fur Seals**. A young **Humpback Whale** was also joining in the action, lunge-feeding from below.

At Cape Point we stopped to take photographs and enjoy the views of the Capes and lighthouses. While there, we spotted the first pelagic birds of the trip – **Sooty Shearwaters** gliding above the turbulent waves below the lighthouses.

We then headed southwest towards the fishing grounds, where at least one trawler was active. Along the way, we found several more pelagic species, including **White-chinned Petrels**, **Subantarctic Skua** and our first albatross species of the day, **Shy Albatross**. A pod of several hundred **Common Dolphins** provided an entertaining detour. They were on the move, but chose to ride alongside our boat for a while. Not long afterwards, we encountered an **Oceanic Sunfish (*Mola mola*)**, and a **Southern Giant Petrel** flew past close enough for us to see its diagnostic pale green bill tip.

En route to the trawler, we picked up a couple more species, including **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross** and four **Soft-plumaged Petrels**, an uncommon winter visitor to these waters. Although the trawler was not pulling up its nets, the birds scattered in its wake made the long ride offshore worthwhile. Tens of **Black-browed** and **Shy Albatrosses** soared past or clustered in groups on the water, with a handful of **Indian** and **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses** in the mix as well. The black-and-white **Cape Petrel** proved particularly popular among the group, while a single **Great Shearwater** was also seen. Careful searching through rafts of **White-chinned Petrels** proved successful when we found a **Spectacled Petrel**, an uncommon species and our top bird of the day.

After an hour or two combing through the pelagic birds behind the trawler, we turned and headed for land. Not long into the return journey, we saw our fifth and final **Soft-plumaged Petrel** for the day. **White-chinned Petrels** and **Shy Albatrosses** dotted the sea on our way back, and another **Humpback Whale** put in an appearance too.

Inside False Bay, we paused for a light lunch in a picturesque setting close to Buffel's Bay beach, where we also had great views of a distinctly non-pelagic species, with five **Common Ostriches** foraging along the coastline. We then headed back towards Simon's Town, enjoying splendid views of the jagged mountains, steep cliffs, sea caves and granite boulders along the coast.

At Partridge Point we stopped to examine the **Bank Cormorant** colony, where many birds, including a partially leucistic individual, were attending nests amongst other cormorant species. Shortly afterwards, we visited the nearby seal haul-out before returning safely to Simon's Town harbour at approximately 14h00.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Southern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	1
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche carteri</i>	15
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chlororhynchos</i>	8
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	70
Shy Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	60
Spectacled Petrel	<i>Procellaria conspicillata</i>	1
White-chinned Petrel	<i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>	450
Cape Petrel	<i>Daption capense</i>	15
Soft-plumaged Petrel	<i>Pterodroma mollis</i>	5
Great Shearwater	<i>Ardenna gravis</i>	1
Sooty Shearwater	<i>Ardenna grisea</i>	120
Subantarctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius antarcticus</i>	3

Coastal species:

African Penguin	<i>Spheniscus demersus</i>	25
Cape Gannet	<i>Morus capensis</i>	50
Cape Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>	120
Bank Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax neglectus</i>	30
White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus</i>	5
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>	80
Hartlaub's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus hartlaubii</i>	10
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	25
Common Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>	5

Marine mammals:

Brown (Cape) Fur Seal	<i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>	150
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	500
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	2

Fish:

Oceanic Sunfish	<i>Mola mola</i>	1
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GALLERY**Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross****Black-browed Albatross****Soft-plumaged Petrel****Spectacled Petrel**

Trip report & photos: Cape Town Pelagics guide: Rion Cuthill

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.