



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - 23 May 2021

Cape Town Pelagics guide [Vincent Ward](#)

Trip Highlights: SOUTHERN ROYAL ALBATROSS, Cape Petrel, Antarctic Prion, Cory's Shearwater, Great Shearwater, Wilson's Storm Petrel and European Storm Petrel.



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Southern Royal Albatross

Our group of mostly first time pelagic seabirders departed from Simon's Town on a beautiful winter's morning. The floats bordering the yacht basin were crowded with masses of roosting **Cape Cormorants**. They were joined by a few conspicuous **White-breasted Cormorants**, as well as several **Kelp** and **Hartlaub's Gulls**.

As we passed Boulders Beach, we picked up several groups of **African Penguins** heading out into False Bay. The run down to Cape Point was relatively quiet, but we did get to enjoy a spectacular sunrise over the towering Kogelberg Mountains.

At the Point, we picked up several **White-chinned Petrels** feeding amongst several small flocks of **Great Crested (Swift) Terns**, with a few **Cape Gannets** passing through.

Our skipper received news of a distant stern trawler, and we set course towards where it was fishing. As we ventured into deeper offshore waters, we picked up a nice diversity of new species including three species of shearwater: **Cory's, Great** and **Sooty Shearwaters**. A **Parasitic Jaeger** made a very rapid fly-by and quickly disappeared into the oceanic swells.

A juvenile **Shy Albatross** made a very close approach, becoming the first ever albatross seen by most on board. Several more good views of other "Shys" over the next few nautical miles added to the growing albatross fever on board.

We intercepted the *Bluebell* at 28 nautical miles from the coast. It was trailing very good numbers of birds in its wake. The most conspicuous were the large numbers of **Black-browed Albatrosses** and **Cape (Pintado) Petrels**. The near windless conditions at the trawlers meant that most of these birds were resting on the sea; usually clustered into large rafts, patiently waiting for the trawler to raise its net.

We worked our way through these assembled seabirds, picking out several new species for the day. These included both **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, Northern** and **Southern Giant Petrels, Antarctic Prion** and **Brown Skua**.

Groups of **Wilson's Storm Petrels** were especially common. Hidden within these flocks were several individuals of the **Fuegian subspecies** and a lone **European Storm Petrel**. A few people on board also had a very quick glimpse of an all-black storm-petrel sized seabird, but it frustratingly disappeared before we could photograph it.

The star bird of the day was a handsome immature **Southern Royal Albatross**. It obligingly sat on the water close to our boat, allowing everyone on board to get fantastic views. This species is a rare visitor to Cape waters and consequently a highly sought-after bird for local listers.

At midday we made our run back to the coast, stopping briefly for a light lunch back in the Bay.

We made our last birding stop at Partridge Point. Here the large granite outcrops held good numbers of endangered **Bank Cormorants**, along with all three of the other local marine species: **White-breasted, Crowned** and **Cape Cormorants**. The nearby seal haul-out was packed with resting **Cape Fur Seals**.

A lone **African Oystercatcher** feeding on the floats in Simon's Town harbour made for a great final addition to our very respectable trip list.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Southern Royal Albatross - 1
Shy/White-capped Albatross - 50
Black-browed Albatross - 200
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross - 2
Northern Giant Petrel - 4
Southern Giant Petrel - 2
Sooty Shearwater - 30
Great Shearwater - 5
Cory's Shearwater - 3
White-chinned Petrel - 250
Cape (Pintado) Petrel - 500
Antarctic Prion - 150
Wilson's Storm Petrel - 250
European Storm Petrel - 1
Parasitic Jaeger - 1
Brown (Sub-Antarctic) Skua - 3

Coastal species:

African Penguin - 40
Cape Gannet - Common
White-breasted Cormorant - 18 breeding pairs
Cape Cormorant - abundant
Crowned Cormorant - 3
Bank Cormorant - 30
Kelp Gull - common
Hartlaub's Gull - 1
Great Crested Tern - common
African (Black) Oystercatcher - 1

Marine mammal

Cape Fur Seal - abundant

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.