

THE ALLEGED OCCURRENCE OF THE FALKLAND ISLAND RACE OF THE  
SUBANTARCTIC SKUA *CATHARACTA ANTARCTICA ANTARCTICA* IN  
SOUTH AFRICA

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Devillers (1977) is the first author to provide a satisfactory revision of the forms of large skuas, genus *Catharacta*, breeding in the southern hemisphere. He found that while colour was useful in series, it seldom permitted one to place an individual specimen taken away from the breeding grounds to its proper form. However, tarsus and culmen lengths and, to a lesser extent, wing lengths and ratios of these three characters provide the basis for the correct determination of specimens. Only for specimens with measurements in areas of overlap does colour become important in their determination.

Clancey (1982) has argued for the recognition of the nominate race of the Subantarctic Skua *Catharacta antarctica antarctica* breeding in the Falkland Islands as a member of the South African avifauna or as occurring in South African waters. After an appeal to the authority of Peters (1934) and Vincent (1952) (he might well have added White 1965), all workers who wrote before there was moderate clarity on the recognizable forms in *Catharacta*, he has cited significant colour differences between his two nonadult Natal taken specimens of nominate *antarctica* and adult breeding birds from Marion Island which are *C. a. madagascariensis* (= *lonnbergi*).

However, nominate *antarctica* and *madagascariensis* are to be recognized not principally on colour differences which may reflect age and individual variation but on measurements as set out in Table 1. As may be seen from Table 1 the two Natal specimens assigned to nominate *antarctica* by Clancey (1982) cannot belong to that form on mensural grounds but must belong to *madagascariensis* as maintained by Brooke (1978). It is, of course, accepted that *C. a. antarctica* is a breeding summer visitor from mid October to late April to the Falkland Islands (Woods 1975). It is believed that most of them winter on the coasts of Argentina, Uruguay and southern Brazil (e.g. Escalante 1970, Woods 1975, Blake 1977). It is quite feasible that some birds cross the Atlantic to southern Africa but there is, as yet, no evidence for this. I conclude that no grounds exist for accepting the nominate race of *C. antarctica* as occurring in South African waters or anywhere else in Africa.

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TABLE 1

MENSURAL CHARACTERS IN MM OF SUBANTARCTIC SKUAS *CATHARACTA ANTARCTICA ANTARCTICA* AND *C.A. MADAGASCARIENSIS* (= *LONNBERGI*) AFTER DEVILLERS (1977) AND MEASUREMENTS OF ALLEGED SOUTH AFRICAN TAKEN *C.A. ANTARCTICA* FROM BROOKE (1978)

Taxon or specimen	Wing mean (range)	Culmen mean (range)	Tarsus mean (range)
<i>C. a. antarctica</i> —	379 (355 - 397)	45,6 (41,2 - 49,5)	68,6 (61,5 - 72,9)
<i>C. a. madagascariensis</i>	415 (389 - 442)	51,7 (47,5 - 56,0)	77,0 (71,5 - 85,0)
juv. unsexed 4 Mar 1975	390	52	75
imm. female 20 Sep 1968	385	56	80