

SEABIRD OBSERVATIONS BETWEEN SOUTH GEORGIA AND SOUTH AFRICA FROM
A SAILING VESSEL

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INTRODUCTION

The following notes were made on birds observed from the yacht *Totorore* during a voyage from South Georgia to Cape Town, South Africa, via the South Sandwich Islands and Bouvet Island (Fig. 1) from 12 September to 25 October 1985. A few species were recorded breeding at the South Sandwich Islands. The islands south of Saunders Island, South Sandwiches, were not visited since they were surrounded by pack ice.

One of the main reasons for going to the South Sandwich Islands was to determine whether King Penguins *Aptenodytes patagonicus* might be nesting there now, taking into consideration their phenomenal increase in numbers on South Georgia, and the fact that they had previously been reported on Zavodovski and Saunders Islands (Watson 1975). Although unable to land on either of these islands, we circumnavigated them from close offshore but did not see any King Penguins. Nor were any seen on Vindication or Candlemas Islands on which we landed.

METHODS

At sea during daylight hours an almost continuous watch was kept, when weather permitted, and frequent 10-minute periods were recorded. Due to weather and ice conditions the average speed of the vessel, which is 10,5 m in length and weighs seven tonnes, was only four knots. Sea surface temperatures were recorded at least once each day.

The species observed are listed in Table 1 for each day at sea with the noon positions given in degrees, the sea surface temperature, and the maximum number of each species seen at a time as an indication of comparative density, being the highest number recorded in any 10-minute observation period for that day, and the total number of species seen each day. Only birds in the air or on the water are included, not birds on icebergs. Birds on or near the islands are discussed separately, but those seen away from the land between the islands of the South Sandwich group appear in the table. The last observations were recorded in sight of the coast of South Africa, but do not include birds seen close offshore. Antarctic Prions *Pachyptila desolata* were recorded only when identification was positive. In all other cases or when they were in mixed flocks, they were recorded as prions *Pachyptila* sp.

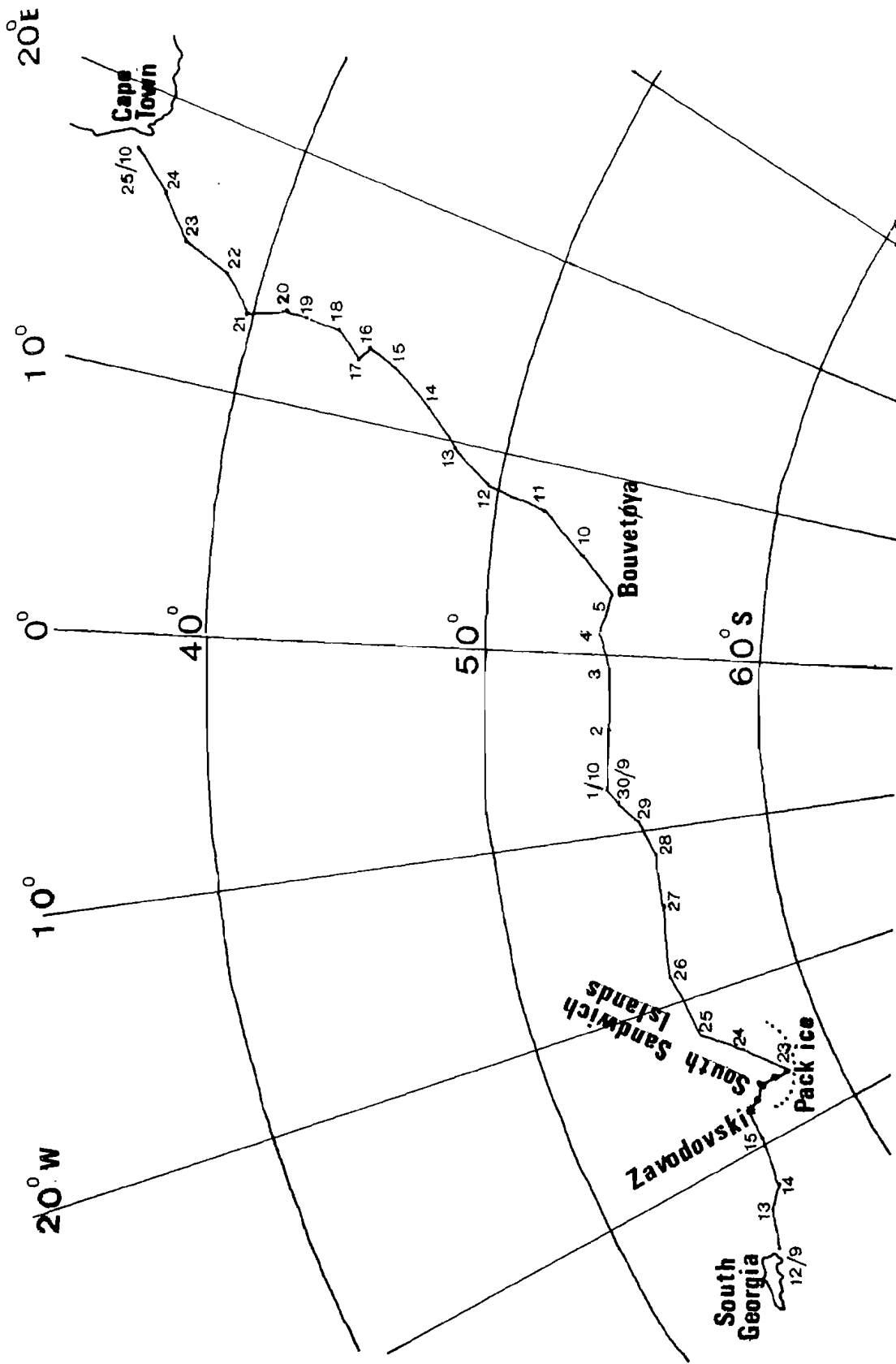


Figure 1

Course of the *Totorone* between South Georgia and Cape Town, 12 September - 25 October 1985. Daily noon positions are shown.

TABLE 1

MAXIMUM NUMBERS OF EACH SPECIES SEEN AT SEA IN A TEN-MINUTE PERIOD

Number of Species	8	6	5	7	5	6	8
September/October	13	14	15	17	18	21	23
Antarctic Tern				1		2	
Arctic Tern							
Kelp Gull							
Arctic Skua							
Subantarctic Skua							
Cape Cormorant							
Cape Gannet							
Divingpetrels							
Blackbellied Stormpetrel							
Wilson's Stormpetrel							
Little Shearwater							
Sooty Shearwater							
Great Shearwater							
Cory's Shearwater							
Whitechinned Petrel							
Grey Petrel							
Prions							
Antarctic Prion							
Blue Petrel	3	2	5			1	3
Softplumaged Petrel							
Kerguelen Petrel	1	1					
Atlantic Petrel							
Whiteheaded Petrel							
Greatwinged Petrel							
Snow Petrel	1		1	c.60	10	4	c.90
Pintado Petrel	3	1	1	175	35		c.40
Antarctic Petrel	c.50	30	12	c.30	c.75	9	c.35
Antarctic Fulmar	c.50	1	1	c.50	c.65	2	c.70
Giant petrels	1			4	5	2	1
Lightmantled Sooty Albatross							
Sooty Albatross							
Greyheaded Albatross							
Yellownosed Albatross							
Shy Albatross							
Blackbrowed Albatross							
Wandering Albatross							
Chinstrap Penguin	30	10		c.70			c.50
Adélie Penguin							c.10
Sea Surface Temperature (oC)	0,2	-1,2	-1,5	-1,5	-0,9	-1,2	-1,3
Noon Longitude (W/E)	33	32	29	27	26	26	26
Noon Latitude (S)	55	56	56	56	56	57	58

6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	4	4
01	02	03	04	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

1

7	1 6	1 10	3	5	4	2	5	4	2	3
2	5	4	2	2	2	2	4	5	1	1
1	1	2	1	3	2	1	3	1	1	
2	1			2	13	3	4	3	4	4
1	2	5	2	2	1		1			
1			1	1	1		1	1		1

c.30

4	-0,7	-1,2	-0,9	-0,7	-0,8	0,4	0,1	-0,9	-1,3	-0,7
7	4	0	1	24	22	18	14	11	9	8
4	54	54	54	57	55	55	55	55	55	54

6	5	10	13	10	11	17	13	15	11	10
05	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
		1	2	3	3	1	3	1	3	2
			1	2		3	4	7	2	2
								4	4	2
					1	4	2	10	7	4
					18	15	11	6	22	11
		4	3	3	8	6	1			62
5	10	15	8	5	2	2	2	1	1	3
2	1	4	6	2	5	2				
		1	1		2	1				
					1	2	1	1	1	1
2										
10	11	5	4	4	1	2	4	5	6	1
15	e.45	4	1							
2	1	1	1	2	1	1		1		
		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
			1	1	2	1	1			
								3		
		1	1	1	2	1	2	8	2	1
		2	1			2	1	3		
-1,7	-1,4	-0,8	1,8	1,7	3,7	4,9	6,0	6,4	7,8	1,7
2	3	5	7	8	9	11	12	13	12	13
54	54	53	51	49	48	47	45	44	44	43

10	14	15	19	13	15	8	14
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
		1	5	1	5		
			1				5
			1				1
							e.200
							13
1	2	1	1	1			
		1	1	1	4		1
2	3	1	2		1		
1	1	2	3		1	1	
	1	21	4	1	1	1	4
					1		3
4	14	11	14	6	9	3	5
11	1	1	1				
					e.350		
62	11	15	e.200				
3	2	1	2	4	4	2	1
1	2			1			
				2	1	1	
1	8	1	5	1	1	1	4
			1				
	2	1	1				
	2						
		1	1	2	1		3
			2	1	1		3
1	2	2	4	1	3	1	3
	1	1	3	1	1	1	1
,7	11,6	9,4	21,1	16,5	19,2	19,8	17,4
13	13	13	13	14	15	16	17
43	41	41	39	38	36	35	34

ANNOTATED SPECIES LIST

Gentoo Penguin *Pygoscelis papua*

Eightythree were counted at Low Point, Vindication Island, South Sandwiches, on 19 September. On Saunders Island several hundred were seen on lava slopes at Cordelia Bay, and about 100 on a small beach on the southwestern coast on 22 September.

Adélie Penguin *Pygoscelis adeliae*

Adélie Penguins were beginning to arrive at their breeding sites in the South Sandwich Islands in September. Seventyseven were seen in groups on Candlemas Island on 20 September and approximately 1 000 on Saunders Island on the 22 September. They were also seen in small numbers among Chinstrap Penguins *P. antarctica* icebergs in the vicinity of the South Sandwich Islands and at the edge of the pack ice

Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarctica*

Mostly on icebergs, in large numbers. One berg at 56 04S, 31 49W supported between 2 000-3 000 individuals.

Many of the bergs had heavy guano deposits, suggesting that they had been occupied for a long time. It is possible that these birds had come from the Antarctic Peninsula area and were using the bergs as transportation to their breeding sites. Small numbers of Chinstrap Penguins were occasionally seen at sea. Fourteen were seen ashore on Zavodovski Island, but the enormous breeding areas on that island, and on Candlemas and Vindication Islands, were empty in spite of the presence of countless thousands of birds on grounded bergs in the close vicinity on 16-20 September. No Chinstrap Penguins were observed on Bouvet Island when circumnavigating close offshore on 5-9 October.

Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*

Not seen after leaving South Georgia until 51S when the sea temperature rose above zero, and common thereafter. Juveniles, mostly of the "leopard" stage, outnumbered adults about 2:1.

Blackbrowed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris*

About the same distribution as the Wandering Albatross, but in larger numbers. The proportion of juveniles to adults was about 8:1.

Shy Albatross *Diomedea cauta*

The first three, seen together at 44S, were juveniles. From 39S to Cape Town, South Africa, they were seen regularly, about half of them being juveniles.

Yellownosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos*

In numbers up to three from 41S to Cape Town.

Greyheaded Albatross *Diomedea chrysostoma*

Seen from 51S to 41S (sea surface temperature 1,80 C - 11,60 C).

Sooty Albatross *Phoebastria fusca*

From 44S (sea 6,40 C) to 39S (sea 210 C), noticeably after we stopped seeing the next species.

Lightmantled Sooty Albatross *Phoebastria palpebrata*

From 53S (sea -0,80 C) to 45S (sea 6,00 C).

Giant petrels *Macronectes* sp.

Seen singly almost daily throughout the voyage up to 50S, and occasionally thereafter. Common around the South Sandwich Islands and Bouvet Island. Seen ashore on Zavodovski Island on 16 September and moderate numbers were observed breeding on Candlemas Island on 20 September.

Antarctic Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides*

Common at sea in small numbers where the sea surface temperature was sub-zero. Large numbers were seen around the South Sandwich Islands and Bouvet Island. Antarctic Fulmars were observed on nests and displaying on Vindication Island on 19 September.

Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica*

Common at sea and on icebergs from the coasts of South Georgia to 51S, 4W. Appears to range farther north than previously supposed. (Watson 1975, Harrison 1983).

Pintado Petrel *Daption capense*

Small numbers were seen at sea throughout the voyage, with large numbers seen near islands. Observed on nests and displaying on Vindication and Candemas Islands, 19 - 20 September.

Snow Petrel *Pagodroma nivea*

Large numbers near all islands visited and the pack ice. Observed on nests and displaying on Vindication and Candlemas Islands, 19 - 20 September (Fig. 2).

Greatwinged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*

Seen commonly only in the last few days before coming in sight of South Africa.

Whiteheaded Petrel *Pterodroma lessoni*

Singly or in occasional pairs from 53S (sea -0,80 C) to 38S (sea 16,50 C).

Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*

A few seen in 48S and 47S (sea surface temperature 40 C) but none farther north.

Kerguelen Petrel *Pterodroma brevirostris*

This species was common up to latitude 47S, except around the South Sandwich Islands.

Softplumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*

Very common in the latter part of the voyage from 47S (sea 50 C) northwards, but never in large numbers.

Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea*

Small to moderate sized flocks were seen throughout the voyage except near the South Sandwich Islands and after the sea had warmed to 60 C.

Prions *Pachyptila* sp.

Few were seen in subzero waters, but thereafter there was usually a flock of varying size accompanying the vessel, most but not all of which were identified as Antarctic Prions *P. desolata*.

Grey Petrel *Procellaria cinerea*

In small numbers from 47S (sea 50 C) to 39S when the sea surface had an inexplicably high temperature of 210 C. On 18 October, 11 were seen together at 43S, 13E (sea 8,70 C).

Whitechinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*

Very common ship followers from 48S (sea 3,70 C) to South Africa. It was noticeable that the white under the chin was very much more conspicuous than is generally seen on birds in the Pacific region, but no spectacled forms *P. a. conspicillata* were seen.

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

Seen frequently within about 200 nautical miles of South Africa.

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*

Common after sea surface temperature had reached 110 C.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

Common in small numbers from 44S (sea 6,40 C) to South Africa, individuals often accompanying the vessel.

Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*

Followed the vessel in numbers up to seven from 47S (sea 4,90 C) to 36S (sea 190 C). Flying low above the sea, they were not easily seen in heavy swells or rough seas and it is therefore probable that they were often undercounted.

Wilson's Stormpetrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

Not seen until 44S (sea 6,40 C), and then mostly singly to Cape

Town. Four were seen during one 10-minute period on 23 October.

Blackbellied Stormpetrel *Fregetta tropica*

The remains of one individual were found on top of Lucifer Hill, Candlemas Island, South Sandwiches, on 20 September. At sea they were common north of Bouvet Island up to 38S.

Divingpetrels *Pelecanoides* sp.

One was seen about 280 nautical miles northeast from the South Sandwich Islands and several up to 540 nautical miles northeast from Bouvet Island. It is likely that many were overlooked.

Cape Gannet *Sula capensis*

Seen only in sight of South Africa.

Imperial Cormorant *Phalacrocorax atriceps*

The only cormorants seen until close to South Africa were about 60 Imperial Cormorants in the vicinity of Candlemas Island, South Sandwich Islands.

Cape Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capensis*

Seen only in sight of South Africa.

Subantarctic Skua *Catharacta antarctica*

These had not yet arrived at the southern islands, but two were seen towards the end of the voyage: one at 39S, 13E and the other close to South Africa.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

One was seen on 21 October at 39S, 13E.

Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* and Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata*

Kelp Gulls were seen in numbers up to 30, and Antarctic Terns in small groups up to seven around Zavodovski, Candlemas, and Saunders Islands in the South Sandwiches but neither was seen during four days close offshore at Bouvet Island.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

Seen frequently in numbers up to five, mostly flying south, from 29 October (41S, 13E) to 23 October (36S 15E).

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Figure 2

Breeding Snow Petrels *Pagodroma nivea* on Candlemas Island, South Sandwich Islands, 20 September 1985.