

EIGHT NEW RECORDS OF THE AUSTRALASIAN GANNET *MORUS SERRATOR* IN SOUTH AFRICA

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The Australasian Gannet *Morus serrator* breeds at 28 localities in Australia (including Tasmania) and New Zealand (Nelson 1978). The species has previously been reported on two occasions at breeding islands of the Cape Gannet *M. capensis* off the South African coast: once at Bird Island, Lambert's Bay (32 05S, 18 18E) (Cassidy 1983) and once at Malgas Island (33 81S, 17 55E) (Berruti 1988, Ryan & Rose 1989). There have also been sightings of the same individual at île de la Possession, îles Crozet (46 25S, 51 45E) (Brown & Oatley 1982) and Marion Island (46 54S, 37 45E) (Brown & Oatley 1982, Cooper 1984). Here I report the presence of eight more Australasian Gannets at breeding localities of Cape Gannets in South Africa and the recapture of the Bird Island, Lambert's Bay individual at a new locality.

Subsequent to Berruti's (1988) record at Malgas Island a further six individuals have been found and banded at this locality (Table 1). The second Australasian Gannet for Malgas Island (A, Fig. 1) has been rarely resighted and was last seen on 24 July 1989. The third (B) has been resighted frequently whilst the fourth (C), fifth (D), sixth (E) and seventh (F) have been resighted only sporadically. In addition, the Australasian Gannet that had been banded in January 1982 at Bird Island, Lambert's Bay was recaptured at Malgas Island in October 1989 (Table 1).

At Bird Island, Lambert's Bay, an Australasian Gannet first seen in December 1989 was difficult to approach and could not be caught. An Australasian Gannet (9-19539) caught and banded close to the site of the original sighting the following month is presumed to be the same individual (Table 1, Fig.

2). The first sighting of an Australasian Gannet at Bird Island, Algoa Bay (33 50S, 26 17E) was made in March 1990. It was easy to approach, and was captured and banded (Table 1, Figs. 3, 4).

The head colour of the Cape Gannet is a deep golden yellow, which fades in intensity as the breeding season progresses (pers. obs.). In comparison, the head colour of the Australasian Gannets recorded in South Africa is an orange yellow. Therefore, heads of Australasian Gannets seen in December contrasted strongly with those of Cape Gannets, many of which had initiated breeding in late August. This characteristic accounted for the discovery of five of the eight new records (N.J. Adams pers. comm., pers. obs.). However, by March 1990, the head colour of the Australasian Gannets had also faded and was not noticeably different to that of Cape Gannets at the same time. The dark iris of Australasian Gannets, noted by Berruti (1988), is useful in distinguishing the species from the Cape Gannet. The Australasian Gannet also has a much shorter gular stripe than the Cape Gannet (Fig. 4), and adults always have white outer tail feathers (Nelson 1978, Berruti 1988). The voice of the Australasian Gannet is higher pitched than that of Cape Gannets (Berruti 1988, pers. obs.), which led to the discovery of the Australasian Gannet at Bird Island, Algoa Bay. Interestingly there is a voice difference between male and female Australasian Gannets, males being higher pitched (Nelson 1978).

Two of the Australasian Gannets regurgitated approximately 250 g of South African Pilchards *Sardinops ocellatus* each on capture. Their diet in South African waters therefore appears similar to

TABLE 1

DETAILS OF TEN AUSTRALASIAN GANNETS *MORUS SERRATOR* RECORDED IN SOUTH AFRICA

Band no.	Date first sighted	Date banded	Source
Bird Island, Lambert's Bay (32 05S, 18 18E)			
9-06535	?	25 Jan 1982	Cassidy 1983
9-19539	11 Dec 1989	15 Jan 1990	BMD
Malgas Island (33 81S, 17 55E)			
9-47720	23 Nov 1987	23 Nov 1987	Berruti 1988, Ryan & Rose 1989
9-06535	25 Oct 1989	25 Jan 1982	Cassidy 1983, BMD (Bird Island, Lambert's Bay)
9-47951(A)	14 Oct 1988	14 Oct 1988	BMD
9-47964(B)	02 Dec 1988	02 Dec 1988	BMD
9-61381(C)	14 Dec 1989	14 Dec 1989	BMD
9-61384(D)	14 Dec 1989	16 Dec 1989	BMD
9-61382(E)	15 Dec 1989	15 Dec 1989	BMD
9-61383(F)	15 Dec 1989	15 Dec 1989	BMD
Bird Island, Algoa Bay (33 50S, 26 17E)			
9-70794	15 Mar 1990	15 Mar 1990	BMD

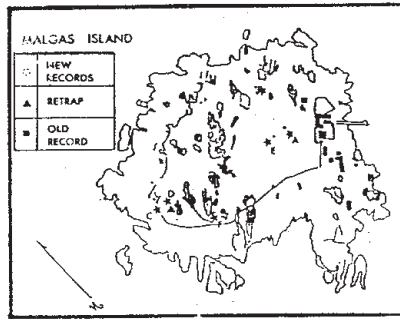


Figure 1

Locations of Australasian Gannets *Morus serrator* at Malgas Island

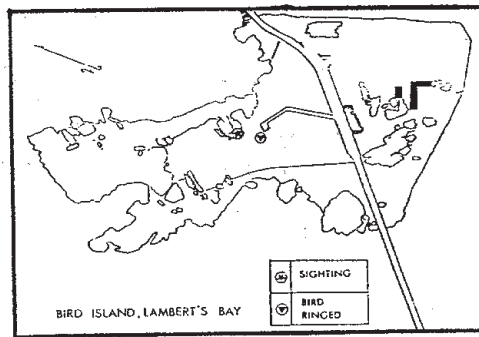


Figure 2

Locations of Australasian Gannets *Morus serrator* at Bird Island, Lambert's Bay

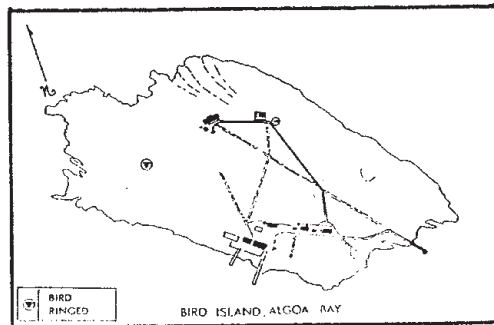


Figure 3

Location of Australasian Gannet *Morus serrator* at Bird Island, Algoa Bay

that of the Cape Gannet (Crawford & Shelton 1981).

Observations were made of the behaviour of Australasian Gannets at South African islands. These are discussed below in relation to the behaviour of the species at its natal colonies off Australia and New Zealand. All the Australasian Gannets recorded in South Africa have been observed defending sites within a metre of the edge of Cape Gannet colonies.

Territory defence. The Australasian Gannet, like the Cape Gannet, breeds from August to May (Nelson 1978, Crawford *et al.* 1983). The breeding localities of Australasian Gannets are topographically similar to those in southern Africa (Jarvis 1970), although breeding density is much lower: 1.68 - 2.59 nests compared with 2.75 - 6.50 nests per m² for Cape Gannets (Nelson 1978, Crawford *et al.* 1983).

Bowing. All the Australasian Gannets to date recorded at South African localities have been observed bowing. This display signifies site ownership, and is common among males with a site but lacking nest contents (Nelson 1978).

Sky-pointing. At South African islands, Australasian Gannets sky-pointed in a manner similar to Cape Gannets. The display is non-aggressive and usually practised by males departing or returning to a nest site on foot (Nelson 1978).

Nape-biting. At Bird Island, Lambert's Bay, the January 1990 Australasian Gannet was observed nape-biting a Cape Gannet as the latter landed. The Cape Gannet greeted the Australasian Gannet by necking, but shortly afterwards showed no further interest. Male Cape Gannets nape-bite their partners on more than 90% of occasions on arrival at their sites, but Australasian Gannets do so on less than 10% of such occasions (Nelson 1978). Male Australasian Gannets are therefore less prone to biting their mates than are Cape Gannets.

Nest-building. An Australasian Gannet (B of Malgas Island) was observed bringing nest material to its site (N.J. Adams pers. comm.). It was also allowed to preen the chick of a Cape Gannet in the presence of one of its parents (pers. obs.). Berruti's (1988) Australasian Gannet was seen building guano into a mound at the site it was holding. In contrast to the Cape Gannet, which builds its nest from guano (Jarvis 1970), the Australasian Gannet builds its nests from seaweeds and grasses that the male usually gathers. Between collecting trips the male will guard such material (Nelson 1978).

From the foregoing it appears that two of the ten Australasian Gannets seen in South Africa have displayed behaviour characteristic of males. However, lack of extensive observations precludes attempts to determine the sex of the other eight birds. A Cape Gannet has bred in an Australian gannetry (Venn 1982), but the converse has not yet been observed. This is perhaps because of the less aggressive behaviour of the Australasian species.

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Figure 4

The Australasian Gannet *Morus serrator* at Bird Island, Algoa Bay