

## NOTES

### The Jackass Penguin colony at Seal Island in Mossel Bay

Seal Island in Mossel Bay (34 09S, 22 07E) was not included among the extant breeding colonies of the Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus* by Frost, Siegfried & Cooper (1976). However, historical records indicate that this species was common at the island when it was first visited by Europeans. The early navigators Vasco da Gama (in November 1497), Mancel de Mesquita Perestrello (January 1576) and Cornelius de Houtman (August 1595) each indicated that penguins were plentiful on the island, although not as abundant as the "sea-wolves", that is Cape Fur Seals *Arctocephalus pusillus* (Raven-Hart 1967). Confirmation of breeding is given by Perestrello who recorded "nests of fishbones" (Raven-Hart 1967). The decrease in size of this penguin colony is discussed in this note.

The colony was present in the first quarter of the 20th century; a photograph of the western side of the island (Gilchrist 1914) shows approximately 130 penguins (and 20 Cape Fur Seals). Symons (1926) visited the island in September 1923 and noted that penguins were present without giving any indication of numbers.

Rand (1960) did not include it in his list of penguin colonies, even though he included some other small islands that are mainly occupied by seals. It may therefore be inferred that no penguins were visible on the aerial photographs taken in November 1956 that Rand used as the basis for his list.

Further evidence is available from aerial photographs of the island taken for seal censuses by the Sea Fisheries Branch on 25 November 1969, 4 December 1971, 18 December 1974, 16 December 1976 and 22 December 1977. No penguins are visible on these photographs.

Aerial photography is not an entirely accurate method of censusing penguins, particularly on Seal Island in Mossel Bay where there are caves and large boulders which can hide them from view. More reliable evidence of the lack of penguins on the island comes from visits in January of 1975 and 1978 by personnel of Sea Fisheries Branch studying seals. Only one Jackass Penguin (moulting) was seen there during the former visit, and none during the latter. Thus the penguin colony on Seal Island in Mossel Bay diminished between the time of the first visits by Europeans in the 15th and 16th centuries and the first half of the 20th century. Since then it has disappeared completely.

We thank Mr R.W. Rand for access to the aerial photographs taken in November 1969.

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#### Bank Cormorants breeding at Port Nolloth

On 10 July 1978, Bank Cormorants *Phalacrocorax neglectus* were observed attending nests on Matthew Rock (29 17S, 16 52E) in McDougall's Bay south of Port Nolloth. There were two groups of nests, all occupied by Bank Cormorants. Six nests were grouped together on top of a rocky outcrop, and 11 nests (at least two contained large young) were clustered on a flat expanse of shingle elevated about 1 m above the level of the sea at high tide. Bank Cormorants normally do not nest on flat ground close to the level of the sea.

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## Postcranial partial albinism in the Whitechinned Petrel

The partial albinism of the head of the Whitechinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis conspicillata*, often known as the spectacled form, is acutely discussed by Rowan *et al.* (1951) and by Southern (1951). However, partial albinism on parts of the body behind the head appears only to have been noted by Shewell (1952) who reported two examples, an apparent partial albino since the legs and feet were among the affected parts and one with all its left primaries white, perhaps a response to injury. Off the western Cape coast, South Africa, I have several times seen birds with irregular white patches on the posterior abdomen approximately in a line with the trailing edge of the wing. However, on only one occasion was the white abdominal patch accompanied by white on the head as is found in *P. a. conspicillata*. Thus most of my observations seem referable to the nominate race. In 1952 A. Thomas (pers. comm.) ringed a bird in southern African waters which had two white feathers in the mantle and one behind the right eye. J.C. Sinclair (pers. comm.) from several years' observations off the South African coast has noted partial albinism in several birds, the parts affected being the wings and body and the patches sometimes large. In addition he has seen one apparently total albino. These observations indicate that partial albinism in *P. a. aequinoctialis* does not normally affect the head and has nothing to do with the most obvious character of *P. a. conspicillata*. I would add that it is only in the Whitechinned Petrel that I have observed partial albinism and that I have not noted it in the several thousands of dark brown petrels of the genera *Pterodroma* and *Fuffinus* that I have seen in southern African waters.

R.K. Brooke helped in the preparation of this note.

### References

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## On Shy Albatrosses from Natal

Recent ringing recoveries and the study of limited museum material now indicate that the race of the Shy Albatross *Diomedea cauta* (Gould) occurring in South African waters is nominate *D. cauta* rather than *D. c. salvini* (Rothschild) (White 1973, Bourne 1977). Two specimens of this albatross from Natal and Zululand in the Durban Museum collection, one from off Durban and the second from Richard's Bay, Zululand, presented to the museum in the 1950's, lend further support to these conclusions in respect of the subspecies of the Shy Albatross to be recognised on the Southern African list.

The two Durban Museum specimens from Natal and Zululand are considered attributable to nominate *cauta*, being relatively lightly coloured over the dorsal head. In both the bill is pale olivaceous grey, the pileum white over the distal half and on the crown centre, the temporal regions and the proximal head-top overlaid with pale smoky grey, this merging insensibly over the sides and hind surfaces of the neck into the light grey of the dorsum. Unfortunately, neither specimen was sexed at the time of preparation. The Durban example has a wing of 564 mm and a tail of 217 mm, while the Richard's Bay skin has a wing of 572 mm and a tail of 206 mm. The wing lengths of these two eastern specimens agree nicely with those given for ♂♂ of *D. c. cauta* by Bourne (1977) though the tails are on the short side insofar as his measurements of adult *D. c. cauta* are concerned. However, they agree with immature birds tentatively identified as *D. c. cauta* by this author from the eastern Indian Ocean and southern African waters.

### References

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## Cape Fur Seals preying on seabirds

The Cape Fur Seal *Arctocephalus pusillus* was described as a predator of the Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus* by Cooper (1974) who observed such behaviour at Dassen Island and reviewed similar observations by other authors.

On 21 January 1977 I observed a bull seal killing two penguins at House Bay on Possession Island (27 01S, 15 12E). The headman informed me that he occasionally saw large seals taking penguins.

During a parliamentary enquiry into the running of the Government Guano Islands and the sealing industry in 1906 and 1907 (Cape of Good Hope 1907), the chairman (Mr J. Searle, M.L.A.) asked several witnesses if they knew of seals destroying seabirds. The skipper of the Guano Islands vessel "Seabird" and the headmen from Sinclair, Possession, Halifax and Ichaboe Islands all knew of seals killing penguins. Two of the headmen (from Sinclair and Ichaboe) specified that it occurred at Possession Island (where there was no seal colony) rather than at their island.

The headman from Possession had also seen "seals taking malgas (*Sula capensis*) but very rarely" (p.231). A witness who netted seals near Robbesteen (E. Wearin) claimed to have "seen seals seizing duikers (*Phalacrocorax* sp.)" (p.160).

It is interesting to note that most of the observations of seals taking penguins occurred at islands with the larger penguin colonies (namely Dyer (in Rand 1959), Dassen, Possession and Halifax) rather than at seal colonies. This can be attributed, in part, to the presence of observers on the bird islands, whereas the seal islands have no permanent human residents.

### References

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Group size of Cape Gannets at Dwesa Nature Reserve, Transkei

Cape Gannets *Sula capensis* were abundant along the coast between the Bashee and Ngqabora rivers during 5-7 August 1978. At night the birds roosted in flocks just beyond the surf zone. The smallest flock contained 29 birds and the largest 726 birds. I did not see any dark, immature individuals in the roosting or foraging groups, though a stranded corpse (desiccated) of an immature bird was found near the mouth of the Mendu River. This was the only stranded seabird found between the Bashee and Ngqabora rivers. In September 1977 dead and dying Cape Gannets, Jackass Penguins *Spheniscus demersus* and Cape Cormorants *Phalacrocorax capensis* were found along this stretch of the coast. Cape Cormorants were common then but in August 1978 they were absent and no large-scale mortality has been reported.

Cape Gannets apparently make use of "ground effect" when flying low over the sea, and possibly they save additional energy by flying one behind the other in groups (Cooper 1978). Table 1 shows the frequency of group sizes of Gannets flying low over the sea past Dwesa Point on 6 August 1978. Mean groups size and standard deviation was 2,6 + 2,1. Typical group size (Jarman 1974) was 3,5. These birds were moving either up or down the coast, and were not foraging at the time (10h00 - 11h00) that the observations were made.

Table 1  
Group size of Cape Gannets flying past  
Dwesa Point, 6 August 1978

Group size	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No. of groups	31	25	9	9	6	2	1	1	1	2

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## Beach patrols on the Tongaland coast

During 2 December 1971 - 14 February 1972, and 3 December 1972 - 25 January 1973, I worked on the Natal Parks Board turtle project, and lived at the Bhanga Nek research post (27 01S, 32 52E), situated a few metres from the seashore. Foot patrols for the purpose of tagging nesting sea-turtles covered 16 km of beach every night. Motorised patrols covered up to 60 km of beach between the Kosi estuary mouth (26 53S, 32 53E) and Mabibi (27 17S, 32 47E), and took place irregularly at night and occasionally during the day. Despite this intensive patrolling, only two stranded seabirds were found; a Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* on 12 December 1971, and a Greatwinged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera* on 13 January 1972. A second Common Tern was killed by the beachbuggy on 15 December 1971.

For the purposes of comparing these results with those of the beached bird surveys in the Cape Province in 1977 (Cooper 1978), I suggest (conservatively) that the Tongaland patrolling effort was equivalent to 300 km of beach patrols, i.e. five monthly patrols of 60 km each, since Cape patrols take place at monthly intervals. The beached bird "density" on the Tongaland coast was thus calculated to be 0.006 birds per kilometre. This is far lower than the lowest densities in the Cape Province in 1977 (Cooper 1978).

Other seabirds were recorded incidentally on the beach or close inshore, but no seawatches were made. Seabirds were not abundant inshore. Lesser Crested Terns *S. bengalensis* and Swift Terns *S. bergii* were regular in small numbers, and Little Terns *S. albifrons* were seen occasionally in groups of up to four birds. A single Greyheaded Gull *Larus cirrocephalus* was seen on the Kosi estuarine system, an area I seldom visited. Large flocks of Comic Terns *S. hirundo/paradisaea*, numbering several hundred individuals were seen on three occasions, twice at the estuary mouth. Two Frigate Birds (presumably *Fregata minor*) were seen on 3 February 1972 after a stormy period. The skeleton of a small *Diomedea* albatross was found buried in sand beneath dune vegetation.

Undoubtedly more seabirds would be recorded during seawatches especially during winter, when petrels, albatrosses and the occasional Cape Gannet *Sula capensis* and Cape Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capensis* would occur.

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## Breeding of the Hartlaub's Gull at Rietvlei, Milnerton

McLachlan & Liversidge (1978) state that the Hartlaub's Gull *Larus hartlaubi* "recently bred on mainland and factory roofs".

In this regard I would like to record the following breeding colonies which were established in Rietvlei (33 50S, 18 30E) during the latter half of 1977. On 14 August 1977, on a small grass-covered island on which stood several Rooikrans trees *Acacia cyclops* I found an active colony of more than one hundred nests. Most contained either one or two eggs though one contained a clutch of three. Shortly afterwards, during a week of heavy rains, this island was flooded and on 21 August only ten Hartlaub's Gulls could be seen on the highest point which just showed above the water. By 28 August the water had receded but the colony was completely abandoned. Dozens of mud-stained eggs were scattered over the island.

On 31 August, about a kilometre away from the abovementioned site, another breeding colony had been established. A check showed the following nests : C 1, 22; C 2, 13; C 3, 3. On 12 September the colony comprised 57 occupied nests : C 1, 34; C 2, 22; C 3, 1, but a check on 26 September showed that most of the eggs had disappeared. On that day there were only six nests with eggs and one with two small downy chicks.

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## Whitebreasted Cormorants breeding in the Tsitsikamma Coastal National Park

On 30 January 1978, while hiking the final section of the Otter Trail in the Tsitsikamma Coastal National Park, I observed a breeding colony of Whitebreasted Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* 3 km east of Nature's Valley (35 59S, 23 36E). The colony was situated on an isolated rockstack broken off the 100 m high cliffs which are characteristic of the coast in this area. All the nests appeared to be on the north side of the stack, the side which faced away from the sea. The number of occupied nests was estimated to be 30. No large chicks were visible, so the nests must have contained either eggs or small young.

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