

GREAT CRESTED GREBES *PODICEPS CRISTATUS* AT SEA IN  
SOUTHERN AFRICA

Both the Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and the Blacknecked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* are now known to occur at sea on sheltered offshore waters in southern Africa (Robertson 1980, Ryan 1980). This is not recorded in handbooks for the Great Crested Grebe *P. cristatus* in southern Africa (McLachlan & Liversidge 1978, Brown *et al.* 1982), although it is mentioned briefly by Smith (1981). Up to seven Great Crested Grebes were recorded on the eastern (sheltered) side of Ichaboe Island (26 17S, 14 56E) off South West Africa/Namibia during the winter of 1979 until late January 1980 (B.H. Smith, Headman, Ichaboe Island, pers.comm. to R.P. Wilson). These birds are the ones alluded to by Smith (1981). Great Crested Grebes were seen in small numbers (approximately five) in later years at Ichaboe Island where they foraged with flocks of Blacknecked Grebes (B.H. Smith, pers.comm. to J. Cooper).

In the winter of 1978 I found two adult Great Crested Grebes dead on the beach between Eland's Bay (32 19S, 18 20E) and the Berg River mouth (32 46S, 18 09E) in the southwestern Cape, South Africa. On 31 December 1980 a flock of 14 birds was seen offshore in St Helena Bay (32 46S, 18 05E) west of the Berg River mouth, a further two birds were seen at this locality on 2 January 1981 (Western Cape Wader Study Group unpubl. data). A subadult bird was seen in Yzerfontein harbour (31 21S, 18 09E) on 27 December 1982 (R.K. Brooke pers.comm.) and an immature was present off the Strand (34 08S, 18 51E) for several weeks in October–November 1982 (P. Malan pers.comm.). This individual was loosely associated with a roosting flock of Hartlaub's Gulls *Larus hartlaubii*.

Great Crested Grebes regularly occur on sheltered coastal waters in Europe and North Africa outside the breeding season (Cramp & Simmons 1977). The preponderance of summer records in the southwestern Cape, South Africa, may be related to both juvenile dispersal and the drying up of suitable wetlands inland (Dean 1977).

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AN INLAND RECORD OF LONGTAILED SKUA *STERCORARIUS LONGICAUDUS*  
IN EAST AFRICA

Spearpoint (1981) reported a Longtailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* in the northern Cape, South Africa, 500 km from the Atlantic Ocean. A statement that it has been recorded inland elsewhere in the Afrotropical region is supported by only a single record from Togo. Backhurst *et al.* (1973) detailed a bird at Lake Turkana, northern Kenya, photographed in flight by A.D. Forbes-Watson on 25 - 26 August 1961. This vast lake in the Rift Valley, 700 km from the Indian Ocean, has provided subsequent records of various vagrant seabirds, and supports a substantial population of apparently resident Little Terns *Sterna albifrons* (Britton 1980). The only other record of the Longtailed Skua for eastern Africa is from coastal Kenya where two flew south (near Malindi) on 19 October 1980 (Moore 1981).

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FIRST SPECIMEN OF THE NOMINATE RACE OF THE  
KELP GULL *LARUS DOMINICANUS* IN AFRICA

Brooke and Cooper (1979) separated the African breeding population of the Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* under the name *vetula* Bruch 1853 on the grounds, primarily, that the iris of breeding birds appeared dark brown whereas all other reported breeding populations had pale yellow or pale grey irises. They also noted that *vetula* seemed to have a more domed skull than the nominate race and was amongst the largest populations studied mensurally. They mentioned (p.33) a somewhat garbled sight record of nominate race birds seen in South Africa. The locality and date of this sight record should be corrected to North Head, Saldanha Bay (33 03S, 17 55E) and to 26 July 1977 (J.C. Sinclair *in litt.*).

On 23 October 1982, while conducting a beach patrol at Yzerfontein (33 20S, 18 10E), west coast of the Cape Province, South Africa, a number of adult Kelp Gulls *L. d. vetula* were found mortally sick and caught by hand. Their condition was thought to be due to botulism or some similar poisoning. In addition, one adult bird which we take to be *L. d. dominicanus* was caught. It had a pale grey iris with a pinkish or mauvish cast lightly flecked with black. It also had to the touch a noticeably flatter crown than the *vetula* caught and handled at the same time. The iris was photographed in colour by G.A. and P.A.R. Hockey while still alive. It was frozen after death and subsequently measured: exposed culmen 53,7; depth at gonys 19,8; wing 405; tail 135; tarsus 61,4; middle toe plus claw 62 mm. The bird is now in the osteological collection of the South African Museum. It is planned to obtain comparative osteological material so that we can define the relative flatness of the skull of nominate *dominicanus* when compared with *vetula*. The specimen, meanwhile, seems to be the first material evidence of the occurrence of the nominate race of *L. dominicanus* in Africa.

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ON THE MASS OF SABINE'S GULL *LARUS SABINI*

Furness and Furness (1982) give the mass of four South African taken Sabine's Gulls *Larus sabini* as 164 - 174 g, with a mean of 169 g, and add that they are not aware of any northern hemisphere records for comparison. Sabine (1818) in describing this species as new to science says "and the weight from six and a half to seven and a half ounces". This converts to a range of 180 - 210 g. It would appear that Sabine's Gulls are heavier on their northern breeding grounds than in their southern subtropical wintering area.

Pre-1870 bird literature sometimes contains fascinating snippets of biological information which have been ignored by later summarizers. A relevant example is that the only known mass for the Whitethroated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus nudipes* of the Himalayas and associated mountain ranges is given by its describer, Hodgson (1836) (Collins & Brooke 1976).

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KAROO HARVESTER TERMITE ALATES FOUND IN THE STOMACH OF A  
KELP GULL *LARUS DOMINICANUS*

In the course of preparing bird specimens for the Comparative Avian Osteology Collection of the South African Museum, the stomach contents of a Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* (accession number SAM Zo T.504) were found to contain numerous alates of the Karoo Harvester Termite *Microhodotermes viator* (Latreille). Kelp Gulls have been observed aerially feeding on unidentified insects (Summers 1977) and they have been seen feeding together with Hartlaub's Gulls *L. hartlaubii* on termite alates (indet.) on the beach at Saldanha Bay, South Africa, by Dr A.J. Prins of the South African Museum (pers.comm.).

This particular Kelp Gull, weighing 1 270 g, was found dead at Marcus Island, Saldanha Bay, by R.K. Brooke on 8 August 1980. Brooke *et al.* (1972) list in Table 5 (pp. 99-103) regular and casual termite alate eating species in Zimbabwe. Amongst these is the Greyheaded Gull *L. cirrocephalus* listed as a casual termite alate eater, based on the record by Milstein (1970) at Barberspan, Transvaal. The few observations of Kelp Gulls feeding on termite alates class it as a casual feeder. Thus it does not enter into any competitive interaction with regular termite alate eaters found in South Africa. Its coastal foraging distribution would also limit its competitiveness in this case with terrestrial species.

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FIRST RECORDED MAINLAND BREEDING BY THE JACKASS PENGUIN  
*SPHENISCUS DEMERSUS*

The Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus* breeds on a number of offshore islands around southern Africa but no mainland breeding has been previously reported (Frost *et al.* 1976). On 17 November 1982, following a report from the SANCCOB Foundation, a single nest of the Jackass Penguin was found at Stony Point (34 22S, 18 53E) southern Cape, South Africa.

The nest was situated in a narrow cleft among jagged rocks 5 m from the sea on a rocky shore and contained one adult and a downless chick when visited (see photographs in *The Argus*, 25 November 1982). Both birds were ringed. A search among the rocks nearby did not reveal more nests.

The nearest penguin breeding islands are Dyer Island (60 km south-eastwards) and Seal Island, False Bay (40 km northwestwards). The penguin population at Dyer Island is now estimated to be five times greater than it was in 1956 (Crawford & Shelton 1981). If nest sites at this island are becoming limited, then it is a likely source of the mainland-breeding birds.

Mainland breeding by Jackass Penguins is unexpected since they are vulnerable to predation by carnivores such as genets and foxes when ashore (J. Cooper pers.comm.).

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SUBANTARCTIC SKUA *CATHARACTA ANTARCTICA* REGURGITATES AN EGG OF  
THE GOUGH ISLAND MOORHEN *GALLINULA COMERI*

The Subantarctic Skua *Catharacta antarctica* at Gough Island feeds mainly on burrowing petrels (e.g. Swales 1965, Shaughnessy & Fairall 1976, Williams & Imber in press, pers.obs.). Swales (1965) also reported that skuas "apparently searched for Gough Moorhens" and noted that they were "most persistent in trying to take our captive (caged) moorhens". However, no actual observations have been made of skuas preying upon Gough Island Moorhens *Gallinula comeri*, their young or eggs.

On 28 October 1982 at about midday I caught an adult Subantarctic Skua in a mist net erected near a stream among *Phyllica arborea* trees near the Meteorological Base at Transvaal Bay (40 21S, 09 53W), Gough Island. On removing the bird from the net I noticed an egg, which I subsequently identified as that of the Gough Island Moorhen, immediately below the skua on a patch of cleared ground. This egg was not present when the mist net was checked earlier in the day and was almost certainly regurgitated by the skua.

The egg was slightly crushed and was broken at one end revealing the presence of a nearly ready to hatch embryo. The egg was photographed and measured approximately 49 x 29 mm, apparently the first published measurement (Ripley 1977). It resembled a Common Moorhen's *G. chloropus* egg. The ground colour was a dull buffy cream with purplish speckling and blotching up to 3 mm in size in a zone around the middle and wider end. The egg is similar in appearance to those of the Gough Island Moorhen described by Wilson and Swales (1958). The embryo within the egg resembled the description for a newly-hatched chick given by Wilson and Swales (1958).

Gough Island Moorhens are extremely secretive breeders : only one nest has ever been found in the wild, which contained eggs, on 30 September 1956 (Wilson & Swales 1958). Watson (1975) is incorrect in stating that the eggs have not been discovered. Predation by Subantarctic Skuas, of which this note gives the first real evidence, is a likely cause for such secretiveness.

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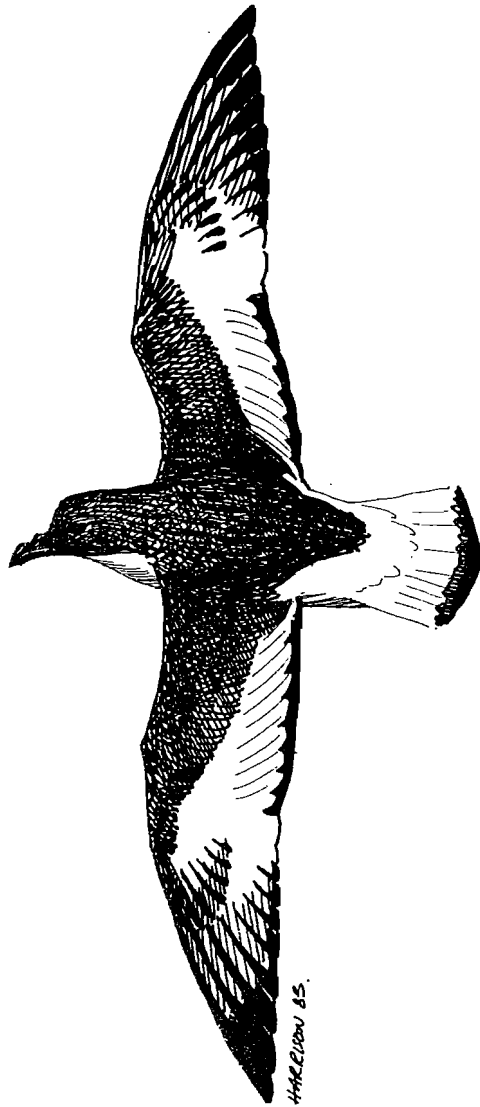
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Antarctic Petrel



EUROPEAN BEE-EATER *MEROPS APIASTER* AT SEA IN THE AFRICAN SECTOR  
OF THE SOUTHERN OCEAN

A European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* was found alive aboard the R.V. *Africana* on 19 September 1982 at 40 41S, 28 05E in the African sector of the Southern Ocean. This position is 769 km from the nearest point on the African continent. The bird was soaked and could hardly fly. Attempts were made to keep it alive, but it died on 21 September.

The European Bee-eater breeds in the Palaearctic and also in southern Africa where it arrives in September and October and departs in February to March (McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). The winds prior to its discovery on the ship varied from westerly on 16 September (with an average wind speed of 30 m/sec) and 17 September (14 m/sec) to northeasterly from late on 17 September (up to 29 m/sec) until the bird was found. With a high pressure of 1 032 mB situated between Marion Island and South Africa resulting in anticlockwise winds it would seem likely that the bird overshoot the African continent and continued in a southerly direction.

The European Bee-eater has not been reported as a vagrant at Marion Island (46 54S, 37 45E) (Burger *et al.* 1980, Berruti & Schramm 1981) although it fits the pattern found there of vagrants being primarily migrants. This record therefore represents the most southerly record for the species.

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*Cape Petrels*

## Cape Cormorant

*Phalacrocorax capensis*

Cooper *et al.* (1982, *Fish Bull. S. Afr.* 16: 121-143) list 51 known breeding localities of the Cape Cormorant. A 52nd locality on a sandy island in a maturation pond at the Stransfontein Sewage Works, South Africa (34 05S, 18 31E) contained 671 occupied nests on 23 November 1982. This island was well vegetated in 1972 but increasing numbers of roosting Cape Cormorants over the years have led to the killing of the vegetation from guano deposition and trampling (pers.obs.). The island is only 400 m from the sea in False Bay. The nests were counted from the bank of the pond using a 15-60X telescope. Nests were in groups of three to 112 and were among remnants of dead bushes and against small sandy ledges (JC).

A 53rd locality is Dolphin Head (24 44S, 14 50E), South West Africa/Namibia where c. 400 nests were counted on a coastal cliff in February 1982 using binoculars from a boat. Although Hottentot's Bay (26 08S, 14 56E) South West Africa/Namibia is a known breeding locality, no population size was given (Cooper *et al.* 1982). During February 1982 more than 200 nests were observed on mainland rocks forming the promontory to the bay (Hottentotspunt). Other nests (perhaps 30 - 40 in number) near a disused jetty within the bay at that time were apparently disturbed by fishermen (BHS).

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## Whitebreasted Cormorant

*Phalacrocorax carbo*

Brooke *et al.* (1982, *Gerfaut* 72: 188-220) list 58 breeding localities of the Whitebreasted Cormorant on the southern African coast for the period 1977-1981. A 59th locality 600 m west of Gericke Point, South Africa (34 01S, 22 45E) contained 44 nests of which 36 were occupied by nestlings on 30 January 1983. Some nests (with at least 11 - 15 occupied) were present on 7 August 1982. The nests were 50 m up on ledges on a dunerock cliff (AFB). Brooke *et al.* (1982) gave the easternmost breeding locality of the Whitebreasted Cormorant as Morgan Bay, eastern Cape, South Africa. During the first week of April 1980 a colony containing at least three occupied nests was photographed at Hole-in-the-Wall, Transkei (32 02S, 29 07E). This colony has not been reported occupied since at least 1932 and was not included in the modern breeding range by Brooke *et al.* (1982). This is therefore the 60th breeding locality for the Whitebreasted Cormorant on the southern African coast and extends the modern breeding range by approximately 105 km eastwards (BRR).

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Crawford *et al.* (1982, *Ostrich* 53: 164-179) list 52 breeding localities of the Kelp Gull in southern Africa.

Three more localities have been discovered on the Skeleton Coast of South West Africa/Namibia, all outside the breeding range given by Crawford *et al.* (1982).

One nest with three eggs was found among sand dunes approximately 10 km from the sea in October 1982 near Torra Bay (20 10S, 13 10E) by J.A. Meyer. Three pairs (nests with one, two and three eggs) bred at the Die Oase (19 27S, 12 49E) from December 1982 - January 1983. On 21 January 1983 a single nest contained a downy chick on a sandspit at this locality (J.A. Day pers.comm. to J. Cooper). Die Oase is a reed-fringed lake 7,5 km from the sea.

The northernmost locality, and the 55th breeding locality for the Kelp Gull, is near Cape Fria (18 26S, 12 00E) where one pair bred (nest with two eggs) about 6 km inland from November 1982 to January 1983. This locality represents a 440 km northward extension of the known breeding range of the species from the Cape Cross Lagoon (Crawford *et al.* 1982).

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#### NEW DATA ON RARELY RECORDED SEABIRDS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

##### Kerguelen Petrel

##### *Pterodroma brevirostris*

Brooke and Avery (1981, *Cormorant* 9: 27-29) list 11 records of the Kerguelen Petrel *Pterodroma brevirostris* in southern Africa to which two more records may now be added. The 12th record is of a beached specimen found north of Yzerfontein (33 20S, 18 10E) on the west coast of the Cape Province on 28 August 1982 during a monthly beach patrol (G. Avery *in litt.*).

On 8 September 1980 Ranger P. White recovered a corpse on the beach at Mapelane (28 25S, 32 26E), just south of the St Lucia estuary, Natal, South Africa. On donation to the Durban Museum in August 1982 it was determined as a Kerguelen Petrel, a species whose previous most north-easterly record was Durban, 300 km to the south (Brooke & Avery *op.cit.*). It will be noted that of the 13 records of the Kerguelen Petrel in Africa no less than five were made in August and September 1980.

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