

THE BLUE PETREL *HALOBAENA CAERULEA* IN SOUTH AFRICA

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White (1965) gives the African distribution of the Subantarctic breeding Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea* as "off Cape Province, scarce in territorial waters". Clancey (1980) says "irregular visitor to coasts of the western, southern and eastern Cape". Several birds have been recovered during African Seabird Group beach patrols. We have assembled all records to see whether they produce geographical and seasonal patterns and whether the statements in the standard works survive critical testing in the light of more recent data.

We have found 12 specimen records (Table 1) and eight acceptable sight records (Table 2) (20 in all) from South Africa and its adjacent waters. It is now apparent that the Blue Petrel is a rare but regular visitor to the coasts of the Cape Province in both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and Natal but does not occur further north. It usually occurs in South African waters between June and October with a peak in September (Table 3). All sight records in Table 2 are of single birds and it does not appear that flocks occur in South African waters.

It is only at close quarters that the white tipped tail of the Blue Petrel can be seen, the principal character which distinguishes it from prions *Pachyptila* spp. We regard with great suspicion statements that the Blue Petrel may be commonly found, e.g. Layard (1867), Swinburne (1886), Godfrey (1931), and believe that the birds they referred to were at least predominantly prions.

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TABLE 1
SPECIMEN RECORDS OF THE BLUE PETREL *HALOBAENA CAERULEA*
FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Place	Date	Source
Elands Bay 32 12S, 18 18E	12 Oct 1979	South African Museum
Baboon Point 32 13S, 18 18E	11 Aug 1979	South African Museum
Strandfontein 34 05S, 18 33E	9 Oct 1978	South African Museum
Strandfontein	6 Sep 1980	South African Museum
Nature's Valley 33 59S, 23 34E	10 Jul 1973	Robinson (1976)
Maitlands River estuary 33 59S, 25 17E	16 Jul 1978	Every (1978)
Cape Recife 34 02S; 25 45E	4 Sep 1978	Hosten (1978)
near Port Elizabeth (two skeletons)	1894	Marshall (1895)
near East London	1870s	Layard & Sharpe (1884)
between Mbonambi and Dawson's Rock 28 40S, 32 15E	9 Sep 1980	Mendelsohn (1980)
Lake Sibayi 27 20S, 32 45E	13 Sep 1980	Mendelsohn (1980)

TABLE 2
SIGHT RECORDS OF THE BLUE PETREL *HALOBAENA CAERULEA* IN
SOUTH AFRICAN WATERS

Place	Date	Source
northwest of Cape Town 31S, 16E	5 Sep 1969	Voous (1970)
off Malgas Island 33 03S, 17 56E	22 Aug 1977	J.C. Sinclair (<i>in litt.</i>)
southwest of Cape Town 35 05S, 15 25E	19 Dec 1945	Gibson-Hill (1946)
Bird Island, Algoa Bay (stranded) 33 51S, 26 17E	Nov 1936	Courtenay Latimer & Gibson-Hill (1946)
off Kenton-on-Sea 33 45S, 26 40E	11 Jul 1978	Boddam-Whetham (1978)
off Kenton-on-Sea	9 Jun 1979	Samuels (1979)
off Kenton-on-Sea	27 Jun 1979	Samuels (1979)
off Port Alfred 33 40S, 26 55E	12 Aug 1954	Jones (1965)

TABLE 3
SEASONAL OCCURRENCE OF THE BLUE PETREL *HALOBAENA CAERULEA* IN
SOUTH AFRICA

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
No. of records	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	3	5	2	1	1

- from Durban to Cape Town. *Ostrich* 17: 232-239.
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