

A SECOND RECORD OF THE AUSTRALASIAN GANNET *SULA SERRATOR* IN
SOUTH AFRICA, WITH NOTES ON ITS IDENTIFICATION

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An adult Australasian Gannet *Sula serrator* was seen in the actively breeding colony of Cape Gannets *S. capensis* at Malgas Island (33 03, 17 55E), southwestern Cape, South Africa, on 23-25 November 1987 and was last seen on 19 April 1988 (C.B. Walter pers. comm.). The bird was initially noticed as it landed, because of its call which was pitched higher than that of the Cape Gannet. The bird was captured for ringing (9-47720) on 23 November, photographed and then released. On being handled, the four white outer rectrices on each side of the tail and the shorter gular stripe were readily apparent (Fig. 1). It was identified as an Australasian Gannet on the basis of these characters. The bird was in full adult plumage with no black feathers among the wing coverts, secondaries or scapulars. During handling, the bird regurgitated eleven anchovy *Engraulis japonicus capensis*, measuring 10-11 cm (caudal length). The bird returned to the same empty nest site regularly between 23 November and 21 February (N.J. Adams pers. comm.).

The iris of the Australasian Gannet at Malgas Island was much darker in colour than that of adult Cape Gannets, in which the iris colour is silvery-cream (pers. obs.). There are various descriptions of the iris colour of adult Australasian Gannets. Oliver (1955) describes the iris as silvery brown. Serventy & Whittell (1962, p.104) and Serventy *et al.* (1971, p.177) describe the iris as silver-grey. Macdonald (1984, p.61) gives the iris colour as pale grey. Nelson (1978, p.266 and p.308) notes that the iris of the Australasian Gannet is noticeably darker than that of the Atlantic *S. bassana* and Cape Gannets, but also describes the iris of the Cape

Gannet as typically darker than the light blue-grey of the Atlantic Gannet (p.232). Nelson (1978, p.267) describes the iris of the Australasian Gannet in more detail as often having a distinct narrow band of darkish pigment encircling the pupil, rather than being uniformly dark. The iris of the Australasian Gannet at Malgas Island had an innermost, narrow, pale band but the far wider outer band of the iris was much darker. Clearly, iris colour of adult Australasian Gannets needs further description.

Iris colour is not mentioned elsewhere as a field character (e.g. Harrison 1983) but has such value because the shorter gular stripe is not always visible. Furthermore, some Cape Gannets have up to seven white outer tail feathers (Broekhuysen & Liversidge 1954) whereas some Australasian Gannets have more than four dark central rectrices (Nelson 1978, Harrison 1983). It should be noted that of 3 682 Cape Gannets examined by them, 414 had at least one white outer tail feather but none had the same pattern as the Australasian Gannet: four white outer tail feathers on each side. Three of the examined birds had four white outer tail feathers on one side (Broekhuysen & Liversidge 1954).

This is the second record of an Australasian Gannet in South Africa (Cassidy 1983) with another record of an Australasian Gannet from sub-Antarctic Marion Island in the southern Indian Ocean (Brown & Oatley 1982).

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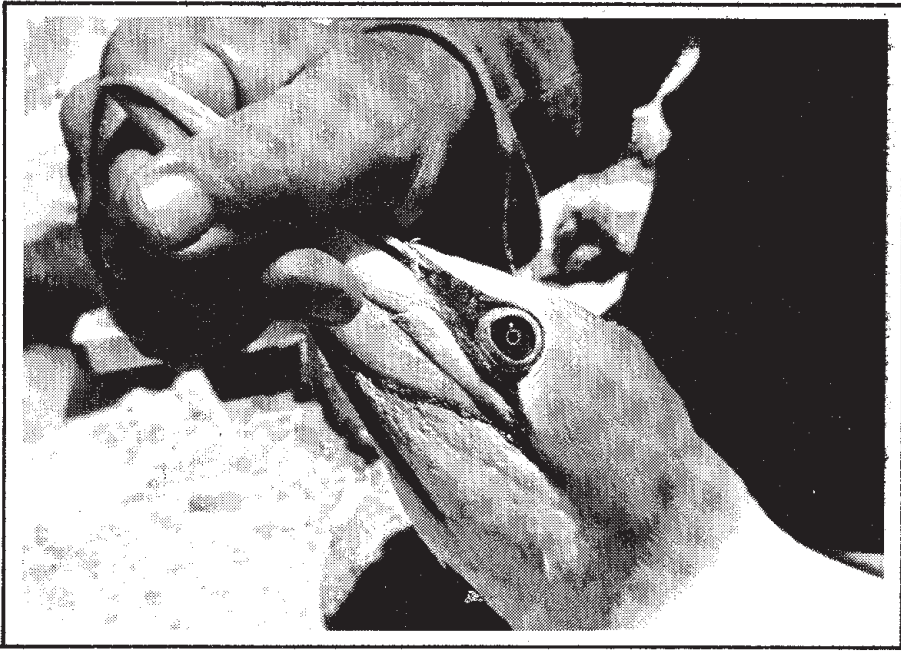


Figure 1

Gular stripe and iris of the Australasian Gannet *Sula serrator* at Malgas Island, 23 November 1985.
Photographed by E. McMahon.

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