

BLACKNECKED GREBES *PODICEPS NIGRICOLLIS* AT SEA
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

In western Europe Blacknecked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* often winter on sheltered inshore waters (Cramp & Simmons 1977). This note summarises published records and gives previously unpublished sightings of Blacknecked Grebes at sea in southern Africa.

The Blacknecked Grebe is well recorded from the sheltered harbours and lagoons of South West Africa: principally Walvis Bay, Lüderitz and Sandwich Harbour (Becker 1965, Winterbottom 1971, Summerhayes *et al.* 1974, Berry & Berry 1975, Whitelaw *et al.* 1978). It is also known to occur offshore around the South West African islands (Cooper *et al.* 1979). However, Cooper *et al.* (1979) are incorrect in giving Possession Island (27 01S, 15 12E) as the southern limit for the species occurring at sea, since Rand (1949) had recorded it further south at Sinclair Island (27 40S, 15 31E). R. Wilson (pers.comm.) observed *ca.* 430 off Possession Island in late January 1980 and B. Smith (pers. comm. to R. Wilson) reported up to 67 birds off Ichaboe Island (26 17S, 14 56E) in the winter of 1979, they left when commercial cray-fishing commenced. Within South Africa, published records are limited to an old winter report from Lambert's Bay (Cape Bird Club Checklist 1979). J. Cooper (pers.comm.) considers this record may refer to the seasonal waterbody Jakkalsrivier, where he has seen the species north of the town and not to the marine habitat.

I have two sightings of Blacknecked Grebes at sea in the Cape Province, South Africa. On 24 November 1979 three birds were seen diving in the sheltered zone behind the breakwater at Yzerfontein (33 31S, 18 09E) and on 15 January 1980 12 birds were observed diving in John Owen Bay, Port Nolloth (29 16S, 16 52E). The numbers of Blacknecked Grebes off South West Africa reach a peak in winter (Rand 1949, Berry & Berry 1975). The fact that both records for the Cape Province were in summer may be incidental, but could be due to the lack of suitable freshwater bodies at that time of year. In the southwestern Cape, Black-necked Grebes tend to move to temporary vleis in winter, especially on the west coast (pers.obs.). In early summer when these pans dry out it is possible that some of the non-breeding birds move out to sea. Also, when the birds were seen at Port Nolloth, the entire northern Cape was drought stricken.

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DIVING BY GIANT PETRELS *MACRONECTES*

Of the albatrosses and petrels (Order Procellariiformes), diving and swimming underwater is well known among the Family Pelecanoididae and for several members of the Family Procellariidae (Serventy *et al.* 1971, McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). It has recently been described in Shorttailed Shearwaters *Puffinus tenuirostris* in Bass Strait (Skira 1979), and in Blackbrowed and Shy Albatrosses *Diomedea melanophris* and *D. cauta* in South African waters (Nicholls 1979, Oatley 1979). In this note we describe diving by the largest members of the Procellariidae, the giant petrels *Macronectes* spp.

From 26 to 29 September 1977 we were at Wolf Bay (26 49S, 15 07E) near Lüderitz in South West Africa/Namibia, catching Northern Giant Petrels *M. halli* from an inflatable dinghy with an outboard motor by throwing a net on a cane hoop over them (Voisin *et al.* 1977). One of us (PDS) noticed that a few birds escaped from the net by diving and swimming a few metres underwater.

One month later, on 26 October 1977 J-FV made a similar observation at Gough Island (40 21S, 09 53W). One Giant Petrel *M. giganteus* was observed sitting on the sea near the shore at Long Beach and was being slowly driven towards the surf zone, which consisted of breaking waves over a metre high. As the bird came within one or two metres of the waves, it made a half-turn with an energetic kick to face the swell and dived below it. It resurfaced a few metres on the seaward side of the surf, and swam offshore before resuming its resting position.

In order to dive, giant petrels spread their wings as they do when they bathe (Voisin 1978). They dived with a low angle of incidence and, while underwater, kept their wings almost outstretched with the joints slightly bent. Their diving behaviour differed from that described for albatrosses by Nicholls (1979) in that the giant petrels' wings were not bent sharply at the carpal joints, and they used their feet rather than their wings