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eine Zweigstelle der
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und der
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Editorial ... Redaktion

This double issue of LANIOTURDUS simultaneously completes volume 23 and exhausts our backlog of articles. It also ends my temporary sojourn as scientific editor and the next volume will again be edited by Joris Komen. Those readers with material suitable for publication in LANIOTURDUS should sit down at their typewriters now so that Joris isn't faced with a shortage of material.

The five year programme of twice yearly counts of the birds in the Walvis Bay Wetland is drawing to an end. There are to be only two further Round Table sponsored counts - in September/October this year and in April 1989. The spring count at the end of September this year could well be the largest yet. With the excellent rains in eastern Botswana and the Orange Free State and the reasonable rains over large parts of Namibia a high proportion of the Blacknecked Grebes, flamingos, Cape Teal, Chestnut-banded Plovers and Avocets, which pass the dry seasons and years at the Walvis Bay Wetland, have moved inland to breed. By late September they should have been forced back to the coast as the inland wetlands dry out. They should be bringing with them substantial numbers of young birds. This increased number of intra-African migrants will be supplemented in September by the first waves of Palaearctic migrants. Taken together we have the makings of the largest count in the five year programme. Those keen to take part in the September count should contact me as soon as possible as the count will be limited to 20 observers.

Looking through this issue and its predecessors there may seem to some to be a surprising emphasis on coastal birds although the coast forms less than 1 % of the overall area of Namibia (inclusive of the Walvis Bay enclave). In part this reflects the bias of those prepared to sit down and prepare material for LANIOTURDUS. Also the fact that the coast does form such a small fraction of the country creates a conservation situation. The concentration of human activities along the coast can have a major detrimental affect on the birds that occur there. Also, because suitable habitat is often restricted along the coast thus concentrating the birds into relatively small areas, counts are more feasible at coastal localities than in inland areas.

Dr A.J. Williams

Articles and Reports

Artikel & Berichte

PELAGIC SEABIRDS INSHORE OFF THE
SOUTHERN NAMIB COAST
NOVEMBER 1985 - AUGUST 1986

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Während Küstenfahrten an der Atlantik Küste von S.W.A./ Namibia zwischen November 1985 und August 1986, wurden folgende Beobachtungen an 13 Arten paläarktischer Zugvögel gemacht: drei Albatrosse, drei Sturmvögel, zwei Sturmtaucher, eine Sturmschwalbe, zwei Raubmöwen und eine Möwe.

ABSTRACT

During inshore voyages along the Namib coast, between November 1985 and August 1986 inclusive, observations were made on 13 species of pelagic seabirds: three albatrosses, three petrels, two shearwaters, a stormpetrel, two skuas and a gull.

INTRODUCTION

The trawling grounds well off the coast of Namibia support internationally important populations of a number of species of sub-Antarctic and Antarctic pelagic seabirds (Becker 1976, Lambert 1969, 1971, 1975, 1980, Rodrigues 1972, Summerhayes et al. 1974). The number and variety of these pelagic birds which frequent inshore waters along the Namib coast is little known.

In November to December 1985, and April and July 1986 I sailed between Lüderitz and one or more of the guano islands along the southern Namib coast between Mercury Island, 25°43'S

14°50'E, and Sinclair Island, 27°40'S 15°31'E, and in August 1986 I sailed between Walvis Bay and Mercury Island. All these voyages were made within three kilometres of the shore and with land in sight at all times. Here I report the occurrence of seabirds, excluding locally breeding species, observed during these voyages.

SPECIES LIST

Shy Albatross Diomedea cauta

On 9 April 1986 thirteen sightings (not necessarily all of different individuals) were made between Ichaboe and Mercury Islands, and on 6 August four single birds were seen approximately off St Francis Bay.

Shy Albatrosses, which breed on islands off southeastern Australia and near New Zealand, are regular nonbreeding visitors to waters off the Namib coast where they are most common between August and October (Lambert 1971, Summerhayes et al. 1974).

Blackbrowed Albatross Diomedea melanophris

On 9 April an adult Blackbrowed Albatross was seen between Ichaboe and Mercury Islands and on 6 August nine, all except one of which were adult, were seen approximately off St Francis Bay.

Blackbrowed Albatrosses are regular nonbreeding visitors to waters off southern Africa (Lambert 1971, Rodrigues 1972). Most of the birds occurring in southern African waters are from the population which breeds at South Georgia (Tickell 1967, Morant et al. 1983).

Greyheaded Albatross Diomedea chrysostoma

A single Greyheaded Albatross, with a dark grey head and almost entirely dark underwing, flew close to the RV Kuiseb on 6 August 1986 approximately off St Francis Bay. If ratified by the S.A.O.S. Rare Bird Committee, this will be the second record of this albatross off the Namib coast. The previous record was one seen far off Rocky Point in May 1960 (Lambert 1968).

Pintado Petrel Daption capense

A single bird was off Conception Bay and six were seen between Hollamsbird and Mercury Islands on 5th and 6th August 1986 respectively.

Pintado Petrels, which breed at sub-Antarctic and Antarctic islands and in Antarctica, are regular nonbreeding visitors to waters off southern Africa where they occur throughout the year though mainly between August and November (Cooper & Dowle 1976).

Northern Giant Petrel Macronectes halli

The two species of giant petrel - the Northern M. halli and the Southern M. giganteus - are difficult to distinguish at sea unless they approach close enough for bill colour to be seen. All individuals recognized during the voyages were Northern Giant Petrels but some of the giant petrels seen at a distance may have been Southern.

Giant Petrels were observed at the following localities: at Ichaboe Island in November when there were at least two individuals; off the Lüderitz Peninsula in April, when there was a maximum of five in one day; and at sea off Lüderitz with a maximum concentration of eight close to the seal colony at Long Island in December 1985.

Giant Petrels occur along the Namib coast throughout the year with a marked concentration of birds, a maximum of 250 individuals, near the Cape Fur Seal Arctocephalus pusillus colonies at the Wolf Bay - Long Islands area where all but 3 % are halli (Shaughnessy & Voisin 1981). Recoveries of ringed birds indicate that giant petrels off southern Africa are from both Antarctic and sub-Antarctic breeding islands including Macquarie Island (Voisin et al. 1977), the Crozet Islands (Williams 1986), Heard Island, the South Orkney Islands, South Shetland Islands, and South Georgia (Morant et al. 1983).

Prions Pachyptila spp.

A single prion was seen briefly on 6 August as it circled the RV Kuiseb approximately off Easter Cliffs. Though not positively identified it was probably an Antarctic Prion Pachyptila desolata the most commonly occurring prion in southern African waters and the only species recorded by Lambert (1971) off the Namib coast.

Sooty Shearwater Puffinus griseus

Sooty Shearwaters were seen in small numbers during all voyages but in large numbers only twice. On 5 July 1986, after four days of southwesterly gales, a large passage of Sooty Shearwaters was observed off the Lüderitz Peninsula. This passage continued for at least two hours and probably longer. During a five minute count from the shore the shearwaters were passing across the "screen" of a telescope at the rate of one a second. A minimum of 5,000 individuals took part in this passage.

On 5 August 1986 between Sandwich Harbour and Conception Bay several rafts of between 50 and 150 birds were flushed from the sea by the RV Kuiseb and other undisturbed rafts were seen. In addition there were many hundreds of birds seen in flight. Probably a minimum of 3,000 birds were in the area. Numbers fell rapidly

south of Conception Bay nor were more than a few seen in the same area during northward passage on a very calm sea on August 8th.

The previous documented maximum count of Sooty Shearwaters along the southern African coast is of 410 birds (Lambert 1971) although larger numbers are known to occur off the Cape Peninsula (P.A.R. Hockey pers. comm.).

Manx Shearwater Puffinus puffinus

Single Manx Shearwaters were seen off Lüderitz on 5th December 1985 and on April 9 and 11, 1986.

Manx Shearwaters, which breed in western Europe, are now known to be uncommon but regular visitors to waters off southern Africa (Lambert 1975, Sinclair & Rose 1982).

Whitechinned Petrel Procellaria aequinoctialis

Whitechinned Petrels, which breed on sub-Antarctic islands, were seen during all voyages but generally in small numbers with a maximum of about 50 in any one area.

Wilson's Stormpetrel Oceanites oceanicus

A single bird was seen off the Lüderitz Peninsula on 14 April 1986.

Pomarine Skua Stercorarius pomarinus

At least twelve, and probably nearer 30, individuals were seen either singly or in parties of up to six birds on August 5 to 7, 1986.

Pomarine Skuas, which breed in Holarctic tundra areas, have been reported off the Namib coast between November and March (Lambert 1971, Summerhayes et al. 1974). These August records indicate that some, presumably immature birds, may pass the breeding season in southern African waters.

Arctic Skua Stercorarius parasiticus

Small numbers of Arctic Skuas were seen during most voyages between November and April inclusive but none were seen in July. In August 1986 two individuals were positively identified and probably several other skuas too far off for positive identification were of this species.

Arctic Skuas, which breed in the Palaearctic, have been recorded regularly off the Namib coast between September and May (Lambert

1971, Summerhayes et al. 1974) but seldom during the species' breeding season.

Sabine's Gull Xema sabinii

Single Sabine's Gulls were seen in December near Ichaboe Island and on August 6th between Conception and Meob Bays.

Sabine's Gulls, which breed in the Holarctic tundra, occur regularly in Benguela Current waters which form one of their most important nonbreeding concentration area (Lambert 1969).

DISCUSSION

As would be expected, the inshore waters of the Namib coast support far fewer pelagic seabirds than the offshore waters closer to the edge of the continental shelf (see Lambert 1971, Summerhayes et al. 1974 etc). Species which regularly occur in offshore waters which were not seen during these inshore voyages are: Yellow-nosed Albatross Diomedea chlororhynchos, Cory's Shearwater Calonectris diomedea, European Stormpetrel Hydrobates pelagicus and Longtailed Skua Stercorarius longicaudus.

Although most birds were observed at what would be maximum range for observers from the shore, the variety of species observed indicates that sea-watching from a mainland vantage point could turn up some interesting bird records, especially during or following periods of severe storms. Suitable watch points would be the Lüderitz Peninsula and Cape Cross, both of which provide both height and some shelter, and off Paaltjies and Bird Rock near Walvis Bay.

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