

THE OCCURRENCE OF HOLARCTIC SEABIRDS IN THE AFRICAN SECTOR  
OF THE SOUTHERN OCEAN

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INTRODUCTION

The coast of southern Africa is well known as a wintering ground for many seabirds that breed in the northern hemisphere (Brooke & Sinclair 1978, Clancey 1980). Some of these extend into the African sector (35S - 70W, 20W - 40E) of the Southern Ocean, but their occurrence in this area (5 100 000 km<sup>2</sup>) is poorly documented. This note reports on observations of 11 Holarctic species made during April 1979 to April 1980, and reviews these in the light of the published literature. All ocean cruises were made on the M.V. *Agulhas* during its relief voyages to Marion Island (46 57S, 37 52E), Gough Island (40 21S, 09 52W) and SANAE, Queen Maud Land, Antarctica (70 18S, 02 21W) from Cape Town, South Africa. The observers were familiar with all species mentioned, both in southern African waters and in the northern hemisphere (JCS).

SPECIES LIST

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

These birds are common in southern African waters from November to May, ranging east to Durban from January onwards (Brooke & Sinclair 1978). There is only one published record of the species south of the continental shelf, Williams and Burger (1978) recording two at the Prince Edward Islands (46 50S, 37 45E). JCS observed many moving west at Marion Island during the 1978/1979 austral summer. Our records of 20 birds in February and 16 in May only marginally extend the known distribution (Table 1, Fig. 1).

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

Manx Shearwaters occur regularly over the western and, infrequently, the eastern continental waters of southern Africa (Lambert 1971, Sinclair 1977, Brooke & Sinclair 1978, J.C. Sinclair & B. Rose in prep.). Our observation of one bird represents the only record of the species in the oceanic area considered here (Table 1, Fig. 2). A northwesterly gale of 65 knots had been blowing for the previous two days, indicating that the bird may have been blown southwards.

Leach's Stormpetrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

The species is seen infrequently off the west and south coasts of southern Africa, ranging as far as Durban, Natal (Bourne 1967, Brooke & Sinclair 1978). Our records (Table 1, Fig. 3) suggest that the species is more common in the area than was previously thought. The only other published record is that of Bierman and Voous (1950) at 57 40S, 05 00E.

TABLE 1

EXTREME DISTRIBUTION RECORDS OF Holarctic Seabirds Seen in the African Sector of the Southern Ocean, April 1979 to April 1980

Species	Date	Most southerly	Date	Most westerly	Date	Most easterly	No.
Cory's Shearwater	Jan	39 17S	May	8 26E	May	21 42E	60
Manx Shearwater	May	44 31S			May	15 21E	1
Leach's Stormpetrel	Mar	48 19S	Apr	17 16E	Mar	20 19E	38
British Stormpetrel	Jan	36 21S	Jan	18 21E	Sep	21 32E	6
Grey Phalarope	Jan	48 25S	Nov	3 51W	Nov	15 46E	148
Pomarine Skua	Nov	40 47S	Nov	14 36W	Feb	18 52E	22
Arctic Skua	Jan	41 19S	Oct	5 39W	Jan	18 58E	8
Longtailed Skua	Oct	38 33S	Nov	14 35W	Sep	22 53E	6
Arctic Tern	Mar	69 44S	Oct	9 32W	Mar	28 30E	60

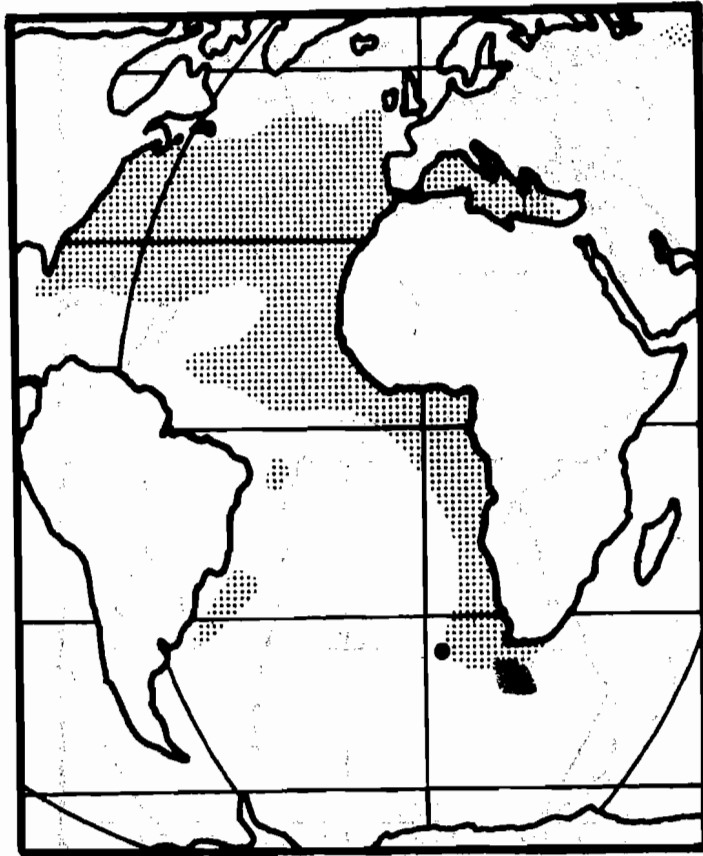


Figure 1

Distribution of Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*. Light stippling is the known distribution as given by Cramp & Simmons (1977). Dark stippling shows areas in the African Sector of the Southern Ocean where the species was commonly observed. Dots represent single records.

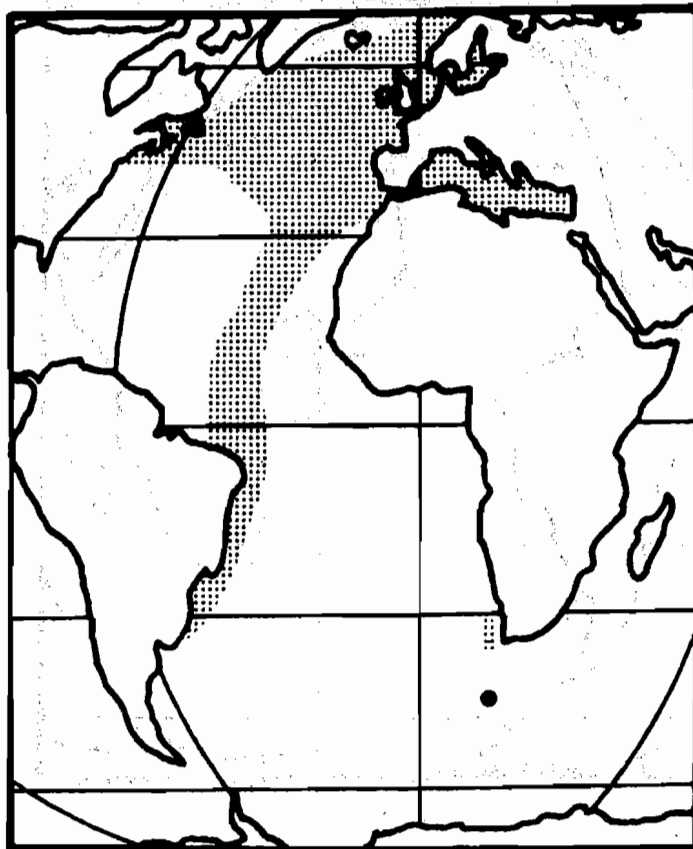


Figure 2

Distribution of Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*. Conventions as for Fig. 1.

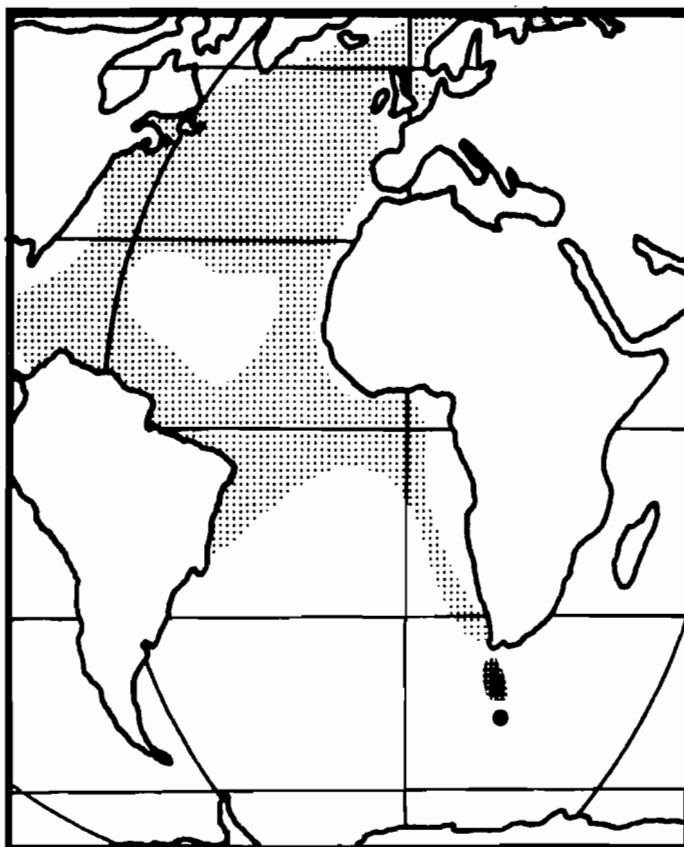


Figure 3

Distribution of Leach's Stormpetrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*.  
Conventions as for Fig. 1.

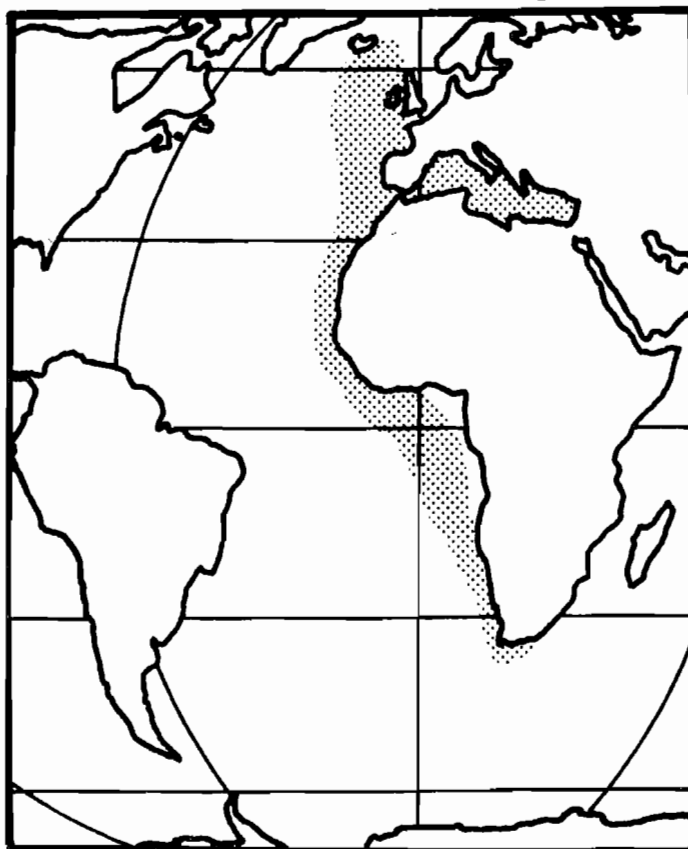


Figure 4

Distribution of British Stormpetrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*.  
Conventions as for Fig. 1.

British Stormpetrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*

This species winters along the west and south African coasts and regularly as far as Durban (Van Oordt & Kruijt 1953, Brooke & Sinclair 1978) from August to April. One specimen has been recorded from Tristan da Cunha (Winterbottom 1976). Our records (Table 1, Fig. 4) indicate that the species is found mainly in continental waters.

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Grey Phalaropes occur fairly regularly along the southern African coast as far east as East London (Courtenay-Latimer 1950, Stanford 1953, Brooke & Sinclair 1978, Sinclair 1979) and as far north as Durban, Natal (JCS pers.obs.). There are three accounts of their presence in the African sector of the Southern Ocean: 100 at 36 06S, 24 07E (Harrison *et al.* 1976), two at 41 30S, 28E (Van Oordt & Kruijt 1954) and two at Marion Island (Sinclair 1981). Our records (Table 1, Fig. 5) of 85 birds in February, 21 in October and 22 in November suggest that the wintering grounds of this species include the plankton rich Subtropical Convergence.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*

The species is a regular winter visitor to the southwestern coast of Africa and extends to Durban, Natal (Lambert 1971, Brooke & Sinclair 1978). There is only one previous record south of the continental shelf (Curtis 1977). Our observations (Table 1, Fig. 6) show that Pomarine Skuas occur northwest of the Tristan Archipelago, 18 birds being recorded there on two days in November.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

This species has the same wintering grounds in southern African waters as the Pomarine Skua (Brooke & Sinclair 1978), but occurs in greater numbers. Van Oordt and Kruijt (1953) and Sinclair (1981) report on individuals at 43S, 21E, and at Marion Island, respectively. We observed three birds west of the continental shelf in January, and five south of the shelf in November (Table 1, Fig. 7). Arctic Skuas were seen to harass unsuccessfully Soft-plumaged Petrels *Petrodroma mollis* on two occasions.

Longtailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

The southwestern coast of Africa has recently been identified as a wintering ground for the Longtailed Skua, Lambert (1980) reporting some 200 birds off Lüderitz, South West Africa/Namibia. This reference, Lambert (1968), Brooke and Sinclair (1978) and Clancey (1980) represent the only documentation of their presence in southern African waters. No previous records exist for the African sector of the Southern Ocean. We observed a total of seven birds in the study area during April, May and September to November (Table 1, Fig. 8). One bird seen in April was in fresh nuptial plumage, showing the elongated central tail feathers.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*

This species has been recorded in small numbers on the southwestern coast of southern Africa and as far east as Durban, Natal (Clancey 1980, R.K. Brooke & J.C. Sinclair in prep.). One record has been reported from Tristan da Cunha (Swales & Murphy

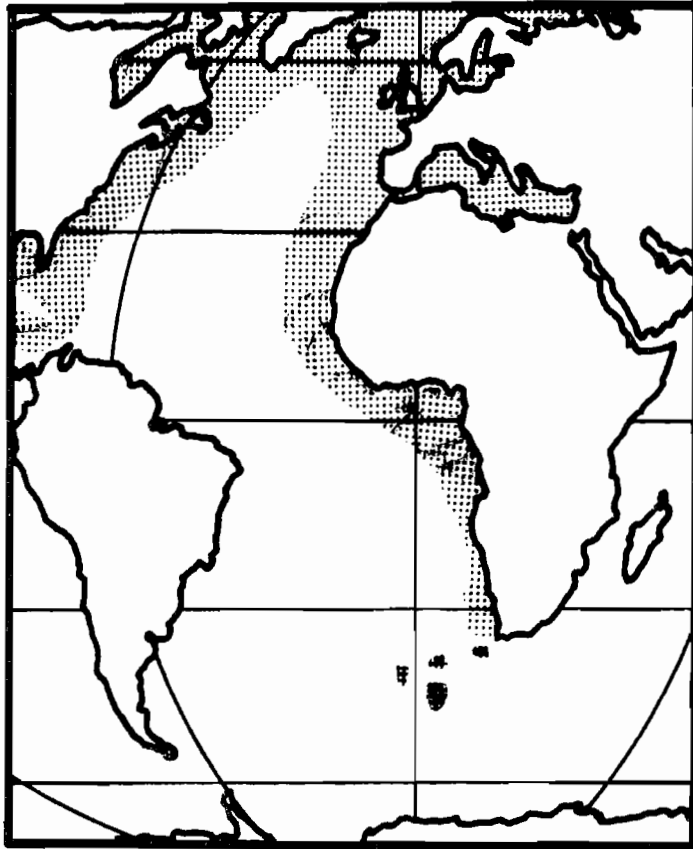


Figure 5

Distribution of Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*. Light stippling is the known distribution as given by Tuck & Heinzel (1979). Otherwise conventions as for Fig. 1.

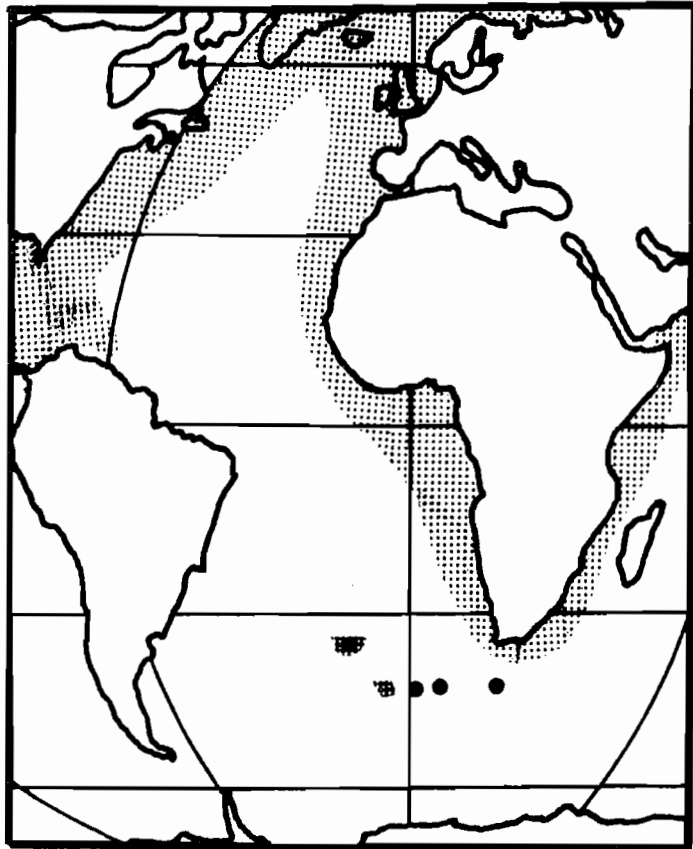


Figure 6

Distribution of Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*. Conventions as for Fig. 5.

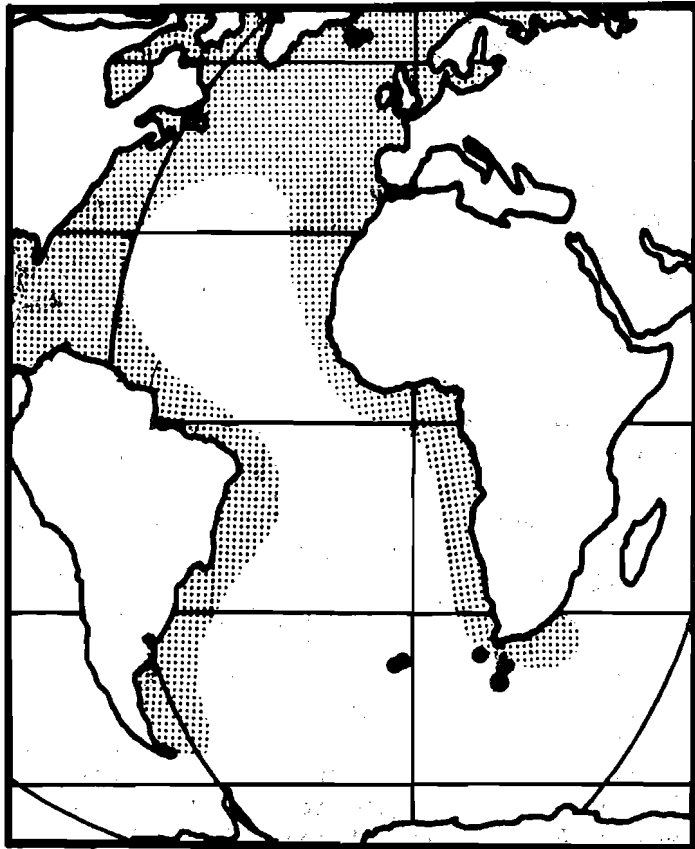


Figure 7

Distribution of Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*.  
Conventions as for Fig. 5.

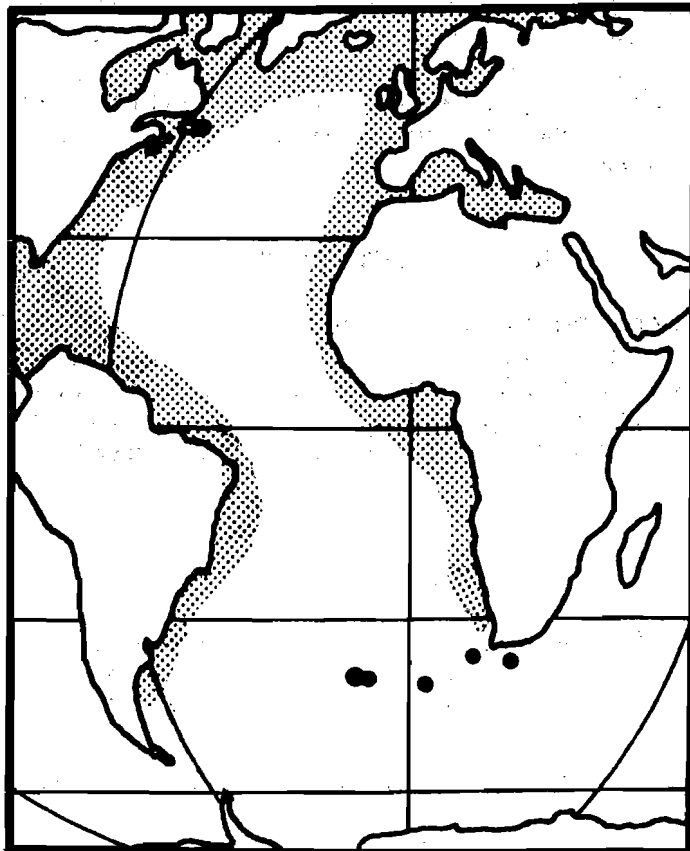


Figure 8

Distribution of Longtailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*.  
Light stippling is the known distribution as given by Tuck &  
Heinzel (1979) and Lambert (1968, 1980). Otherwise  
conventions as for Fig. 1.

1965). One adult in winter plumage was seen flying east off Marion Island (Sinclair 1981).

#### Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*

Sabine's Gull is common off the western coast of southern Africa and ranges as far east as southern Mozambique (Lambert in press). Our observations indicate that the species is confined to continental waters with three vagrants seen at Marion Island (Sinclair 1981).

#### Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

The Southern Ocean is well known as a wintering area for the Arctic Tern (Elliott 1971, Watson 1975). The birds fly in a southeasterly direction past southern Africa until they reach the East Wind Drift (Salomonsen 1967) where they congregate in areas of sea ice. We recorded the species most abundantly (flocks of over 200 birds) sitting on ice floes (Fig. 9). Once they were observed feeding above *c.* 200 Minke Whales *Baleanoptera acutorostrata* just north of the ice shelf. In the open ocean all birds seen were in flight. In November one bird with very heavy wing moult landed on the ship allowing capture. Most birds observed were seen on transects between South Africa and Gough Island (Fig. 9). It is surprising, in view of Salomonsen's (1967) suggested migration routes that none was observed between South Africa and Marion Island.

### CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the observations made above, the Holarctic species that could be considered regular in the African sector of the Southern Ocean are Leach's Stormpetrel, Arctic Tern and Grey Phalarope. The remaining species can be, until further observations prove otherwise, considered as infrequent or vagrant visitors to the region.

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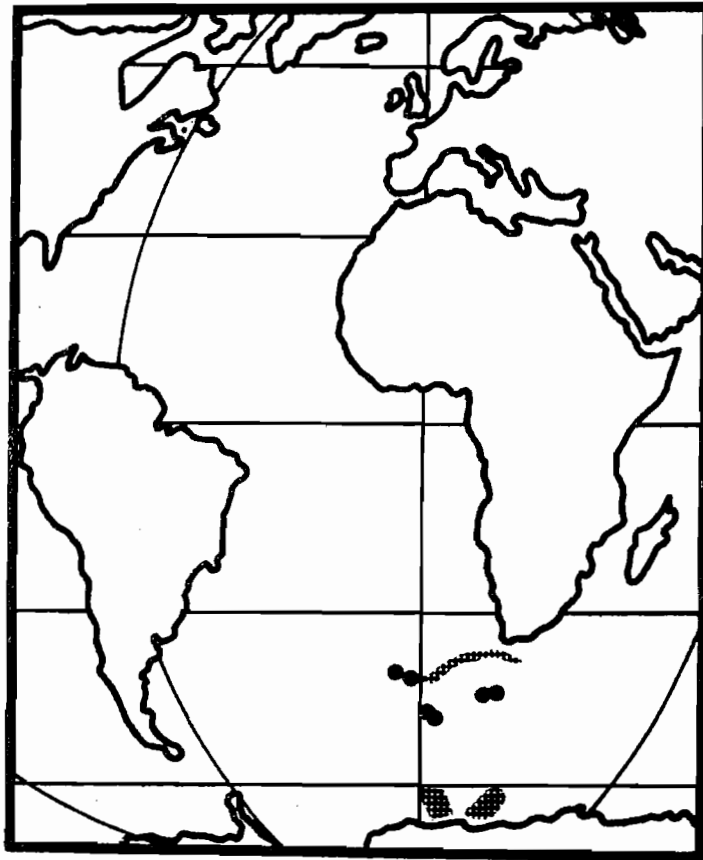


Figure 9

Distribution of Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*.  
The previously known distribution is not shown (see text).