SEABIRD RARITIES

In 1981 the Southern African Ornithological Society formed a Rarities Committee (Sinclair 1981). The procedure and functions of this committee are well outlined with the basic function of the committee being the vetting of all sight records of rare and vagrant birds in southern Africa before full publication in a recognized journal. Over one-third of the species listed on the S.A.O.S. rare bird list are seabirds and to date 25 % of records submitted to the Rarities Committee have been seabirds.

Many seabirds on the southern African list (Clancey 1980) are "rare" due to the fact that they are extremely difficult to identify and are usually overlooked. They are difficult to observe from the mainland because of the distances they occur offshore and very few observers venture out to sea in search of them. Even at sea they are not the easiest of birds to identify because weather conditions are all important in obtaining good views and too often birds disappear over a wave whilst the boat pitches and rolls and the bird is lost from view. Before the 1970s most records of our lesser known seabirds came from beach wrecked specimens and are now housed in museums throughout the country. Today the pattern has changed. Sightings of rare seabirds are now made regularly around the southern African coast and these records are being published in various news-sheets and journals often without substantiating evidence.

A Rare Bird Form has been designed with a special section for seabird sightings. These forms are obtainable from the Editor of *Cormorant*. An observer who makes a sight record of a seabird in southern African waters which appears on the list below is requested to complete a Rare Bird Form and to submit it to the Editor of *Cormorant*. This form will then be circulated to the members of the S.A.O.S. Rarities Committee who will assess the validity of the sight record. If the committee cannot pass comment on the record, it will then pass the record to observers familiar with the species for their comments. If accepted by the committee, the record will be recommended for publication in *Cormorant* and will also be published in the Rarities Committee's Annual Report.

List of seabirds on the S.A.O.S. Rare Bird List

King Penguin
Macaroni Penguin
Rockhopper Penguin
Greyheaded Albatross
Royal Albatross
Sooty Albatross
Lightmantled Sooty Albatross
Antarctic Fulmar
Antarctic Petrel
Atlantic Petrel
Whiteheaded Petrel
Kerguelen Petrel
Blue Petrel
Fairy Prion
Grey Petrel
Whitefaced Stormpetrel
Blackbellied Stormpetrel
Whitebellied Stormpetrel
Redtailed Tropicbird
Whitetailed Tropicbird
Masked Booby
Brown Booby
Great Frigatebird
Lesser Frigatebird
Longtailed Skua
South Polar Skua
Lesser Blackbacked Gull
Franklin's Gull
Kittiwake
Gullbilled Tern

Fleshfooted Shearwater
Manx Shearwater
Wedgetailed Shearwater
Audubon's Shearwater
Little Shearwater
Leach's Stormpetrel
Common Noddy
Royal Tern
Blacknaped Tern
Whitecheeked Tern
Sooty Tern
Bridled Tern
Black Tern

REFERENCES

CLANCEY, P.A. (Ed.). 1980. S.A.O.S. checklist of southern African birds. Johannesburg: Southern African Ornithological Society.

SINCLAIR, J.C. 1981. S.A.O.S. Rarities Committee. *Bokmakierie* 33: 31-34.

J.C. Sinclair, Chairman, S.A.O.S. Rarities Committee, Durban Museum, P.O. Box 4085, Durban 4000, South Africa.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION : COLOUR RINGED SWIFT TERNS *STERNA BERGII*

Swift Tern *Sterna bergii* chicks have been ringed on islands in the southwestern Cape, South Africa, by members of the African Seabird Group, since 1977. After breeding, adults along with young birds spread out along the coastline at least as far east as Richard's Bay, Natal, and up the west coast to at least Walvis Bay, South West Africa/Namibia. Red colour rings were used in 1979, yellow in 1980 and blue in 1981. This year white was used when an African Seabird Group party ringed 2 558 chicks at Marcus Island, Saldanha Bay, on 17 and 22 April 1982. A total of 7 056 chicks has been ringed in six years. Sightings of these colour ringed birds along with flock size and numbers of juveniles (heavily barred individuals) present are requested. The date and locality are also needed.

Send all observations to J. Cooper, African Seabird Group, c/o FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.

REVIEW OF THE EIGHTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PACIFIC SEABIRD GROUP, SEATTLE, JANUARY 1982

About 120 people attended the annual meeting of the Pacific Seabird Group at the Seattle Aquarium, Washington, U.S.A., from 6 - 9 January 1982. The Aquarium proved to be a stimulating venue, particularly since we could watch puffins, murres and auklets feeding underwater during our cocktail hour. The 53 papers were divided up into three symposium sessions plus many general papers. The symposium papers will be published in the Canadian Wildlife Service Occasional Paper Series.

The first symposium dealt with the feeding ecology of marine wate fowl. Large numbers of ducks and geese use inshore marine habitats in North America, particularly during the winter. Thes papers confirmed that there is still a large population of wildli biologists in North America which views biology down the barrel o a gun or from the gore of gut contents.

The second symposium was on feeding ecology of pelagic marine birds. Several papers dealt with Alaskan seabirds, which have received considerable attention in the past decade. Kenneth Briggs and his coworkers presented a remarkable paper showing tha phalaropes off California were most numerous in strong thermal an chlorohpyll gradients bordering upwelling water masses. Their study incorporated daily readings of sea surface temperatures and chlorophyll concentrations obtained from satellites, in addition to regular observations from ships and aircraft. Their findings confirm those of R.G.B. Brown, who showed that phalaropes in other parts of the world tend to concentrate at oceanic fronts.

Several papers considered resource partitioning amongst sympatric species. It seems that seabird species quite often have overlapping trophic niches during the nonbreeding season. Ray Pierotti found almost complete overlap in the diets of some sympatric gull species, and he rejected the idea that interspecific competition acts to structure foraging patterns in these birds. Problems associated with shortterm studies of seabird diets were also demonstrated. Kees Vermeer showed that there were significant changes in the diets of breeding Rhinoceros Auklets *Cerorhinca monocerata* at one site in British Columbia, Canada, both between years and also at times within a single season.

The third symposium dealt with the interactions between seabirds and commercial fisheries. The depletions of the stocks of many species of small pelagic shoaling fish, and changes in the fish species composition, have affected the diets and population sizes of seabirds in California, Peru, southern Africa and on both side of the north Atlantic. Specialized pursuit divers, such as puffins, murres and Razorbills *Alca torda* in the North Atlantic and penguins off Peru and southern Africa, appear to have been adversely affected by these changes. In certain regions, seabir have been able to switch to alternative prey species, but in some regions, notably the western North Atlantic, such "buffer" specie cannot support the seabird populations, which are expected to decrease. A welcome addition to this symposium was contribution from fisheries biologists, from California and Newfoundland.

The value of computer modelling of seabird energetics and population changes, in relation to the fisheries, was demonstrated in two papers. Bob Furness emphasized with his model that we need to know a lot more about the effects of food shortage on adult survival, age of first breeding and parental attendance patterns in seabirds. Jake Rice and others showed that models might be useful in predicting critical periods during the breeding season when food shortages might have the greatest impact. Their presentation also emphasized that by constructing a model, valuable data were often forthcoming from biologists of different fields who otherwise seldom share data or problems.

Alec McCall proposed an interesting hypothesis, which might apply to southern Africa. He proposed that, prior to the guano and fishing industries, the guano cap on Peruvian seabird islands provided an important nutrient buffer for the local marine ecosystem. During the El Niño years rainfall was higher than normal and would have washed essential nutrients from guano into the sea to boost productivity near the seabird colonies, thus partially buffering the deleterious effects of the reduced upwelling during these times. The present lack of accumulated guano might account for the failure of Peruvian seabird populations to recover from El Niño years.

Drowning of seabirds in gillnets has become a major problem in some areas. Off Newfoundland and Greenland, many thousands of puffins and murres drown annually and in British Columbia local breeding populations of Marbled Murrelets *Brachyramphus marmoratus* might be threatened for this reason. Another problem now facing seabirds is the abundance of plastic on the sea surface. Plastic particles, evidently mistaken for food, have become an integral part of the intake of several seabirds, including albatrosses from Hawaii and phalaropes off California. Accumulations of plastic reduced the overall food intake in some cases.

The temperatures during the meeting were low, dropping below -10°C, which is unusual for Seattle. This might have influenced the executive committee of the Pacific Seabird Group, when they decided to hold their next meeting, jointly with the Australasian Seabird Group, from 1 - 3 December 1982 in Waikiki, Hawaii.

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