

OBSERVATIONS OF BIRDS AT NUNATAKS IN WESTERN DRONNING MAUD LAND, ANTARCTICA,

1988-1989

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Ryan & Watkins (1988) reported on their observations of birds in the inland mountains of western Dronning Maud Land, Antarctica, during the summer of 1987-1988, and collated casual observations of members of South African earth science teams in the region since 1984. They also summarized previous published work. This note summarizes my observations at three inland localities in western Dronning Maud Land during 17 December 1988 to 26 January 1989.

All observations were made during the course of other field work, but the time of day and weather were recorded for all observations. No "watch" for birds was maintained and consequently the records are not as comprehensive as those of Ryan & Watkins (1988). The areas visited during the course of the season were the Grunehogna group of nunataks (72 02S, 2 22W), the Sistefjell area (73 22S, 0 40W) and the Straumsvola area (72 07S, 0 20W). Ryan & Watkins (1988) do not give records of birds for the Sistefjell area. The same four bird species that were observed by Ryan & Watkins (1988) were all recorded at at least one of the three localities visited.

*Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica**

Two flocks of between 25-30 birds of this species were seen. The first was in the Grunehogna area in the late afternoon of 23 December 1988. The second was also in the late afternoon at Tvora near Straumsvola on 11 January 1989, a locality not mentioned for the species by Ryan & Watkins (1988). On both occasions the weather was fine and had been preceded by at least 48 hours of good

weather. No record was kept of the direction in which the flocks were moving. These observations are in contrast to those of Ryan & Watkins (1988) who reported strong winds during or immediately before sightings. They also reported that no Antarctic Petrels were observed after 2 January.

*Snow Petrel *Pagodroma nivea**

This species was observed at all three localities. The largest group was of five birds at Grunehogna. A single individual was present at Sisterabben near Sistefjell, the only bird seen in this area. Sightings of this species were made at all times of the day and during all weather conditions at both Grunehogna and Straumsvola.

*Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus**

A single individual was seen at the southern end of Straumsvola at 08h30 on 16 January 1989, a locality not mentioned for the species by Ryan & Watkins (1988). A South Polar Skua was also present. The weather was good at the time.

*South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki**

South Polar Skuas were seen five times at Grunehogna. The maximum number of birds seen at one time was two. At Straumsvola no birds were seen for four days after setting up camp. However, a group of birds were attracted to the camp on 17 January, and their numbers grew from two at 02h00 to 10 by 08h00. Other field parties in the area also reported large groups at the same time, and there were possibly up to 30 birds in the area at one time.

No apparent weather change was observed. After this at least one skua was seen daily in the Straumsvola area, a locality not specifically mentioned for the species by Ryan & Watkins (1988).

New data on localities, time of day, weather conditions and numbers were obtained for four species of seabirds in western Dronning Maud Land. Identification of these species is easy and it is therefore useful to encourage earth science team members to record their observations each year.

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REFERENCE

- RYAN, P.G. & WATKINS, B.P. 1988. Birds of the inland mountains of western Dronning Maud Land, Antarctica. *Cormorant* 16: 34-40.