

LITTLE SHEARWATER *PUFFINUS ASSIMILIS* ASHORE AT ROBBEN ISLAND, SOUTH AFRICA

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Robben Island (3345S, 1822E), 13 km northwest of Cape Town in Table Bay, southwestern Cape, South Africa, is a major breeding locality for seabirds (Kriel *et al.* 1980). On 15 September 1989, during a census of breeding Hartlaub's Gulls *Larus hartlaubii*, the remains of three seabirds were observed on the fringe of a gull colony. These were one wing of a Hartlaub's Gull chick, a pair of wings from an adult Hartlaub's Gull, and the partly eaten remains of a Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* (Fig. 1). These birds appeared to have been killed by a feral Domestic Cat *Felis catus*, which is the only mammalian predator recorded on the island (Cooper *et al.* 1985). Although they have bred regularly at Robben Island in recent years, Hartlaub's Gulls only initiated breeding at the particular locality in 1989 (pers. obs.). The area had recently been cleared of bluegum trees *Eucalyptus* spp., and was situated near the centre of the island at least one kilometre from the sea. It can be assumed that the Little Shearwater, a rare winter migrant to southern African waters (Sinclair *et al.* 1982, Ryan & Rose 1989), came inland to roost within the security of a gull colony, where it was caught by a cat. Only one live Little Shearwater has previously been recorded ashore in South Africa (Sinclair *et al.* 1982).

Measurements for the Little Shearwater were as follows: wing 181 mm; culmen 25.9 mm; tarsus 39.4 mm. Based on these measurements, the specimen was identified as belonging to the

subspecies *P. a. tunneyi* (Sinclair *et al.* 1982). The skull is being kept by Mr B. Rose of the Sea Fisheries Research Institute. This subspecies breeds on islands off southwestern Australia and perhaps on St Paul Island in the southern Indian Ocean (Ryan & Rose 1989).

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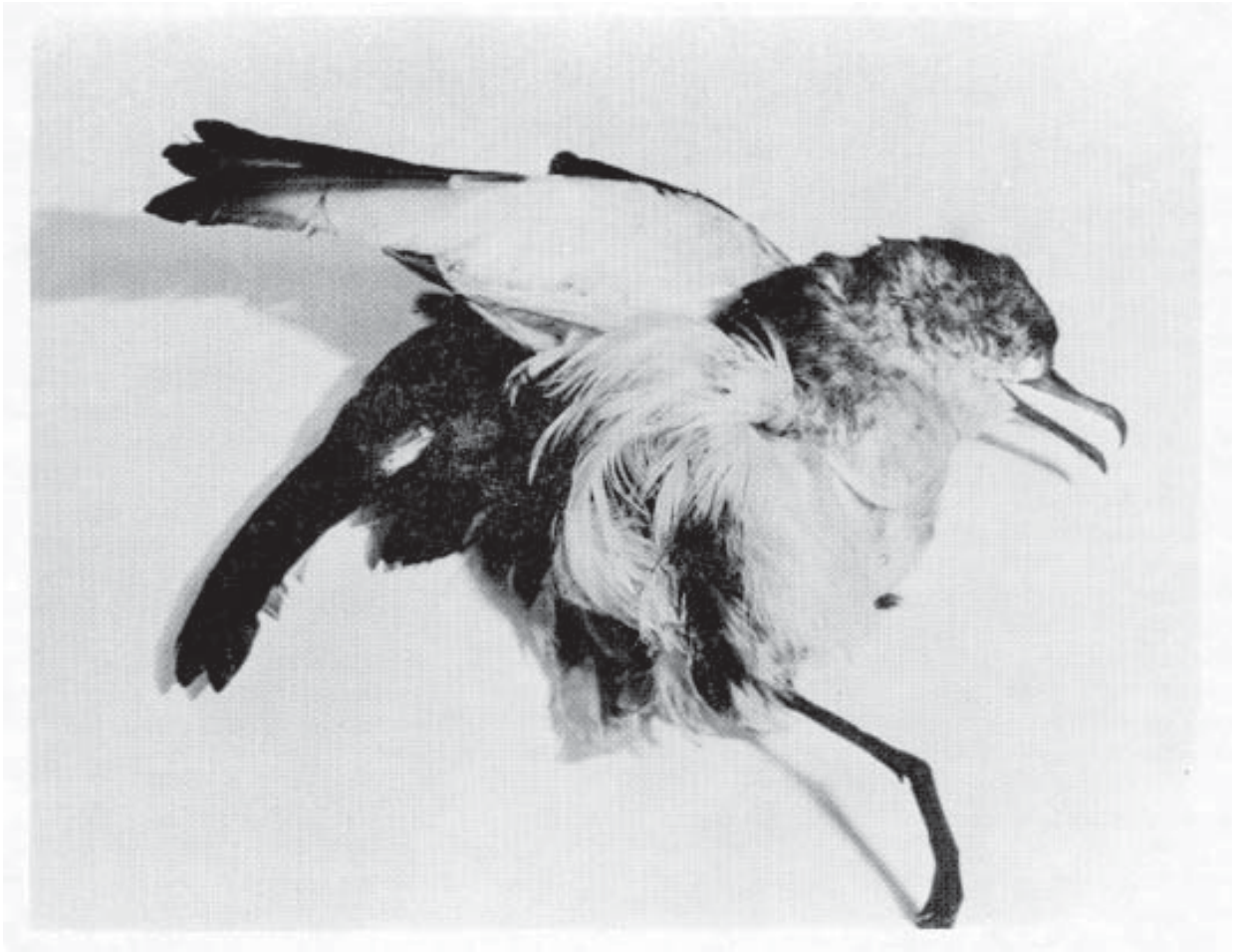


Figure 1

The remains of a Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis* recovered from Robben Island on 15 September 1989