

Cory's Shearwaters in the Indian Ocean

Distribution of most pelagic species at sea is imperfectly understood, the Indian Ocean range of the Cory's or Mediterranean Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* being a prime example. In recent years, sightings have shown that this species is a regular visitor to the seas off the coastline of South Africa. Apparently it is more plentiful off Cape Point and along the western coast of South Africa than off the Natal coast (McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). Its precise range in the Indian Ocean however is unclear.

Presumably on the strength of one beach-washed casualty at Foxton Beach, New Zealand in 1934, (Falla, Gibson & Turbott 1966) both Mathews (1946) and Alexander (1955) record this species' range as including the Indian Ocean area. Watson (1975) lists Cory's Shearwater as a questionable vagrant to the higher latitudes of the Indian Ocean. Serventy, Serventy & Warham (1971) appear to disagree with Mathews' (1946) opinion that this species is sometimes present at sea off south western Australia, and an early record by Sharp in 1878 of specimens collected at the Iles Kerguelen is suggested by Bourne (1955) to have probably been taken off the coast of South Africa. From the foregoing it is evident that authorities differ in their opinion on the Indian Ocean status of this species.

During two voyages in consecutive years I have been surprised at the numbers and frequency of sightings of Cory's Shearwater in the Indian Ocean. Details of sightings are listed below :

Voyage 1 on the R.S.A. from Cape Town to Marion Island and the return leg to Cape Town. Unfortunately co-ordinates were not recorded at the times of the sightings. Approximate positions only are available :

8 April 1976, approximately 180 miles south-east of Cape Point, one.

8 May 1976, approximately 210 miles south-east of Cape Point, eight birds approached the R.S.A. in a loose flock and flew alongside the vessel before departing.

Voyage 2 on the Gallileo, from Durban to Freemantle. Positions given are from the Navigational Officer's log and refer to chart positions at the time of the sightings :

14 January 1977, 36 52S, 53 27E (1 199 miles out of Durban). One.
15 January 1977, 38 31S, 63 13E (1 675 miles out of Durban). One.
15 January 1977, 38 31S, 63 90E. Five in a loose flock approached the Gallileo closely. Straw-coloured bills were plainly visible.
16 January 1977, 39 01S 73 34E (2 161 miles out of Durban). Two.

Two points emerge from the above observations. Firstly that, although many birds return north in March, a proportion evidently remain at sea off South Africa after this date (McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). Whether they remain in the Agulhas Banks area or simply return north after the main exodus is not known. Secondly, from my observations during my voyage on the Galileo, Cory's Shearwater appears to disperse widely into the Indian Ocean. This concept is contrary to popular opinion on the movements of this species. Nine specimens recorded between the

53rd and 73rd parallels East, and almost down to the 40th parallel South however leaves the matter in no doubt. January is possibly the time when the greatest number of Cory's Shearwaters are in the seas off South Africa. It appears that many round the Cape and then disperse into the Indian Ocean. Exactly how far they manage to penetrate has yet to be determined, but it is interesting to note that it was in January that the beach-washed casualty in New Zealand was recovered.

To enable a more accurate appraisal of this species' Indian Ocean distribution, I would welcome any information, including records of past sightings. Details of sightings should preferably include date, co-ordinates, or approximate positions from land and numbers.

References

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