

A SOURCE OF NEST MATERIAL FOR CAPE CORMORANTS

PHALACROCORAX CAPENSIS ON MALGAS ISLAND

Malgas Island (33 03S, 17 56E, ca. 9 ha) at the northern entrance to Saldanha Bay, southwestern Cape, has 14 species of birds breeding on it. The three most numerous (over 1 000 pairs annually) are, in descending order of numbers, the Cape Gannet *Sula capensis*, the Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus* and the Cape Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capensis* (RKB pers.obs.). All three breed in summer. As a result of the mass of birds and their guano there is little chance for the locally growing vegetation to flourish and provide the amount of nesting material required by breeding birds, particularly the Cape Cormorant and, to a lesser extent, the Jackass Penguin. On 11 April 1980 SJM examined the flora of the island and found that in the breeding areas the only relatively common plants were the Ice Plant *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* Mesembryanthemaceae and the groundsel *Senecio elegans* Asteraceae. The Hottentot Grass *Trachyandra divaricata* Liliaceae was found in many Cape Cormorant and a few Cape Gannet nests but was not found growing on Malgas Island.

However, Dassen Island (33 25S, 18 05E) lying 42 km to the south southeast has a dense growth of *T. divaricata* occupying a third of that 220 ha island. Dassen Island is the only place where this plant is abundant. *T. divaricata* has not been found growing on any island in Saldanha Bay and is a sparse and localised plant on the mainland (SJM pers.obs.). After flowering the dried out peduncles break off and blow about in the wind. The prevailing wind in summer is southeasterly so that they mostly blow in a northerly/northwesterly direction into the sea (J. Cooper pers.comm.). There they are apparently carried by the north setting Benguela Current and the prevailing winds towards Saldanha Bay where nest building Cape Cormorants collect them and incorporate them into their nests. Since the peduncles blow about easily some are lost and are used by Cape Gannets for integration into their nests made predominantly of guano. Thus Cape Cormorants make use of nesting material brought by wind and current to the vicinity of their breeding site when the locally grown supply is inadequate.

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BLACKNECKED GREBES *PODICEPS NIGRICOLLIS* AT SEA
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

In western Europe Blacknecked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* often winter on sheltered inshore waters (Cramp & Simmons 1977). This note summarises published records and gives previously unpublished sightings of Blacknecked Grebes at sea in southern Africa.

The Blacknecked Grebe is well recorded from the sheltered harbours and lagoons of South West Africa: principally Walvis Bay, Lüderitz and Sandwich Harbour (Becker 1965, Winterbottom 1971, Summerhayes *et al.* 1974, Berry & Berry 1975, Whitelaw *et al.* 1978). It is also known to occur offshore around the South West African islands (Cooper *et al.* 1979). However, Cooper *et al.* (1979) are incorrect in giving Possession Island (27 01S, 15 12E) as the southern limit for the species occurring at sea, since Rand (1949) had recorded it further south at Sinclair Island (27 40S, 15 31E). R. Wilson (pers.comm.) observed *ca.* 430 off Possession Island in late January 1980 and B. Smith (pers. comm. to R. Wilson) reported up to 67 birds off Ichaboe Island (26 17S, 14 56E) in the winter of 1979, they left when commercial cray-fishing commenced. Within South Africa, published records are limited to an old winter report from Lambert's Bay (Cape Bird Club Checklist 1979). J. Cooper (pers.comm.) considers this record may refer to the seasonal waterbody Jakkalsrivier, where he has seen the species north of the town and not to the marine habitat.

I have two sightings of Blacknecked Grebes at sea in the Cape Province, South Africa. On 24 November 1979 three birds were seen diving in the sheltered zone behind the breakwater at Yzerfontein (33 31S, 18 09E) and on 15 January 1980 12 birds were observed diving in John Owen Bay, Port Nolloth (29 16S, 16 52E). The numbers of Blacknecked Grebes off South West Africa reach a peak in winter (Rand 1949, Berry & Berry 1975). The fact that both records for the Cape Province were in summer may be incidental, but could be due to the lack of suitable freshwater bodies at that time of year. In the southwestern Cape, Black-necked Grebes tend to move to temporary vleis in winter, especially on the west coast (pers.obs.). In early summer when these pans dry out it is possible that some of the non-breeding birds move out to sea. Also, when the birds were seen at Port Nolloth, the entire northern Cape was drought stricken.

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DIVING BY GIANT PETRELS *MACRONECTES*

Of the albatrosses and petrels (Order Procellariiformes), diving and swimming underwater is well known among the Family Pelecanoididae and for several members of the Family Procellariidae (Serventy *et al.* 1971, McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). It has recently been described in Shorttailed Shearwaters *Puffinus tenuirostris* in Bass Strait (Skira 1979), and in Blackbrowed and Shy Albatrosses *Diomedea melanophris* and *D. cauta* in South African waters (Nicholls 1979, Oatley 1979). In this note we describe diving by the largest members of the Procellariidae, the giant petrels *Macronectes* spp.

From 26 to 29 September 1977 we were at Wolf Bay (26 49S, 15 07E) near Lüderitz in South West Africa/Namibia, catching Northern Giant Petrels *M. halli* from an inflatable dinghy with an outboard motor by throwing a net on a cane hoop over them (Voisin *et al.* 1977). One of us (PDS) noticed that a few birds escaped from the net by diving and swimming a few metres underwater.

One month later, on 26 October 1977 J-FV made a similar observation at Gough Island (40 21S, 09 53W). One Giant Petrel *M. giganteus* was observed sitting on the sea near the shore at Long Beach and was being slowly driven towards the surf zone, which consisted of breaking waves over a metre high. As the bird came within one or two metres of the waves, it made a half-turn with an energetic kick to face the swell and dived below it. It resurfaced a few metres on the seaward side of the surf, and swam offshore before resuming its resting position.

In order to dive, giant petrels spread their wings as they do when they bathe (Voisin 1978). They dived with a low angle of incidence and, while underwater, kept their wings almost outstretched with the joints slightly bent. Their diving behaviour differed from that described for albatrosses by Nicholls (1979) in that the giant petrels' wings were not bent sharply at the carpal joints, and they used their feet rather than their wings

for swimming.

We have not observed giant petrels diving through waves on other occasions, but our colleagues J. Cooper and A.J. Williams of the FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, have both witnessed such activity at Marion Island (46 53S, 37 52E).

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WHITEBREASTED CORMORANT *PHALACROCORAX CARBO* CHOKES ON FISH

A freshly dead adult Whitebreasted Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* was found on the shore of Barberspan (26 33S, 25 36E) on 30 August 1978. The bird had choked on a Mud Mullet *Labeo umbratus* that was upside down in the bird's gullet. The mass of the bird was 2 480 g, while the dimensions of the fish were : mass 870 g (35 % of the bird's mass), length 380 mm, depth 85 mm.

On 12 October 1974 a large number of large Carp *Cyprinus carpio* were spawning in the shallow water around the edge of Barberspan. One Whitebreasted Cormorant was swimming amongst the fish and catching them. The fish were well over 2 kg in mass and flicked themselves to break free from the bird. They appeared to be unconcerned by the presence of this predator.

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SOUTH AFRICAN SHELDUCK *TADORNA CANA* FEEDING AT SEA IN SOUTH AFRICA

On 16 January 1980 a female South African Shelduck *Tadorna cana* was observed feeding in the sea 2 m offshore at McDougall Bay (29 17S, 16 52E), Port Nolloth. The bird fed by up-ending in shallow water (ca. 30 cm deep) rich in particulate organic matter presumably produced from nearby stranded kelp. Twenty Shelduck were counted here, this being the locality where the species was first recorded at sea in southern Africa (Baron, S. 1977, *Cormorant* 3: 19).

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DABCHICKS *TACHYBAPTUS RUFICOLLIS* FORAGING AT SEA IN SOUTH AFRICA

In western Europe Dabchicks *Tachybaptus ruficollis* occur on sheltered coastlines outside the breeding season (Cramp & Simmons 1977). This has not been recorded in southern Africa (McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). On 15 January 1980 two Dabchicks were observed diving approximately 30 m offshore in John Owen Bay, Port Nolloth (29 16S, 16 52E).

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