

Three new seabird species recorded at Tristan da Cunha archipelago

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Introduction

The Tristan da Cunha archipelago comprises three main islands: Tristan, Inaccessible and Nightingale at 37°S 12°W, with Gough Island (40°S 10°W) the only other temperate oceanic island in the South Atlantic Ocean (Ryan 2007). Tristan and Gough are important breeding sites for 25 species of seabirds (Ryan 2008; Ryan *et al.* 2014; 2015; Robertson *et al.* 2016), and a further 30 species of non-breeding seabirds have been reported from the islands (Ryan 2007; Visser *et al.* 2009; Ryan 2010). We report three additional species from the islands based on observations from 2017 to 2019.

Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross

On 17 January 2019, an adult Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche carteri* was seen flying over Gough Island near the path from the weather station to Gonydale. It then landed and bill-fenced with a loafing Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *T. chlororhynchos*. It was distinguished from an Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross by its pale head and pointed yellow bill stripe at the base of its culminicorn (Figure 1). Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses generally have a grey wash over the head and more extensive dark feathers around the eyes, and the base of the yellow bill stripe is rounded (Shirihai 2007). The Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross flew away when first approached, but landed again a few minutes later and continued to interact with the same Atlantic bird.

Indian Yellow-nosed Albatrosses breed on Southern Ocean islands, namely Prince Edward Island and the French islands Amsterdam, Crozet, Kerguelen and Ile Saint-Paul. At sea, they regularly venture into the southeast Atlantic Ocean off South Africa, but the species is not listed from Tristan da Cunha (Ryan 2007; 2008). However, AS observed three in the 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone around the Tristan da Cunha archipelago during research cruises in summer 2017 and 2018: one 87 km SSW of Nightingale Island on 25 January 2017, one over Crawford Seamount on 23 March 2018, and one 55 km north of Tristan on 31 March 2018. Tristan Conservation

staff (JR) report seeing a pair loafing ashore on the east coast of Tristan in 2012, but this is the first confirmed and photographically documented record of an individual coming ashore at one of the Tristan islands.

Fairy Prion

Brown Skuas *Catharacta antarctica* breeding along the path from the huts to the Ponds on Nightingale Island feed mainly on Broad-billed Prions *Pachyptila vittata*, and the path is littered with prion carcasses. On 29 September 2018, BJD found a dead Fairy Prion *P. turtur* in a skua midden on the main path near the junction to the West Landing. The carcass was fairly fresh and readily identified by its short, stubby bill and broad black tail tip (Shirihai 2007). On 30 September 2018, NR found a Fairy Prion head in a different skua midden along the path closer to the huts. Non-breeding skuas at Inaccessible Island occasionally catch Antarctic Prions *P. desolata* (Fraser *et al.* 1988; Ryan & Moloney 1991; PGR unpubl. data), which are not known to breed at the

islands (Ryan 2007). However, these Fairy Prions were found in the middens of incubating pairs of skuas, and incubating skuas seldom range more than a few hundred metres from their nests on Nightingale Island (BJD unpubl. GPS tracking data). It is thus likely that these Fairy Prions were caught ashore by the skuas.

In the South Atlantic Ocean, Fairy Prions only breed at the Falklands and South Georgia; farther east in the southwest Indian Ocean they also breed at the Prince Edward, Crozet and Kerguelen archipelagos. Fairy Prions typically remain fairly close to their breeding islands, with a large break in the range between the southwest Atlantic and southwest Indian Ocean (e.g. Marchant & Higgins 1990; Shirihai 2007; Ropert-Coudert *et al.* 2014). However, vagrants have been recorded from southern Africa (Hockey *et al.* 2005), and tens of Fairy Prions were seen farther south in the central South Atlantic during the Antarctic Circumnavigation Expedition in March 2017 (PGR unpubl. data). They were observed from 57°S 6°W to 55°S 2°W on 11–12 March, and again from 51°S 7°E to 48°S 10°E on 14–15 March (PGR unpubl. data). Fairy Prions presumably are easily overlooked at sea among the vast numbers of Broad-billed and MacGillivray's Prions *P. macgillivrayi* that occur off Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island.



Figure 1. The adult Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche carteri* loafing on Gough Island on 17 January 2019. © Michelle Risi



Figure 2. The adult gannet (*Morus* sp.) photographed off the west coast of Inaccessible Island from a fishing vessel on 1 December 2018. © Peter Ryan

Gannet

An adult gannet *Morus* sp. was photographed by PGR approximately 5 km off the west coast of Inaccessible Island on 1 December 2018 (Figure 2). Its black secondaries and tail feathers indicate it is not a Northern Gannet *M. bassanus*, but the images obtained are not sufficiently clear to discriminate between a Cape Gannet *M. capensis* and an Australasian Gannet *M. serrator*. Based on the location of Tristan da Cunha relative to the ranges of these two species, Cape Gannet is more likely, but the relatively dark orange-gold head, dusky grey eye and hint of white outer tail all point towards Australasian Gannet (Shirihai 2007). Unfortunately, the length of the gular stripe is not visible in the images obtained. The bird was seen from the *Geo Searcher*, a fishing vessel catching Rock Lobster *Jasus tristani*. The ship was attended by scavenging birds (mainly giant petrels *Macronectes* spp., Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, Spectacled Petrels *Procellaria conspicillata*, Great Shearwaters *Ardenna gravis* and Cape Petrels *Daption capense*) but the gannet did not visit the ship.

Vagrant Cape Gannets have reached Argentina and Brazil (Shirihai 2007), and Australasian Gannets are rare but regular vagrants to Cape Gannet colonies in southern Africa, sometimes hybridising with Cape Gannets (Hockey *et al.* 2005). This appears to be the first record of a gannet from the Tristan da Cunha archipelago.

These records bring to 33 the number of non-breeding seabird species recorded in Tristan da Cunha waters, and the total seabird list to 58 species.

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