

### Blackbrowed Albatross

Swartrugmalmok

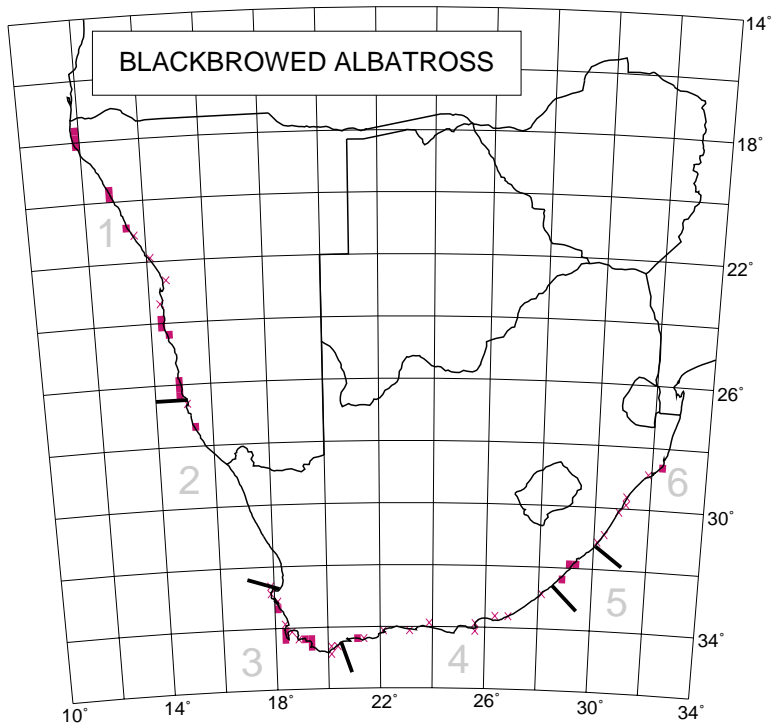
*Diomedea melanophris*

A common nonbreeding visitor ranging from southern Angola to northern KwaZulu-Natal in winter (Brooke 1981b; Brooke *et al.* 1981), but most numerous off the west and south coasts. Its breeding range is circumpolar on subantarctic islands during the austral summer. Nonbreeding birds disperse throughout the Southern Ocean. The global population is estimated at *c.* 500 000 pairs (Marchant & Higgins 1990). Only the nominate subspecies has been recorded from southern African waters.

It is scarce in oceanic waters and occurs primarily over the deeper waters of the continental shelf. Groups of up to several thousand scavenge at trawlers where it is usually the most abundant albatross; its distribution is closely associated with that of demersal trawlers (Ryan & Moloney 1988). It is less common inshore than the Shy Albatross *D. cauta*, but can be seen from promontories during strong onshore winds (Berruti & Sinclair 1983). The lack of records between St Helena Bay (3218CA) and southern Namibia is due to extensive, shallow coastal waters which are avoided by most pelagic species. Atlas records indicate that it is more abundant than the Shy Albatross inshore off the Namibian coast.

Adults breed annually and are present only during winter (April–September), whereas immatures remain throughout the year. Numbers peak in winter, and occurrence off KwaZulu-Natal is predominantly during late winter (July–September; Cyrus & Robson 1980). Recoveries of rings suggest that most birds off southern Africa derive from South Georgia. Large numbers have been ringed at both South Georgia and the Falkland Islands, but recoveries are strongly biased in favour of the former site (152 to 4; Morant *et al.* 1983). Birds from the Falklands appear to occur mostly off the east coast of South America. Most ring recoveries were made in the western Cape Province, but some have been found as far east as KwaZulu-Natal (SAFRING). At least one bird ringed at Kerguelen Island has been recovered in South Africa (Marchant & Higgins 1990). On the west coast, recoveries of first-year birds predominate north of Lambert’s Bay (3218AB), whereas two-year-olds are more frequent between Lambert’s Bay and Cape Agulhas (3420CC) (Morant *et al.* 1983).

Recently fledged juveniles reach the western Cape Province by mid-May, while still completing growth of their primaries. At



Recorded in 49 grid cells, 1.1%  
 Total number of records: 231  
 Mean reporting rate for range: 2.0%

this time they are prone to being wrecked by severe storms (Ryan & Avery 1987). The average departure date for fledglings from South Georgia is 28 April (Tickell & Pinder 1975); juveniles must cross the South Atlantic Ocean to southern Africa in about three weeks (Ryan & Avery 1987).

Large numbers were killed for food by fishermen off the western Cape Province in the early 20th century (e.g. Ryan & Rose 1989). This practice has decreased in recent years, but incidental mortality during longlining operations remains a problem (Brothers 1991). Most birds killed are young and therefore presumably more prone to being caught than adults. The apparent dependence of large numbers of Blackbrowed Albatrosses on trawler wastes is cause for concern if fishery practices change, reducing the amount of wastes discarded at sea (Ryan & Moloney 1988).

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