

# ALL HANDS ON DECK TO SAVE ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS



The Wandering Albatross – one of the vulnerable seabird species.

M.P. KAHL

According to *Threatened Birds of the World*, albatrosses have the highest proportion of threatened species of any bird family. Of the 21 species recognised by BirdLife International, only one is not threatened with extinction. Two species are critically threatened, two are endangered, 12 are vulnerable, and four are near-threatened. The main threat facing albatrosses is uncontrolled longline fishing, which also threatens both species of giant petrel *Macronectes* and all five *Procellaria* petrels.

To address this global conservation problem, a group of Southern Hemisphere governments, led by Australia, has set up an Agreement under the Bonn Convention on the Conservation

of Migratory Species. This Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) is designed to protect all Southern Hemisphere albatrosses as well as giant petrels and *Procellaria* petrels. A draft text was thrashed out at the third negotiation meeting, held in Cape Town at the end of January 2001.

To the uninitiated the proceedings were less than dynamic, with politicians and policy-makers quibbling over the wording of clauses. But ACAP's efforts should improve the conservation status of these magnificent seabirds through an Action Plan that calls for reduction of incidental mortality in fisheries, eradication of introduced predators at breeding sites, reduction of disturbance and habitat loss, and measures to reduce marine pollution. A promising aspect of the Cape Town meeting was the presence of several nations with longline fleets. The Agreement should come into effect before the end of 2002.

PETER RYAN

# Red-billed Tropicbird flies in

At 10h30 on 9 January 2001, an adult Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* was seen as it circled the Smit Pentow Marine deep-sea tug *John Ross*, and the ship it was towing. For an hour it made frequent and seemingly desperate attempts to land on board the tug. It would get to the point of landing, only to go off again in a flurry of feathers, streaming its long white tail. Then it would give up on the tug, fly off to the ship being towed, and repeat the performance there before returning to the tug. The photograph on this page was taken during this period. Ultimately, the bird crashed, exhausted, onto the deck of the tug, which was then 300 kilometres north-west of Cape Town.

The tropicbird was cared for on board until the *John Ross* arrived in Cape Town two days later, when it was sent to the rescue centre of the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB). It was found to be suffering from a lung infection, and although it was treated with great care, it died six days later.

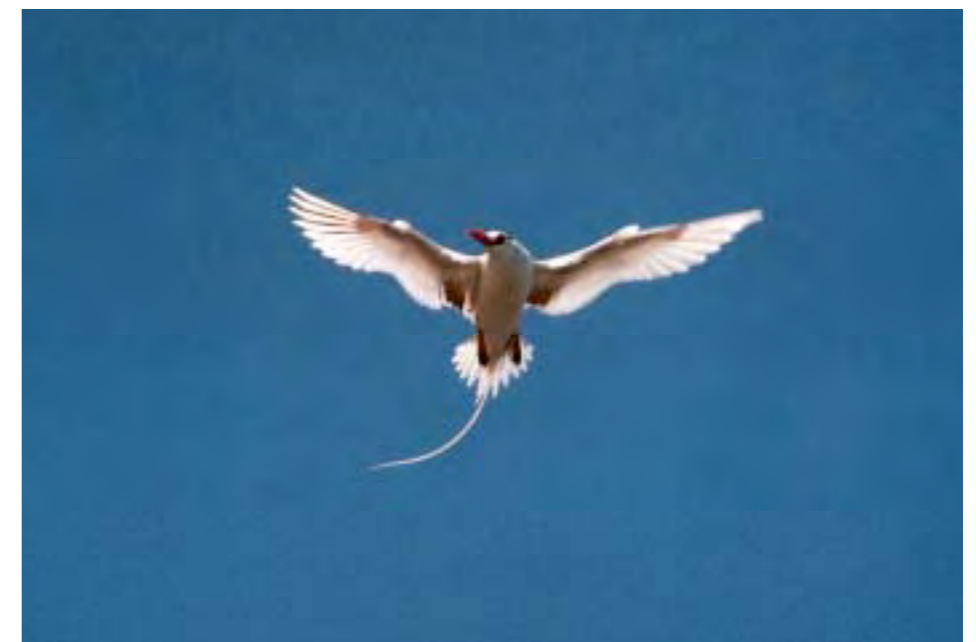
This is the fourth record of the Red-billed Tropicbird off South Africa, and the first specimen, the previous records being sight records. The first record was on 25 November 1984, when one was

seen and photographed close inshore from Chapman's Peak Drive on the Cape Peninsula. The second record was on 9 February 1989, about 70 kilometres off the Cape Peninsula. The third was made on 10 December 2000, also from the *John Ross*, about 180 kilometres north of the place where the bird came aboard one month later.

There is one record off the Namibian coast: a Red-billed Tropicbird accompanied a research ship 'for a short time' at a point about 400 kilometres offshore of Lüderitz. The researchers do not give the exact date, but it was most likely to have been in early April 1972.

The specimen was of the nominate subspecies which breeds on islands of the Atlantic Ocean south of the equator: St Helena and Ascension Islands along the mid-Atlantic Ridge, and Abrolhos and Fernando de Noronha offshore of Brazil. The total population of this subspecies on these islands is believed to number fewer than 3 000 pairs. Although this bird could have come from any of these islands, St Helena is the closest to the localities of the five records and it is most likely that they originate from this island.

A. CHIPPS, L.G. UNDERHILL & E. VAN DER MERWE



The Red-billed Tropicbird photographed as it circled above the boat.

A. CHIPPS

## SAFRING NEWS Cory's & Scopoli's Shearwaters

On 12 January 2000, an exhausted seabird was found on the beach at Jeffreys Bay, Eastern Cape. It had a ring L18993 from Portugal. The bird died a few hours later, but it has taken almost a year to obtain its ringing details.

It was a Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris [d.] borealis*, ringed as a nestling on the Madeira Islands off the coast of Morocco in the north-east Atlantic Ocean. It had been ringed more than 15 years ago, on 13 October 1984. The direct distance between ringing and recovery was 8 322 kilometres, although the route flown over the ocean would have been considerably greater.

Cory's Shearwaters breed on rocky coasts and islands of the Mediterranean and the north-east Atlantic, with three distinct taxa. The Cape Verde population was recently re-split as the Cape Verde Shearwater *C. edwardsii*, which is easily distinguished by its dark bill, smaller size

and darker, greyer upperparts. This species disperses south to at least 26°S in the South Atlantic, but has not yet been recorded from southern Africa.

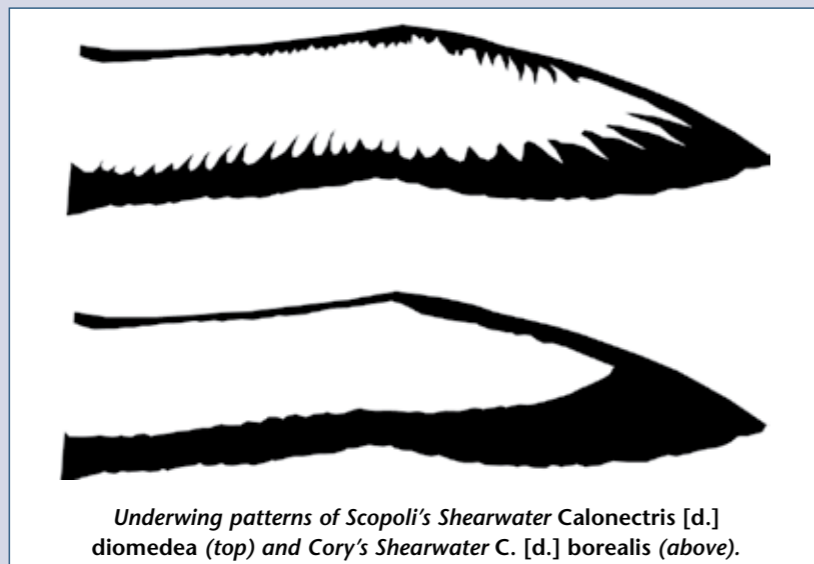
The other two taxa are more similar in appearance, but are recognised by at least

south coasts of southern Africa, mainly between November and May. Cory's Shearwaters (in the strict sense) breed on islands in the Atlantic (Madeira, the Canary Islands and Azores) and migrate chiefly to the west Atlantic, occurring off the east coasts of North and South America.

There have been only two confirmed records of Cory's Shearwater in southern Africa, based on morphometrics of specimens. The Jeffreys Bay bird adds another record, as does one of the only two other recoveries of ringed Cory's Shearwaters from southern Africa: a bird ringed on Madeira in September 1981 that was caught at sea off Durban 12 years later in February 1994. The other recovery was presumably a Scopoli's

Shearwater, ringed on a Spanish island in the Mediterranean in 1985 and found dead in Namibia six and a half years later.

Cory's Shearwater is larger than



Underwing patterns of Scopoli's Shearwater *Calonectris [d.] diomedea* (top) and Cory's Shearwater *C. [d.] borealis* (above).

some authorities as separate species: Cory's, and Scopoli's shearwaters *C. [d.] diomedea*. Scopoli's Shearwaters breed in the Mediterranean and are common non-breeding visitors off the west and