



PETER RYAN (2)

The Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve, established in 1939, forms a key component of the Table Mountain National Park. Situated at the southern tip of the Cape Peninsula, it offers not only sanctuary from the bustling city, but is also ideally situated to 'trap' lost birds. This, together with the excellent seabirding off Cape Point, ensures that the reserve has an impressive bird list for an area comprising mostly scrubby mountain fynbos.

Despite being based in Scotland for the past two decades, Mike Fraser, author of the delightful 1994 book *Between Two Shores*, has kept a reserve list since he conducted his MSc research there in the mid-1980s. Recently he alerted local birders that a milestone was looming: a Red-capped Lark found by Cliff Dorse at Buffelsbaai on 5 September 2021 was the 299th species for the reserve, and challenged us to see who would find the 300th species.

I was thus doubly excited to see a lake tern in breeding plumage at sea off Olifantsbos on the reserve's west coast on 27 September, as both Black and White-winged terns would be new to the reserve list. My initial thoughts

were of Black Tern, given the habitat and association with a large flock of Common Terns, which is typical of Black Terns on the Namibian coast. However, the whitish rump and black underwing coverts indicated that it was a White-winged Tern. But it wasn't quite right – the upperparts were darker grey than those of a typical breeding adult White-winged Tern.

Fortunately, I relocated the bird and was able to photograph it feeding near the tern roost at The Fishery north of Olifantsbos Bay. The images confirmed my initial impression: the upperwing coverts and tail were much darker grey than usual, with some blackish feathers in the normally whitish lesser upperwing coverts. It may be a 'second summer' bird (second alternate plumage), which is reported to be darker above than older adults (*Birds of the Western Palearctic and Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*), and possibly a female, as females tend to be less intensely marked than males and often have more extensive grey in the tail (*HANZAB*). However, it appears to be even darker than these plumages are described and the possibility of a hybrid Black x White-winged Tern cannot be excluded; several juveniles showing characteristics intermediate between the two species have been reported from Europe and the Middle East.

The images – many taken at 20 frames per second – also gave interesting insights into the bird's foraging success. White-winged Terns typically feed on insects and other invertebrates. This individual foraged mostly over the brackish beach lagoon, targeting kelp flies on or near the water surface. Here its success rate was not impressive: of nine attempts, only three were successful. By comparison, all four attempts to take flies higher in the air over the beach and intertidal zone were successful. It may be that the bird was better able to concentrate on capturing its prey when operating farther away from the ground or that the flies were less successful in avoiding capture at greater altitude.

The experience reminded me yet again of the value of having a decent camera when in the field.

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It transpires that the reserve's 300th species was in fact Cliff Dorse's Red-capped Lark. A Horus Swift seen over the northern boundary by Callan Cohen on 8 February 2021 has been added retrospectively to the list. The White-winged Tern, if such it is, would therefore be the 301st for the site, but no less impressive for that. The bird was originally found on 24 September 2021 by Glynis Coetzee.

above The breeding plumage tern, showing unusually dark upperparts for a White-winged Tern (left), closed in on a kelp fly low over the water (right).