

During the period covered by this report, the operations of the Rarities Committee were sponsored by Syfrets. Their generous support ensured the Committee's smooth running and we are very grateful for their interest in its activities.

Since the Rarities Committee's formation in 1981, every report has contained details of at least one new species for South Africa! This report is no exception, including the first record of Lesser Frigatebird. We also have three possible firsts which are pending the outcome of outside review – Buller's Albatross, Short-tailed Shearwater and Rüppell's Vulture; details of these records will appear in next year's report. The report does make history, however, in being the first in which not a single record of a passerine rarity is documented.

During this review period, Digby Cyrus resigned from the Rarities Committee. Digby has been a stalwart member of the Committee from the start, and we are very grateful for all the efforts he has put into its operations over the last 17 years. The present Committee membership is Richard Grant (Secretary), Phil Hockey (Chairman), Clive Hopcroft, John Isom, Mostert Kriek, Peter Ryan, Ian Sinclair and Tony Tree. As always, the Committee is indebted to those many 'outside reviewers' who so generously give of their time to help us adjudicate problem records.

The last list of species that were considered by the Rarities Committee was published in 1995 (Birding in SA 47(1):18-19). A new list appears at the end of this report. The following species have been added to the list since 1995: Mascarene and Yelkouan shearwaters, White-faced Storm Petrel, Lesser Frigatebird, Rüppell's Vulture and Rock Pratincole. Olive-tree Warbler and Cinnamon Reed

Warbler have been dropped from the list: the former is not a rarity in the east of the country, and the latter has lost its specific status. Obviously, this list does not include species that have never been recorded in South Africa: sightings of any such species should be submitted to the Committee.

As the Rarities Committee moves into its 18th year of operation, it has built up a substantial database describing the distribution, frequency and seasonality of occurrence of rare birds in South Africa. The more data that are added to this database, the more valuable it will become: it has already proved useful to researchers and in compiling the new BirdLife Atlas of Southern African Birds. We would encourage you all to submit your rare bird sightings.

The Committee has gone to all possible lengths to give records an equally impartial and fair hearing. For example, all members vote independently on all records and do not see each other's votes; if there is a split decision, individual records may be recirculated as many as three times for debate by the Committee; and, records that we cannot resolve satisfactorily within the Committee are sent for outside review. Most of these reviews are solicited from overseas. This procedure may not be the quickest, but it is the fairest we can devise. In instances where a record is rejected, brief reasons for the rejection are forwarded to the observer.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF ACCEPTED RECORDS

015 Dark-mantled Sooty Albatross *Phoebastria fusca*. One adult 130 nautical miles south of Cape Town on 25 November 1994 (A. Marchant). It seems as though this species regularly enters territorial waters south of Cape Agulhas.

020 Antarctic Petrel *Thalassoica antarctica*. One adult in faded plumage seen during stormy conditions from the shore of Bird Island, Algoa Bay, on 13 August 1996 (V. Ward). This species is an extremely rare visitor to South African waters. There are only three previous records, all of birds stranded ashore following winter storms.

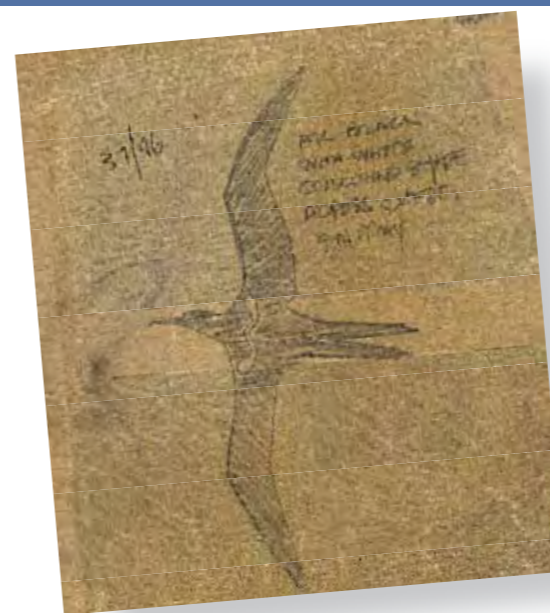
039 Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*. Three sightings, possibly of the same bird, 130 nautical miles south of Cape Town on 25 November 1994 (A. Marchant).

043 Leach's Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*. Approximately 17 birds



▶ White-tailed Tropicbird

P.A.R. HOCKEY



A picture can tell a thousand words! Field sketch of the Durban Lesser Frigatebird made at the time on a brown paper bag from Len Jones' tackle box.

190 nautical miles south of Cape Town on 25 January 1995 (A. Marchant, B. Dyer). Despite the fact that this species is now known to breed on at least one island off the Western Cape coast (AB&B 1(3):13), very few sightings are reported, even though the bird is probably regular seaward of the continental shelf in summer.

045 White-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregata grallaria*. Ten adults approximately 190 nautical miles south of Cape Town on 25 January 1995 (A. Marchant, B. Dyer). This species was last reported in South African waters in September 1990 (Birding in SA 44(2):39). It is, however, regularly seen within territorial waters (but more than 150 nautical miles offshore) in the same region as Dark-mantled Sooty Albatrosses, south of Cape Agulhas.

048 White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*. One adult 180 nautical miles north-east of Durban on 22 February 1996 (J.C. Sinclair). This species is much scarcer than Red-tailed Tropicbird in the Mozambique Channel.

021 Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*. One sub-adult landed on a ship 175 miles north-east of Durban on 22 February 1996 (J.C. Sinclair). This is only the second record of Red-footed Booby in

South Africa, the first being of a bird found in Cape Town on 26 February 1992 (Birding in SA 47(1):15). The February 1996 bird was regularly harried by a Greater Frigatebird.

061 Greater Frigatebird *Fregata minor*. One 175 nautical miles north-east of Durban on 22 February 1996, harrying a Red-footed Booby (J.C. Sinclair).

022 Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*. A single male about 1.5 km offshore and 4 km south of Durban harbour on 9 May 1996 represents the first South African record of this species (L. Jones, M. & D. Leal). Contrary to expectations, the bird was seen after

a prolonged period of calm weather. The few previous southern African records have been from the coast and coastal waters of Mozambique and have been associated with cyclonic conditions.

110 Garganey *Anas querquedula*. One adult male in breeding plumage at the Gamtoos River Mouth Nature Reserve from 9 to 13 August 1996 (A.E. Bateman, D.M.V. Brown). This is the second recent winter record of a male Garganey in breeding plumage, the other being at Strandfontein Sewage Works, Cape Town, in June and July 1995 (AB&B 1(3):68). The Cape Town bird was

accepted as an escape, but dates for both of these birds are consistent with reverse migration. **130 Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*. One in a garden in Klippoortjie, Germiston, on 3 December 1995 (J. Wilson). **177 Eleonora's Falcon** *Falco eleonora*. One near the lighthouse on Bazaruto Island, Mozambique, on 30 January 1996 (P. & U. Köhler). Recent reports suggest that this species may be under-reported in southern Africa. Visitors to Mozambique during midsummer should certainly be aware of its possible occurrence there.

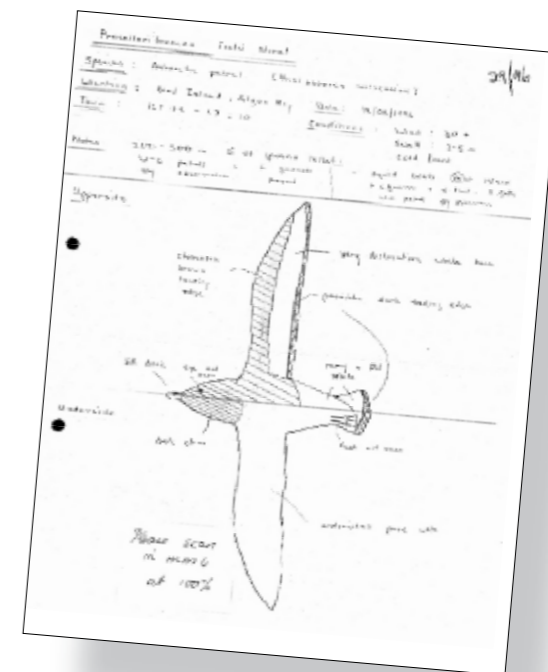
243 European Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*. An adult and a juvenile were present at the Sundays River mouth from at least 22 May to 8 June 1996, but did not cause as much excitement as the Crab Plover present at the same time (D.M.V. Brown, A.P. Martin).

265 Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*. One at Diepsloot sewage works on 21 January 1996 (R. Searle). One in front of the Masinga hide, Mkuze Game Reserve, on 11 February 1996 (A.C. Sutherland).

268 Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*. One at the

Fish River Wetland Reserve on 11 October 1996 (A.J. Tree). **283 Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus*. One 1 km upstream from the Swartkops River mouth on 5 April 1996 (M. Middleton). Outside Kenya, the non-breeding range of this species is poorly known in Africa. It is almost certainly a more regular visitor to South Africa than records suggest. **296 Crab Plover** *Dromas ardeola*. One in almost-adult plumage at Richards Bay harbour from 30 December 1995 to 15 January 1996 (A.C. Sutherland, J. Jones). One well-watched sub-adult at Sundays River mouth from 19 May to 8 June 1996 (E. Penrith, D.M.V. Brown, K. & J. Munro). Birders who made the trip to see this bird were rewarded with views down to a few metres.

302 Three-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus cinctus*. One seen at night on Birding Big Day (30 November 1996), 10 km west of Komatipoort (E. Edmonds and seven other observers). This species may be more widespread in the north-eastern regions of the country than currently appreciated, being under-recorded because it is



Field sketch of the Antarctic Petrel seen at Bird Island, Algoa Bay, on 13 August 1996 by Vincent Ward. This is the first sighting of this species at sea in southern Africa.

almost exclusively nocturnal. The only area where it has been recorded regularly in recent years is in an area of the northern Kruger National Park that is closed to the public.

308 Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*. One 187 nautical miles south-south-west of Cape Town on 25 January 1995 (A. Marchant). Birders on the Symphony cruise in February 1997 were treated to the sight of dozens, if not hundreds, of these birds to the south and east of Durban, an area of ocean previously poorly covered by birders, and north into Mozambican waters. Most of these birds were moving in a north-easterly direction. It seems as though we still have a lot to learn about the distribution of Long-tailed Skuas in southern African waters.

331 Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*. Four at the Umvoti River mouth in early 1976, one of which was mistnetted on 30 March (Sinclair 1977; Bokmakierie 29:18-19), and another in October 1978 (S. Jex, D. Morran, J. Law, R. Cowgill). These were the first records of Black-naped Tern in South Africa. This species was reported from the same locality in February 1981 (Bokmakierie 35(2):39).

332 Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*. One juvenile at Strandfontein sewage works, Cape Town, on 11 June 1995, following a strong south-westerly gale with rain (C. Boix). Several flocks seen 150–170 nautical miles north-east of Durban on 22 February 1996 (J.C. Sinclair). Several large flocks were observed in South African waters, 150 to 200 nautical miles off the KwaZulu-Natal coast, during the February 1997 cruise of the Symphony. During the same cruise, large numbers of Sooty Terns were seen off the coast of Mozambique. Despite sightings of flocks in local waters, the normal southerly limits to the range of this species are not well understood and, for the time being, it will remain on the Rarities Committee list.

RECORDS ACCEPTED AS ESCAPED BIRDS

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*. One adult male at Vogelfontein (Nylsvley) on 14 September 1996 (D. Hill, S. Hugo). The normal African non-breeding range of this Palearctic-breeding migrant does not extend south of the Nile Valley in central Sudan (25°N). Although it is a migrant, it is very popular as an ornamental waterbird and any record south of the Equator almost certainly is of an escaped bird.

RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

Madagascar Squacco Heron *Banza Pan, Ndumo Game Reserve*, 27 November to 13 December 1996.

Garganey *Sabi Sand Game Reserve*, 11 April 1996.

Long-legged Buzzard *Van Staden's Pass*, 30 November 1996.

Eleonora's Falcon *Bay of Pomene, Mozambique*, 9 April 1996 and 11 December 1996.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Bronkhorstspuit Dam*, 31 December 1995 to 11 February 1996. (Note: Any large gull seen far from the coast in southern Africa is likely to be this species. However, many observers appear to make the same assumption and

submit records of this species without describing definitive identification features. As a result, several 'good' records are probably lost.)

Pallid Swift *Riversong Farm, Keerom*, 28 January 1996; two, *Mokolo Dam*, 23 November 1996.

Pacific Golden Plover *Langebaan Lagoon*, 18 December 1996.

European Blackcap *South of Krugersdorp*, 11 December 1994.

African Citril 10 birds, 30 km south of Lacerdonia, *Mozambique*, 31 September 1995.

RECORDS PENDING

Buller's Albatross *West of Hout Bay, Cape Peninsula*, 10 August 1995.

Mascarene Shearwater 15 km south-east of Durban, 4 August 1996. (Although this species is included in the 'Rare Bird List' and the Sasol field guides, there is some international debate about its taxonomic validity. Until this debate is settled, one way or the other, all claimed sightings of this species will be held over for future adjudication.)

Short-tailed Shearwater 90 km south-east of Mossel Bay, 29 November 1996.

Garganey *Vogelfontein*, 20–28 April 1996.

American Golden Plover *Hartenbos sewage works, Mossel Bay*, 20 December 1996 to 5 January 1997.

Yellow-breasted Noddy *Between Dondo and Chinazua, Mozambique*, 10 January 1996.

Below *Crab Plover, Sundays River mouth.*



REVISED SOUTH AFRICAN RARE BIRD LIST

This listing refers only to South African rarities. The Committee also adjudicates records from Mozambique.

- 002 **King Penguin** *Aptenodytes patagonicus*
- 004 **Rockhopper Penguin** *Eudyptes chrysocome*
- 005 **Macaroni Penguin** *E. chrysolophus*
- xxx **Gentoo Penguin** *Pygoscelis papua*
- 009 **Royal Albatross** *Diomedea epomophora*
- 013 **Grey-headed Albatross** *D. chrysostoma*
- 095 **Laysan Albatross** *D. immutabilis*
- 015 **Dark-mantled Sooty Albatross** *Phoebastria fusca*
- 016 **Light-mantled Sooty Albatross** *P. palpebrata*
- 020 **Antarctic Petrel** *Thalassoica antarctica*
- 022 **Bulwer's Petrel** *Bulweria bulwerii*
- 025 **White-headed Petrel** *Pterodroma lessonii*
- 026 **Atlantic Petrel** *P. incerta*
- 027 **Kerguelen Petrel** *P. brevirostris*
- 028 **Blue Petrel** *Halobaena caerulea*
- 030 **Slender-billed Prion** *Pachyptila belcheri*
- 031 **Fairy Prion** *P. turtur*
- 033 **Grey Petrel** *Procellaria cinerea*
- 039 **Little Shearwater** *Puffinus assimilis*
- 040 **Audubon's Shearwater** *P. lherminieri*
- xxx **Mascarene Shearwater** *P. atrodorsalis*
- 041 **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** *P. pacificus*
- xxx **Yelkouan Shearwater** *P. yelkouan*
- xxx **Streaked Shearwater** *Calonectris leucomelas*
- 043 **Leach's Storm Petrel** *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*
- 918 **Matsudaira's Storm Petrel** *O. matsudairae*
- 045 **White-bellied Storm Petrel** *Fregetta grallaria*
- xxx **White-faced Storm Petrel** *Pelagodroma marina*
- 047 **Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda*
- 048 **White-tailed Tropicbird** *P. lepturus*
- 910 **Red-billed Tropicbird** *P. aethereus*
- 052 **Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster*
- 921 **Red-footed Booby** *S. sula*
- 054 **Australian Gannet** *Morus serrator*
- 061 **Greater Frigatebird** *Fregata minor*
- 922 **Lesser Frigatebird** *F. ariel*
- 070 **Slaty Egret** *Egretta vinaceigula*
- xxx **Little Blue Heron** *E. caerulea*
- 109 **Pintail** *Anas acuta*
- 110 **Garganey** *A. querquedula*
- 111 **European Shoveller** *A. clypeata*
- xxx **Rüppell's Vulture** *Gyps rueppellii*
- 120 **Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus*
- 130 **Honey Buzzard** *Pernis apivorus*
- 151 **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*
- 164 **European Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*
- 174 **African Hobby Falcon** *Falco cuvierii*
- 176 **Taita Falcon** *F. fasciinucha*
- 177 **Eleonora's Falcon** *F. eleonora*
- 216 **Striped Crake** *Aenigmatolimnas marginalis*
- 219 **Streaky-breasted Flufftail** *Sarothrura boehmi*
- 222 **White-winged Flufftail** *S. ayresi*
- 225 **American Purple Gallinule** *Porphyryla martinica*
- 243 **European Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*
- 253a **American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica*
- 253b **Pacific Golden Plover** *P. fulva*
- 265 **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*
- 267 **Spotted Redshank** *T. erythropus*
- 268 **Common Redshank** *T. totanus*
- 906 **Greater Yellowlegs** *T. melanoleuca*
- 902 **Lesser Yellowlegs** *T. flavipes*
- 273 **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

- 275 **Long-toed Stint** *C. subminuta*
- 276 **Red-necked Stint** *C. ruficollis*
- 277 **White-rumped Sandpiper** *C. fuscicollis*
- 278 **Baird's Sandpiper** *C. bairdii*
- 279 **Pectoral Sandpiper** *C. melanotos*
- 280 **Temminck's Stint** *C. temminckii*
- 282 **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** *Tryngites subruficollis*
- 283 **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus*
- 285 **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media*
- 287 **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*
- 914 **Hudsonian Godwit** *L. haemastica*
- 293 **Wilson's Phalarope** *Phalaropus tricolor*
- 296 **Crab Plover** *Dromas ardeola*
- 912 **Greater Sheathbill** *Chionis alba*
- 302 **Three-banded Courser** *Rhinoptilus cinctus*
- 306 **Rock Pratincole** *Glareola nuchalis*
- 308 **Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus*
- 311 **South Polar Skua** *Catharacta maccormicki*
- 313 **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus*
- 314 **Herring Gull** *L. argentatus*
- 317 **Franklin's Gull** *L. pipixcan*
- 319 **Black-headed Gull** *L. ridibundus*
- 320 **Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla*
- 321 **Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica*
- 331 **Black-naped Tern** *Sterna sumatrana*
- 332 **Sooty Tern** *Sterna fuscata*
- 333 **Bridled Tern** *S. anaethetus*
- 336 **White-cheeked Tern** *S. repressa*
- 340 **Common Noddy** *Anous stolidus*
- 341 **Lesser Noddy** *A. tenuirostris*
- 343 **African Skimmer** *Rhynchops flavirostris*
- 919 **European Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*

- 376 **Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo** *Cuculus rochii*
- 439 **Olive Bee-eater** *Merops superciliosus*
- 917 **White-throated Bee-eater** *M. albicollis*
- 456 **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill** *Bycanistes brevis*
- 491 **Angola Pitta** *Pitta angolensis*
- 537 **Eastern Saw-wing Swallow** *Psalidoprocne orientalis*
- 559 **Spotted Creeper** *Salpornis spilonotus*
- 585 **European Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*
- 907 **Pied Wheatear** *O. pleschanka*
- 916 **European Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*
- 597 **Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra*
- 603 **Collared Palm Thrush** *Cichladusa aquata*
- 609 **Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia*
- 624 **Mashona Hyliota** *Hyliota australis*
- 911 **European Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*
- 627 **River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis*
- 629 **Basra Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus griseldis*
- 630 **European Reed Warbler** *A. scirpaceus*
- 682 **Red-winged Warbler** *Heliolais erythroptera*
- 692 **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis*
- 699 **Vanga Flycatcher** *Bias musicus*
- 715 **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*
- 903 **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus*
- 726 **Golden Pipit** *Tmetothylacus tenellus*
- 755 **Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrike** *Prionops scopifrons*
- 766 **Lesser Blue-eared Starling** *Lamprolornis chloropterus*
- 786 **Yellow-bellied Sunbird** *Nectarinia venusta*
- 794 **Blue-throated Sunbird** *Anthreptes reichenowi*
- 833 **Golden-backed Pytilia** *Pytilia afra*
- 839 **Red-throated Twinspot** *Hypargos niveoguttatus*
- 863 **Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah** *Vidua obtusa*