



Wilson's Storm Petrel

Geelpootstormswael

Oceanites oceanicus

Wilson's Storm Petrel is a common nonbreeding visitor, occurring throughout the region, but most frequent off the west and south coasts where it can be extremely abundant. It is scarce off KwaZulu-Natal and Mozambique (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Brooke *et al.* 1981), despite the presence of major nonbreeding areas in the northern Indian Ocean (Marchant & Higgins 1990). It seldom occurs in dense flocks like the European Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*. It breeds during the austral summer in Antarctica and on adjacent islands (*O. o. exasperatus*), and at subantarctic islands (*oceanicus*). Nonbreeding birds disperse widely throughout the oceans, being scarce only in the North Pacific Ocean. Both subspecies occur off southern Africa, with Antarctic birds being more frequent (Clancey 1980b).

It is found in all waters, but is most numerous over the continental shelf. It is attracted to vessels; several will appear within an hour of a vessel arriving at a station, despite none being seen while it is steaming. It attends trawlers, with loose

groups of up to hundreds or thousands present, but avoids dense feeding groups of larger species. Because of their small size, storm petrels are seldom seen from land. However, Wilson's Storm Petrel often occurs fairly close inshore, and can be observed from coastal promontories (Berruti & Sinclair 1983).

Although present throughout the year, it is more numerous in winter than in summer. Peak numbers occur in autumn, March–May (Liversidge & Le Gras 1981), coinciding with the northward movement from breeding colonies. There is a smaller peak in abundance in spring (Liversidge & Le Gras 1981) as birds move back south from their nonbreeding range.

P.G. Ryan

Recorded in 47 grid cells, 1.0%
 Total number of records: 108
 Mean reporting rate for range: 1.1%

