

Arctic Skua

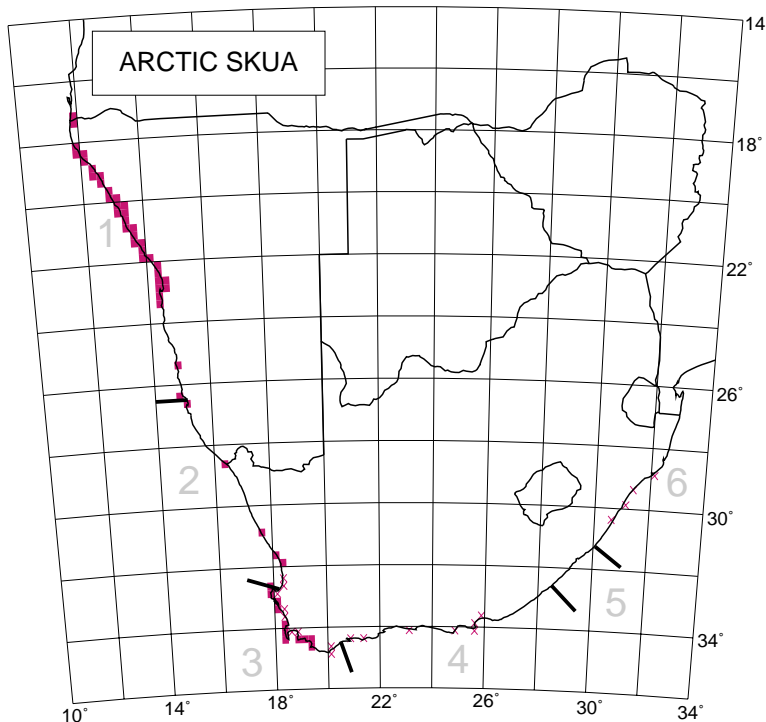
Arktiese Roofmeeu

Stercorarius parasiticus

The Arctic Skua is a common summer migrant with a circumpolar breeding distribution in the Holarctic. Nonbreeding birds disperse throughout coastal waters in the southern hemisphere (Harrison 1983b). It is most frequent off the west and south coasts, especially northern Namibia; it is uncommon off KwaZulu-Natal and southern Mozambique (Brooke *et al.* 1981). Tropical cyclones have blown birds inland to the eastern Transvaal, e.g. in January 1976 and 1984 (Joubert 1977; Sinclair *et al.* 1987).

It typically occurs inshore, kleptoparasitizing terns and gulls (Furness 1983). It is regularly seen from the coast, often chasing terns over the shore; in one hour 21 were seen on southward passage 50–100 m offshore near Cape Town (3318CD) on 21 October 1975, and *c.* 1000 were seen from Glencairn (3418AB) in False Bay on northward migration on 23 April 1994 (Williams & Cooper 1975; Fraser & McMahon 1995). It is scarce out to the shelf edge, and rare in oceanic waters (Griffiths & Sinclair 1982).

Mostly it occurs during summer, October–April (Liversidge & Le Gras 1981), but a few occur in the austral winter (Fraser & McMahon 1990). It breeds on the Holarctic tundra during the boreal summer. Seven ring recoveries in southern Africa are of birds ringed at breeding localities: Iceland (1), Faeroe Islands (1), Orkney–Shetland (3) and Finland (2) (Morant *et al.* 1983; Ryan & Avery 1990; Oatley 1995a; SAFRING). These recoveries point to western Palearctic origins of Arctic Skuas migrating to southern Africa, although it is likely that relatively few have been ringed east of Finland.



Recorded in 68 grid cells, 1.5%
 Total number of records: 424
 Mean reporting rate for range: 3.1%

P.G. Ryan

