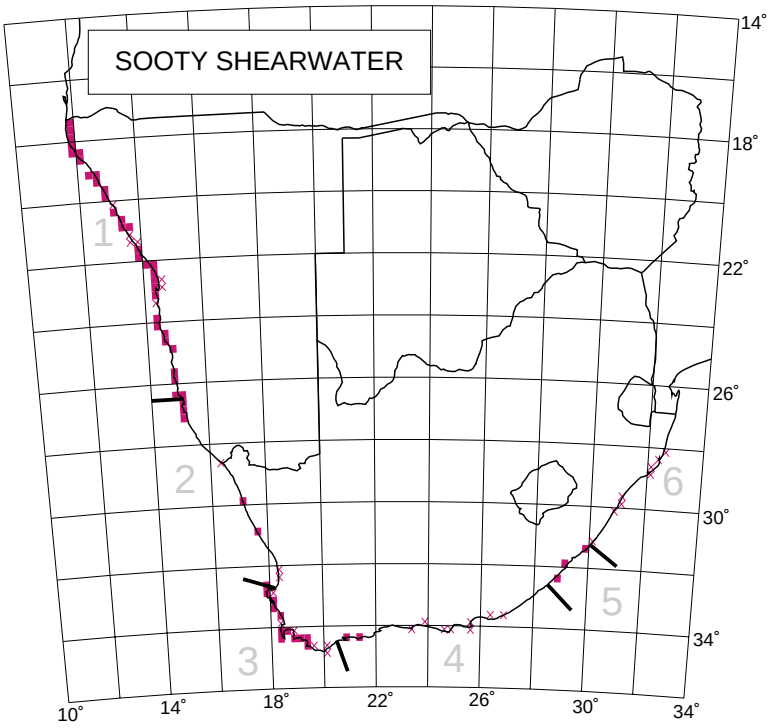
Sooty Shearwater

Malbaatjie

Puffinus griseus



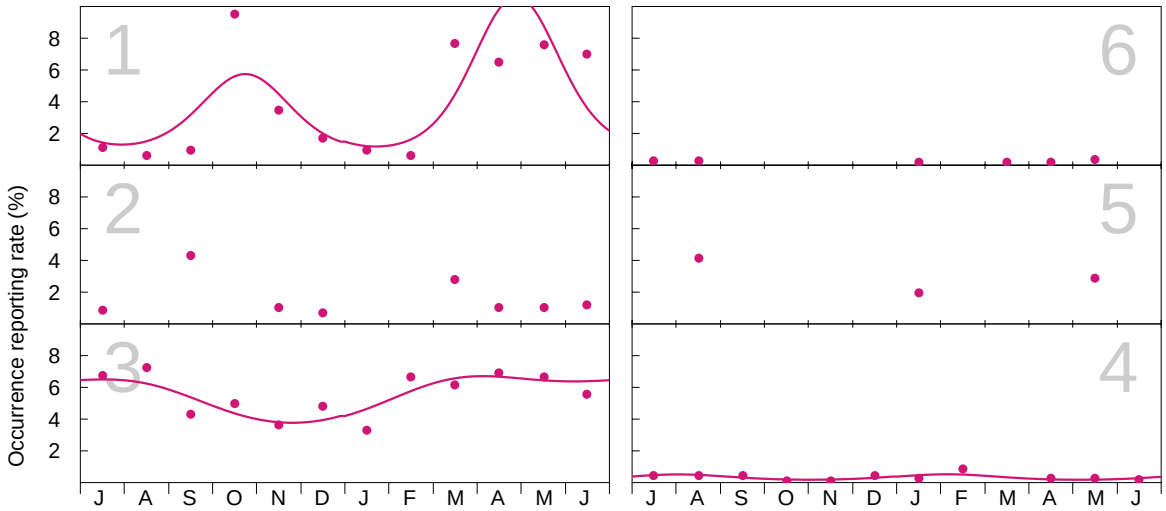
Recorded in 83 grid cells, 1.8%
Total number of records: 555
Mean reporting rate for range: 3.8%

The Sooty Shearwater is a nonbreeding visitor, abundant off the west and south coasts, and fairly common off KwaZulu-Natal. It is scarce off Mozambique, Angola and in oceanic waters. Typically it occurs in large groups, often numbering tens of thousands of birds. Wrecked birds in January–April usually show signs of primary moult (Cooper *et al.* 1991). It breeds during the austral summer in Australia, New Zealand, southern South America and on adjacent islands. It was found breeding in very small numbers on Tristan da Cunha in 1985 (Ryan *et al.* 1990). Nonbreeding birds disperse widely in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, with most birds migrating across the equator each year.

Small numbers can occur anywhere in continental waters, but the distribution of large flocks is linked to that of pelagic fish schools. These are found primarily in the Benguela upwelling region off the west coast and on the Agulhas Bank east to Algoa Bay (3325D). Small numbers follow schools of Pilchard *Sardinops ocellatus* along the east coast in winter (the 'sardine run'). It also attends trawlers, but seldom enters dense feeding groups, rather diving from the periphery to catch scraps that sink beyond the reach of other species.

The clumped distribution and constant movement of large numbers of birds from one feeding area to another confound the detection of clear seasonal patterns. Observations off the western Cape Province suggest a winter peak in abundance (Ryan & Rose 1989); this also appears to be the case off KwaZulu-Natal (Cyrus & Robson 1980) and the northern Benguela. Counts off the eastern Cape Province suggest fairly high numbers throughout the year, but with an autumn influx (Liversidge & Le Gras 1981) which would correspond with the northward dispersal of birds from the breeding grounds. However, there are no breeding sites immediately south of Africa, and it is unclear whether there is a significant movement of birds through southern African waters en route to wintering areas in the northern hemisphere, or whether birds which migrate to southern Africa remain in the region throughout the nonbreeding season (Cooper *et al.* 1991).

P.G. Ryan



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
Occurrence: 96, 15, 405, 26, 4, 9.