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Seabird Identification Guide

Bronwyn Maree

BirdLife South Africa

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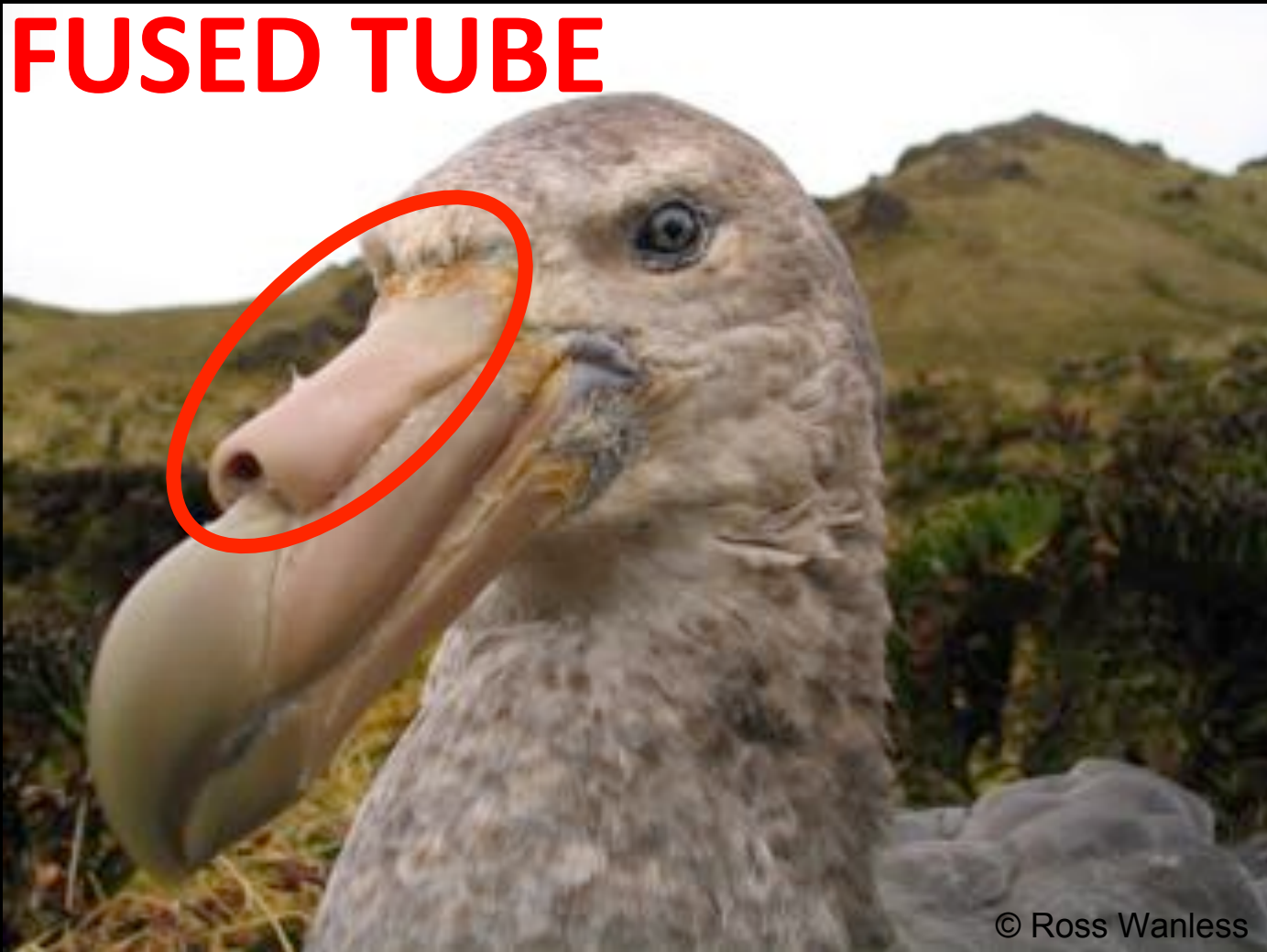
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Common species in the South Atlantic Ocean

- Procellariiforms
 - Albatrosses
 - Petrels (& shearwaters)
 - Storm-petrels
- Skuas
- Gannets

Procellariiform = tube-nosed seabirds

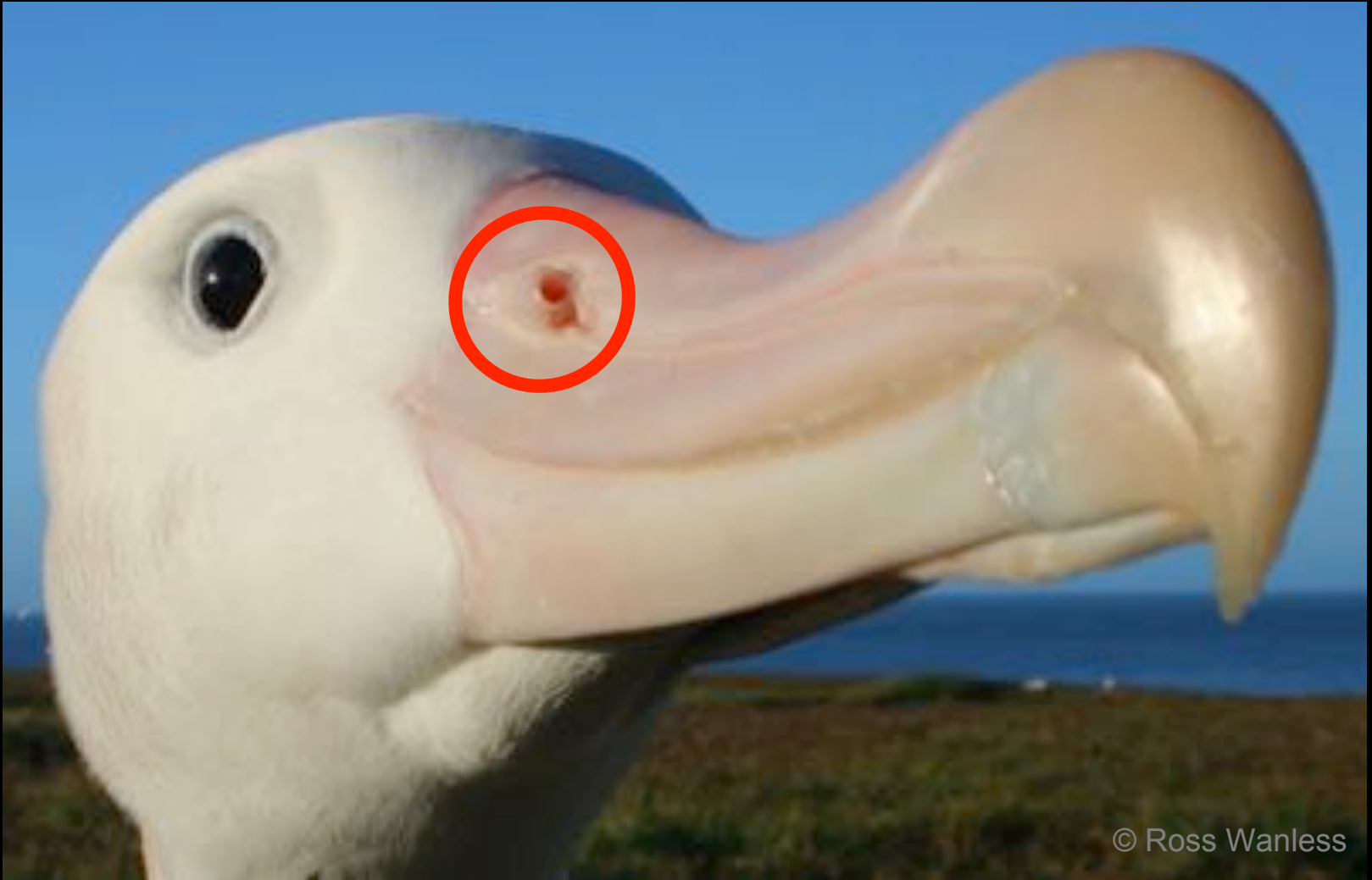
FUSED TUBE



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= petrel (includes shearwaters)

UNFUSED TUBE



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= albatross

Albatrosses = 3 genera

Follow
ships?

- **Great (Wandering-type): *Diomedea***
- **Smaller ('mollymawk'): *Thalassarche***
- **Dark (Sooty-type): *Phoebetria***



Diomedea albatrosses

- Globally – 5 species

- Wandering

- N Royal

- S Royal

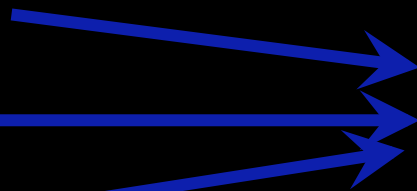
- Tristan

- Amsterdam

Widespread in
Southern Ocean

Atlantic Ocean (mostly)

Indian Ocean (endemic)



Wandering Albatross

- **Enormous** wingspan
- Undersides completely white except wing tips
- Very narrow black trailing edge to underwings

3.5 meters

No black line
on cutting
edge



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Sub-adult/young adult



Immature/
adult ♀ Tristan



White
breaks
from
centre

ADULT Tristan/Wandering - upperside



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1. White back

2. Black in tail

1 + 2 + White in wings = diagnostic

N and S Royal albatrosses always have



- Black cutting edge on bill
- White backs (no dark juvenile stage)
- All-white tails



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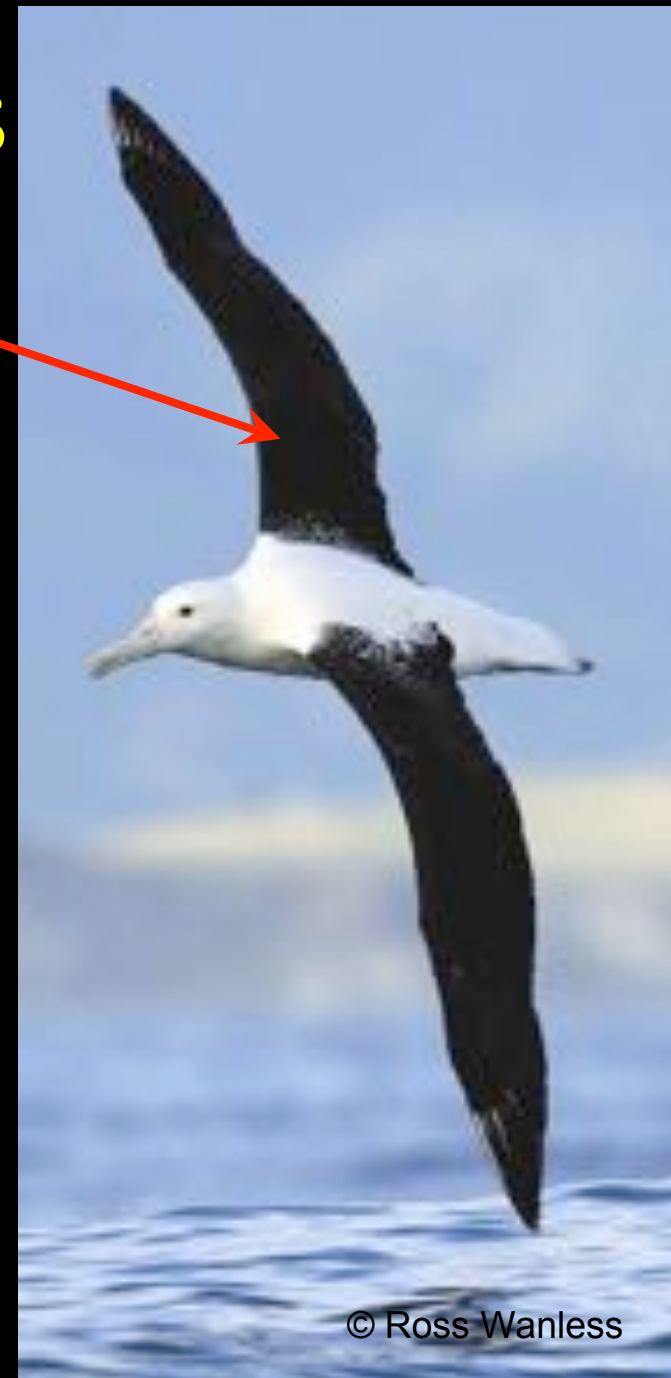
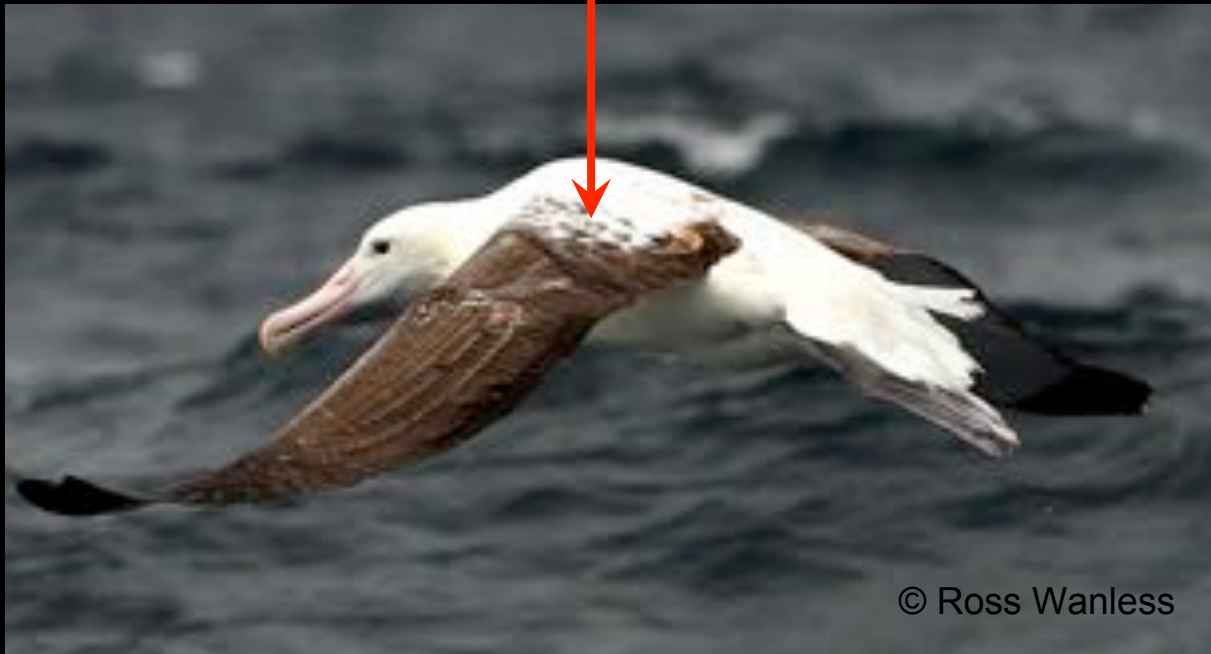
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N and S Royal albatrosses

N → No white in wings, ever

S → Leading edge always white

→ White breaks from leading edge down, not from centre



So you have a massive albie...

- Things to look for:

1. **Brown back/underbody** → Wandering/Tristan (juv)

– **WHITE BACK + CUTTING EDGE ON BILL...**

1. **NO DARK EDGE** = Wandering/Tristan

2. **DARK EDGE, ALL-DARK UPPERWINGS** = Northern Royal

3. **DARK EDGE, WHITE IN UPPERWINGS** = Southern Royal

NOTE EXCEPTIONS – juvenile Royals not easily separable

Black-backed albies *Thalassarche*

- 4 in region, only two extensive in Atlantic
- Shy-type (mostly Indian Ocean)
- Black-browed (widespread)
- Atlantic Yellow-nosed (Atlantic endemic)
- Indian Yellow-nosed (mostly Indian Ocean)
- Grey-headed (very far south)

Shy-type

- Includes Shy (*cauta*) and White-capped (*steadii*)
- Largest of 'mollies'
- Diagnostic black armpit notch
- Underwings mostly white, have narrow black edges all round





JUVENILE

- Bill tip dark
- Grey collar
- Grey head, extremely variable



IMMATUR

- Bill tip ^E lighter
- No collar
- Grey head lighter



ADULT

- Bill tip yellow
- No collar
- Head has pale grey wash, lighter cap

Black-browed Albatross



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- Adult has orange bill with pinkish tip
- Dark eye-shadow
- White underwing with THICK leading & trailing edges



Subadult

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- White underwing with thick, smudgy black edging
- Pale bill with dark tip



- Dark underwing
- Brown-grey bill with dark tip
- Incomplete grey collar

Juvenile

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Juvenile Black-browed and shy-type albatrosses

If size of bill in hand does not tell you immediately, then

Underwing pattern is key!



Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross



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- Black bill, yellow stripe on top
- Grey head, white cap

Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross

- White under-wing + thick, dark leading edge



INDIAN



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Yellow stripe
ends in point

ATLANTIC



© Ross Wanless

Yellow stripe
ends with
rounded

Northern & Southern Giant-petrels

Dark, albatross-sized
petrels



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Both chocolate-
brown juveniles,
whiten with age



© Ross Wanless

Northern & Southern Giant-petrels

Separation is difficult – only one feature



N: reddish-brown bill tip
At-sea: look for contrast

S: greenish bill tip
At-sea: little contrast

White phase Southern Giant-petrel



Smaller procellariiforms

Petrels (= short, stout bills)

- Pintado Petrel
- White-chinned Petrel
- Spectacled Petrel

Shearwaters (= long, slender bills)

- Sooty Shearwater
- Great Shearwater
- Cory's Shearwater

Pintado Petrel – unmistakable!

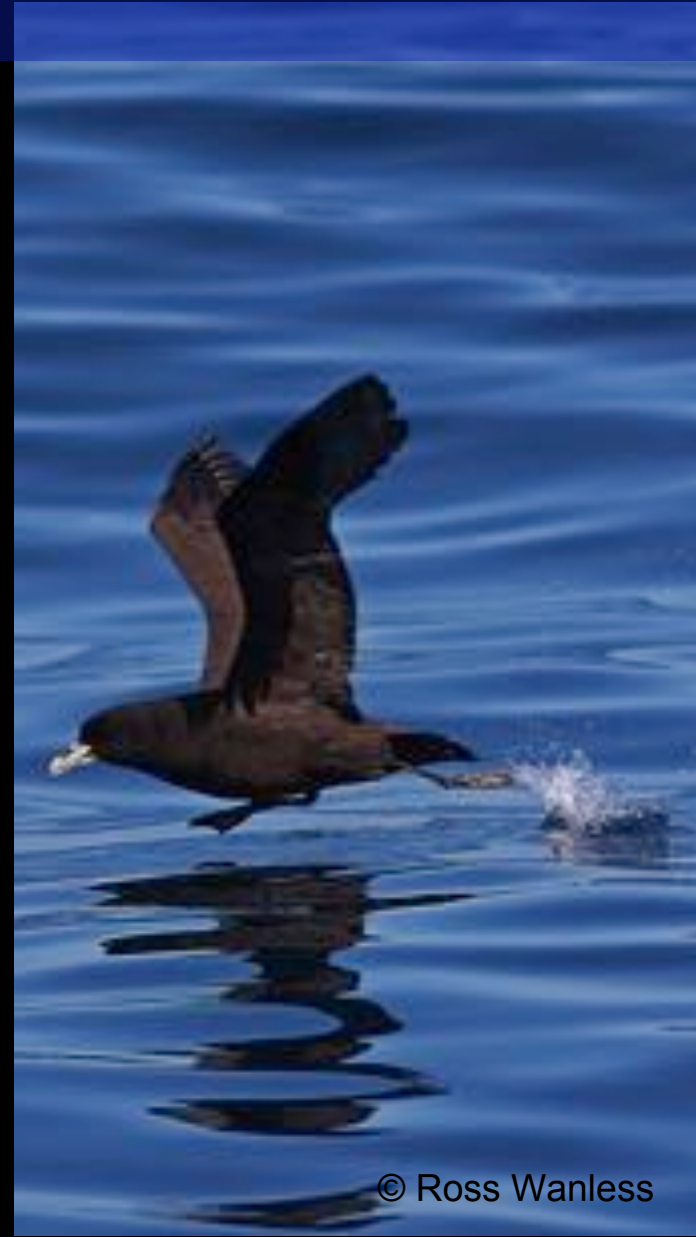


White-chinned Petrel

- Commonest
- Dark-brown
- White chin
- Ivory bill



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Spectacled Petrel

- Striking facial pattern
- Very obvious, even from distance
- Dark tip to bill diagnostic



White-chinned vs Spectacled

- White-chins → variable white on face & head
- Dark tip to bill diagnostic for Spectacled



Sooty Shearwater



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- Small, uniformly dark with narrow tail
- Dark bill, not white like White-chinned Petrel

Sooty Shearwater



© Barrie Rose

© Barrie Rose

Great Shearwater



Great Shearwater



© Ross Wanless

- Dirty belly - diagnostic
- Dark cap with white neck



- Dark margins to mottled white underwing

Cory's Shearwater (does not follow ships)

- Orange/yellow bill, **dark tip**
- White undersides



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- Lacks white collar (→ Great)

Storm-petrels



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Other large seabirds around vessels

- Sub-Antarctic (Southern) Skua
- Cape Gannet

Sub-Antarctic Skua



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Other large seabirds around vessels

- Sub-Antarctic Skua
 - Comparatively short, broad wings
 - White 'flashes' on wings (upper- and under-sides)

Cape Gannet



Other large seabirds around vessels

- Seldom far from shelf edge (=mostly 'coastal')
- Similar size to smaller albatrosses
- Orange head unique
- Juveniles all-dark
- Plunges into water at great speed from 50 m+

Multi-species ID photos



Multi-species ID photos

