

LONG RANGE MOVEMENT OF A CAPE GANNET *MORUS CAPENSIS* IN THE SOUTHERN INDIAN
OCEAN

D. BERTEAUX

Centre d'Etudes Biologiques de Chizé, 79360 Beauvoir sur Niort, France

Current address: *Groupe de Recherche en Ecologie, Département de Biologie, Faculté des Sciences, Université de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke QC, Canada J1K 2R1*

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On 24 and 25 October 1989 an adult Cape Gannet *Morus capensis*, bearing ring no. 9-41489, was observed in the centre of the actively breeding colony of Yellow-nosed Albatrosses *Diomedea chlororhynchos* at Amsterdam Island (37° 50'S, 77° 35'E) in the southern Indian Ocean. The gannet occupied an empty Yellow-nosed Albatross nest, and was observed removing material (grasses) from adjacent nests to its own nest. The presence of many droppings around its nest implied that the gannet had been present for several days. This individual was observed again in the albatross colony on 20 November 1989 and 15 January 1990. The following summer it was again noted in the same place from 2 to 7 and 20 to 30 October 1990 (F. Gérard pers. comm.). During these two latter periods the gannet occupied a nest entirely of its own construction. It was frequently observed performing "bowing" behaviour (which signifies site ownership, Nelson 1978a) and actively defended its nest against albatrosses.

This bird had been ringed as a fledgling on 17 February 1985 at Bird Island, Algoa Bay, South Africa (33° 50'S, 26° 17'E), some 4 600 km to the west. Extraordinarily, on 18 October 1986 it was entangled in a fishing line and then released a few kilometres south east of Cape Leeuwin, Western Australia (34° 32'S, 115° 08'E) (Ross 1988). This first record was 7 860 km east of the ringing site, and 3 378 km east of Amsterdam Island.

There have been previous records of gannets on Amsterdam Island. Segonzac (1972) observed an unidentified gannet on 7 March 1970, whereas 13 additional records of Cape Gannets were noted off Amsterdam Island between mid-October and the beginning of February in 1979, 1981, 1984 and 1985 (Roux & Martinez 1987). The observation reported here is thus the first record of a Cape Gannet substantiated on data other than plumage features alone, and the first record of a Cape Gannet ashore at Amsterdam Island.

The presence of the gannet from October to January 1990 is interesting because the bird remained through the major part of the breeding season, as observed on Bird Island, Algoa Bay, to a point when pre-breeding club birds (2-, 3- and some 4-year old pre-breeders) appear to be far less active at the breeding colony. This fits in with the age of this bird, which would have reached breeding age at four or five years of age (occasionally three years) on Bird Island (G.J.B. Ross pers. comm.). The presence of the gannet in October 1990 but its absence in the following months is unexplained.

Also interesting is to note that this is the first observation of a Cape Gannet retrapped at a great distance from the breeding colony, and later shown to be alive through a second retrap closer to or at home base. Moreover, this is the first example of a long range movement of a Cape Gannet from east to west in the southern Indian Ocean. Ross (1988)

suggested that there may be a small but persistent loss of prebreeding gannets into the southern Indian Ocean, probably assisted by the easterly movement of weather systems passing southern Africa. The bird's presence at Amsterdam Island may be a temporary stop in a longer return towards its natal colony, and this observation indicates that such individuals can travel against the direction of the prevailing winds and can probably return to their breeding sites in southern Africa.

Finally, especially interesting is the ability of this bird to survive in the southern Indian Ocean for at least five years. This suggests that westward bound birds (e.g. the present record, and those of Australasian Gannets *M. serrator* recorded in South Africa (Cassidy 1983, Berruti 1988, Dyer 1990) and at Crozet and Marion Islands (Brown & Oatley 1982)) have plenty of time to move apparently against the prevailing wind. This removes a possible argument against gannets originating from an Australasian centre and spreading to the Atlantic via southern Africa, as proposed by Nelson (1978b).

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