

STATUS, LATITUDINAL AND SEASONAL OCCURRENCES OF ALBATROSS SPECIES IN KANGAROO ISLAND WATERS (SOUTH AUST.)

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Other than estimates made from beach-derelicts, there seem to be few recorded observations about the comparative numerical status of the various albatross species known to occur in South Australian waters. During over thirty years professional fishing

in Kangaroo Island waters, I have always taken great interest in these magnificent birds. Over the past five to six years I have taken particular note of the comparative status of the various species.

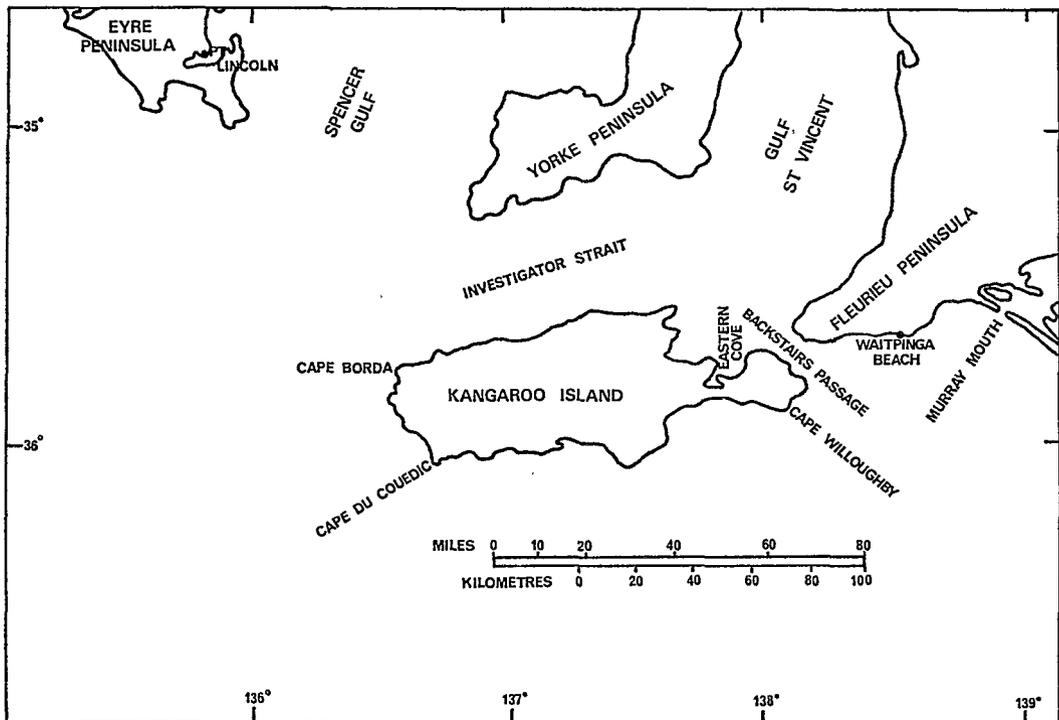
The Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea*

melanophrys is by far the most numerous albatross within about 20 miles of Kangaroo Island coasts. I estimate that about 90% of all albatrosses seen by me within this range are of this species. Black-brows are much more numerous in winter than in summer, although even in summer they are usually the most common species. They move close inshore during April, and move further out to sea again in October. However, a few birds do remain inshore during the summer months, mainly south of Capes Borda and Willoughby. Earlier inshore movements occur if the weather is rough; and the reason for them may be that the disturbed shallow water causes cuttlefish to die, and also brings other food to the surface. At Eastern Cove, on the north coast, Black-brows do not move inshore until May or June, departing again at the end of August. If there has been little rough weather, the main body of birds do not appear there until about mid-June. Odd birds are also seen there during the summer. These Eastern Cove birds move in for the cuttlefish which live in the rocks which form the bottom of the eastern part of the Cove—very few birds are sighted away from this

area of the Cove. In a fine winter the cuttlefish do not die off in this shallower water until the rough weather starts.

A longer period of observations will be necessary to determine the second most numerous species near the shore. The choice lies between the Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos* and the Shy *D. chrysostoma*, but I believe that it is the former. The numbers of Yellow-nosed about Kangaroo Island remain fairly constant during the whole year, and on some days during the summer months are greater than those of the Black-browed, which have mostly moved out. The Yellow-nosed also tends at all times of the year to come closer inshore than other species. In Investigator Strait, in the summer months, the Yellow-nosed seems always to be the most common albatross.

The Shy (White-capped) Albatross *D. cauta* appears to be rare at all times north of Capes Borda and Willoughby. But offshore, from 20 to 50 miles south, the Shy seems to be as common as the Black-browed; and in those latitudes these two species comprise about 90% of the total albatross population. The other 10% consists mostly



of Wandering Albatross *D. exulans*, a few Grey-headed *D. chrysostoma* and an occasional Yellow-nosed. These estimates of comparative status in offshore waters probably apply to the summer as well as the winter. Estimates are more difficult in summer, though, because the total albatross population is then much reduced. The estimates are based on observations made during five years of shark-fishing in all seasons. The Shy Albatross becomes more common in summer, and also moves inshore during that season. In some summers it is the commonest species of albatross in inshore waters, and on some days has been known to outnumber the Black-browed and Yellow-nosed combined. I have noted a few Shy Albatrosses with grey heads—some of them with comparatively pale backs—which seem to indicate the race *salvini*.

I have found the Grey-headed Albatross *D. chrysostoma* to be rare at all latitudes, and usually see only two or three individuals each year, most commonly immature birds

with very dark head, neck, and upper breast, and with the bill just starting to show yellow. These sightings have usually been made in late summer. The species is very rarely seen north of the island.

The Wandering Albatross *D. exulans* is also rare, only two or three birds being sighted each year and these usually from August to February. I have sighted twelve birds on one occasion. This was in October or November many years ago, approximately 7 miles N.-E. of Cape Borda. This species, too, is less likely to be seen north of the island.

I have only twice seen birds with long narrow wings—obviously not Giant Petrels—which may have been Sooty Albatrosses *Phoebastria fusca*. In both cases this was in winter and south of Kangaroo Island.

One must remember that the occurrence of albatrosses in K.I. waters is subject to weather and food conditions, not only locally, but many hundreds of miles out to sea.