

# NEW AND RARELY RECORDED BIRDS AT GOUGH ISLAND,

MARCH 1982 - DECEMBER 1983

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## INTRODUCTION

Gough Island ( $40^{\circ}\text{S}$ ,  $10^{\circ}\text{W}$ ) lies on the mid-Atlantic Ridge in the southern Atlantic Ocean almost midway between Africa and South America. The nearest land is the Tristan da Cunha group, some 500 km to the northwest. Gough Island was discovered in the Sixteenth Century (Holdgate 1958), but the first ornithological observations were not made until 1869 (Brooke 1979). Until recently, ornithological visits have been irregular, and with a few exceptions, of short duration. Williams & Imber (1982) provide a list of all ornithological observations made at Gough Island from 1869 to 1981 and a checklist of the birds annotated as to their status as breeders or visitors.

This paper records new and rarely recorded birds at Gough Island from March 1982 to December 1983.

## METHODS

During the period under review ornithologists from the FitzPatrick Institute made five visits to Gough Island : 12 October - 7 November 1982, 19-24 April 1983, 4-5 July 1983, 18 July 1983 and 7 September - 18 October 1983. During July 1983 observations were made only from the M.V. *S.A. Agulhas* while it was anchored close offshore. In addition, observations made by members of the South African meteorological teams at Gough Island have been included. Records of each species are discussed separately below.

## SPECIES LIST

Chinstrap Penguin

*Pygoscelis antarctica*

An adult Chinstrap Penguin was found at The Admiral on about 15 March 1983. The bird was not in moult and was photographed by T. de Jongh, a member of the meteorological team. The bird was not seen again. This is the first record of the species for Gough Island (Williams & Imber 1982). The nearest breeding locality is Bouvet Island some 3 000 km away where the population is of the order of 9 000 pairs (Wilson 1983). The species has been increasing in numbers for some time, with recent breeding extensions including Heard Island, the Balleny Islands and Peter I Island. The world population is at least 1,25 million pairs (Wilson 1983). Vagrants have previously been recorded at Macquarie Island and Tasmania (Serventy *et al.* 1974) and also at Marion Island (Cooper 1984).

Blackbrowed Albatross

*Diomedea melanophris*

Occasionally seen offshore from the meteorological base at Transvaal Bay during systematic seabird observations in October and November 1982. These were generally single adult birds but three were seen together on 2 November. Blackbrowed Albatrosses were the most numerous albatross at sea while sailing away from the island on 7 November 1982. Williams & Imber (1982) list the species as an offshore visitor.

Greyheaded Albatross

*Diomedea chrysostoma*

One was observed from the M.V. *S.A. Agulhas* c. 8 km offshore on 7 November 1982. Listed as an offshore visitor by Williams & Imber (1982).

Lightmantled Sooty Albatross

*Phoebastria palpebrata*

At least six were observed offshore in Transvaal Bay on 28 October 1982 and one was seen c. 6 km offshore from the M.V. *S.A. Agulhas* on 7 November 1982. Williams & Imber (1982) record it as a visitor.

White phase Southern Giant Petrel

*Macronectes giganteus*

At least two white phase birds were observed from the M.V. *S.A. Agulhas* on 18 July 1983 with other giant petrels *Macronectes* spp. and within sight of Gough Island. One white phase bird was seen over the sea from Richmond Hill on 26 September 1983 and another sighting was made in Transvaal Bay on 12 October 1983. White phase Southern Giant Petrels have occasionally been reported offshore at Gough Island (Voisin & Bester 1981, Williams & Imber 1982) but none has apparently yet been seen ashore.

Antarctic Fulmar

*Fulmarus glacialisoides*

One observed in Transvaal Bay on 5 November 1982 with Pintado

Petrels *Daption capense*. One was seen c. 10 km offshore from the M.V. *S.A Agulhas* on 7 November 1982. Recorded as a visitor by Williams & Imber (1982).

Pintado Petrel

*Daption capense*

Observed offshore in Transvaal Bay during October and November 1982, and in October 1983 (B.P. Watkins pers. comm.). Maximum numbers recorded were 15 on 5 November 1982. Williams & Imber (1982) record a maximum of 40 offshore.

Sooty Shearwater

*Puffinus griseus*

This species was seen offshore in Transvaal Bay during October and November 1982. Maximum numbers recorded were 17 on 1 November 1982. Recorded as an offshore visitor only by Williams & Imber (1982).

American Sheathbill

*Chionis alba*

An American Sheathbill was caught on 10 June 1983 at Snoek Gat, near the meteorological base by G. van Rooyen. The bird was photographed by T. de Jongh (Fig. 1). It was released but was not subsequently seen. This is the first record of the species at Gough Island, and also the first record within the African Sector of the Southern Ocean (Williams & Imber 1982, Harrison 1983).

It is possible that the American Sheathbill recorded at Gough Island was ship-assisted. There has been increased sea traffic in the southern Atlantic Ocean resulting from the Falkland Islands dispute in 1982 and returning naval craft have since then visited the Tristan da Cunha group (R. Rogers pers. comm.). In 1982 an American Sheathbill travelled from the Falkland Islands to England by ship (Sharrock 1982) and an individual has also reached St Helena in 1968 (Loveridge 1969), who also thought it to be ship-assisted.

American Sheathbills breed south of the Antarctic Convergence at South Georgia, the South Sandwiches, South Orkneys, South Shetlands and the northern part of the west coast of Grahamland on the Antarctic Peninsula (Jones 1963). Escalante (1959) cites occurrences north to 34°S in Uruguay and this appears to be the northern limit of natural migrants.

Cattle Egret

*Bubulcus ibis*

Two Cattle Egrets were identified on 8 March 1982 and up to five



Figure 1.

American Sheathbill at Gough Island, 10 June 1983. Photographed by T. de Jongh.

were recorded together in April 1982. The birds were observed feeding around the meteorological base over a period of time and were identified from photographs taken by C.J. Bonnet. It is not known how long these birds survived at Gough Island.

On 21-23 April 1983 a single Cattle Egret was present near the meteorological base. Team members had seen the bird in the vicinity for about two weeks previously. What was presumably the same individual was still present on 4 July 1983 when it was observed on the shore at Transvaal Bay. It was eventually found dead towards the end of July 1983 (T. de Jongh pers. comm.). It thus survived on Gough Island for over three months.

Cattle Egrets were the only strictly nonmarine birds recorded during the period. It would appear that they are able to survive longer at Gough Island than at Marion Island, southern Indian Ocean, where they also occur periodically (Table 1) probably because Marion Island is farther south and has a less hospitable climate and supports a less luxuriant vegetation.

#### DISCUSSION

From systematic observations carried out from the meteorological base in October and November 1982 it appears that the intensity and direction of seabird movements around Gough Island is highly weather dependant. These observations will be the subject of a separate paper. However, it seems species such as the Antarctic Fulmar and Lightmantled Sooty Albatross are fairly regular visitors.

The addition of the Chinstrap Penguin and American Sheathbill to the avifauna of Gough Island means that 46 species have now been recorded (Williams & Imber 1982).

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TABLE 1  
 KNOWN OCCURRENCES OF CATTLE EGRETS *BUBULCUS IBIS*  
 AT GOUGH AND MARION ISLANDS\*

Date	Numbers
Gough Island	
May 1968	" 1 bird
May 1974	" 1 bird
Apr-May 1975	" 3 birds
8 Mar-Apr 1982	" 2 birds, rising to 5 in April 1982
Apr-Jun 1983	" 1 bird
Marion Island	
19 Mar 1948	" 1 record of 8 birds
9 Feb-11 Apr 1975	" 1 bird, 2 birds from 5 Mar 1975 to 12 Mar 1975, then 1 bird until 11 Apr 1975
10 Mar 1976	" 3 birds
May 1977	" 1 bird
14 Jan 1980	" 1 bird
1 May 1982	" 1 bird

\* after Williams & Imber 1982, Newton *et al.* 1983 and references therein and this paper.

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