

## Birds observed at sea in the Indian Ocean

In this short paper I present a daily account of the birds observed from passenger ships on a return voyage from Durban, Natal, to Bombay, India. Whilst at sea the majority of daylight hours was spent looking for seabirds from the forepeak which was found to be the best vantage point for observation. Identification at sea can at times be difficult because some pelagic seabirds tend to steer clear of ships and therefore can only be seen at long range. A 15-60 power telescope mounted on a rifle butt was invaluable for birds far off. Photography proved well-nigh impossible because of the pitching and rolling of the ship but on occasions when birds came on board in an exhausted condition they were approachable enough to be caught as well as photographed. One White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* came on board at Karachi, Pakistan, and stayed with the ship until it berthed in Mombasa, Kenya. It appeared to find plenty to eat and generally frequented the deck outside the galley where the cooks threw it scraps of food.

No chart positions were available for the northbound journey but estimates for the noon positions are provided. I left Durban on 21 September 1974 at 1800 hrs local time. A few Greyheaded Gulls *Larus cirrocephalus* and several Kelp Gulls *L. dominicanus* followed the ship *Asia* out of the harbour.

22 Sept. ca. 25°40'S : Shy Albatross *Diomedea cauta* 1, Cape Pigeon *Daption capense* 14, Greatwinged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera* 25, Schlegel's Petrel *P. incerta* 1, Softplumaged Petrel *P. mollis* 40, prions *Pachyptila* sp. 2, Whitechinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* 10, Fleshfooted Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes* 30, Wedgetailed Shearwater *P. pacificus* 8, Sooty Shearwater *P. griseus* 2, Common/Arctic Tern *Sterna hirundo/paradisaea* 1.

23 Sept. ca. 19°55'S : Greater Frigate Bird *Fregata minor* 1, Sooty Tern *S. fuscata* 6.

24 Sept. ca. 14°10'S : Whitebellied Stormpetrel *Fregatta gallaria* 2, Sooty Tern 400.

25 Sept. ca. 8°25'S : Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* 3, Sooty Tern 120.

26 Sept. : Arrived Mombasa, Kenya, at 0500 hrs local time and entered the harbour at 0930 hrs. Species seen just offshore were Cape Pigeon 1, Sooty Gull *L. hemprichii* 30, Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* 20, Whitecheeked Tern *S. repressa* ca. 100, Roseate Tern *S. dougallii* 25, Little Tern *S. albifrons* 10, Lesser Blackbacked Gull *L. fuscus* 1 imm.

Left Mombasa 27 Sept. at 0200 hrs : Absence of birds at sea except for four Sooty Terns in the late afternoon.

28 Sept. ca. 3°N 48'E : No birds seen.

29 Sept. ca. 7°N 53'E : Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* 2, Masked Booby 3, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* 1 on board, Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* 1 on board.

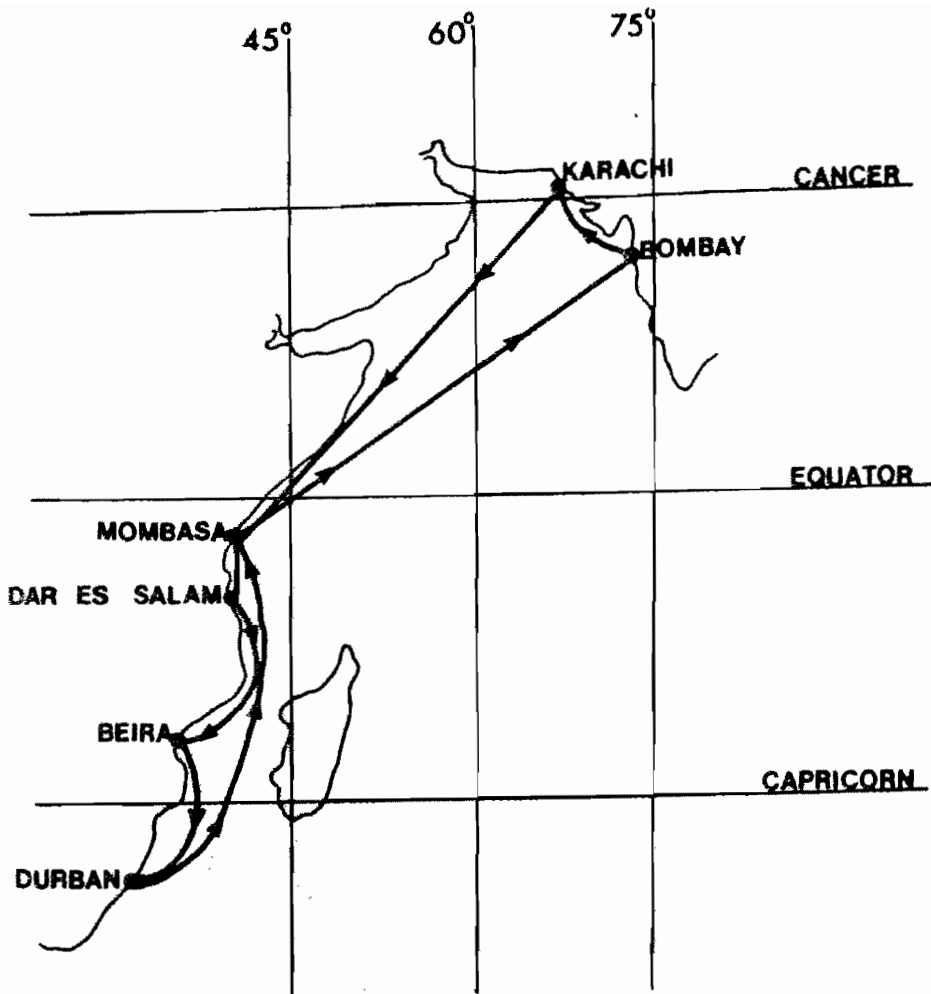


Figure 1  
 Approximate routes of the *Asia* and *Karanja* in  
 the Indian Ocean in 1974

30 Sept. ca. 11°N 58'E : Jouanin's Petrel 2, Masked Booby 1, Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* 1 imm. on board.

1 Oct. ca. 16°N 64'E : Jouanin's Petrel 2, Whitebellied Storm-petrel 2, Hobby *Falco subbuteo* 1, Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* 1, Turtle Dove and Yellow Wagtail still on board, Redthroated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* 1.

2 Oct. ca. 18°N 71'E : Yellow Wagtail and Turtle Dove still present on board. No other birds seen. Arrived Bombay, India, at 0600 hrs local time. Birds present offshore : Black Kite *Milvus migrans* 20, Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* 4, Herring Gull *L. argentatus* 25, Blackheaded Gull *L. ridibundus* 30, Gullbilled Tern *Sterna nilotica* 8, Whitecheeked Tern 400, Sandwich Tern *S. sandvicensis* 3, Swift Tern *S. bergii* 4, Little Tern *S. albifrons* 40, House Crow *Corvus splendens* 60.

Left Bombay, India, 21 November 1974 at 1300 hrs on the *Karanja*. Chart positions are for midday.

Birds in the harbour and at sea : Herring Gull 200, Blackheaded Gull 6000, Brownheaded Gull *L. brunnicephalus* 2 500, Great Blackheaded Gull *L. ichthyaetus* 25, Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* 4, Pomarine Skua *S. pomarinus* 2, Gullbilled Tern 30, Swift Tern 4, Little Tern 20, Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* 100.

22 Nov. 22°36'N 68°19'E : Herring Gull 40, Blackheaded Gull 3 000, Brownheaded Gull 15, Great Blackheaded Gull 50, Whitecheeked Tern 250, Common Tern 25, Swift Tern 6, Lesser Crested Tern 40, Rufous Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* 1, Rock Dove *Columba livia* 2, Richard's Pipit *A. novaeseelandiae* 2, Desert Wheatear *O. deserti* 1.

23 - 24 Nov. : Berthed in Karachi, Pakistan.

25 Nov. 21°36'N 63°47'E : Jouanin's Petrel 5, Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* 120, Pomarine Skua 200, Arctic Skua 6, Slender-billed Gull *L. genei* 1, White Wagtail 1.

26 Nov. 16°35'N 59°28'E : Masked Booby 35, Brown Booby 60, Quail *Coturnix coturnix* one bird tried to land on the side of the ship but fell into the sea and did not reappear on the surface, White Wagtail 1.

27 Nov. 11°48'N 55°11'E : Jouanin's Petrel 2, Redbilled Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* 25, Masked Booby 1, Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* 1 imm., White Wagtail 1.

28 Nov. 07°18'N 51°23'E : Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri* 3, Redbilled Tropicbird 2, Whitetailed Tropic Bird *Phaethon lepturus* 4, Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* 1, Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* one followed the ship for several hours, Rednecked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* 4, White Wagtail 1.

29 Nov. 02°28'N 47°06'E : Noddy Tern *Anous* sp. 4, Sooty Tern 60, Quail 1, Bluecheeked Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus* 6 on board, White Wagtail 1.

30 Nov. 01°54'S 42°46'E : Greater Frigate Bird 1, Swift Tern 5, Sooty Tern 10, Creamcoloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* 1. This bird met the same fate as the Quail on 26 Nov.

1 Dec. : Arrived Mombasa at 0600 hrs. The White Wagtail was seen to fly ashore towards Nyala Beach.

2 Dec. : Harbour and coast : Sooty Gull 150, Blackheaded Gull 28, Lesser Blackbacked Gull 2, Whitecheeked Tern 35.

3 Dec. 06°03'S 39°36'E : Sooty Gull 25, Lesser Blackbacked Gull 40, terns *Sterna* sp. 120, Lesser Crested Tern 4, Sooty Tern 80.

4 Dec. 07°04'S 40°03'E : Redfooted Falcon *Falco vespertinus* 1, Sooty Tern 400.

5 Dec. 14°04'S 40°03'E : Common/Arctic Tern 4 500, Roseate Tern 300, Sandwich Tern 6, Little Tern 40, Sooty Tern 250.

6 Dec. : No birds present at sea.

7 Dec. : Arrived Beira, Mozambique, at 0600 hrs. Birds in harbour area and offshore : Lesser Blackbacked Gull 17, Grey-headed Gull 300, Blackheaded Gull 1, Swift Tern 30.

13 Dec. 24°48'S 35°17'E : Yellownosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos* 2 imm., Greatwinged Petrel 40, Fleshfooted Shearwater 4, Sooty Tern 130.

14 Dec. 28°51'S 32°13'E : Arctic Skua 12, Common/Arctic Tern 4 500, Sabine's Gull *L. sabini* 3, Sandwich Tern 20, Swift Tern 40, Lesser Crested Tern 12, Sooty Tern 60, Little Tern 200.

15 Dec. : Arrived Durban, Natal, at 0530 hrs. Greyheaded Gull 30, Kelp Gull 6, Sabine's Gull 1, Common/Arctic Terns 1 500.

Many more birds were seen from the ship but were too far away for positive identification. Very few pelagic birds were seen feeding at sea except for the terns and skuas. The Sooty Terns avoided the ship during the day but at night they could frequently be heard calling their distinctive "wideawake" call around the stern where they sometimes roosted.

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