



Leach's Storm Petrel

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Swaelstertstormswael

Oceanodroma leucorhoa

In southern Africa, Leach's Storm Petrel is a summer visitor and rare breeder, fairly common off the west and south coasts, rarely reaching KwaZulu-Natal. It typically occurs in oceanic waters and is scarce over the shelf edge and rare inshore. None was recorded from coastal grid cells during the atlas period, and therefore no map is presented for this species.

Birds have been recorded ashore on offshore islands. One was caught on Dassen Island (3318AA) in December 1971 (Cooper & Edwards 1974). One occupied and called from a burrow at St Croix Island (3325DB) during the summers of 1976–84, October–January (Randall & Randall 1986). Similar observations, involving at least 17 birds, including one caught with a vascularized brood patch, were made at Dyer Island (3419CB) in October–December 1995 (Whittington & Dyer 1995; Whittington 1996). One was heard at Jutten Island (3317BB) (B.M. Dyer pers. comm.) and up to four at Dassen Island on several dates in November 1996 (P.A.W. pers. obs). Further investigation of Dyer Island in 1996 revealed 19 birds calling from within dry-stone walls. At least one of these birds was incubating an egg and a large chick was found in February 1997 (P.A.W., B.M. Dyer, R.J.M. Crawford & E. Dunn unpubl. data). This appears to be the first confirmed record of breeding by this species in the southern hemisphere. The use of offshore islands and predominantly nocturnal activity of breeding birds, could have resulted in this population existing unnoticed for some considerable time, and raises the question of there perhaps being other southern hemisphere breeding sites as yet undiscovered.

It occurs singly or in small groups, often found resting on the water. It is casually attracted to ships, occasionally following vessels for several hours. The nominate subspecies breeds during summer at islands in the North Atlantic and North Pacific oceans. Nonbreeding birds disperse over tropical and subtropical waters of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Birds off southern Africa have previously been presumably to derive from northern Atlantic Ocean populations (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992), but the recent discovery of a breeding colony at Dyer Island could perhaps indicate the existence of a separate southern hemisphere population.

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