

SHORT NOTES

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SPECTACLED FORM OF THE WHITE-CHINNED PETREL (*PROCELLARIA AEQUINOCTIALIS* *CONSPICILLATA*) IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

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The white-chinned petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* is a circumpolar species breeding on sub-Antarctic islands between 35° S and 55° S (Watson and others, 1971). White-chinned petrels are summer breeders, returning to colonies in October and November. Eggs are laid from November to January, and fledging and departure occurs in April and May (Watson, 1975).

One of the rarest seabird taxa in the South Atlantic Ocean is the *conspicillata* subspecies of the white-chinned petrel, which is confined to Inaccessible Island (37° 17' S, 12° 45' W) in the Tristan da Cunha group (Rowan and others, 1951), where its total breeding population was recently estimated at *c.* 1000 pairs (M. Fraser, personal communication). Unlike most seabird subspecies, which are only recognizable from measurements made on the bird in the hand, *P. a. conspicillata* is unmistakable at sea by virtue of the white markings on the face and head, which gave rise to its vernacular name of spectacled shoemaker. The birds are also known as 'ringeyes' to the Tristan islanders.

With such a rare and highly distinctive but little-known bird it is of considerable interest to assemble what is known of its distribution at sea and, in particular, its movements outside the breeding season. The subspecies is exceptional among South Atlantic seabirds in that it breeds only at one island and is identifiable at sea. Thus Fig. 1 shows the distribution at sea of birds belonging to the population of a single island.

Information on the distribution of *P. a. conspicillata* at sea was obtained from five sources. These are as follows.

1. Published records involving nine birds (von Pelzeln, 1869 (in Murphy, 1936); Ferguson, 1921*; Murphy, 1936*; Shewell, 1952*; Bourne, 1966; Voisin, 1983; * denotes not on Fig. 1).
2. Sightings (involving 40 birds) from 14000 SCAR/BIOMASS ten-minute cards (BIOMASS Working Party on Bird Ecology 1984) from the Percy FitzPatrick Institute involving eight voyages to the Tristan da Cunha group in the breeding season.
3. Sightings (involving 10 birds) from 4000 ten-minute cards from the British Antarctic Survey involving voyages between South Georgia and South America in spring and autumn, but always in the breeding season.
4. Sightings (involving five birds) made from commercial fishing trawlers in the Benguela region off the west coast of South Africa.

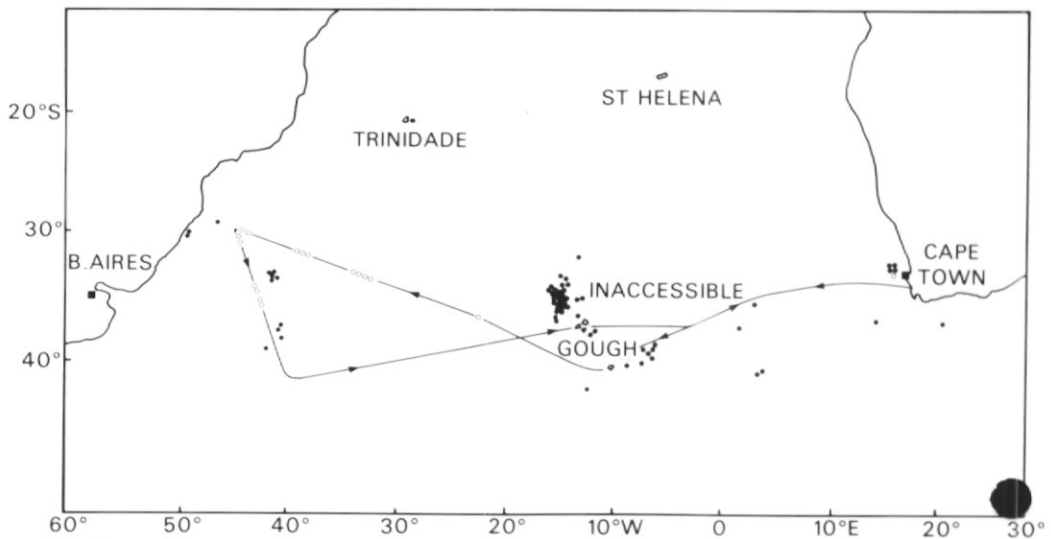


Fig. 1. Distribution of spectacled white-chinned petrels in the South Atlantic Ocean. ● = August–May, ○ = June–July, — = winter cruise track.

5. Sightings (involving 16 birds) from 751 ten-minute cards from a winter (June–July) cruise of the M.V. *S. A. Agulhas* from Cape Town to Gough Island and then to within 200 nautical miles of South America returning to Cape Town via Inaccessible Island.

Individual sightings are plotted on Fig. 1 (positions and dates available on request from the Percy FitzPatrick Institute) and are grouped by area and month in Table I.

Of 190 white-chinned petrels recorded on the winter cruise, 8.4% were *P. a. conspicillata*.

In mid-winter, birds are found mainly on the South American shelf but extend to within 600 nautical miles of Inaccessible. There was no observation from the vicinity of the Tristan da Cunha group, suggesting that most birds leave the breeding grounds in winter. This is contrary to the suggestion of Rowan and others (1951) that the birds stay in the immediate area of the breeding ground, only visiting their burrows when the weather is fine (based on sightings by Lawrence at Inaccessible in June 1943 and Rowan and others' own observations in 1949 and 1950). Although most other records are of birds seen at sea around the Tristan da Cunha group throughout the September to May breeding season, records show a few present in South American and South African waters, well outside the potential foraging range of breeding birds. These may well represent immature birds remaining in their wintering grounds.

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Table I. Number of spectacled white-chinned petrels seen at sea by area and by month

<i>Area</i>	<i>Jun/Jul</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sep.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>	<i>Nov.</i>	<i>Dec.</i>	<i>Jan.</i>	<i>Feb.</i>	<i>Mar.</i>	<i>Apr.</i>	<i>May</i>
	17	—	5	10	36	—	—	—	—	9	2
50° W–40° W	8	—	—	6	2	—	—	—	—	3	1
40° W–30° W	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
30° W–20° W	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
20° W–10° W	—	—	1	2	29	—	—	—	—	—	—
10° W–0°	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	4	1
0° –E10°	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	1	—
10° E–20° E	1	—	4	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
20° E–30° E	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1*	—

* Not on Fig. 1 (Shewell, 1952). Total observations: 79, all latitudes 30° S–41° S.

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VALIDATION OF A NEW COMBINATION USED IN THE MOSS GENUS *PLAGIOTHECIUM* ON SOUTH GEORGIA

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Plagiothecium falklandicum (Card. et Broth.) M. E. Newton, comb. et stat. nov.

Basionym: *Plagiothecium roeseanum* var. *falklandicum* Card. et Broth., *Kungliga Svenska vetenskapsakademiens handlingar* **63**: 66 (1923).

Justification of this taxonomic treatment is discussed in detail elsewhere (Newton, 1983), together with a full description and illustration of the newly recognized species on South Georgia.

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REFERENCE

- NEWTON, M. E. 1983. A new species of the moss genus *Plagiothecium* from South Georgia. *British Antarctic Survey Bulletin*, No. 60, 63–7.