

Southern and Northern Giant Petrels

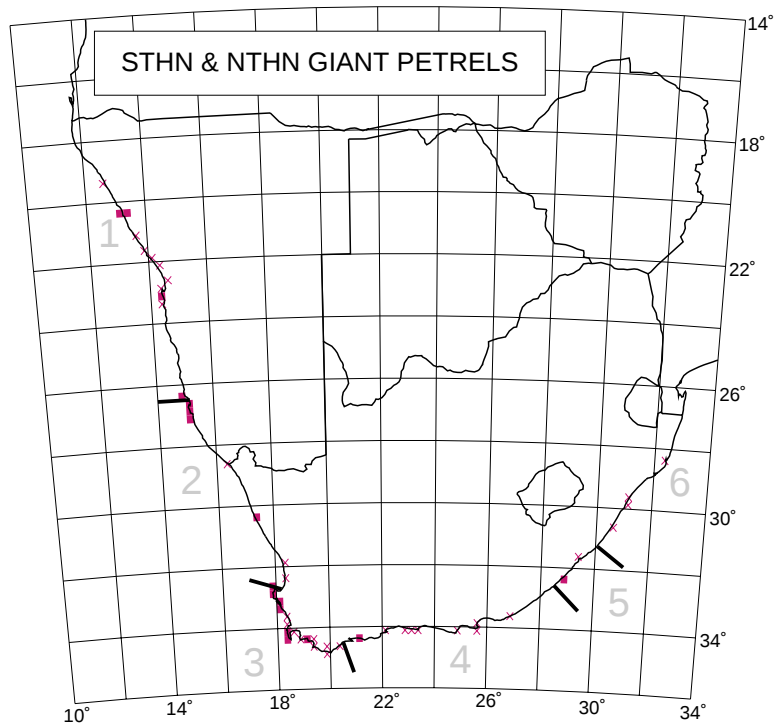
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Macronectes giganteus and *M. halli*

These are fairly common nonbreeding visitors. They are sibling species which differ in nesting behaviour and the timing of breeding, as well as in morphology and plumage sequences (Hunter 1987). They breed together at a number of subantarctic islands, and occasionally interbreed (Hunter 1982). They are hard to separate in the field without a good view of the bill; consequently they are treated together here. Both species occur throughout the region, but are most common off the west and south coasts. The specific identity of birds off southern Mozambique is uncertain (Brooke *et al.* 1981).

Both species breed during the austral summer. Some 38 000 pairs of Southern Giant Petrels breed on Antarctica and at circumpolar subantarctic islands, north to Gough Island at 40°S. Nonbreeding birds disperse throughout the Southern Ocean. Northern Giant Petrels are much less abundant, with some 8600 pairs breeding at subantarctic islands and islands south of New Zealand (Hunter, S. 1985). Their nonbreeding range is less well known, but includes the Southern Ocean south of Africa and Australasia. White-phase Southern Giant Petrels, which are more frequent in populations breeding at high latitudes, are rare off southern Africa; five were seen during six one-month winter cruises off the west coast in winter (Ryan *et al.* 1989).

They occur throughout shelf waters, attending trawlers operating near the shelf-break and visiting Cape Fur Seal *Arctocephalus pusillus* colonies along the coast (Shaughnessy & Voisin 1981). Large flocks used to gather to scavenge at whaling stations, and birds occasionally come ashore to feed on stranded whale and seal carcasses (Shaughnessy & Voisin 1981). Both tend to fly closer to the coast than do other procellariiforms, often passing over the surf zone. Off the west coast, Southern Giant Petrels predominate offshore at trawlers (Ryan & Rose 1989), whereas Northern Giant Petrels are much more numerous at Namibian fur-seal colonies (Shaughnessy & Voisin 1981). They are uncommon in oceanic waters and follow ships primarily near breeding islands.



Recorded in 46 grid cells, 1.0%
Total number of records: 211
Mean reporting rate for range: 1.7%

Both species occur throughout the year, although there is a winter peak in abundance. Southern Giant Petrels ringed as chicks at Marion, Macquarie, Heard, Signy, the Crozets and South Georgia islands have been recovered in southern Africa; Northern Giant Petrels ringed at the Crozets and Macquarie Island have been recovered (Morant *et al.* 1983; Marchant & Higgins 1990; Oatley 1993). Most recoveries are of birds from Signy Island in the South Orkneys, and Bird Island, South Georgia; more than half were recovered within a year of fledging (Morant *et al.* 1983).

A population of giant petrels at Tristan da Cunha was extirpated during the 19th century after the island was settled by people (Richardson 1984).

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