

A SHY ALBATROSS OFF SOMALIA

By Piet and Kathy Meeth

On our way from Singapore homeward bound by container vessel *Nedlloyd Houtman* we passed The Brothers, Socotra during the morning of 18 September 1986. The ship's noon position was 11°44'N 53°07'E, 55nm SW of Socotra. The seawater temperature was 23.5°C which was considerably lower than the previous day (27°C) and the following day (30°C). The wind was SW force 4; it was towards the end of the SW monsoon. During the early part of the day we saw large numbers of the normal species for the area until at 1555, whilst observing a party of terns and dark petrels feeding on a shoal of fish, we were suddenly highly surprised to see a soaring and banking albatross.

The ship's position at this time was 11°50'N 51°35'E, 18nm NE of Cape Guardafui, Somalia. The sea was choppy and the wind was estimated at force 5. Although the bird was too far away to see all the plumage details we noted the following main characteristics:

It was a large, long-winged albatross. The upperwing and back were sooty grey, crown of head and cheeks were light grey. The large white rump was conspicuous. The underparts were white except black wing-tips, and a very thin dark leading and trailing edge. The bill was grey. These main characteristics, as well as the typical "jizz" (head and neck held a little forward and down) led us to identify the bird as a Shy Albatross *Diomedea cauta*. The bird was too far away to see the diagnostic "thumbmark" on the underwing.

COMMENT. It is interesting to note that less than two months later a near adult female Shy Albatross *D.c. cauta* was caught in fishing nets off Mombasa (G.R. Cunningham-van Someren, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 108:18-19). In addition, another Shy Albatross *D.c. cauta* was seen in the Gulf of Aqaba on 20 February 1981, and found dead 15 days later on 7 March (M.C. Jennings, *Saudi Arabia Nat. Hist. Soc. J.* 2(4): 14: 14-17).

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