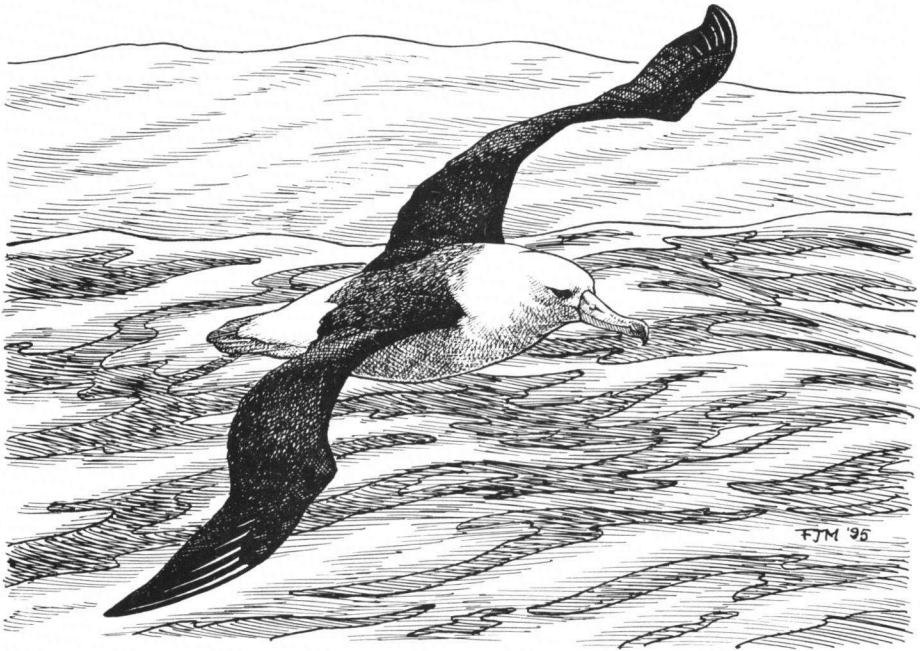


Korte bijdragen

The Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris* in the North Sea

De Wenkbrauwwalbatros in de Noordzee

In the Atlantic, albatrosses are typical birds of the southern hemisphere. Still, at least one Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris* lives in the north and this is by no means a new phenomenon. From 1860-94 a female spent the summers in the Faeroe Islands (Bauer & Glutz von Blotzheim 1966) and another bird spent part of the (northern) breeding season in the gannetries of the Westmann Islands (Iceland, 1966), the Bass Rock (1967-69) and Hermaness, Shetland (1972-present; Waterston 1968, Bourne 1977, Sutherland & Brooks 1979, Thom 1986, Harrop 1994). Many birdwatchers have visited Hermaness, especially to see the albatross (see Anon. 1987 for directions). As the bird survived for several decades, it obviously has to feed and it should be possible to see the bird at sea. Indeed, there are quite a few records of the species in waters around Scotland (Thom 1986). Moreover, Black-browed and unidentified albatrosses have been reported from a much larger area, from northern Norway south to Morocco, including a relatively large number of sightings off the east coast of Britain (Anon. 1987, Dymond *et al.* 1989, Harrop 1994). Of particular interest are several recent records from the Skagerrak area, indicating that the Shetland bird might cross the northern North Sea: 10 May 1989 off SW Norway; 10 April 1990 off SW Sweden; 19 July 1990 off northern Denmark; 23 September 1991 again off northern Denmark (after Harrop 1994); and on 24 August 1993 off southern Norway (Birding World 6: 314). There is also one record at 60°N, 2°E, halfway between Shetland and Norway (A. Campbell, 30 January 1990; Brit. Birds 87: 508). Many records from the English eastcoast could also refer to the Shetland bird, but there is good evidence that more than one individual is involved (Dymond *et al.* 1989). However, extensive survey work in the North Sea proper, started by the British in 1979 failed to produce a single sighting for a long time. There could thus be doubt whether the Shetland bird



Black-browed Albatross *Diomedea melanophris* Wenkbrauwalbatros
(F.J. Maas)

ventures into the central and southern North Sea for any length of time; it seemed more probable that it preferred the oceanic waters of the Atlantic. On the other hand, seawatchers in The Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and France have produced several records of presumed Black-browed Albatrosses, or at least of smaller mollymawk-albatrosses, along the eastern North Sea seaboard. The first was seen off Castricum, and probably again off Scheveningen at 22 October 1971. The principal observer (Slings 1981) considered the bird to be a Black-browed Albatross (but see Meeth 1981). Another record is from 30 November 1980 at the seawatching site Hond-

bossche Zeewering in The Netherlands (Platteeuw *et al.* 1994), but the observers were not sure whether this bird was a Black-browed, or an immature Grey-headed Albatross *D. chrysostoma* (*pers. comm.* M. Platteeuw). An albatross seen in Germany (off Sylt, 29 September 1988; *Limicola* 2: 234) also remained unidentified. Off Dunkerque, France, a Black-browed Albatross was seen on 11 September 1991 (*Birding World* 5: 24). The most recent record, of an unidentified albatross seen from the mainland coast in the eastern North Sea was made at Blåvandshuk (Denmark) 'early' September 1993 (*Birding World* 6: 356). Offshore records in the central and southern North Sea are still very rare, despite the large-scale seabird projects that are now carried out by nearly all North Sea states. The British fisherman William Crombie beat us to it, when he noted and photographed a Black-browed Albatross at the Dogger Bank at 21 May 1988. In the course of the seabirds at sea projects, a Black-browed Albatross has now been seen on three occasions, of which only the first has been reported before:

(1) 5 October 1988, Henk Offringa and Rob Witbaard noted the first, at 53° 51'N, 6° 19'E. The bird was swimming at 30 m from the ship's course line, with several Great Black-backed Gulls *Larus marinus* flying around, and was the first accepted record for Germany (Offringa & Witbaard 1990).

(2) 5 September 1990, MFL and Pim Wolf observed and photographed one flying in Moray Firth, (Scotland; 57°49'N, 2°50'W). The bird got as near as 70 m. It was accompanied by several Gannets *Sula bassana*, compared to which it seemed 1.5 times larger. The body, head and rump were white, the upperwing was black and the mantle and tail slightly lighter grey. The underwings showed an obvious central white band between black margins. The bill was yellow.

(3) 7 May 1991, during one of the first surveys in the German seabirds at sea programme, MR and CD obtained the last record at sea so far. The bird was seen east of Helgoland (54°08'N, 8°25'E), at several hundreds of metres distance from the ship. The white head, body and rump, the black upperwings and the underwing pattern of black margins and a white, narrow central line were noted in the field. The colour of the bill could not be seen from this distance. Although not all diagnostic characteristics could be noted, other species than Black-browed are unlikely. The combination of a white head and narrow white band on the underwing argue against the other mollymawks in the *Diomedea* family, except the Grey-headed Albatross. Of the only other

likely candidate, the Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchus* there is only accepted record for the western Palearctic (Norway; Harrop 1994). This record is currently under review of the German rarities committee.

These three records were all rather closely inshore and resemble the seawatching sightings in this respect. The coast was well in sight when the bird in the Moray Firth was seen, and this bird could even have been seen from land. The two records in German waters were also both near the coast and within the coastal waters of the southeastern North Sea (within the 30 m depth contour). Therefore, the only truly offshore records to date are those made by William Crombie at the Dogger Bank and by A. Campbell in the northern North Sea. Bourne (1977) and Thompson (1992) have argued that Black-browed Albatrosses have thrived since they learnt to exploit fisheries waste at trawlers. Bourne suggested, that, as the species is a relatively migratory albatross that readily follows ships for long distances, an increase in sightings in our waters is to be expected. Black-browed Albatrosses are most frequently recorded in the North Sea in late spring (April/May) and autumn (September/November). As it has been established that more than a single individual has roamed the North Sea and the surrounding waters lately (one was found dead in NW Spain in December 1987), and that at least one individual does enter the Skagerrak and the southern North Sea up to locations very closely inshore, it is worthwhile to look out for the species, both from the shore and from ships.

Samenvatting Een overzicht wordt gegeven van de waarnemingen van Wenkbrauw-albatrossen in de Noordzee. De meeste meldingen worden gedaan in de kustwateren. Naast een relatief groot aantal meldingen vanaf de Britse oostkust, bestaan er ook enkele waarnemingen langs de continentale kusten. Opvallend zijn de waarnemingen bij zuid-Noorwegen en zuidwest Zweden. Deze doen vermoeden dat de bekende Wenkbrauw-albatros van Shetland soms de noordelijke Noordzee oversteekt. Tijdens tellingen van zeevogels op zee werd drie maal, en steeds dicht bij de kust een Wenkbrauw-albatros gezien: éénmaal in Schotse, en twee maal in Duitse wateren. Er bestaan slechts twee waarnemingen van deze soort verder uit de kust. Een visser zag er een op de doggersbank en in de centrale noordelijke Noordzee werd de soort ook éénmaal opgemerkt.

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