

A MASSIVE FLIGHT OF CORY'S SHEARWATERS AT CAPE HATTERAS

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Will McDowell and I observed a massive migration of Cory's Shearwaters (*Puffinus diomedea*) from the beach at Cape Point, Cape Hatteras, Dare County, N.C., on 28 October 1974. A total of more than 8850 Cory's were counted during 4 hours of continuous observation in the morning and 3 hours late in the afternoon. In addition, Greater Shearwaters (*P. gravis*), Sooty Shearwaters (*P. griseus*), Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*), Pomarine Jaegers (*Stercorarius pomarinus*), Parasitic Jaegers (*S. parasiticus*), Black-legged Kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla*), and Roseate Terns (*Sterna dougallii*) were seen. Table 1 summarizes our observations.

The migration proceeded from west to east, passing just south of Cape Point, and continuing due east over and along the turbulent waters of Diamond Shoals. About 80% of the birds passed our observation station, located about 300 meters W of the Point, between 30 and 250 meters off the beach. Occasional Cory's Shearwaters could be seen at 1 km or more, and some east-to-west movement was noted among these most distant birds. Only a few shapes of shearwaters were recognized on the horizon along the north edge of Diamond Shoals, north of the Point. A 30-minute watch at noon from Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, about 5 km N of Cape Point, yielded only one immature Northern Gannet. The intensity of the flight between 0630 and 1030 averaged about 40 Cory's per minute with extremes of 65 and 15 per minute. The flight diminished to about 4.5 Cory's per minute between 1530 and 1830. Figure 1 illustrates the character of the flight.

Throughout the day, thousands of gulls and terns were observed feeding off Cape Point, over schools of blue fish (*Pomatomus saltatrix*), and most of the shearwaters, gannets, and kittiwakes flew through or around them without stopping. The only Sooty Shearwater was watched for about 30 minutes, diving and feeding with the flock of gulls, 200 meters S of the Point. The jaegers usually paused long enough to engage a tern or gull in brief, halfhearted pursuit, before continuing eastward. More than 100 fishermen jammed the Point in the evening and were consistently catching 7- to 18-pound blue fish within

Table 1. Seabirds observed flying from west to east, passing Cape Point, Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, 28 October 1974.

SPECIES	TIME	0630-1030	1530-1830	TOTAL
Cory's Shearwater	-----	8400+	450+	8850+
average no. Cory's/min.	----	40±	4.5	--
Greater Shearwater	-----	6	0	6
Sooty Shearwater	-----	0	1	1
Northern Gannet (adult)	-----	1	0	1
" " (sub-adult)	----	5	2	7
" " (juvenile)	----	120±	72	192±
Pomarine Jaeger	-----	0	4	4
Parasitic Jaeger	-----	3	3	6
Black-legged Kittiwake (1st winter immature)	-----	22	6	28
Roseate Tern	-----	2	0	2

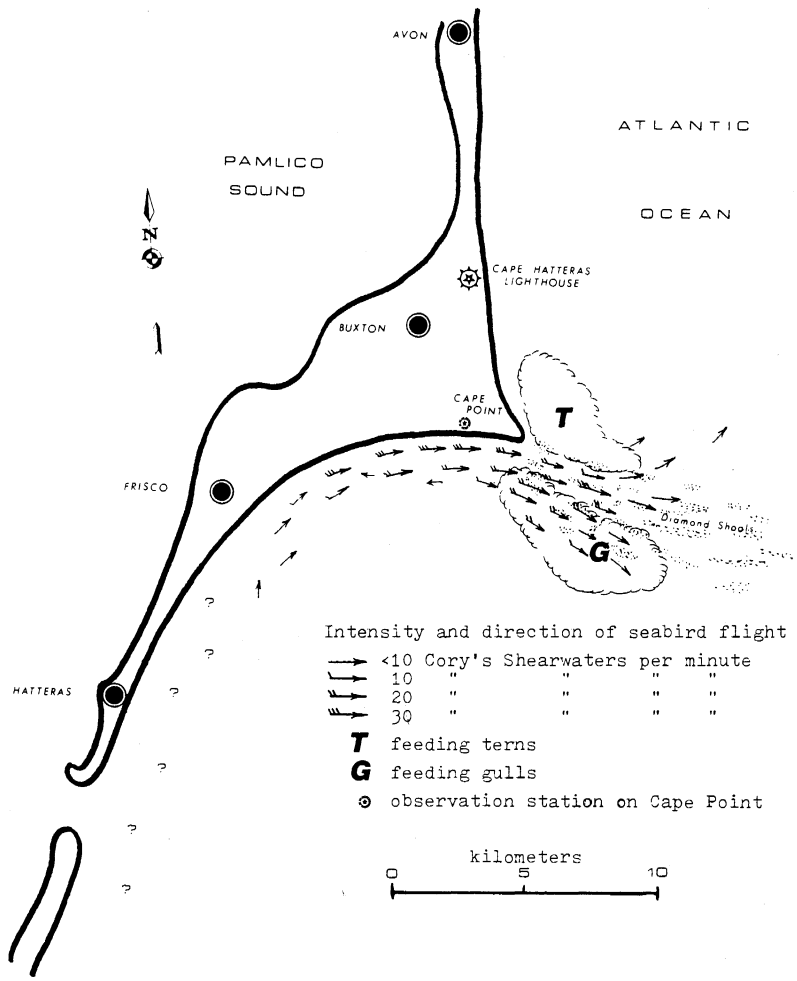


Fig. 1. Character of seabird activity at Cape Hatteras, N.C., on 28 October 1974.

seconds of casting, and the jaegers and kittiwakes were cutting across the Point directly overhead, occasionally swooping at some unattended bait lying on the beach.

We had birded at Ocracoke on the preceding day, and we did not observe any shearwaters from the beach. One immature Black-legged Kittiwake was seen flying north past the mouth of Silver Lake Harbor in the morning, and one Parasitic Jaeger was pursuing terns over Hatteras Inlet in the evening. A fisherman, who seemed to have a keen side interest in seabirds, told us that he had been fishing off the Point all week and that the shearwater flight was first apparent to him when he arrived at dawn on the 28th.

Weather conditions on 27 and 28 October were clear, wind E to SE at 5 to 10 knots, and the air temperature ranged from 64° to 76°F.

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