



All at sea

TEXT BY PETER RYAN

Seabirds at sea offer some of the most challenging bird photography. It's no sinecure getting crisp images of fast-moving birds while being tossed around on a boat, buffeted by the wind and drenched in salt-spray.

*The recipe for taking great seabird pictures is patience, perseverance and anticipation. You need to spend a lot of time at sea looking for the right light conditions, and then predict where your quarry is going to be. But the rewards of getting a good shot are manifest in this superb portfolio by **Roland Seitre**.*

An Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche carteri* soars against the cliffs at Amsterdam Island. More famous for its relict population of great albatrosses, Amsterdam supports over 70 per cent of the population of this species. Both

Indian and Atlantic Yellow-nosed albatrosses occur commonly off southern Africa. The adult of the Indian form is told by its white crown, pale grey cheeks and sharply-pointed base to the yellow bill stripe. ▷



A Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*, with its diagnostic greenish bill tip, glides over a mirror-smooth sea. Such calm conditions are relatively unusual in the Southern Ocean. They make for great photographs, but seabirds, the larger birds especially, tend to rest during windless conditions when they cannot use dynamic soaring – utilising the differential wind speed between wave crests and troughs – to get a free ride.



A lovely study of a Slender-billed Prion *Pachyptila belcheri* pattering across the sea. Identification of prions is notoriously difficult, but Slender-billed is one of the easier species to identify. Given a good view, the pale head, lacking a dark eye-stripe, rules out any of the broad-billed prion group (*P. vittata*, *sensu lato*). Separation from Fairy Prion *P. turtur* is best done by tail pattern (a relatively narrow terminal band, extending up the centre of the undertail in Slender-billed). At very close range it also shows a longer, more slender bill. ▷



A pair of Campbell Albatrosses *Thalassarche impavida* squabbling over food. Superficially similar to the widespread Black-browed Albatross *T. melanophris*, the Campbell Albatross breeds only on Campbell Island off New Zealand, and it typically remains within the western Pacific. It has not yet been recorded from Africa, but local birders should keep an eye out for it. Adults are easily told by their honey-coloured eyes, even more marked black eye-liner, and generally more extensive black on the underwing.



An adult Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri* skids to a halt to investigate a potential meal. Buller's Albatross breeds at four islands off New Zealand, and typically disperses across the Pacific Ocean to South America. There has been only one record from African waters. The adult could be confused with the adult Grey-headed Albatross *T. chrysostoma*, but it has a much broader yellow stripe on its upper mandible, as well as a pale crown and less black on the underwing. From a distance it is most likely to be mistaken for the grey-headed Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *T. chlororhynchos*. □