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Global change hits African Penguin harder than Cape Gannet, find UCT study

PhD thesis focuses on three threatened seabirds

University of Cape Town doctoral student Viviane Barquete's thesis, *Using stable isotopes as a tool to understand the trophic relationships and movements of seabirds off southern Africa*, assesses how African Penguins and Cape Gannets have reacted to the advent of commercial fishing and the recent spatial shifts in fish distributions.

Her comparison of historical and contemporary samples confirms that the African Penguin, a dietary specialist, has been less able to cope with global change than the more generalist Cape Gannet.

Barquete uses stable isotope ratios of carbon and nitrogen sampled non-destructively from seabird tissues to examine the trophic relationships and movements of three globally threatened seabirds.

She also uses stable isotopes in feathers to show that adult White-chinned Petrels only commence moulting after they arrive in their wintering grounds.

Combining this result with data from adult birds sampled on their breeding islands throughout their range around the Southern Ocean, she is able to show that adults breeding in different ocean basins winter in different continental waters, which can be used to infer the origin of birds killed by different fisheries.

Barquete has been studying at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at UCT since October 2007, conducting fieldwork in the Benguela region and at Marion Island.

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