

# BIRD OF THE YEAR 2022

# CAPE GANNET

*Morus capensis*

## ABOUT

**Cape Gannets** are from the *Sulidae* family. They are large seabirds that feed by plunge diving at great speed, up to an astonishing 100 km/hr, to catch mostly **pelagic fish** such as sardines and anchovies. Their streamlined, missile-shaped bodies, dagger-like bills, and large, webbed feet are ideally adapted for diving and swimming quickly underwater to catch fleeing fish.

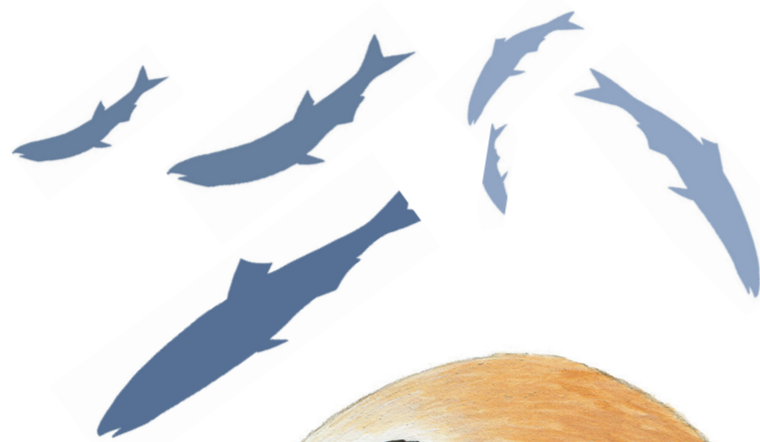


## LOCATION

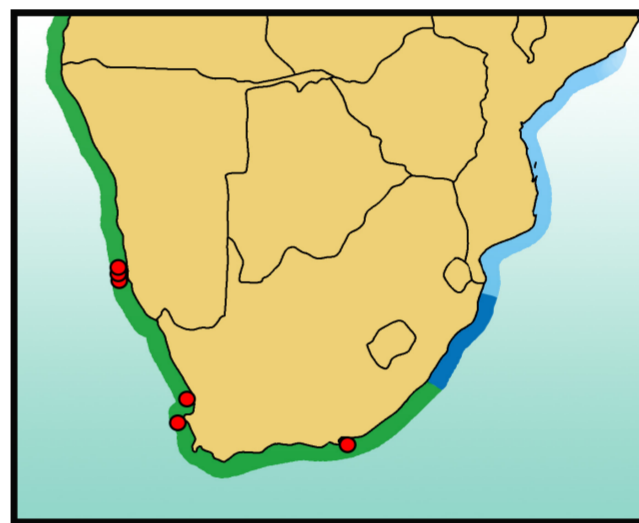
Cape Gannets only breed in **southern Africa**, on 6 offshore islands, making them **endemic breeders** to the area. Three breeding colonies are in Namibia, (Mercury, Possession and Ichaboe Islands), and three are in South Africa, (Lamberts Bay, Malgas Island and Bird Island). They are resident along the coast in the southern part of Africa, feeding close to shore, occasionally venturing as far as Nigeria. In winter they gather in their thousands, following the abundant sardine shoals up the KwaZulu-Natal coast.

## FUN FACT

The Afrikaans name for gannet is 'Malgas', which is thought to be a corruption of 'mal gans', meaning 'mad goose'



Breeding Endemic to southern Africa



## IDENTIFICATION

The **Cape Gannet** is a striking bird, appearing hand painted in its coloration. The adult **plumage** is predominantly creamy white with a golden-yellow washed head. The long, pointed, pale blue-grey bill, has contrasting black nasal grooves and black facial skin at the base. This extends down the middle of the throat to form a sharply tapered gular stripe. Powder blue eye-rings and piercing silver-grey eyes, complete their eye-catching facial features. Male and female Cape Gannets are alike, and have black tail and flight feathers. The dark grey legs and webbed feet are highlighted with pale yellow-green stripes.

classified as **ENDANGERED**

Dwindling stocks of their preferred food, **sardines and anchovies**, has led to a worrying decline in Cape Gannet numbers. In the past 60 years, their total population has dropped by over **50%**!

1960s  
250 000 breeding pairs

Today  
123 000 breeding pairs



1.6 - 1.7 m wingspan

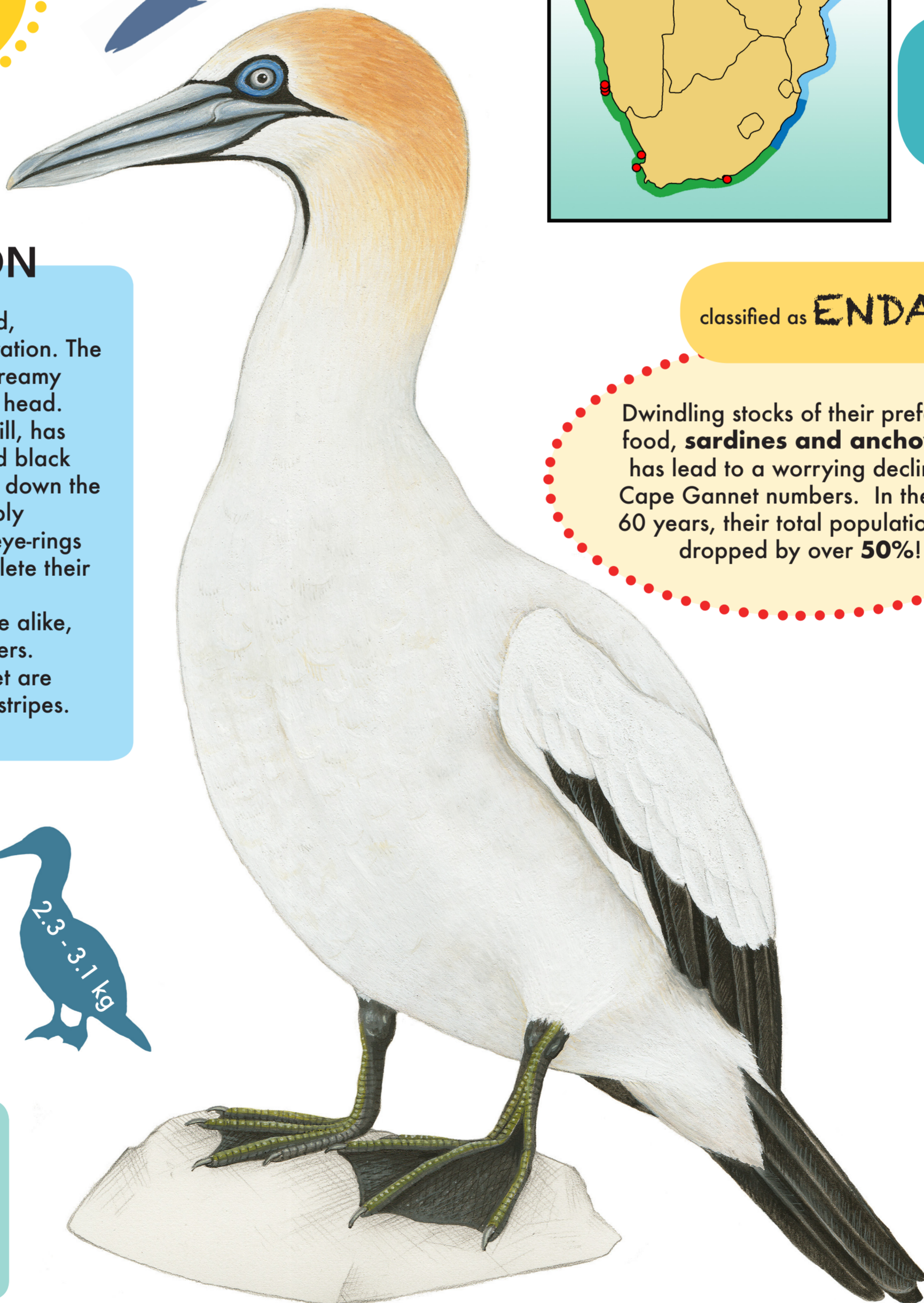


84 - 95 cm



## FLIGHT

Long, narrow **wings**, spanning nearly 2 metres, allow gannets to glide above the ocean, using the air currents to conserve energy when foraging for fish.



### References:

Birdlife International (2022) Species Factsheet: *Morus capensis*. <http://www.birdlife.org>  
Sinclair, I., Hockey, P., Tarboton, W., Perrins, N., Rollinson, D., Ryan, P. 2020. Sasol Birds of Southern Africa. 5th Revised Edition. Struik Nature.