

A Fisher's Guide to New Zealand Seabirds



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

In this quick-reference guide are 26 different seabirds that you may see in New Zealand's EEZ. Some of these seabirds can be found near our coasts, but many are more commonly seen while foraging over the open ocean.

Most of the birds in this guide breed in New Zealand and many breed nowhere else in the world. In fact, New Zealand is considered the seabird capital of the world because of the diversity of seabirds on our waters including the 86 species that breed here. New Zealand's seabirds include penguins, albatrosses, petrels, shags, gannets, terns and skuas.

For this guide we have selected seabirds that are at risk of being caught in fisheries. Because most of the seabirds listed in this guide travel long distances, they face an array of threats while at sea including interactions with various fisheries, pollution and depletion of prey. These seabirds often face additional pressures at their breeding colonies.

Some of New Zealand's fisheries now have mitigation measures in place to reduce seabird by-catch. Many of these mitigation measures are also being used in other parts of the world. There are numerous individuals, organisations and governments working to protect seabirds. Populations for many of the seabirds in this guide are so low that every individual plays an important role in the survival of its species. In other words, your efforts to reduce by-catch are critical.

Note: Because threats to seabirds may occur in several EEZs as well as international waters we have used the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List of threatened species.

List of seabirds found in this guide

Great albatrosses

Antipodean (wandering) albatross and
Gibson's albatross
Diomedea antipodensis antipodensis and
D. antipodensis gibsoni

Northern royal albatross
Diomedea sanfordi

Southern royal albatross
Diomedea epomophora

Sooty albatrosses

Light-mantled sooty albatross
Phoebastria palpebrata

Albatrosses

Buller's albatross
Thalassarche bulleri

Campbell albatross
Thalassarche impavida

Chatham albatross
Thalassarche eremita

Grey-headed albatross
Thalassarche chrysostoma

Salvin's albatross
Thalassarche salvini

Black-browed albatross
Thalassarche melanophrys

White-capped albatross
Thalassarche steadi

Petrels

Northern giant petrel
Macronectes halli

Southern giant petrel
Macronectes giganteus

Grey petrel
Procellaria cinerea

Westland petrel
Procellaria westlandica

White-chinned petrel
Procellaria aequinoctialis

Black petrel
Procellaria parkinsoni

Common diving petrel
Pelecanoides urinatrix

Grey-faced petrel
Pterodroma macroptera

Cape pigeon/petrel
Daption capense

Shearwaters

Buller's shearwater
Puffinus bulleri

Flesh-footed shearwater
Puffinus carneipes

Short-tailed shearwater
Puffinus tenuirostris

Sooty shearwater (also known as tītī or
muttonbird)
Puffinus griseus

Wedge-tailed shearwater
Puffinus pacificus

Prions

Fairy prion
Pachyptila turtur

Antipodean (wandering) albatross and Gibson's albatross

Diomedea antipodensis antipodensis and *D. antipodensis gibsoni*



Photo: CJR Robertson



Photo: Tui De Roy

Head: White faces and throat with brownish crowns.

Body: Large albatrosses that become whiter as they mature, but some dark tail feathers. Adult males often have white bodies with some mottled brown patches. Females frequently have dark bodies.

Wings: Average wingspan 640 mm. Upperwings can be dark through to almost all white. White underwings with dark tips.

Bill: Pink.

Juvenile features: Dark brown plumage with a white face, throat and underwings.



Feeding and range

Eats: Forages on squid and sometimes fish.

Range: South Pacific Ocean from Australia to Chile. Gibson's known to forage in the Southern Ocean. Tracking studies on Antipodean albatrosses indicate incubating birds mainly forage east of New Zealand, but some non-breeding males fly east to the waters off Chile. During early incubation, Gibson's are believed to mainly feed in the Tasman Sea and east of New Zealand.

Interesting facts

Although genetically similar, Gibson's albatrosses usually have a paler plumage than Antipodean albatrosses.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Antipodean albatrosses breed at Antipodes Island, with a few pairs at Campbell Island and the Chatham Islands (Chatham, Pitt). Gibson's albatrosses breed only at the Auckland Islands (Adams, Auckland, Disappointment).

Breeding period: Egg laying begins in December for Gibson's and January/February for Antipodean albatrosses. Chicks usually fledge the following January through March.

Frequency of breeding: Every two years for successful breeders or annually for failed breeders.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Nest in loose colonies with nests widely spaced apart. Nest is a raised cup of soil that is built among tussock and megaherbs.



Threats

At sea

- Frequent vessel followers, both Antipodean and Gibson's albatrosses are relatively frequent by-catch in longline fisheries.
- In New Zealand waters they have been frequently caught in the southern bluefin tuna fishery on vessels operating east of New Zealand. Recently they have also been captured in the swordfish fishery.
- Gibson's are also known to be killed in Australia's southern bluefin tuna fishery.
- Because this species forages widely across the South Pacific Ocean and Tasman Sea it is at risk from longline fishing in international waters.

On land

There are currently few land-based threats to Antipodean and Gibson's albatrosses.

- Mammalian predators may take eggs and kill unguarded chicks at some colonies. Adams, Disappointment and Campbell islands are free of introduced mammals.
- Visitor impacts on this species are currently minimal because access is restricted to Antipodes, Adams and Disappointment islands, and very few people visit the nests of birds breeding at Campbell and Auckland islands.

IUCN Red List: Endangered

Northern royal albatross

Diomedea sanfordi



Photo: Tui De Roy



Photo: Tui De Roy

Head: White, sometimes with dark spots on their crown.

Body: Very large. Body and back white.

Wings: Upperwings are completely dark.

Feet: Pink.

Bill: Light pink with a thin black line on the cutting edge.

Juvenile features: Immature birds look similar to adults, but may have some dark spots on their crown and back.



Feeding and range

Eats: Mainly feed on squid, but also eat some fish.

Range: Forage widely over the Tasman Sea, Pacific Ocean and South Atlantic Ocean.

Interesting facts

The northern royal albatross colony at Taiaroa Head on the Otago Peninsula is the only albatross colony on New Zealand's main islands.

Royal albatrosses usually live for up to 35 years, but "Grandma", one of the first birds to breed at Taiaroa Head, was in her early 60s when she raised her last chick. In January 2007, Toroa became the 500th chick to be born at Taiaroa Head. He is a grandson of Grandma.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Chatham Islands (Forty-Fours, Big Sister and Little Sister), South Island (Taiaroa Head) and Auckland Islands (Enderby where some have hybridised with southern royal albatrosses).

Breeding period: Egg laying begins in late October and chicks depart the following year from August to October.

Frequency of breeding: Every two years for successful breeders.

Number of eggs: One.

Nesting: Northern royal albatrosses have denser colonies than other great albatrosses. They build nesting mounds out of soil and vegetation.



Threats

At sea

- The high survival rate of adults and fledglings indicates that fisheries-related mortality is not a major threat to the species, but some have been caught on longlines and in trawl fisheries.
- Fly strike from the introduced blowfly (*Lucilia sericata*) and heat stress have been a major cause of egg and chick failure at Taiaroa Head. In particularly warm years, some adults have died from heat exhaustion and possibly from an avian pox virus.

On land

- Until recently, habitat changes at breeding colonies on the Chatham Islands had a significant impact on northern royal albatross populations. Habitat has since recovered.
- At Taiaroa Head, mammalian predators have killed chicks in some seasons.

In recent years intensive pest control has minimised the impact of these predators. All other breeding colonies are free of mammal predators.

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

Southern royal albatross

Diomedea epomophora



Photo: Peter Reese



Photo: Peter Moore

Head: Usually white, some may have dark spots on their crown.

Body: Very large albatrosses with a white body. Tail all white in adults. When fully mature they are the whitest of all the albatrosses.

Wings: White upperwings with some black barring. As they age their upperwings become whiter.

Feet: Light pink.

Bill: Pink with a thin black line on the cutting edge.



Feeding and range

Eats: Mainly feed on squid, but also eat some fish.

Range: During breeding season they forage over the Tasman Sea and South Pacific Ocean. Birds migrate after breeding to the South Atlantic Ocean and probably have a circumpolar distribution in the Southern Ocean.

Interesting facts

Southern royal albatrosses and wandering albatrosses are the largest of all albatrosses.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Mainly on Campbell Island, with a few on the Auckland Islands (Adams, Enderby, Auckland) and the South Island (Taiaroa Head – where they have hybridised with northern royal albatrosses).

Breeding period: Eggs are laid from late November to late December. After the egg is laid both parents take turns on the nest. The egg takes about 79 days to hatch (October-December). The chick is brooded for a month and fledges after about 240 days.

Frequency of breeding: Every two years for successful breeders.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: A mound of soil and vegetation.



Threats

At sea

- Longline fishing poses a moderate threat.
- Small numbers have been caught in southern bluefin tuna longlines in the New Zealand EEZ.
- Internationally, birds have been killed on tuna longlines set off south-western Australia in summer and off Tasmania in the summer and winter.
- The species is also caught by Japanese tuna longliners fishing the high seas.
- A few birds have been observed captured in trawl nets or associated warps and cables.

On land

- Skuas are natural predators and take some eggs.
- Feral pigs may take eggs and kill unguarded chicks on Auckland Island.
- A potential threat to the breeding habitat of southern royal albatrosses is the encroachment of the scrub *Dracophyllum*, which may be caused by climate change.
- Tourist visits may have some impact on nesting albatrosses. Nervous birds are known to abandon nests when visited or handled. DOC has implemented a number of measures to control and limit the area where visitors can go on islands while southern royal albatrosses are breeding.

Light-mantled sooty albatross

Phoebastria palpebrata



Head: Sooty brown with a white crescent behind its eye.

Body: Sooties are amongst the smallest of the albatrosses. Ash-grey with a darker grey belly.

Wings: Average wingspan 200 cm. Sooty brown in colour.

Feet: Grey.

Bill: Dark with a faint blue line on its cutting edge.



Feeding and range

Eats: Fish and some squid.

Range: Prefers deep offshore waters and forages over cold Antarctic waters in summer as far south as the pack ice, but ranges north into temperate and subtropical seas in winter. While foraging, breeding birds may range thousands of kilometres from their breeding grounds.

Interesting facts

Unlike other albatrosses, sooties have a long stiff wedge-shaped tail which is believed to aid their agility during paired courtship flights.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Auckland Islands (Adams, Disappointment, Auckland, Enderby, Rose), Campbell Island group (Campbell, Dent, Jacquemart, Folly, Monowai and other inshore stacks) and Antipodes Islands (Antipodes, Bollons, Archway, Leeward). Elsewhere breeds on Macquarie, Heard, Kerguelen, Crozet, Prince Edward, Marion and South Georgia islands.

Breeding period: Begins in late October and chicks depart the following May and June.

Frequency of breeding: Every two years for successful breeders.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Less colonial than other species of albatross, sometimes even nesting singly. Build cone-shaped nests, mainly on cliff ledges.



Threats

At sea

- The main threat at sea is from longline fishing.
- There have been no recently reported captures of this species in New Zealand.
- Caught in small numbers on Australian tuna longliners.
- Japanese scientists report the species is frequently caught on the high seas, particularly in the Indian and south-west Pacific oceans.

On land

- Mammalian predators may take a few eggs or kill chicks on Auckland Island although most birds nest on cliff ledges that are protected from these predators.
- The most significant predator on land is probably the brown skua. This natural predator takes some eggs and has been seen scaring adults off their nests.
- Human visitors to breeding areas may have some impact. The species is sensitive to disturbance during courtship. Some birds will abandon their nests if handled during early incubation. This is not a significant threat in New Zealand where few people visit breeding colonies.
- Ticks and mice on Antipodes and Auckland islands may be potential vectors for avian diseases.

Buller's albatross

Thalassarche bulleri



Head: Grey head and neck with white crown.

Body: White body with a dark upper tail.

Wings: Upperwing is dark. Underwing is white with a black margin.

Bill: Dark with broad, bright-yellow stripes on the top and bottom. The top stripe is rounded at the base of the bill.



Feeding and range

Eats: Mostly on fish, squid, octopuses, sea squirts and crustaceans.

Range: Breeding and non-breeding adults are known to forage in the Tasman Sea, the Pacific Ocean east of the South Island, and over the shelf areas south of Stewart Island. Juveniles and non-breeding adults disperse across the South Pacific Ocean, north of the Antarctic Convergence, reaching the Humboldt Current off Chile and Peru.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Breed only in New Zealand on the Snares Islands, Solander Islands, Chatham Islands, and Three Kings Islands.

Breeding period: On the Chatham Islands they breed from October to the following May. Other breeding colonies breed from December to September.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Build pedestal nests amongst shrubs on narrow terraces or in the forest.



Threats

At sea

- A significant threat to this species may be climate change, which is affecting the distribution of its marine prey.
- Longline fishing is another important threat. Very few are caught by longliners in the New Zealand EEZ, because the species feeds over deep water away from the continental shelf. Large numbers of immature grey-headed albatrosses are caught on southern bluefin tuna longlines particularly in the high seas off Australia, the Indian Ocean and South Atlantic Ocean.

On land

- Few threats to the species on land.
- Weka were introduced to Big Solander Island and may have some impact on breeding success there.
- Avian diseases may be a potential threat to species.

Interesting facts

After breeding, many adults and juveniles migrate to the waters of Peru and Chile. Here the immature birds may remain for up to five years.

Campbell albatross

Thalassarche impavida



Photo: Tui De Roy, Roving Tortoise Photos



Photo: Tui De Roy, Roving Tortoise Photos

Head: White. Black eyebrows. Irises are honey-coloured.

Body: Medium-sized albatross with a white body.

Wings: Dark upperwings. Underwings white with black margins.

Feet: Bluish white.

Bill: Yellow with a red tip.

Juvenile features: Dark bill with blackish tip. Grey plumage on lower neck. Eye colour initially dark brown and therefore easily confused with juvenile black-browed albatross.



Feeding and range

Eats: Mainly fish, squid and crustaceans.

Range: The species disperses widely around the Southern Ocean and into the temperate seas of the South Atlantic, Indian, and South Pacific oceans.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Breeds only on Campbell Island.

Breeding period: Begins August and ends the following April.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial nesters that nest on cliffs and steep slopes. Build pedestal nests made of compacted soil.



Threats

At sea

- Significant numbers of the species have been caught in the southern bluefin tuna fisheries in New Zealand and Australia.
- Both adults and juveniles are caught. The high capture of juveniles is probably affecting colony recruitment.
- This species is also caught in New Zealand's trawl fisheries.

On land

Few land-based threats remain for the species.

- Human visitors may have some impact, but few people visit the colonies at the northern end of Campbell Island.
- Avian diseases are a possible threat to the species.

Interesting facts

Long considered a New Zealand subspecies of the black-browed albatross, the two species are now known to breed in mixed colonies on Campbell Island. While some hybrids have been found, the birds appear to prefer to mate with their own species.

Chatham albatross

Thalassarche eremita



Photo: Tui De Roy



Photo: Tui De Roy

Head: Mature birds have a grey crown, face and throat.

Body: Medium-sized with a white chest and belly, and a dark-grey tail.

Wings: Dark-grey upperwings. White underwings.

Bill: Yellow bill with a dark spot at the tip of the lower bill.

Juvenile features: Juveniles have more grey in their plumage and a blue-grey bill that has a black tip.



Feeding and range

Eats: Squid and fish.

Range: South Pacific Ocean west to Tasmania and east to South America. In winter the species migrates to the territorial waters of Chile and Peru. Juveniles appear to remain in South American waters until they reach breeding age.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Chatham albatrosses breed only on The Pyramid, which is a large rock stack in the Chatham Islands.

Breeding period: August-September to the following March-April.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial breeders that build pedestal nests out of guano and fish bones.



Threats

At sea

- Chatham albatrosses have been caught in longline fisheries in New Zealand, Australia and in South American waters.
- Coastal longline fisheries in Chile and Peru are of special concern and may pose a significant threat to the species.
- The species is also reported in the by-catch of trawlers in New Zealand waters.

On land

- The habitat quality on the islet deteriorated following a severe storm in 1985, but has since recovered.
- The loss of soil and drying of the island may have increased greater egg and chick mortality.
- The Pyramid is privately owned and it is believed the illegal harvesting of Chatham albatross chicks still occasionally occurs.
- Could be affected by bird diseases including avian pox virus.

Interesting facts

It is New Zealand's rarest endemic albatross. The entire world population breeds on one 10-hectare rock stack.

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

Grey-headed albatross

Thalassarche chrysostoma



Photo: A. Wright



Photo: A. Wright

Head: Grey head and neck.

Body: Medium-sized albatross. When mature, the body is white and upper tail is dark grey.

Wings: Dark grey upperwings. Underwings are white with black margins. The species has a two-metre wingspan.

Bill: Dark bill has a yellow stripe on the top and on the bottom. The top stripe gradually tapers at the base of the bill.



Feeding and range

Eats: Fish, squid and crustaceans. Lampreys appear to be important in the diet of young birds being fed by their parents.

Range: Circumpolar navigators that prefer to feed in the open oceans rather than over the continental shelves. Breeding birds are known to travel up to 2000 km away from their breeding areas to the Polar Front to forage.

Interesting facts

Total population for this species is estimated at 600,000, but all monitored populations are in sharp decline.



Breeding

Breeding sites: In New Zealand this albatross breeds only on Campbell Island. In other parts of the southern hemisphere it breeds on Diego Ramirez (Cape Horn), South Georgia, Prince Edward, Crozet, Kerguelen and Macquarie islands.

Breeding period: Season begins in August with eggs laid in late September and ends the following May.

Frequency of breeding: Every two years for successful breeders.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Cone nests are made of mud and lined with vegetation.



Threats

At sea

- A significant threat to this species may be climate change which is affecting the distribution of its marine prey.
- Longline fishing is another important threat. Very few are caught by longliners in the New Zealand EEZ, because the species feeds over deep water away from the continental shelf. Large numbers of immature grey-headed albatrosses are caught on southern bluefin tuna longlines particularly in the high seas off Australia, the Indian Ocean and South Atlantic Ocean.

On land

Few land-based threats remain for the grey-headed albatross.

- Greatest land-based threat is from its natural predator, the brown skua, which takes some eggs and will kill weak chicks. As density and size of albatross colonies decrease this natural predator may have an increasingly negative impact on the population.
- The species is known to abandon nests if handled during incubation, but few humans visit its colonies on Campbell Island.
- Avian diseases are a possible threat.

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

Salvin's albatross

Thalassarche salvini



Head: Light grey to brown with a white cap.

Body: Medium-sized albatross with a mostly white body.

Wings: Dark upperwings with some mottled white near neck. Underwings are mainly white with a narrow outline of black.

Bill: Dusky grey or pale brown, with yellow patches at the base, tip and sides.



Feeding and range

Eats: Squid and fish.

Range: Distribute widely over the Southern Ocean. They can be found in the South Pacific and Indian oceans. They often forage over shelves and seamounts.

Interesting facts

Ninety-five per cent of the world population breeds crowded on to the tiny, barren islets of the Bounty Islands.



Breeding

Breeding sites: In New Zealand, Salvin's albatrosses breed annually at the Bounty Islands, the Snares and possibly The Pyramid and the Forty-Fours at the Chatham Islands. The species also breeds at the Crozet Islands in the Indian Ocean.

Breeding period: Begins in October and ends the following April.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Nest on barren islands and rock stacks.



Threats

At sea

- Commonly seen attending fishing vessels.
- Moderate numbers of Salvin's have been caught in longline fisheries in the New Zealand EEZ.
- Moderate numbers reported caught in trawl fisheries.
- Because they forage widely in the Southern Ocean they may be at risk in longline fisheries on the high seas.

On land

There are very few land-based threats to Salvin's albatrosses.

Black-browed albatross

Thalassarche melanophrys



Photo: Tui De Roy, Roving Tortoise Photos



Photo: Tui De Roy, Roving Tortoise Photos

Head: White. Black patch around the eye and black irises.

Body: Body is white.

Wings: Dark upperwings and white on the underwings with black margins. Wingspan is 210-250 cm.

Feet: Yellowish-orange webbed feet.

Bill: Bright yellow with reddish tip.

Juvenile features: Immature birds have dark bills with blackish tips.



Feeding and range

Eats: Mostly krill and fish. Also eat some squid, salps and jellyfish.

Range: During the summer, common over shelves around New Zealand and Australia. In the winter, birds from the Indian Ocean migrate to shelves off of East Africa, Australia and New Zealand.



Breeding

Breeding sites: In New Zealand, black-browed albatrosses breed in low numbers on Campbell, Antipodes and Snares islands. Elsewhere the species breeds on Cape Horn, Falkland, South Georgia, Crozet, Kerguelen, Heard and Macquarie islands.

Breeding period: Begins in August with eggs laid in late September and ends in April.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial nesters. Nest on terraces on top of coastal tussock-clad cliffs or steep slopes. Builds a pedestal nest of soil, guano and vegetation.



Threats

At sea

- Species often seen near trawlers. Many black-browed albatrosses are killed each year in trawl fisheries off of South Africa and in the Indian Ocean.
- The species is also frequently captured in longline fisheries in the southern hemisphere.
- Another threat to this species may be climate change which is affecting the distribution of its marine prey.

On land

- Introduced mammals at some breeding colonies. This is not currently a threat in New Zealand.
- Ticks and avian diseases.
- Numbers of visitors to some breeding colonies. This is not currently a threat in New Zealand.

Interesting facts

The total population of this species is estimated between one million and 2.5 million birds, which makes it more abundant than all other Southern Ocean albatrosses combined. In spite of its large population, the species is listed as endangered because it is believed to be in sharp decline at a rate of c.65 per cent over three generations (65 years).

The species is a recent coloniser in New Zealand.

White-capped albatross

Thalassarche steadi



Head: White with faint grey on cheeks.

Body: The large albatross has a white chest, belly and rump.

Wings: Dark upperwings. Underwings are white with narrow black margins.

Bill: Light greyish-white with yellow tip and a faint yellow patch near the base of the top mandible.

Other information: Very similar in appearance to the shy albatross (*Thalassarche cauta*) that breeds off Tasmania. Some researchers consider white-capped albatross to be the local form (subspecies) of shy albatrosses.



Feeding and range

Eats: Squid and fish.

Range: During breeding season they feed over the Snares Island Shelf and Auckland Island Shelf.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Breed only in New Zealand on Disappointment Island, Adams Island, Auckland Island, and Bollons Island. About 96 per cent of the total population breeds on Disappointment Island (60,000-72,000 pairs). Ongoing work suggests that this number may be higher.

Breeding period: Egg laying starts in mid-November and the chicks fledge in mid-August.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial nesters that build large mound nests out of soil and vegetation



Threats

At sea

- Frequently caught in New Zealand's squid fishery.
- Reported captures in New Zealand tuna longline fishery.
- Frequently caught in tuna longline and trawling operations off the coast of South Africa.

On land

There are few land-based threats to the species.

- Mammalian predators (especially feral pigs) on Auckland Island destroy nests and eat eggs and chicks.

Interesting facts

On 7 March 1907 the Dundonald, a four-masted barque carrying a cargo of wheat, ran ashore on Disappointment Island in the Auckland Island group. Twelve men lost their lives due to the wreck and the 15 survivors spent nine months on Disappointment Island and Auckland Island before being rescued. According to one survivor's account the men ate up to five white-capped albatross per day during their ordeal.

Northern giant petrel

Macronectes halli



Head: Mottled white on their head and neck. White face and chin as they mature.

Body: Mottled white on their breast. Older birds become a mottled dark grey on their upper body.

Wings: Wingspan is 150-200 cm.

Bill: Light pink with a reddish-brown tip. One way to tell northern giant petrels apart from southern giant petrels is by the pinkish-brown tip on the bill of the northern giants (compared with greenish tips on southern giants).

Juvenile features: Entirely blackish-brown with a pale bill.



Feeding and range

Eats: Feed on squid. These opportunists are frequently seen scavenging around dead seals and whales. They are also known to attack and eat smaller species of seabirds.

Range: Birds disperse widely over the Southern Ocean, mainly north of the Antarctic Convergence. The northern giant petrel is more restricted to foraging near shorelines than the southern giant petrel. Many mature northern giant petrels remain near their breeding colonies year-round, while immature birds appear to make circumpolar journeys.



Breeding

Breeding sites:

Auckland Islands (Enderby, Ewing, Ocean, Disappointment), Campbell Island group, Antipodes Island, and Chatham Islands (Forty-Fours, Big Sister, Little Sister). Elsewhere breeds at Macquarie, Kerguelen, Crozet, Prince Edward and South Georgia islands.

Breeding period: Seasons vary slightly based on colony, August/October to February/March.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Loose colonial nesters, often breed in dispersed pairs. Build nests amongst vegetation on rugged terrain.



Threats

At sea

- Some northern giant petrels have been caught on southern bluefin tuna longlines in Australia and New Zealand.
- They are attracted to trawlers when nets are hauled and are caught occasionally in trawl gear.
- Because northern giant petrels are scavengers they may be more at risk of plastic pollution than some other seabirds.

On land

Currently there are not many threats to northern giant petrels on land.

- Northern giant petrels are quite sensitive to human disturbance and will sometimes abandon eggs or young chicks if approached too closely.

Interesting facts

Giant petrels are also known as nellies or stinkpots. Although the northern giant petrel is much rarer than the southern giant petrel, it is the more frequently seen species in New Zealand waters.

Giant petrels are the only petrel species that will feed on land.

Southern giant petrel

Macronectes giganteus



Photo: Dennis Buurman Photography



Photo: Tui De Roy, Revving Tortoise Photos

Head: Have two distinct colour phases: Dark phase with speckled white head and neck. White phase with a completely white head and neck except for a few dark feathers.

Body: Dark phase can be confused with the northern giant petrel, but southern giant petrel adults are much paler on the neck and underbody. White phase birds are white except for a few scattered dark feathers.

Wings: Wingspan 150-200 cm.

Bill: Pale peach with a greenish tip.

Juvenile features: Fledge black with their plumage slowly fading as they mature. Juveniles take about seven years to develop adult plumage.



Feeding and range

Eats: Feed on squid. They are opportunists that can be found in mixed flocks with northern giant petrels and are often seen scavenging around dead seals and whales. They are also known to attack and eat smaller species of seabirds.

Range: Breeding adults spend summers near breeding colonies. In winter, some adults remain in Antarctic waters, while others move further north and disperse across the Southern Ocean.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Nests in small colonies on ice-free Antarctic and subantarctic islands. Visits New Zealand waters, but does not breed in New Zealand.

Breeding period: September-March at northern colonies and November-May in Antarctica.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Small breeding colonies are often close to penguin colonies.



Threats

At sea

- Some caught on southern bluefin tuna longlines.
- Illegal and unregulated longline fisheries for Patagonian toothfish in the Southern Ocean are of particular concern.

On land

- Highly sensitive to human disturbance. Known to abandon nests if close contact is made.

Interesting facts

Petrels can spit foul-smelling oil when threatened by an intruder. Because of this smell, southern giant petrels are sometimes known as stinkers.

Grey petrel

Procellaria cinerea



Head: Grey with a darker grey crown.

Body: Large, grey with darker upper body. Under body is white. Tail is grey and wedge-shaped.

Wings: Upperwings are grey. Underwings are darker grey.

Feet: Greyish pink.

Bill: Pale white with yellow or green tinge and dark purplish patches.



Feeding and range

Eats: Squid, fish and crustaceans.

Range: These circumpolar foragers prefer deep ocean basins. They avoid shelves except near breeding islands and off Argentina in autumn.

Interesting facts

Grey petrels are strong swimmers and can dive to depths of 10 metres in search of food.

Grey petrels have recently been rediscovered breeding on Campbell Island following DOC's 2001 rat eradication programme.



Breeding

Breeding sites: In New Zealand breeds at Campbell Island and Antipodes Islands. Grey petrels also breed at Kerguelen, Amsterdam, Crozet, Prince Edward, Tristan da Cunha and Gough islands.

Breeding period: March to November.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial nesters. Nest in burrows.



Threats

At sea

- Grey petrels are capable divers and have been observed diving deeply to retrieve baits cast by longliners, especially tuna and ling fishing vessels.
- Grey petrels form the largest percentage of seabirds killed by tuna longliners in New Zealand EEZ.
- Frequently captured in the toothfish longlining fishery near the French subantarctic islands.
- Grey petrels regularly feed behind trawlers and there are some reports of by-catch in trawl fisheries.

On land

- Feral cats and rats have exterminated grey petrel populations on Macquarie Island and Crozet Islands (Hog). They have also reduced populations on Amsterdam, Marion, Possession and Campbell islands.

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

Westland petrel

Procellaria westlandica



Head: Black.

Body: Large black petrel that is similar looking to the white-chinned petrel.

Wings: Black.

Feet: Legs and feet black.

Bill: Mature birds have bills that are pale yellow with a large black tip.



Feeding and range

Eats: Mainly fish and squid. The species is also known to use offal for a significant part of its diet, especially when feeding chicks.

Range: A highly pelagic species, at sea the Westland petrel ranges from Tasmania to the territorial waters of Chile. While breeding (March–November) found in New Zealand shelf waters and Tasman Sea. From November to April migrates across the Pacific: adults travel south to Cape Horn while immature birds travel north to the Humboldt Current.



Breeding

Breeding sites: The species breeds only in New Zealand in the coastal foothills near Punakaiki on the South Island's West Coast.

Breeding period: Breed each winter between May and November.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial nesters that excavate burrows.



Threats

At sea

- Westland petrels are a by-catch species in tuna fisheries in New Zealand and Australia.
- They also frequently follow trawlers and can be caught in trawl gear.

On land

- Introduced mammals sometimes prey on eggs, chicks and even adults.

- Mining and agricultural activities have destroyed some habitat adjacent to breeding colonies.
- Birds occasionally strike power lines when flying to and from the colony.
- The native weka is a natural predator of the Westland petrel. In recent years, with a shortage of other prey available, petrel chicks have become particularly vulnerable to weka predation.

Interesting facts

Pest control measures implemented by DOC have helped stabilise the Westland petrel population. The colonies within Paparoa National Park are protected under a "Westland Petrel Special Area" that restricts public access to the colonies.

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

White-chinned petrel

Procellaria aequinoctialis



Photo: Darren Scott



Photo: Darren Scott

Head: Blackish-brown with a few white feathers under the bill (which are difficult to observe at sea).

Body: Large blackish-brown petrel that is similar looking to the Westland petrel.

Wings: Blackish-brown.

Feet: Legs and feet are black.

Bill: Light yellow. One of the visible differences between the Westland petrel and the white-chinned petrel is that the white-chinned petrel does not have a dark tip at the end of its bill.



Feeding and range

Eats: Mainly krill and fish.

Range: Forage across the Southern Ocean between the tropics and Antarctica. One of the few species that is commonly seen foraging over both shelves and ocean basins.



Breeding

Breeding sites:

In New Zealand, the white-chinned petrel breeds annually in colonies at the Auckland Islands, Campbell Island group and Antipodes Islands. It also breeds at Kerguelen, Crozet, Prince Edward, Marion, South Georgia and Falkland islands.

Breeding period: November to May.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs incubated: One.

Type of nests: Colonial nesters.
Nest in burrows.



Threats

At sea

- Adept divers, white-chinned petrels are extremely vulnerable to fisheries impacts and are by-caught around the southern hemisphere.
- The species is known to forage for bait both during the day and night.
- May be the most frequently killed species on longlines in the South Atlantic, off southern Africa, and in the western Indian Ocean.

- Known to congregate around longliners and trawlers. Accidentally caught in fisheries using both methods, including in New Zealand.

On land

- Introduced mammals are a threat at some colonies.
- Human disturbance is an issue, with visitors unintentionally crushing burrows by walking over them.

Interesting facts

White-chinned petrels were called shoemakers by the early sealers because of the clacking and rattling sounds they make in their burrows. White-chinned petrels are the largest burrowing petrel species.

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

Black petrel

Procellaria parkinsoni



Head: Dark.

Body: Medium-sized, very dark brown or black.

Wings: Dark brown or black.

Feet: Black.

Bill: Pale yellow with a dark tip.

Other notes: The black petrel looks very similar to the Westland petrel, but is smaller. Its range is also further north and north-east of the North Island than the Westland petrel. Also known as Parkinson's petrel.



Feeding and range

Eats: Fish and crustaceans.

Range: The black petrel forages mainly off the eastern North Island and in the Tasman Sea. Black petrels migrate after breeding to the eastern tropical Pacific, with birds frequently seen off the coast between southern Mexico and northern Peru and westwards to the Galapagos Islands.

Interesting facts

Black petrel colonies were once found on the mountains and hills on the North Island and north-western South Island, but most colonies were lost before the 1950s.



Breeding

Breeding sites: The only remaining colonies of the species are found on Little Barrier Island and Great Barrier Island.

Breeding period: November to June.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial nesters.
Nest in burrows.



Threats

At sea

- Black petrels frequently scavenge behind fishing boats and are a concern particularly in longline fisheries where they dive deeply to retrieve bait.
- Information suggests the species may also be caught by longline fisheries operating closer to shore in New Zealand (e.g. snapper fisheries) and by recreational line fishers.
- In winter the species may also be at risk in fisheries in the eastern tropical Pacific.

On land

- The species was eradicated by feral cats and other mammalian predators from many of its former breeding colonies. The removal of feral cats from Little Barrier Island has helped to slow its decline.
- On Great Barrier Island, mammalian predators may take some eggs and kill some chicks and adults.

Common diving petrel

Pelecanoides urinatrix



Head: Dark.

Body: Small, stocky bodies with dark plumage on upper body and light-grey plumage on its throat and chest.

Wings: Dark plumage on upperwings and light-grey plumage on its underwings. Wingspan 33-38 cm.

Feet: Legs and feet are a light blue.

Bill: Black, short and broad.



Feeding and range

Eats: Mainly small crustaceans.

Range: Foraging habits not well known, but the species may stay over continental shelf waters near its breeding colonies.

Interesting facts

Common diving petrels are the most aquatic of all petrels and frequently dive and “fly” underwater to capture their prey.

A one-year-old diving petrel was recently found breeding. This is the youngest breeding age ever recorded for the entire Order Procellariiformes (albatrosses and petrels).



Breeding

Breeding sites: There are a number of subspecies of the common diving petrel that breed in New Zealand. The subantarctic diving petrel breeds at Auckland Islands, Antipodes Islands and Campbell Island group. The southern diving petrel breeds around Foveaux Strait and in a number of colonies at Stewart Island and surrounding islets and rock stacks. It also breeds at the Snares and at a number of colonies at the Chatham Islands. The northern diving petrel breeds on islands and small stacks around the North Island and Cook Strait, from Three Kings Islands to Brothers Island. The northern diving petrel also breeds on up to 20 Australian islands off of Victoria and Tasmania.

Breeding period: August to February.

Frequency of breeding Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial. Nest in burrows and natural cavities.



Threats

At sea

- Although some common diving petrels have been reported as by-catch, this threat is not considered as great as threats the species faces on land.

On land

- Introduced predators on breeding islands are the greatest threat. Diving petrel colonies can be destroyed within three to five years because fledglings return to natal colonies at one to two years of age and adults visit their nesting burrows eight to ten months of the year.
- Human disturbance can also have a significant impact on diving petrel colonies, because they breed in shallow burrows that are easily damaged. Diving petrel burrows may accidentally be damaged when sooty shearwaters are harvested around Stewart Island.
- Diving petrels are also attracted to bright lights. Birds have been reported crashing into brightly lit buildings near breeding colonies or onto ships at sea.

IUCN Red List: Least concern

Grey-faced petrel

Pterodroma macroptera



Photo: Rod Morris



Photo: Terry Greene

Head: Dark brown head with a grey face.

Body: Large with dark sooty brown plumage on its entire body.

Wings: Black or brown.

Feet: Black legs and feet.

Bill: Black.



Feeding and range

Eats: Mainly squid, but also fish and crustaceans.

Range: At sea they forage widely over the south-west Pacific Ocean and Tasman Sea. Highly pelagic, grey-faced petrels forage beyond the continental shelf and are seldom seen in inshore waters except near their nesting areas during breeding season.



Breeding

Breeding sites: The grey-faced petrel breeds on islands, rock stacks and headlands from the Three Kings Islands down to Omata near New Plymouth. It also breeds on many islets in the Hauraki Gulf and Bay of Plenty, a number of islands and headlands west of Auckland, and at a number of locations in the Gisborne and East Cape regions. The nominate subspecies is known as the great-winged petrel and breeds in many locations in the South Atlantic and Indian oceans.

Breeding period: Breeds June to January.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial nester that nests in burrows.



Threats

At sea

- Grey-faced petrels occasionally scavenge behind fishing boats and have been caught in New Zealand's longline and trawl fisheries.
- Caught in Australia's southern bluefin tuna fishery.

On land

- Introduced mammals are the greatest threat to grey-faced petrels. It is believed that due to the impacts of introduced mammals on the North Island mainland, colonies only still exist on steep bush-clad slopes or headlands.
- Human disturbance is an issue, with visitors unintentionally crushing burrows by walking over them.

Interesting facts

With its long and narrow wings, this petrel appears to soar effortlessly and is spectacular to see in flight.

Cape pigeon/petrel

Daption capense



Photo: Rod Morris



Photo: Tili De Roy

Head: Black head and neck.

Body: Medium-sized. Under body is mostly white with some black marking on chin and throat. Upper body has a distinctive black and white pattern.

Wings: Underwings are mostly white with black margins. Upperwings feature a distinctive black and white pattern. The two subspecies found in New Zealand's waters are easiest to tell apart by the amount of black on their upperwings. Snares Cape pigeon (*D.c. australe*) has dark upperwings with white patches. Southern Cape pigeon (*D.c. capense*) has whiter upperwings with black flecks.

Bill: Black.



Feeding and range

Eats: Feed mainly on krill, but also eat fish and squid. They are also known to scavenge near fishing vessels and near marine mammal carcasses.

Range: Circumpolar, but during the summer feed close to their breeding colonies in Antarctica's waters especially shelf areas. Winter range extends from the ice edge to eastern tropical Pacific, especially off Argentina, south-west Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Most commonly found foraging on shelves.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Cape pigeons breed on numerous islands surrounding Antarctica. Snares Cape pigeon breeds in many locations in the subantarctic islands and Chatham Islands.

Breeding period: November to March.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial nesters. They build simple nests that are usually on cliffs or steep slopes with easy access to the sea.



Threats

At sea

- Habitual ship followers and have occasionally been caught in longline and trawl fisheries.

On land

- Skuas are natural predators and will prey on eggs and chicks.

Interesting facts

Cape pigeons earned their common name because of the way they peck at the water to capture prey and because of their presence around Cape of Good Hope, South Africa.

They are not a pigeon and these days are increasingly known as Cape petrels.

Buller's shearwater

Puffinus bulleri



Head: Dark grey upper half and white lower half.

Body: Large, white-bellied shearwater. Undersides are white.

Wings: Distinctive “M” pattern on its upperwings. Underwings are white with dark-grey margins.

Bill: Grey bill.



Feeding and range

Eats: Fish, squid and crustaceans.

Range: During breeding season they forage north of the Subtropical Convergence, usually staying over the continental shelf. The species is also found in the mid-Tasman Sea and off eastern Australia. Migrates to the North Pacific Ocean in winter and disperses widely from Japan and Alaska east to California. Some annually migrate to the territorial waters of Peru and Chile.



Breeding

Breeding sites: The species breeds only on islands in the Poor Knights group.

Breeding period: November to May.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: They nest in burrows or crevices on cliffs and bush-clad slopes.



Threats

At sea

- Scavenge food behind trawlers and occasionally around recreational fishing boats.
- Birds may be caught in trawl nets and on hand and reel lines.
- There is a risk of the species being caught in set nets.

On land

- Fire is a threat because the Poor Knights are very dry in summer and fires could cause temporary losses in the population.
- Burrows are easily collapsed by people moving about on colonies. Visitor access is strictly limited to protect the birds and other threatened fauna on the islands.

Interesting facts

By 1936 the population on Aorangi Island had been all but wiped out (c. 100 nests left) by feral pigs. Once the pigs were removed the population rapidly increased.

IUCN Red List: Least concern

Flesh-footed shearwater

Puffinus carneipes



Head: Black or dark brown.

Body: Small shearwater. Black or dark brown.

Wings: Black or dark brown.

Feet: Pink legs and feet. Similar looking to the black petrel, one of the visible differences between the two species are the distinctive pink feet that flesh-footed shearwaters have. Black petrels have black feet.

Bill: Pale pink with a dark tip.



Feeding and range

Eats: Fish, squid and crustaceans.

Range: Forages over continental shelves north of the Subtropical Convergence during the summer and the New Zealand population migrates to the North Pacific Ocean between May and September.

Interesting facts

The calls that flesh-footed shearwaters make are a series of high-pitched moans. Their calls have been likened to the sound of cats fighting.

Although they voraciously eat whole livers, the species is effectively deterred from attending fishing vessels by spreading small quantities of shark liver oil on the sea surface.



Breeding

Breeding sites: In New Zealand breeds on islands around the North Island and Cook Strait, including Hen & Chickens Islands, Mercury Islands, Ohinau, Karewa, Kauwahaia, Motumahanga, Middle Trio and Titi. Elsewhere it breeds on Lord Howe Island, in South Australia, western Australia and on some islands in the Indian Ocean.

Breeding period: December to May.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Colonial. Nests in burrows.



Threats

At sea

- At risk of being caught off eastern Australia by tuna longliners, with immature males regularly taken in April and adults returning from migration caught in September.
- Reported caught in New Zealand longline fisheries.
- They may be at risk in the high seas tuna fisheries.
- This species frequently scavenges behind trawlers and may be at risk from trawl nets and warps.
- Recreational fishers catch flesh-footed shearwaters on hand and reel lines.

On land

- Mammals are a potential threat to some flesh-footed shearwater colonies. The largest colonies in New Zealand occur on islands that are free of ship rats, Norway rats and mustelids.
- Competition for burrows with other seabird species has an impact on breeding success.
- Visitors can unintentionally crush burrows when walking over them.

Short-tailed shearwater

Puffinus tenuirostris



Photo: Troy Guy, US Fish & Wildlife Service



Photo: Troy Guy, US Fish & Wildlife Service

Head: Dark brown.

Body: Dark brown with lighter-coloured breasts. Similar looking to sooty shearwaters, but short-tailed shearwaters are plumper in appearance.

Wings: Dark brown upperwings with paler underwings. Underwings are darker than the underwings of sooty shearwaters.

Feet: Legs and feet are dark on the outer parts and mauve-pink on the inside.

Bill: Dark, narrow bills are shorter than sooty shearwater bills.



Feeding and range

Eats: Krill, squid and fish.

Range: Forage in summer and autumn south of Australia and to the South Indian Ocean. In winter most migrate to the North Pacific to the seas off the Aleutian Islands and Kamchatka.



Breeding

Breeding sites:

Short-tailed shearwater colonies are present on many islands off the Australian coast. Visits New Zealand's waters, but does not breed in New Zealand.

Breeding period: November to April.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Breed in colonies. Nest in burrows.



Threats

At sea

- Short-tailed shearwaters are frequently by-catch in gillnet fisheries in the North Pacific.
- Reported caught in New Zealand trawl fisheries.

On land

- Habitat destruction is a major threat to short-tailed shearwater colonies.
- Trampling of burrows by pigs, sheep, and cows have destroyed entire colonies.

- Feral cats and uncontrolled dogs kill shearwater chicks.
- Burrows are easily collapsed by people moving about on colonies and erosion caused by recreational vehicles can destroy suitable sites for burrowing.
- Over-harvesting is another potential threat to short-tailed shearwater numbers.

Interesting facts

The short-tailed shearwater is thought to have a total population of about 23 million birds. Its numbers are stable or possibly increasing.

It is one of the few Australian native birds to be commercially harvested. They are commonly known as muttonbirds in Australia and are closely related to New Zealand's sooty shearwaters.

They pass through New Zealand waters as part of their annual migration.

Sooty shearwater (also known as tītī or muttonbird)

Puffinus griseus



Photo: Rod Morris



Photo: Dick Veitch

Head: Chocolate brown.

Body: Medium-sized shearwater that is dark-chocolate brown.

Wings: Chocolate brown upperwings with silver-white underwings. Wingspan is 95-110 cm.

Feet: Legs and feet are dark on the outer side and light mauve-pink on the inner side.

Bill: Dark, narrow and longer than short-tailed shearwaters.



Feeding and range

Eats: Fish and squid.

Range: The sooty shearwater is one of the world's most widely distributed seabirds. Birds from New Zealand forage over the South Pacific Ocean and the Tasman Sea. They migrate to the North Pacific Ocean in the austral winter and spread over the entire central and eastern Pacific Ocean, with a few birds reaching the Arctic Ocean.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Sooty shearwaters breed on numerous islands around New Zealand from Three Kings Islands to the Campbell Island group, including Stewart Island, the Snares, Auckland Islands, Campbell Island group, Antipodes Islands and Chatham Islands. A few are also present on coastal headlands on the South Island mainland. Elsewhere the species breeds on at least 17 islands off Australia, islands off Chile, and the Falkland Islands.

Breeding period: November to May.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Breeds in colonies. Nests in burrows.



Threats

At sea

- Sooty shearwaters are one of the seabirds most frequently killed in fisheries and returned for autopsy in the New Zealand EEZ. Birds have been killed by trawl nets or warps used in the hoki, squid and scampi fisheries. A small number of sooty shearwaters are also caught in New Zealand's commercial longline fisheries. Recreational fishermen also catch birds on hand or reel lines and in set nets in some locations.
- Elsewhere, sooty shearwaters are killed by longline and gillnet fisheries in the North Pacific Ocean during their winter migration.

On land

- Introduced mammals are the greatest threat to sooty shearwaters on land.

- Cattle, sheep and goats damage burrows on some islands. Rabbits may compete for burrows or disturb nesting birds on a few islands.
- There may also be some burrow competition with other seabirds (e.g. grey-faced petrels and flesh-footed shearwaters).
- Weka also take eggs and kill chicks at some breeding colonies.
- Visitors can unintentionally crush burrows when walking over them.
- Sooty shearwaters are harvested in commercial operations at traditional sites around Stewart Island by descendants of Rakiura Maori. There are also reports of occasional small-scale illegal harvests in other locations.

IUCN Red List: Least concern

Wedge-tailed shearwater

Puffinus pacificus



Photo: Tony Palliser, courtesy of SOSSA



Photo: Tony Palliser, courtesy of SOSSA

Head: Dark.

Body: Large with dark plumage covering entire body and wedge tail.

Wings: Dark upperwings and underwings.

Feet: Peach.

Bill: Grey.



Feeding and range

Eats: Fish, squid and crustaceans.

Range: New Zealand birds are thought to migrate to the eastern Pacific between June and mid-October.



Breeding

Breeding sites: Breeds in a number of locations, including the Kermadec Islands, islands off the Australian coast and many tropical and subtropical islands in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

Breeding period: Birds in southern hemisphere begin breeding each September but those at the Kermadec Islands do not lay until December.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Often form large colonies. Burrow nesters.



Threats

At sea

- There is some evidence that this species may be vulnerable to commercial fishing operations around the world, particularly during the non-breeding season.

On land

- Norway rats and feral cats were two of the greatest threats to the species. Both have been recently eradicated from Raoul Island.
- Volcanic activity at Raoul and Curtis islands potentially threaten these breeding colonies.
- Visitors to colonies can unintentionally crush burrows by walking over them.

Interesting facts

Birds breeding in New Zealand and Norfolk Island colonies are larger than other populations of this species.

There is a wide variety in plumage for the species. The birds in Hawaiian and Indian Ocean colonies have white underparts. Birds on the Kermadec Islands, Norfolk Island, Lord Howe Island, and other islands off the coast of Australia are all dark.

Fairy prion

Pachyptila turtur



Photo: Dave Crouchley



Photo: Dave Crouchley

Head: Bluish-grey top with white around eyes and below bill.

Body: Underbody is white. Blue-grey back.

Wings: Blue-grey upperwings with a black M-shaped mark across them. Underwings are white. Feature a broad black tip on their tail.

Feet: Dark bluish-grey.

Bill: Short blue bill (approximately 22 mm long and 11 mm wide).



Feeding and range

Eats: Krill.

Range: Found throughout oceans and coastal areas in the southern hemisphere.



Breeding

Breeding sites: In New Zealand breeds in colonies on a number of offshore islands from the Poor Knights south, as well as the Chatham, Snares and Antipodes islands. Elsewhere breeds on 30 islands and rocks off Victoria and Tasmania (Australia), also Macquarie, Heard, Kerguelen, St. Paul, Crozet, Prince Edward, Marion, South Georgia and Falkland islands.

Breeding period: October to February.

Frequency of breeding: Annual.

Number of eggs: One.

Type of nests: Often form large colonies. Burrow nesters.



Threats

At sea

- Fairy prions are not frequent vessel followers, but they are sometimes attracted by the lights of stationary ships at night.

On land

- Introduced predators are the greatest threat to fairy prion populations. All remaining colonies in New Zealand are on rodent-free islands.

- Weka are having an impact on the populations breeding on Open Bay and Big Solander islands.
- Grazing animals can affect prion populations by crushing burrows.
- Visitors to colonies can unintentionally crush burrows by walking over them.
- Fire is a risk during breeding season because many colonies are in grassy habitats.

Interesting facts

Fairy prions are the smallest of all prions. They are also one of New Zealand's most abundant petrels. Research indicates that New Zealand has more than 50 per cent of the world population.

Further reading

There are a number of excellent publications and web-based resources available to learn more about seabirds. If you are interested in learning more, contact the Department of Conservation's Marine Conservation Services section by phone (04) 471 0726 or email csp@doc.govt.nz to request additional resources on seabirds.

Information for this guide came from several sources, including:

Identification of seabirds of the Southern Ocean: a guide for scientific observers aboard fishing vessels.

Derek Onley and Sandy Bartle, Te Papa Press in association with the Commission for the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. First published 1999. Reprinted 2001, 2006.

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Brian Parkinson, New Holland Publishers. First published 2000.

Action Plan for Seabird Conservation in New Zealand Part A: Threatened Seabirds.

Graeme A. Taylor, Department of Conservation, Threatened Species Occasional Publication No. 16. First published 2000.

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