

Black petrel/tāiko



... these
**Nationally
Vulnerable**
birds only breed in the
Hauraki Gulf

This endemic seabird once bred throughout the North Island and northwest Nelson region, but due to introduced predators and habitat loss the only known breeding sites left are Great Barrier Island (Aotea Island), known as Aotea, and Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island.

The black petrel (*Procellaria parkinsoni*) is a medium-sized seabird that looks similar to the bulkier Westland petrel. Its head, wings and body are black or very dark brown, with black feet. Its bill is pale yellow with a dark tip and a distinctive double tube nostril on the top.

They rarely call at sea, but are vocal on the ground and around the colony. Males have a loud, harsh, far-carrying 'clack' – this repeated call peaks just after dark and before dawn and seems to attract females to the burrow location. Females have an 'aerial' call, which they use on approach to and above the colony. On the ground, both

birds 'squawk' when threatened and during territorial disputes, and make gentler 'crooning' calls when pairs are bonding in the burrow together or with their chick.

During the non-breeding months (June to September) black petrel fly as far as the north-western coast of South America, and have been reported off the coasts of Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, and the Galapagos Islands.

Breeding

Black petrels breed between October and May each year and are monogamous. The main breeding colony, around 900–1,000 pairs on 35 hectares, is at the summit of Mount Hobson/Hirakimata on Aotea. There are an estimated 500 breeding pairs on Te Hauturu-o-Toi.

The females lay a single egg in a burrow, then both parents incubate the egg and care for the chick.

**Department of
Conservation**
Te Papa Atawhai

Threats

New Zealand is known as the 'seabird capital of the world' with the most diverse seabird community in the world, comprising albatross, petrels, penguins, shags, gannets, gulls, terns, and skua.

The unique and vulnerable black petrel is threatened due to its feeding habits, as it is caught as bycatch by commercial and recreational fishers both in New Zealand and overseas. They mainly eat squid and small fish, and will scavenge behind fishing boats where they can be caught in nets or on lines as they dive to retrieve baits.

Black petrel can dive to a depth of 34 m, but usually feed at the surface and in shallow dives of around 10 m. Commercial fishing vessels operating in New Zealand are taking action to reduce seabird bycatch, eg by sinking their baits quickly and using tori lines to deter birds.

The breeding colony on Aotea is also threatened by predators such as feral pigs, feral cats and rats. Black petrels on Te Hauturu-o-toi can breed in safety, as the island is a predator-free sanctuary.



Left image:
Tāiko at sea.
Photo: © Isabel Mabey

Bottom image:
Tāiko climbing its
launch rock on Aotea.
Photo: © Dave Boyle



Tāiko chick in its burrow.
Photo: © Dave Boyle

Research

We still have much to learn about these unique seabirds. The Aotea population has been intensively monitored since 1995, and shows a decline rate of at least 1.4% a year.

Better information on juvenile survival rates and extending the current monitoring would improve research data and help to obtain a new total population estimate.

More information on where black petrel forage and how they overlap with various fisheries is also needed to help ensure they are properly protected.

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