

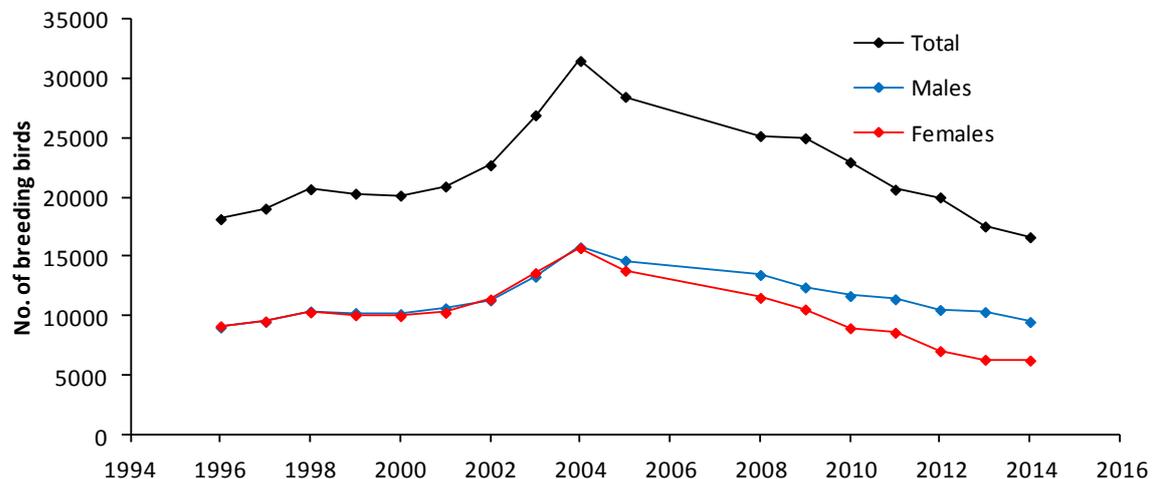
Antipodean Wandering Albatross decline

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Antipodean Wandering albatrosses have been monitored on Antipodes Island since 1994 by repeatedly counting nests in 3 parts of the island and intensively monitoring birds in a study area.

The best indication of population trend comes from the mark-recapture estimates of population size that are produced from the intensive study of birds in the study area (Figure 1). These estimates are based on annual measurement of the number of breeding birds using the study area, and extrapolations from the proportion of the total albatross population which the study area supported in whole island counts made annually in 1994-1997.



Up until 2004 the albatross population was increasing, apparently recovering from high rates of mortality from long-line fishing in previous decades (Elliott & Walker 2005, Walker & Elliott 2005). Since 2004 the population has been on an alarmingly steady decline and it is now smaller than it was in 1994 (Walker & Elliott 2014). Furthermore throughout the period of this decline, the females have been declining at a faster rate (10% per annum) than the males (5%), and there is now a wildly skewed sex imbalance on the breeding grounds.

The decline has been caused mainly by increased female mortality since 2004, but nesting success has also declined. Close examination of the data reveals that the decline in nesting success is not simply caused by females dying while nesting, but from even higher numbers of females dying in the sabbatical year when they are not breeding.

Furthermore, many females are now flying far further than they did prior to 2005, with many flying to the edge of the shelf off southern Chile during their non-breeding year, something not previously recorded during extensive satellite tracking in 1996-2001.

From our study on the island we cannot determine the cause of the decline of these birds, but they are now ranked as a “Nationally Critical” threatened species, they are declining at an alarming rate, and they have been regularly caught in fisheries by-catch in the past. Three things need to happen:

1. The population monitoring needs to continue, and in a more detailed fashion. We have been funding the monitoring since 2005 but are running out of resources.
2. Effort needs to be put into investigating changes in oceanic conditions that might be contributing to this decline.
3. Effort needs to be put into investigating fisheries by-catch of female Antipodean wandering albatrosses, both inside and outside the New Zealand EEZ.

References

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