



Agreement on the Conservation
of Albatrosses and Petrels

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An update on the Southern Royal Albatross population study at Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku, New Zealand

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SUMMARY

The Southern Royal Albatross (*Diomedea epomophora*) is a New Zealand breeding endemic seabird and has been studied intermittently between the 1940s and the 2000s at its main colony on Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku (>99% of the world population). In the late 2000s, following the removal of livestock and mammalian pests, the population appeared to have stabilized after earlier declines. However, during two recent, brief visits in March 2020 and February 2023, rapid survey results suggested concerning population declines of this species, potentially in the order of ~50%, at least at its core study area. To provide a better understanding of the status and trends of the Southern Royal Albatross, a thorough survey consisting of ground counts of the two historic study areas and three index blocks (collectively equating to ~25% of the total population) was completed from December 2023 to February 2024. Results of this latest survey indicate that the Southern Royal Albatross population has declined by ~27% since the 2005-2009 survey. To gain better insights into the drivers of this decline, leg-banding of this species was reinitiated. Thirty-five PTT and 30 GLS tags were also deployed to better understand the range of fisheries which may pose bycatch risks to this particularly wide-ranging species. Furthermore, the field team also photographed mixed colonies of Grey-headed and Campbell Albatrosses from standard viewpoints on the island and counts of nests in photographs were 28% and 16% lower, respectively, since the last counts in 2020. Given these concerning trends as well as the biennial breeding nature of Southern Royal Albatross (and Grey-headed Albatross) further extensive fieldwork will be conducted on Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku during the 2024/25 austral summer at least. Future work will provide further insights into the trend of the Southern Royal Albatross and its underlying drivers.

Field reports

- 2024 Southern Royal Albatross population study:
Mischler et al. 2024. POP2023-04 Campbell Island Seabird Research Project. Department of Conservation, Wellington, New Zealand.
<https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/conservation-services-programme/csp-reports/202324-csp-reports/campbell-island-seabird-research-2024/>
- 2023 Rapid Southern Royal Albatross Survey:
Mischler C & Wickes C. 2023. POP2022-11 Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku Seabird Research & Operation Endurance February 2023. Department of Conservation, Wellington, New Zealand.
<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/marine-and-coastal/marine-conservation-services/reports/202223-annual-plan/pop2022-11-campbell-island-seabird-research-2023-final-report.pdf>.
- 2020 Rapid Southern Royal Albatross Survey:
Mischler C. 2020. Campbell Island/Motu Ihupuku Seabird Research; Operation Endurance. Department of Conservation, Wellington, New Zealand.
<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/marine-and-coastal/marine-conservation-services/reports/201920-annual-plan/bcbc2019-03-campbell-island-seabird-project-final-report-mischler.pdf>.