



Agreement on the Conservation
of Albatrosses and Petrels

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An update on the Southern Buller's Albatross population study at the Snares/Tini Heke, New Zealand

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SUMMARY

The Southern Buller's Albatross (*Thalassarche bulleri bulleri*) is a New Zealand breeding endemic that has been studied virtually annually during 1992-2024 at the Snares/Tini Heke, which hold ~61% of the world population. Adult survival has been declining for most of the study period and has shown high interannual variation since the late 2010s (0.84-0.94), with some years showing concerningly low estimates of adult survival, i.e., <0.9. In contrast to adult survival, abundance (number of nesting pairs in the study colonies) has shown a gradual increase over most of the study period. However, numbers appeared to decline in 2023, followed by a considerable decline of 27-35% in 2024, which for some study sites represented the lowest count on record. The temporal mismatch between declining survival and delayed declining abundance may suggest that until now, Southern Buller's Albatross abundance was maintained by recruitment, which has now been depleted. This suggestion aligns with the most recent New Zealand fisheries risk assessment, which lists this taxon as the most at-risk species in New Zealand, with an estimated 729 (555-939) annual mortalities within the New Zealand EEZ alone (predominantly in domestic pelagic longline and trawl fisheries). To better understand the population dynamics, underlying drivers, distribution, and fisheries risk in various jurisdictions, New Zealand is investing concerted effort into research on this taxon, which includes: 1) further, prolonged visits to the Snares/Tini Heke to improve survival and abundance estimates, 2) an updated population estimate of the other main breeding colony, Solander/Hautere, 3) increased tracking effort including both satellite and GLS tracking to evaluate distribution and fisheries overlap of both the Snares/Tini Heke and Solander/Hautere colonies (which are showing preliminary signs of some spatial segregation), 4) the deployment of TDRs to assess dive depths, and 5) remote cameras to assess breeding success. Furthermore, collaborations with Peru are in place to assess risks to this taxon in the non-breeding grounds. Combined, these efforts will shed light in the near future if this taxon is following the fate of other albatross taxa.

Field reports

Sagar et al. 2024. Population studies of southern Buller's albatrosses at Tini Heke/the Snares Islands and Hautere / Solander Islands. Department of Conservation, Wellington, New Zealand.

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/conservation-services-programme/csp-reports/202324-csp-reports/population-studies-of-southern-bullers-albatrosses-at-tini-heke--the-snares-islands-and-hautere--solander-islands/>