

Antipodean Albatross



Agreement on the Conservation
of Albatrosses and Petrels
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Artwork by **Lea Finke** from a photograph by Kirk Zufelt

THE ANTIPODEAN ALBATROSS has two subspecies, the nominate race *D. a. antipodensis* that breeds only on Antipodes Island, and the Gibson's race *D. a. gibsoni* that breeds in the Auckland Island group (with a handful on Campbell Island). These islands form part of New Zealand's sub-Antarctic realm (and are part of a World Heritage natural site). The two subspecies are hard to tell apart. The species population was of the order of 9 000 breeding pairs in 2016, but may be less now, given the observed rates of decline, with roughly half assigned to each subspecies. Its at-sea range is between Australia and South America in the southern Pacific Ocean.



The Antipodean Albatross is one of the six 'great albatrosses' in the genus *Diomedea*, along with the Amsterdam, Northern Royal, Southern Royal, Tristan and Wandering. These are the largest of the world's 22 albatross species, with an overall circumpolar distribution in the Southern Ocean, breeding on sub-Antarctic islands.

The Antipodean Albatross has been categorized as globally Endangered (at a high risk of extinction) because of its decreasing populations, thought due to mortality while at sea from interactions with longline fisheries, and perhaps to changes in oceanographic conditions driven by climate change. Skewed mortality rates between the sexes (higher in females probably due to differences in at-sea distribution) is exacerbating the problem, resulting in many male birds not finding partners, thus lowering breeding production of this biennially-breeding species. A more positive note comes from the recent successful eradication of introduced House Mice on Antipodes Island and developing plans to eradicate feral pigs and cats (which can kill eggs and chicks) as well as mice on the large main Auckland Island. But by far the largest numbers of the Gibson's subspecies breeds more safely on alien predator-free Adams Island in the Auckland Group.

The Antipodes and Adam Islands' populations are well studied with researchers monitoring colour-banded birds on an annual basis. Funds are being raised by New Zealand charitable trusts to allow the satellite tracking of Antipodes Island birds at sea starting from this austral summer, allowing the fisheries causing unsustainable levels of increased mortality to be identified so that mitigation measures can be enforced. New Zealand is collaborating on research and conservation with Chile (whose waters Antipodean Albatrosses enter when not breeding) and has nominated the species for listing on Annex 1 of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). CMS adopted this proposal in February 2020. Lastly, ACAP has identified the Antipodes Island as a Priority Population for conservation management.

Sources:

ACAP 2012. Antipodean Albatross *Diomedea antipodensis*; <https://acap.aq/en/acap-species>

BirdLife International 2020. Species factsheet: *Diomedea antipodensis*; <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/antipodean-albatross-diomedea-antipodensis/text>

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 01 June 2020