

# Buller's Albatross



Agreement on the Conservation  
of Albatrosses and Petrels  
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Artwork by *Shary Page Weckwerth* from a photograph by *Paul Sagar*

BULLER'S ALBATROSS is one of 11 species of 'mollymawk' albatrosses in the genus *Thalassarche*. They are noticeably smaller than the six great *Diomedea* albatrosses (but still larger than similarly patterned largely black and white gulls). The mollymawks as a group are restricted to the Southern Ocean, breeding on cool-temperate and subantarctic islands.



The species is most recognizable by the broad yellow streaks on both its upper and lower mandibles, separating it from the two species of similarly marked yellow-nosed albatrosses but which have only yellow on their upper mandibles. The somewhat larger Grey-headed Albatross also has upper and lower yellow streaks on its mandibles (although narrower and so a little less obvious), but its all-grey head (in adults) stands out in comparison to the Buller's white cap to its head.

Buller's Albatross is a New Zealand endemic, recognized as a single species by the Albatross and Petrel Agreement, but with its northerly and southerly breeding populations accorded subspecific status in some publications. Southern Buller's albatrosses (c. 14 000 pairs) breed on the Snares and Solander Islands south of South Island. Approximately 18 000 pairs make up the population of Northern Buller's albatrosses breeding on the Forty-Fours and Sister Islands in the Chatham Island group out from North Island. Separating the two subspecies on appearance is a task only for the expert; the subspecific division has been largely made on genetic analysis. Following an increase at some breeding sites the species' total population of c. 32 000 pairs now appears stable, according it only a Near Threatened status.

Most studies of the species haven been undertaken on the southern subspecies, on the subantarctic Snares – part of a World Heritage site and where tourist landings are not permitted. The northern subspecies is less well known.

Incidental mortality in longlining and trawling fisheries in New Zealand, Australian, Chilean and Peruvian waters is thought to be the greatest threat to the species populations. Most of the breeding sites are protected as nature reserves and are free of introduced predators and human disturbance.

**Sources:**

ACAP 2012. Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri*; <https://www.acap.aq/en/acap-species>

BirdLife International 2020. Species factsheet: *Thalassarche bulleri*;  
<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/bullers-albatross-thalassarche-bulleri/text>

*John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 6 January 2020*