

# Light-mantled Albatross

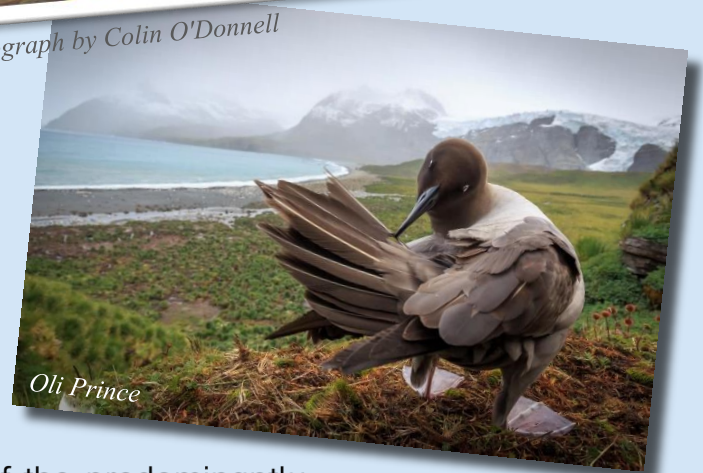


Agreement on the Conservation  
of Albatrosses and Petrels  
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Artwork by *Annie Shoemaker-Magdaleno* from a photograph by *Colin O'Donnell*

THE LIGHT-MANTLED ALBATROSS is one of two distinctive albatross species within the genus *Phoebastria*; the other is the Sooty Albatross. With their near all-dark brown plumage, and their longer tails, they stand out from the rest of the predominantly black and white short-tailed albatrosses. Both Light-mantled and Sooty albatrosses are restricted in their at-sea distribution to the Southern Ocean; the Light-mantled tending to occur farther south than does its congener, reaching the edge of Antarctic pack ice. Light-mantled albatrosses breed on subantarctic islands in Atlantic, Indian and Pacific



Sectors of the Southern Ocean. A few pairs have been recorded breeding on the Antarctic Peninsula, the only albatross species to do so far south.

Separating the Light-mantled and Sooty albatrosses is relatively easy, the paler back of the Light-mantled contrasting with the all-brown Sooty. When observed at close range, adults can be further distinguished by their pale blue sulcus – a coloured groove along the lower mandible. Sooty Albatrosses have a yellow sulcus. However, in juvenile plumage the sulcus is a dark brown in both species that does not show up against the black bill. Both *Phoebetria* albatrosses engage in graceful paired courtship flights, often along the sea cliffs where they concentrate their breeding on narrow ledges, either singly or in small colonies. Breeding is protracted and successful birds take a “gap year” and are thus biennial – as are the great albatrosses in the genus *Diomedea*. Diet includes squid, crustaceans (notably Antarctic Krill), fish and small seabirds such as diving petrels. It is uncertain whether the last are actively caught, probably after dark, or are scavenged.

The global population of the Light-mantled Albatross has been estimated as 19 000 to 24 000 pairs, roughly equivalent to 87 000 individuals in total. The largest populations (c. 5000 pairs each) are found on the Auckland Islands south of New Zealand, Kerguelen in the southern Indian Ocean and South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)\* in the South Atlantic. Population trends vary between the different breeding islands.

The Light-mantled Albatross has been categorized as Near Threatened. Threats include longline fishing for toothfish and tuna in the Southern Ocean, feral cats and pigs on the main Auckland Island (for which research has been conducted towards their eradication), feral cats on Kerguelen and House Mice on Marion Island. The species’ breeding sites are mostly protected as national nature reserves, some are either or both World Heritage sites or Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance. The few birds breeding within Antarctica fall under the international protection of the Antarctic Treaty System.

\* A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas), South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (Islas Georgias del Sur e Islas Sandwich del Sur) and the surrounding maritime areas.

**Sources:**

ACAP 2012. Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebetria palpebrata*; <https://www.acap.aq/en/acap-species>

BirdLife International 2020. Species factsheet: *Phoebetria palpebrata*; <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/light-mantled-albatross-phoebetria-palpebrata/text>

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 10 February 2020