

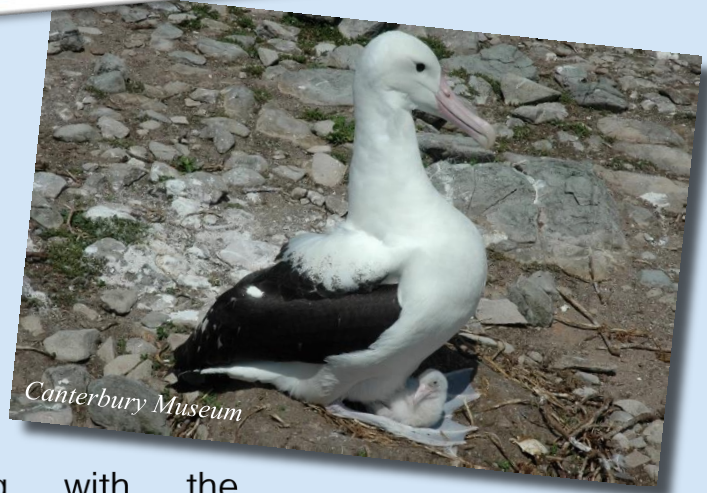
Northern Royal Albatross



Agreement on the Conservation
of Albatrosses and Petrels
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Artwork by *Shary Weckwerth*



THE NORTHERN ROYAL ALBATROSS is one of the six 'great albatrosses' in the genus *Diomedea*, along with the Amsterdam, Antipodean, Southern Royal, Tristan and Wandering Albatrosses. These are the largest of the world's 22 albatross species, with an overall circumpolar distribution in the Southern Ocean, breeding on subantarctic islands. The Northern Royal has a closely related 'sister' species, the Southern Royal Albatross; both species are endemic to New Zealand and its associated islands.

The Northern Royal Albatross breeds on islets off New Zealand's Chatham Islands (Forty-Fours, Big and Little Sister Islands) and on Taiaroa Head at the end of the Otago Peninsula on South Island's mainland. The Chatham Islands population (99% of the total) has been estimated as 6500-7000 pairs, with a total population estimate of 25 000-26 000 individuals (which includes juveniles and non-breeding birds). Around 35 pairs breed at Taiaroa Head, the only mainland population of any albatross in New Zealand. They can be viewed by the public from an observatory. At-sea distribution is circumpolar, notably including the Pacific and Atlantic coastal waters of southern South America.

Royal albatrosses are black and white birds, including in juvenile plumage (unlike juveniles of the other four great albatrosses which are largely chocolate brown). A distinguishing (when viewed from close) feature for both royals is the black edging to the upper mandible, contrasting with the otherwise pink bill. Diet is mainly squid and fish, obtained by surface seizing.

The Northern Royal Albatross is categorized as globally Endangered, due to its small breeding range and the severe storms in the 1980s which washed away soil and vegetation on the Chatham breeding sites, resulting in a decrease in habitat quality and poor breeding success for this biennially-breeding (if successful) species. There has been a partial recovery since these storms. The tightly managed Taiaroa Head population is at risk from introduced predators (Stoats and feral cats), fly strike of hatching eggs, and heat stress in summer. These threats are mitigated by trapping, spraying nests with water via a sprinkler system and sometimes taking hatching eggs into incubators nests to avoid the flies laying their eggs on them and then returning the chicks to their nests. Chicks are regularly weighed, and supplementary feeds are given to any not gaining mass. Scavenging from fishing vessels can lead to mortality at sea from being hooked on longlines and colliding with trawl cables. Chicks on the Chatham Islands have been taken in the past, but this so-called 'harvesting' is now illegal.

Sources:

ACAP 2012. Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sanfordi*; <https://www.acap.aq/en/acap-species>

BirdLife International 2020. Species factsheet: *Diomedea sanfordi*
<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/northern-royal-albatross-diomedea-sanfordi/text>

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 12 February 2020