

Balearic Shearwater



Artwork by Catarina Vitorino after a photograph by Pep Arcos

THE BALEARIC SHEARWATER is one of two shearwaters listed within the Albatross and Petrel Agreement (ACAP); the other is the Pink-footed Shearwater of Chile. It is a small-sized shearwater with greyish-brown upper surfaces and head and variably white and brown underparts. The bill, legs and feet are mainly grey.

The Balearic Shearwater breeds only in Spain's Balearic Islands in the western Mediterranean. Breeding colonies are known for the island groups of Cabrera, Formentera, Ibiza, Mallorca and Menorca. Menorcan birds show signs of hybridisation with the closely related Yelkouan Shearwater which breeds elsewhere in the Mediterranean. The species' breeding population is not well

known, due to difficulties in surveying its cliff-breeding habitats but recent estimates are of around 3000 pairs. However, counts of birds on passage through the Straits of Gibraltar and a global at-sea estimate suggest a total population of 25 000, implying a larger breeding population of



Photograph by Pep Arcos

perhaps 7000 pairs; alternatively, there could be a substantial proportion of non-breeding birds. The population trend is downward at all studied breeding sites, most recently estimated at 14% a year. Adult survival is considered low for a shearwater.

The species breeds in caves and rocky crevices in coastal cliffs and in burrows, laying a single white egg in March with chicks fledging in June and July. It is migratory, flying through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic and northwards coastally to the Bay of Biscay and marginally into the North Sea. It is regular within territorial waters of France, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. Prey is predominantly small pelagic fish (such as anchovies and sardines) caught by diving, often in flocks, to as much as 30 m. Diet includes scavenging on discards from fishing vessels.

The Balearic Shearwater was listed within ACAP in 2015; it is also listed on Appendix I of the Convention on Migratory Species. The species has a global threat category of Critically Endangered, placing it at a high risk of extinction.

Sources:

ACAP 2013. [Balearic Shearwater Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*](#).
BirdLife International 2021. [Species factsheet: *Puffinus mauretanicus*](#).

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 12 April 2022