

Amsterdam Albatross



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

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



The Amsterdam Albatross breeds only on France's Amsterdam Island in the southern Indian Ocean. It tends to be browner as an adult than the other great albatrosses and has a dark line along the cutting edge of the bill. It has a small population of only 46 breeding pairs in 2014. The total population, including juveniles, has been estimated as c. 170 birds. French biologists

continue to monitor the breeding birds on an annual basis (individuals if successful in raising their single young breed only every second year, so are biennial). At sea it ranges from South Africa to Australia in the southern Indian Ocean.



Like all the albatrosses, it is at risk to interactions with fisheries, notably high-seas longline fisheries for tuna. Albatrosses (and other seabirds) seize baited hooks before they sink and are then dragged below the sea surface and drown. The potential spread of infectious diseases on the island is also considered a major threat. Because of these threats and its small breeding population on a single island the Amsterdam Albatross has been categorized as globally Endangered (at a high risk of extinction).

The species' conservation requires the adoption of bird mitigation measures by fishing vessels, such as the deployment of bird-scaring lines that keep birds away from baited hooks, line weighting to make the hooks sink quickly to a depth surface-feeding albatrosses cannot reach, and night-setting of longlines when albatrosses are less likely to be actively foraging. Such measures need to be made mandatory and enforced by the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) that manage high-seas tuna fisheries. The Albatross and Petrel Agreement (ACAP) attends and contributes to annual tuna RFMO meetings in an endeavour to see these best-practice mitigation measures fully adopted.

Sources:

ACAP 2012. Amsterdam Albatross *Diomedea amsterdamensis*;
<https://www.acap.aq/en/resources/acap-species2>

BirdLife International 2019. Species factsheet: *Diomedea amsterdamensis*;
<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/amsterdam-albatross-diomedea-amsterdamensis/text>

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 01 January 2020