

Black-browed Albatross

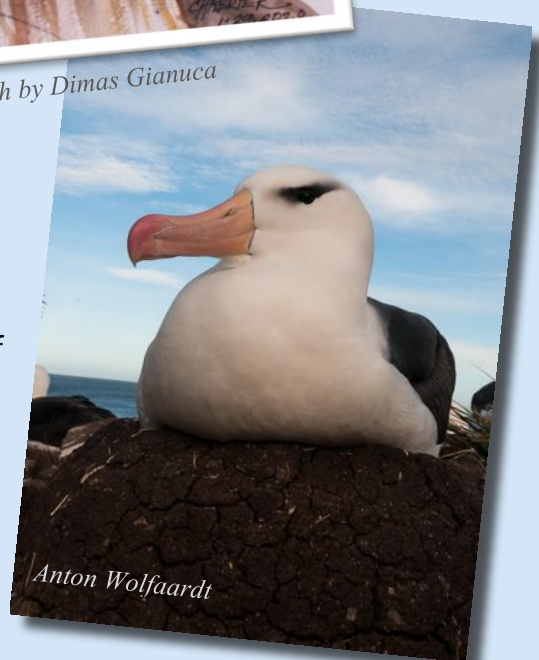


Agreement on the Conservation
of Albatrosses and Petrels
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Artwork by Annie Shoemaker-Magdalenó from a photograph by Dimas Gianuca

THE BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS is one of 11 species of 'mollymawk' albatrosses in the genus *Thalassarche*. Mollymawks are largely restricted to the Southern Ocean, breeding on sub-Antarctic islands, although the Black-browed Albatross does also breed a little farther north on several islands close to the southern tip of South America, as well as on the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)*. Its at-sea distribution tends to be concentrated on the relatively inshore waters of continental shelves, notably along the west coast of southern Africa in the Benguela Current and on the Patagonian



Anton Wolfaardt

Shelf and Humboldt Currents of southern South America. Scavenging behind fishing trawlers can lead to flocks of hundreds if not thousands of Black-brows forming – a spectacular sight. The odd vagrant manages to cross the Equator every other year or so to excite European birdwatchers who are not used to seeing such big seabirds.

Black-browed Albatrosses are best recognized by their yellow bill with a reddish tip, as well as by a dark smudge through the eye. Young birds do not have the yellow bill and so are harder to identify. A 'sister' species, New Zealand's Campbell Albatross, is very similar, but has a honey-coloured eye, instead of the Black-brow's dark one.

The Black-Browed Albatross is one of the most abundant of the 22 albatross species – only being matched by the Laysan Albatross of the North Pacific. A recent estimate is of a total population of 1.4 million individuals. Contrast this with the couple of hundred individuals at most that make up the whole population of the Amsterdam Albatross! Black-brows can breed in very large colonies, such as on Beauchêne and Steeple Jason Islands in the South Atlantic, with recent estimates of 140 000 and 180 000 pairs, respectively.

The species' large population, which is increasing at some of its South Atlantic breeding sites, has led to it not being given a globally threatened status and instead being categorized as 'Least Concern' – one of the few albatross species in this happy situation. It is thought that feeding on trawler offal and discards is a factor in the bird's success for its South Atlantic populations at least. However, Black-browed Albatrosses do fall victim to longline hooks and entanglements or collisions with trawl nets and cables, so there remains a conservation issue to be addressed by the fisheries within the species' range.

* 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. Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*; <https://acap.aq/en/acap-species>

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

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 10 January 2020