

# Salvin's Albatross



Agreement on the Conservation  
of Albatrosses and Petrels  
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Artwork by *Ignacio Domenech*



One of the 11 “mollymawk” albatrosses of the Southern Ocean, SALVIN’S ALBATROSS forms a ‘sister’ group with three more ‘shy-type’ closely related species: Chatham, Shy and White-capped. Salvin’s Albatross is endemic to New Zealand, with practically the whole population of an estimated 40 000 pairs or so breeding on the

subantarctic Bounty Islands. A thousand pairs breed on the Snares Islands, with a few birds breeding at other localities. This breeding total corresponds to roughly 110 000 individuals including non-breeders and juveniles of this annually-breeding species. Numbers are thought to have decreased in the last several decades. Like all the world's 22 species of albatrosses only a single white egg is laid in a breeding season, which is protracted, with lengthy incubation and chick-rearing periods. Breeding habitat for Salvin's Albatross is mainly exposed rock on which they construct pedestal nests out of scraped-up mud.

At-sea distribution is across the Indian and Pacific sectors of the Southern Ocean reaching coastal waters of southern Africa and southern South America but the species is largely absent from the South Atlantic. As for the others in the genus *Thalassarche* it feeds on fish, squid and crustaceans seized on the sea surface or obtained by shallow surface dives. Scavenging from behind fishing vessels can lead to death by drownings and collisions, offsetting the advantages of 'free food'.

As for all the mollymawks they are essentially black and white birds, with a largely white underwing with a black 'thumb print' against the body. The head is greyish. The bill is pale grey-green with a yellow upper ridge and a brighter yellow tip. The bill is not as bright yellow as is that of the closely related Chatham's Albatross.

As for all the albatross species, mortality caused by longline and trawl fisheries poses a significant threat to the species, which along with its few breeding sites and decreasing population has resulted in a global threatened category of Vulnerable. The Bounty and Snares Islands are national nature reserves and form part of a World Heritage Site. Fortunately, neither island group has introduced predators. Ongoing studies of banded breeding birds along with aerial and/or ground counts of occupied nest sites continue on the uninhabited Bounty and Snares Islands.

**Sources:**

ACAP 2012. Salvin's Albatross *Thalassarche salvini*; <https://www.acap.aq/en/acap-species>

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

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 17 February 2020