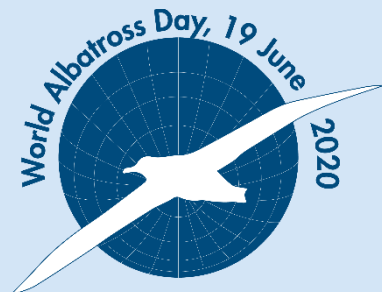


Shy Albatross



Agreement on the Conservation
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Artwork by **Deb Frank** from a photograph by Laurie Johnson

One of the 11 “mollymawk” albatrosses of the Southern Ocean, the SHY ALBATROSS forms a ‘sister’ group with three more closely related ‘shy-type’ species: Chatham, Salvin’s and White-capped. The Shy Albatross is endemic to Australia, breeding on only three small islands around the cost of Tasmania. The total breeding population has been estimated as 15 350 pairs, made up of 5200 on



Albatross, 7600 – 12 400 pairs on Mewstone and 130 -170 pairs on Pedra Branca. The global population including juveniles and non-breeders is estimated to be 60 000 - 70 000 individuals. Information on historical population sizes is too incomplete to predict current trends, giving the species a Near Threatened Status. The species is an annual breeder, laying a single egg (as do all 22 albatross species). The partners share incubation and brooding duties and both feed the chick until fledging.

At-sea distribution is largely restricted to the southern Indian Ocean, westward to the coasts of southern Africa where especially juveniles reach the eastern edge of the South Atlantic in the Benguela Current. Its diet includes fish and squid obtained by surface seizing. Scavenging behind fishing vessels in continental shelf waters puts the Shy Albatross at risk from longline hooks and trawl warps. Mewstone birds appear to travel farther at sea than do birds from Albatross Island, exposing them to interactions with more fishing fleets.

As for all the 'shy-type' mollymawks they are essentially grey-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. Separating it from the slightly larger White-capped Albatross from New Zealand, once considered with it to form a single species, is not easy.

Experiments with artificial pedestal nests have shown improved breeding success on Albatross Island. On Pedra Branca, wave action during stormy weather can wash away nests. On the same island, competition with Australasian Gannets for breeding space is thought to have led to a declining population from a previous high of 350 pairs. Pedra Branca and Mewstone form part of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Sources:

ACAP 2012. Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta*; <https://www.acap.aq/en/acap-species>

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

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 23 February 2020