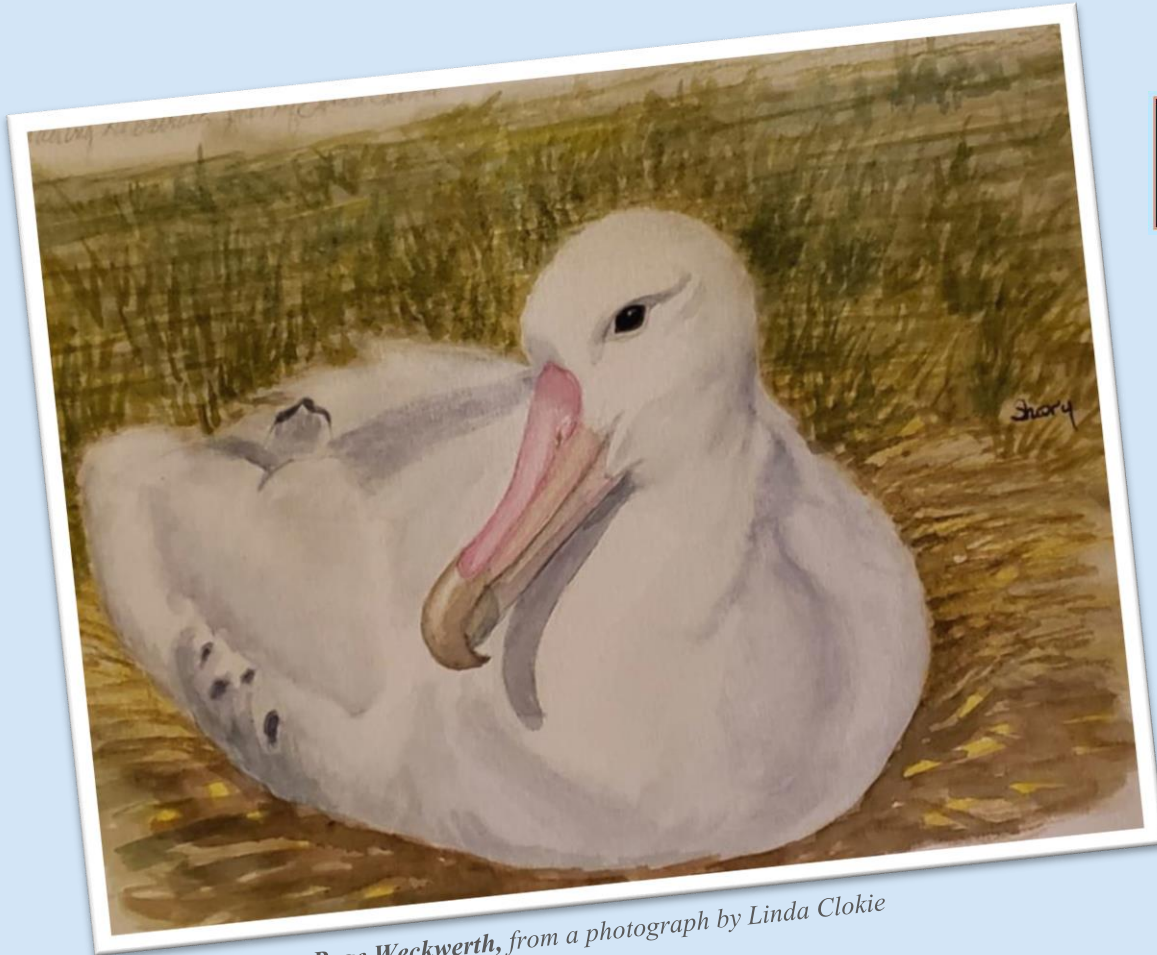


# Wandering Albatross



Agreement on the Conservation  
of Albatrosses and Petrels  
[www.acap.aq](http://www.acap.aq)



Artwork by *Shary Page Weckwerth*, from a photograph by *Linda Clokie*

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



Wandering Albatrosses breed in the South Atlantic (South Georgia/Islas Georgias del Sur)\*, southern Indian (Prince Edward, Crozet and Kerguelen groups) and Pacific (Macquarie Island) Oceans. A single pair bred on Heard Island at least once in the past; the Macquarie population has shrunk to a mere handful of pairs. The global annually-breeding population is estimated to be around 8000 pairs, equivalent to a total population of over 20 000 individuals. The largest populations occur in the South Atlantic (18% of total annual breeding pairs), the Prince Edward Islands (44%) and Crozet and Kerguelen (together 38%). Overall declines have been estimated to exceed 30% over 70 years. Individual island populations are either declining or are currently stable following earlier declines.

Wandering Albatrosses are black and white birds with pink bills; juveniles on fledging are largely chocolate brown with white underwings. They progressively whiten with age, males more so than females. A single white egg is laid, with incubation, brooding and chick-feeding duties shared between the sexes. A successful breeding attempt is so long individuals are not able to breed every year, requiring them to take the following year off. Failed breeders often attempt to breed the next year. The species circumnavigate the Southern Ocean when not breeding. Females tend to have a more northerly at-sea distribution than do the larger males. Diet is predominantly squid and fish, obtained by surface seizing.

The Wandering Albatross has a global threat category of Vulnerable. Conservation actions required are centred on reducing at-sea mortality caused by longline vessels in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans by adopting best-practice mitigation measures (such as deploying bird-scaring lines, line weighting and night setting) by vessels fishing for tuna on the high seas via Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). Breeding sites are protected as national reserves or equivalent and are surrounded by marine protected areas; some are also Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance and/or World Heritage Sites. Eradication of introduced mammals has reduced predation and habitat deterioration on some breeding islands but challenges remain at others, notably House Mice that attack albatross chicks on South Africa's Marion Island in the Prince Edward Island group, where an eradication exercise is planned for 2023.

\*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 y Islas Sandwich del Sur) and the surrounding maritime areas.

**Sources:**

ACAP 2012. Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*; <https://acap.aq/en/acap-species>

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

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 01 October 2020