



# Providence Petrel

*Pterodroma solandri* (Gould, 1844)

**Other common names** Bill Hill Muttonbird, Bird-of-Providence, Brown-headed or Solander's Petrel

## Conservation status

The Providence Petrel is listed as a **Vulnerable Species** on Schedule 2 of the New South Wales *Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995* (TSC Act).

**Description** (summarised from Marchant & Higgins 1990)

*Length*

400mm

*Wingspan*

950-1050mm

*Tail*

126-135mm

*Bill*

34-36mm

*Tarsus*

41-44mm

*Weight*

500g

The Providence Petrel is a large, heavily built, stout-billed petrel. Individuals have dark, grey-brown plumage, with a grey mantle, brown head, scaly white face and brown wings and tail. The species may appear brown at long range and grey at close

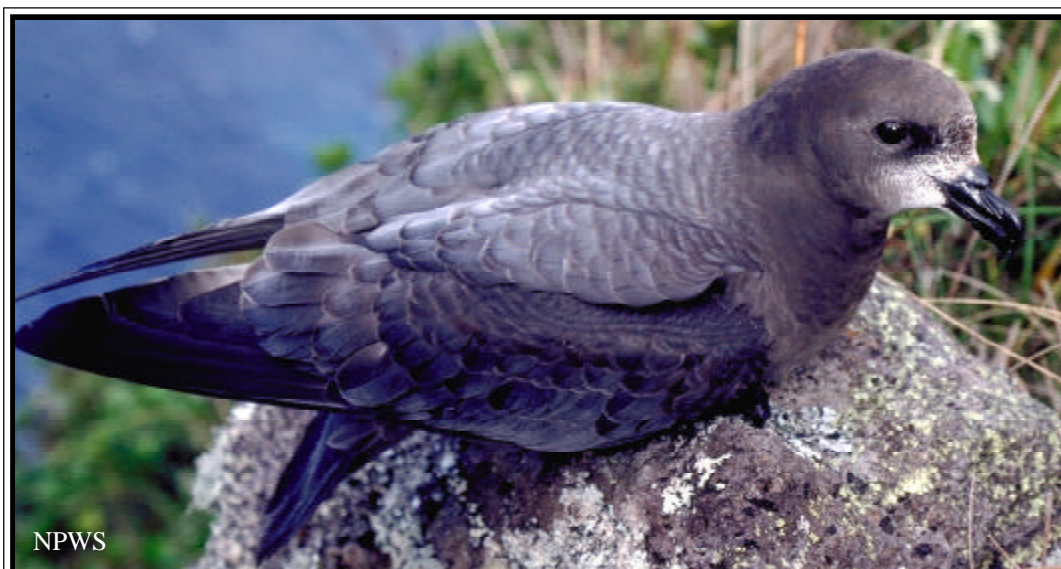
range. When in flight, white patches show on the underside of the primaries. Flight is slow and easy, typical of a gadfly petrel in strong winds.

The species is silent at sea but over breeding colonies it gives a loud, rapidly produced screeching *kir-rer-rer*, *kik-kik-kik* and on the ground have a deeper, trilling *ker-rer*, *kuk-kuk-kuk*, *ker-rer*.

## Distribution

The Providence Petrel has a pelagic distribution, particularly during the non-breeding season. The species is mainly subtropical in the south-west Pacific Ocean, including the Tasman Sea. However, some birds migrate to the north Pacific and Bering Sea (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

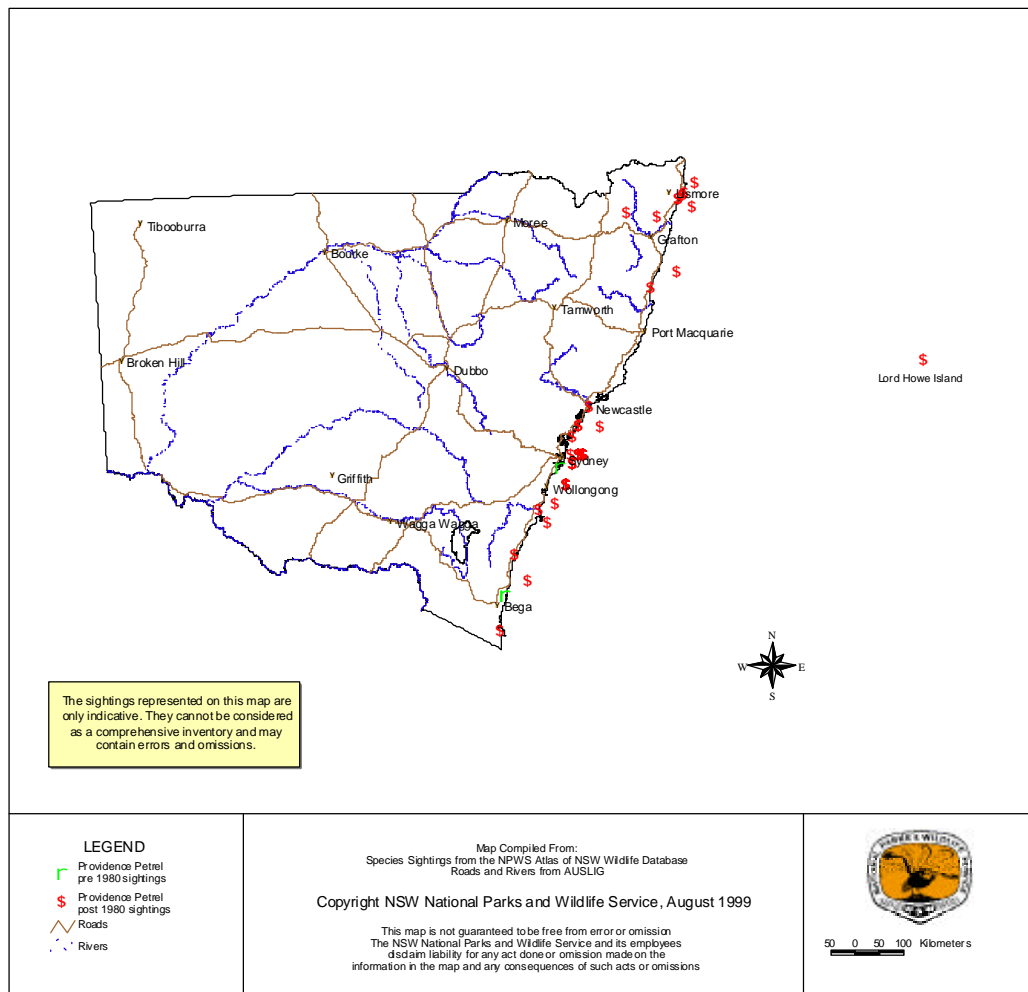
During the breeding season, the species can be found in the waters off the eastern Australian coast. The species may also be observed in eastern Australian waters in the non-breeding season, although it is generally rare or absent from December to February.



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### NPWS records of the Providence Petrel in NSW

During this time of the year the species appears to be more widely spread in the north Pacific (Lindsey 1986).

In NSW, the species occurs along the entire coast, however, it has been recorded most often off the north NSW coast. Mount Lidgbird and Mount Gower, on Lord Howe Island, are popular breeding sites for the species. An estimated 27 000 breeding pairs were recorded on Mt Gower in 1975 (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

#### Habitat

The marine, pelagic Providence Petrel is a seabird of the subtropical and tropical southwest Pacific Ocean, migrating to the north Pacific and Bering Sea in the non-breeding season (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Favoured feeding grounds are located within the Tasman Sea and along the edge of the continental shelf off the east coast of Australia (Cheshire & Jenkins 1981).

In the Northern Hemisphere, the species has been observed over seas of wide ranging surface-temperatures from 3.5 to 28°C (Tanaka 1986). However, observations indicate that the species concentrates along the convergence of warm and cold currents (Tanaka 1986 in Marchant & Higgins 1990).

On Lord Howe Island, the species nests in burrows or rock crevices on forested, upper slopes and summits of mountains up to 600m asl. However, some nests can be located on the grassy slopes of low altitudes (Hindwood 1940). More colonies at low altitudes were recorded prior to human settlement of Lord Howe Island (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

## Ecology

The Providence Petrel mostly eats fish, squid, crustaceans and offal (Marchant & Higgins 1990). The species has been recorded feeding near Humpback Whales (Tarrant 1989 in Marchant & Higgins 1990) and near fishing boats together with Buller's Shearwaters (Kuroda 1955). Flocks of up to 50 have been recorded at feeding locations.

## Threats

- Predation by cats
- Historical records indicate that the species may be sensitive to the impact of feral pigs and goats
- Historically eaten by humans, particularly by the early European settlers of Norfolk Island



Burrow of Providence Petrel

During the breeding season, from March to August, the species has been recorded in dense colonies of thousands (Marchant & Higgins 1990). The area around the burrow is vigorously defended from other birds and both the male and female incubate the egg. After hatching, the adults return only for brief periods at night to feed chicks (Fullagar *et al.* 1974).

## Management

- Control of feral animals around potential breeding habitat areas, specifically targeting cats, pigs and goats
- Protection and maintenance of known or potential breeding habitat

## Recovery plans

A recovery plan has not been prepared for this species.

## References

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