



Sooty Albatross

Phoebetria fusca (Hilsenberg, 1822)

Other common name None

Conservation status

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

Description (summarised from Schodde & Tidemann 1988; Marchant & Higgins 1990)

Head and Body Length

84-89cm

Wingspan

203cm

Wing

52.6-52.3cm

Tail

27.5cm

Bill

11.4cm

Tarsus

8.3cm

Weight

2.7kg (male)

2.4kg (female)

The Sooty Albatross is dark brown to black in colour, with a slightly darker head than breast. There is a thin white crescent surrounding the eye.

The bill is glossy black with a pale yellow to orange stripe along the sides of the lower jaw. The feet and legs are pale grey. Juveniles are similar to adults, with a less pronounced bill stripe.

Individuals are generally silent at sea, however, in display they may scream *pee-pooo*.

Distribution

The Sooty Albatross occurs in the South Atlantic and southern Indian Oceans, off the coast of South America, South Africa and Australia. The species has not been recorded in the Pacific Ocean between Australia and South America (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Lindsay 1986).

In Australian waters the Sooty Albatross occurs off the south coast from Tasmania to Western Australia. Occasionally, the species is recorded off the NSW coast, north to Grafton. Individuals are generally recorded in Australian waters in winter (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Wood 1992).

Recorded occurrences in conservation reserves

The species has not been recorded in any conservation reserves (NPWS 1999).

Habitat

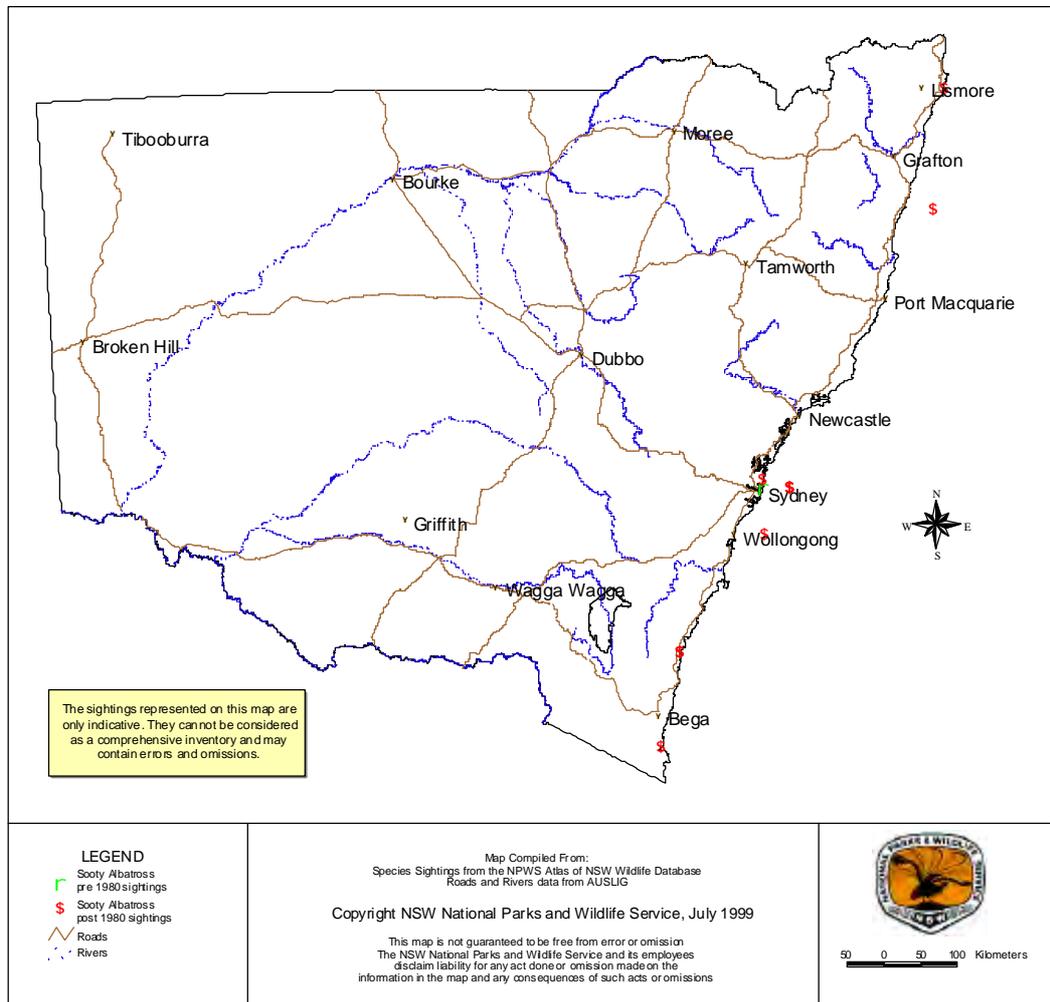
The Sooty Albatross is a pelagic or ocean-going species that inhabits subantarctic and subtropical marine waters, spending the majority of its time at sea. It rarely occurs in continental shelf waters. Often small, isolated, subantarctic islands provide breeding habitat (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

The Sooty Albatross nests on subantarctic islands, including Prince Edward Island, Iles Crozet, Iles des Apotres and Iles Kerguelen. Nests are located amongst vegetation on steep slopes or cliffs and consist of a mound of mud and plant matter, lined with grass (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Ecology

While at sea, the agile species soars on strong winds, and when calm, rests on the ocean. Individuals are generally solitary while at sea, although small groups of 2 or 3 birds have been recorded (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

The species feeds on fish, crustaceans, offal and cephalopods (squid) (Barker & Vestjens 1989) and although solitary, individuals may forage at night in mixed-species flocks. The species is thought to capture food by seizing prey from the surface while swimming or by landing on top of prey.



NPWS records of the Sooty Albatross in NSW

It may follow fishing vessels for short periods (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Brothers 1991; Klaer & Placheck 1995).

Pairs bond for life and pair bonds are re-established with complex displays at nest sites on arrival at breeding areas. The species is highly territorial and defend their nests with threat displays (Jouventin *et al.* 1981).

This species nests in small breeding colonies of up to 100 nests. Breeding occurs between August and December, a single egg is laid and is incubated for between 65 and 75 days by both parents. Both parents guard and feed the young for approximately 5 months,

at which time the young fledges and becomes independent (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Lindsay 1986). Life bonds are made at 3 - 4 years and first breeding is between 9 and 15 years (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Threats

- Disturbance on breeding islands, including frequent fires and predation of young by rats
- Long-line fishing operations, may threaten the species (Brothers 1991; Klaer & Polacheck 1995)
- Pollution from plastics, oil and chemicals

Management

- Fishing techniques which reduce the catch of seabirds, including the setting of lines for fishing operations at night and weighting lines to ensure that they sink quickly (Klaer & Polacheck 1998)
- Further studies into the threats and management of this species

- Preservation of areas where this species is known to breed and forage within Australia
- Appropriate management of pollution.

Recovery plans

A recovery plan has not been prepared for the Sooty Albatross.

References

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