Black-browed Albatross

***Diomedea melanophris* Temminck, 1828**

Other common name Black-browed Mollymawk

Conservation status

The Black-browed Albatross is listed as a **Vulnerable Species** on Schedule 2 of the *Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995* (TSC Act).

Description (summarised from Schodde & Tidemann 1986; Marchant & Higgins 1990)

Head and Body Length
80-95cm
Wingspan
210-250cm
Wing
52-54.1cm
Tail
21.3-21.9cm
Bill
11.1-11.9cm
Tarsus
8.3-8.5cm
Weight
3-5kg

The Black-browed Albatross has a characteristic black brow over each eye. Individuals are predominantly white with dark grey wings and back. The underwing is white with wide black edges (thickest on the leading edge) and tip.

The bill is bright yellow-orange with a pink tip. The feet, toes and web are blue-grey. Juveniles are similar to adults, but with a paler brow and a pale grey hindneck, often extending to sides of neck. The bill in juveniles is dark brown with a black tip and the legs and feet are also darker than the adult.

Distribution

The Black-browed Albatross is circumpolar in distribution, occurring widely in the southern oceans, including around South America, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and Antarctica (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Bretagnolle & Thomas 1990; Waugh *et al.* 1999).

In Australian waters, the Black-browed Albatross occurs along the east coast from Stradbroke Island in Queensland, along the entire south coast of the continent to Western Australia. This species migrates to waters off the continental shelf from approximately May to November and is regularly recorded off the coast of NSW during these periods (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Wood 1992).

Recorded occurences in conservation reserves

Botany Bay NP (NPWS 1999).

Habitat

The Black-browed Albatross inhabits antarctic, subantarctic and subtropical marine waters and can tolerate water temperatures of between 0°C and 24°C. Although generally pelagic or ocean-going, the species also occurs in continental shelf waters and is often seen from the land. Islands of Australia and New Zealand provide breeding habitat (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Wood 1992).

Ecology

The Black-browed Albatross spends the majority of its time at sea, breeding on small isolated islands. When at sea individuals soar on strong winds and rest on the ocean, when calm, often in groups. Flocks of up to 10,000 birds have been recorded off Argentina (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

This species feeds on fish, crustaceans, offal and cephalopods (squid) (Barker & Vestjens 1989) and often forages in flocks with other seabirds. Individuals seize prey from the surface while swimming or landing, occasionally submerging their head and body to capture the prey underwater. This species scavenges in large flocks behind fishing vessels (Wood 1992; Waugh *et al.* 1992).

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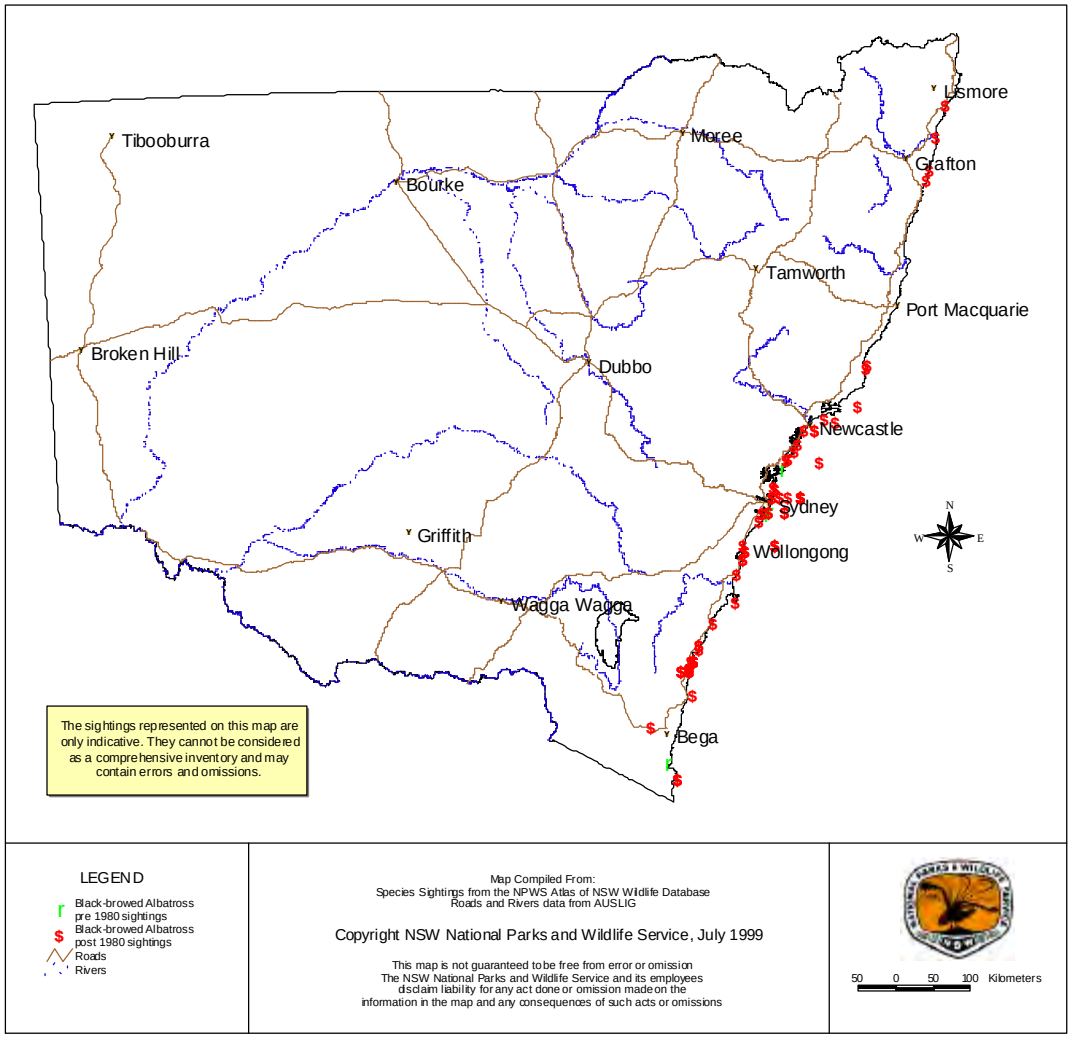

NPWS records of the Black-browed Albatross in NSW

The Black-browed Albatross nests on vegetated sub-antarctic and antarctic islands. Known breeding locations include Macquarie, Heard and Antipodes Islands. Nests are located on cliffs or steep slopes. Nests consist of a mound of soil and vegetation and are used annually (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

This species forms colonies with as many as 100,000 nests. Breeding colonies occasionally contain other species such as the Grey-headed Albatross. Birds are territorial while nesting and will aggressively peck other birds if they come too close (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Breeding occurs between September and December. A single egg is laid and incubated for 65-72 days by both parents. Both parents guard and feed their young for 4-5 months when the young fledges and becomes independent (Schodde & Tidemann 1986). After breeding, the fledgling and adults leave breeding colonies. Young reach breeding age at approximately 11 years (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Threats

- Long-line fishing operations, particularly threaten the species (Brothers 1991; Klaer & Polacheck 1995)
- Disturbance to nesting colonies by predators (in particular introduced species)
- 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 Black-browed Albatross

References

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