



Shy Albatross

Diomedea cauta Gould, 1841

Other common names White-capped Albatross, Mollymawk

Conservation status

The Shy 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

90-100cm

Wingspan

212-256cm

Wing

56-61cm

Tail

22-23cm

Bill

12-14cm

Tarsus

8-10cm

Weight

4-4.4 kg (male)

3.4-3.8kg (female)

The Shy Albatross has a predominantly white body with dark grey wings and back. The brow is dark-grey or black and a light grey wash covers the sides of head, neck and throat. The underwing is white with black edges and tip and a characteristic black patch where the wing joins the body. The bill is grey with a yellow tip and black nasal groove. The feet, toes and web are blue-grey.

Juveniles are similar to adults but with darker grey wash on the side of head or a completely grey head. The juvenile's bill and feet are also darker.

Distribution

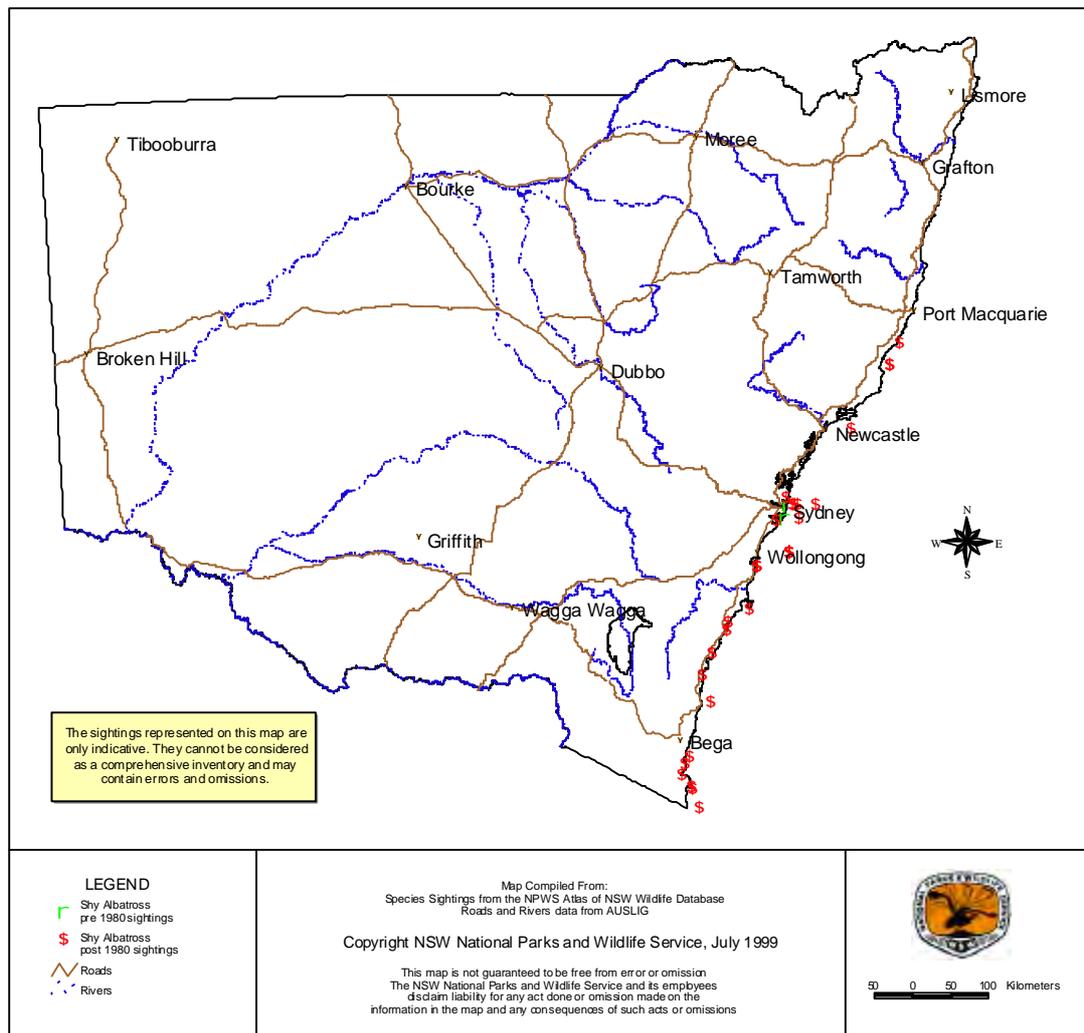
The Shy Albatross is circumpolar in distribution, occurring widely in the southern oceans around the southern margins of South America, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. Islands off Australia and New Zealand provide



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NPWS records of the Shy Albatross in NSW

breeding habitat. After breeding, some populations disperse to South African or South American waters while other populations remain around breeding colonies. (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Bretagnolle & Thomas 1990)

In Australian waters the Shy Albatross occurs along the east coast, from Stradbroke Island in Queensland, along the entire south coast of the continent to Carnarvon in Western Australia. Although uncommon north of Sydney, the species is commonly recorded off south-east NSW, particularly between July and November (Wood 1992).

Recorded occurrences in conservation reserves

Ben Boyd NP (NPWS 1999).

Habitat

The pelagic or ocean-going Shy Albatross inhabits sub-antarctic and subtropical marine waters, spending the majority of their time at sea. Occasionally the species occurs in continental shelf waters, in bays and harbours (Wood 1992).

Nests are located on rocky islets and stacks with little vegetation and soil. Known breeding locations include Albatross Island off Tasmania, Auckland Island, Bounty Island and The Snares, off New Zealand. Located on sheltered sides of islands, on cliffs and ledges, in crevices and on slopes, nests are used annually and consist of a mound of mud, bones, plant matter and rocks (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Ecology

While at sea, the pelagic Shy Albatross soars on strong winds and when calm, individuals may rest on the ocean, in groups during the breeding season or as individuals at other times. The species feeds on fish, crustaceans, offal and squid (Barker & Vestjens 1989) and may forage in mixed-species flocks. Food may be captured by a variety of foraging techniques, including seizing prey from the surface while swimming or by landing on top of prey, diving for prey beneath the water and scavenging behind fishing vessels (Marchant & Higgins 1990; Wood 1992).

Nesting colonies comprise of between 6 and 500 nests and may contain other species, such as the Australasian Gannet. Parents are territorial while nesting and will aggressively peck other birds if they come too close. The species has both defensive and mating displays (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Breeding occurs between September and December with a single egg laid and incubated for 72 days. Both parents guard and feed the young for approximately 5 months until fledging. (Marchant & Higgins 1990)

Threats

- Long-line fishing operations (Brothers 1991; Klaer & Polacheck 1995)
- Disturbance to nesting colonies by introduced predators
- Pollution from plastics, oil and chemicals
- Feather collection historically depleted the breeding population of Albatross Island last century

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 Shy Albatross.



Shy Albatross in nesting colony

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