Conservation Status of Albatrosses and Petrels

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)[1]

ABSTRACT

Incidental mortality (bycatch) of seabirds in longline and trawl fisheries remains a critical conservation challenge, particularly for the 31 species of albatrosses and petrels listed under the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). The worsening in conservation status over time of ACAP species led to a continued conservation crisis being declared by the ACAP Meeting of Parties in May 2025. Of the 22 species of albatrosses recognised by ACAP, 18 breed or forage in the CCSBT Area, as do seven of the nine listed petrel species. This paper provides a summary of the population status and current trends of these 25 species as requested by the CCSBT Secretariat.

BACKGROUND

The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) provides a framework for coordinating and undertaking international activity to mitigate known threats to albatross and petrel populations. Most of the 31 species listed in Annex 1 of ACAP have extensive at-sea distributions (see **Table 1** for the 25 ACAP species found in the CCSBT area), and the greatest threat to these species is incidental mortality (bycatch) in pelagic and demersal longline and trawl fisheries (e.g. Dias et al. 2019, Phillips et al. 2016).

ACAP collates breeding site, trend and other data for all albatrosses and petrels listed under the Agreement and has regularly presented updates to the CCSBT ERSWG on population status and trends of ACAP species which forage in CCSBT waters. Comprehensive knowledge of population size, trend and demographic parameters is fundamental to many aspects of albatross and petrel conservation, and is vital to monitoring the effectiveness of management actions.

CONSERVATION STATUS, POPULATION SIZE AND CURRENT TRENDS OF ACAP SPECIES

Of the 25 species of albatrosses and large petrels that overlap in distribution with the CCSBT Area (**Table 1**), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) currently lists (**Figure 1**):

- one as *Critically Endangered* (CR)
- eight as *Endangered* (EN)
- eight as *Vulnerable* (VU)
- five as *Near Threatened* (NT)
- three as *Least Concern* (LC)

[1] Secretariat to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, Level 2, 119 Macquarie St, Hobart, Tasmania 7000, Australia.

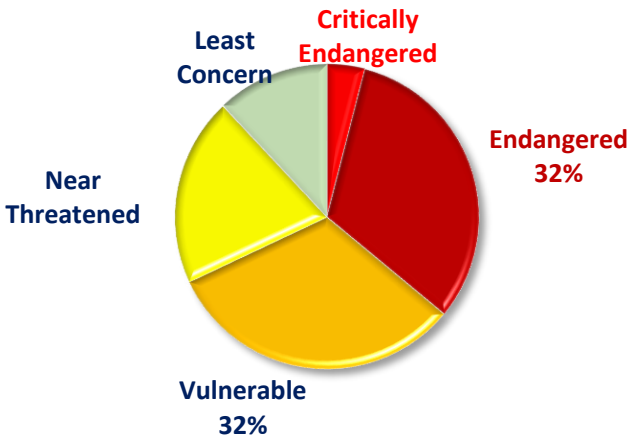


Figure 1. *Proportion of ACAP species in the CCSBT Area listed in each IUCN threat category.*

In 2024, ACAP's Population and Conservation Status Working Group (PaCSWG) assessed the current population trend of the 25 albatross and large petrel species that overlap in their distribution with the CCSBT Area. This assessment showed that over the last 20 years (**Figure 2**):

- 14 species have *declined*
- three species was *stable*
- six species have *increased*
- the trend of two species was *unknown*.

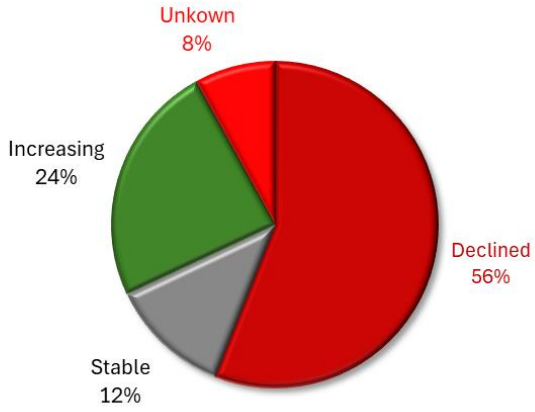


Figure 2. *Current population trend of ACAP species within the CCSBT Area.*

Although the size of most populations has been determined at some point in time, the trend and current demographic statistics for many populations are less well known, due to the high level of resources required to access remote sites at appropriate intervals. Determination of global trends can also be difficult because populations of the same species at different sites may show different trajectories.

Table 1. *2024 Summary of global IUCN conservation status and current trends of ACAP species with distribution in CCSBT waters. Breeding sites where populations have been identified as meeting the criteria for ACAP High Priority Populations (>10% of the global population, declining >3% per year, at risk from fisheries) are in red font.*

Species	2021 IUCN Status[1]	Occurrence in CCSBT Area: Breeding (B) Foraging (F)	Number of sites (ACAP)[2]	Breeding site responsibility	Annual breeding pairs (last census)[3]	Current Population Trend 2001-2020[4]
Diomedea dabbenena Tristan Albatross	CR	B-F	1	UK (Gough Island)	1,442 (2015-2021)	↓
Diomedea amsterdamensis Amsterdam Albatross	EN	B-F	1	France	66 (2023)	↑
Diomedea antipodensis Antipodean Albatross	EN	B-F	6	NZ (Antipodes Islands)	7,440 (1995-2024)	↓
Diomedea sanfordi Northern Royal Albatross	EN	B-F	5	NZ	4,005 (2024)	↓
Thalassarche carteri Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	EN	B-F	6	France (Amsterdam Island), South Africa	33,974 (1984-2016)	↓
Thalassarche chlororhynchos Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	EN	B-F	6	UK	27,254 (1974-2015)	↔
Thalassarche chrysostoma Grey-headed Albatross	EN	B-F	29	Australia, Chile, France, NZ, South Africa, South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)*	80,863 (1982-2020)	↓
Phoebetria fusca Sooty Albatross	EN	B-F	15	France (Crozet Island), South Africa, UK	12,069 (1974-2023)	↓
Procellaria westlandica Westland Petrel	EN	B-F	1	NZ	6,223 (2019)	↑
Diomedea epomophora Southern Royal Albatross	VU	B-F	4	NZ	7,935 (1989-2024)	↓
Diomedea exulans Wandering Albatross	VU	B-F	28	Australia, France, South Africa, South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)*	10,138 (1981-2024)	↓
Procellaria aequinoctialis White-chinned Petrel	VU	B-F	73	Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)*, France, New Zealand, South Africa, South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)*	1,242,090 (1984-2023)	↓
Procellaria conspicillata Spectacled Petrel	VU	B-F	1	UK	42,000 (2018)	↑
Procellaria parkinsoni Black Petrel	VU	B-F	2	NZ	6,970 (2016-2021)	↔
Thalassarche eremita Chatham Albatross	VU	B-F	1	NZ	5,296 (2017)	↔
Thalassarche impavida Campbell Albatross	VU	B-F	2	NZ	24,338 (2020)	↓

Species	2021 IUCN Status[1]	Occurrence in CCSBT Area: Breeding (B) Foraging (F)	Number of sites (ACAP)[2]	Breeding site responsibility	Annual breeding pairs (last census)[3]	Current Population Trend 2001-2020[4]
Thalassarche salvini Salvin's Albatross	VU	B-F	12	NZ	33,587 (1986-2020)	↓
Phoebetria palpebrata Light-mantled Albatross	NT	B-F	71	Australia, France, New Zealand, South Africa, South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)*	15,975^ (1954-2024)	?
Procellaria cinerea Grey Petrel	NT	B-F	17	Australia, France, New Zealand, South Africa, UK	86,959# (1981-2018)	↓
Thalassarche bulleri Buller's Albatross	NT	B-F	10	NZ	33,410 (1984-2023)	?
Thalassarche cauta Shy Albatross	NT	B-F	3	Australia	15,005 (2015-2023)	↓
Thalassarche steadi White-capped Albatross	NT	B-F	5	NZ	62,922 (2009-2017)	↓
Macronectes giganteus Southern giant Petrel	LC	B-F	119	Antarctic Treaty, Argentina, Australia, Chile, Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)*, France, South Africa, South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)*, UK	48,540 (1958-2024)	↑
Macronectes halli Northern giant Petrel	LC	B-F	50	Australia, France, New Zealand, South Africa, South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)*	18,559 (1973-2024)	↑
Thalassarche melanophris Black-browed Albatross	LC	B-F	65	Australia, Chile, Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)*, France, New Zealand, South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)*	691,441 (1982-2024)	↑

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

^ excluding Auckland estimates of 5,000 pairs – not reliable/supported

incomplete global estimate - Prince Edward Islands numbers unknown

[1] **CR** = Critically Endangered, **EN** = Endangered, **VU** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near Threatened, **LC** = Least Concern The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2021-1. <www.iucnredlist.org>

[2] **Site:** usually an entire, distinct island or islet, or rarely, section of a large island (>3,000km^2)

[3] ACAP database. <data.acap.aq>. 9 August 2024

[4] **ACAP Trend:** ↑ increasing, ↓declining, ↔ stable, ? unknown.
n.b. the overall trend for the species may not reflect particular regional or site trends.

Further information on the conservation status, population size, and trends of these species can be found in the species assessments (https://www.acap.aq/resources/acap-species) developed by ACAP, which also provide comprehensive information on distribution, biology and threats. The assessments will be updated in 2026. The current population sizes, conservation status, and the 20-year population trends for species found within the CCSBT Convention Area are summarised in **Figure 3**.

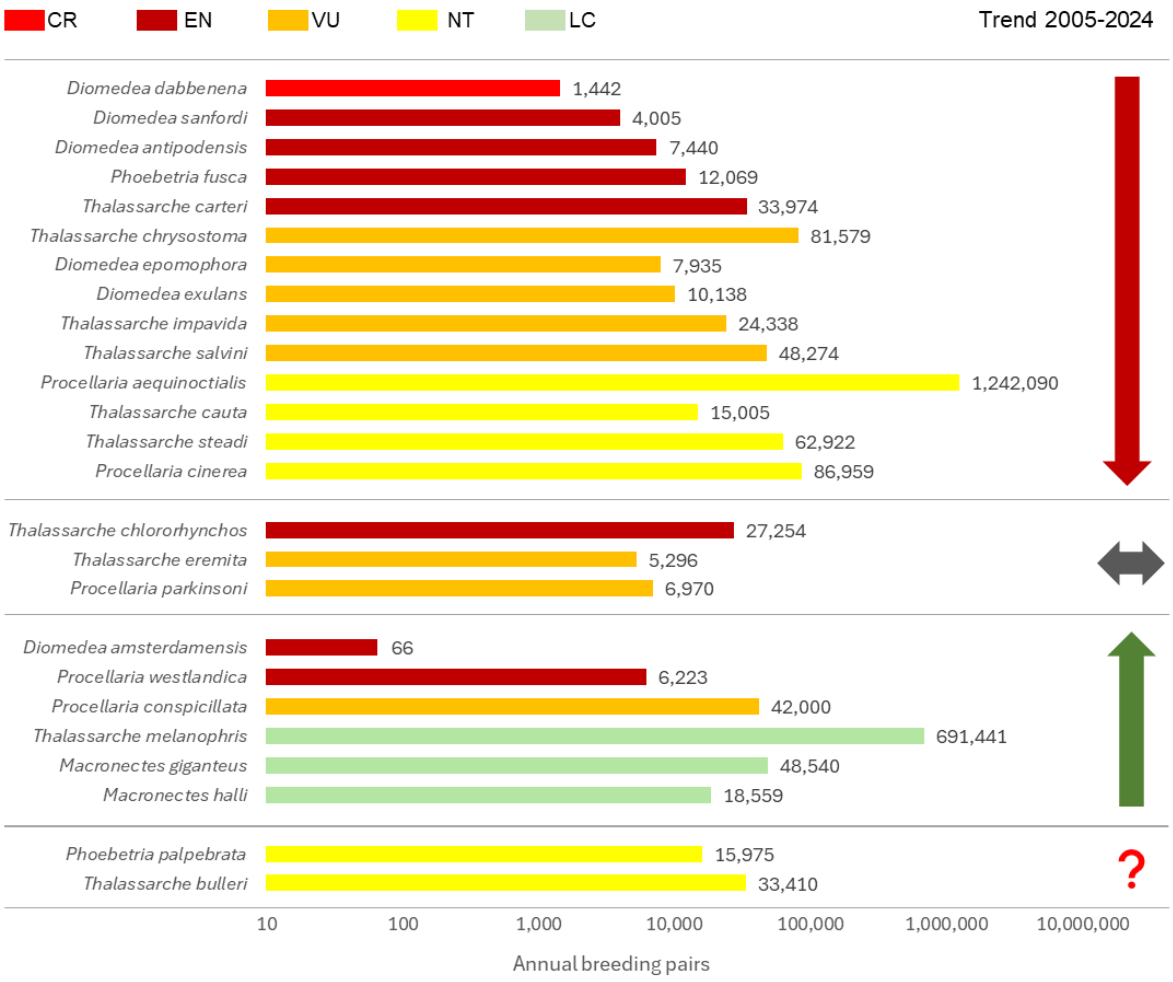


Figure 3. *Current information about population size, conservation status, and 20-year population trends for species found within the CCSBT Area.*

A CONSERVATION CRISIS

The Eighth Session of the Meeting of the Parties to ACAP (May 2025) recognised that the conservation status of albatrosses and petrels continues to be threatened by incidental mortality associated with commercial fishing activities and adopted Resolution 8.5. The Resolution urges Parties to make renewed efforts to review and where necessary improve their operational, management, and other measures to reduce or eliminate the incidental mortality of albatrosses and petrels from fishing activities, in particular by adopting and implementing ACAP's Best Practice Advice, and by collecting and monitoring of bycatch and mitigation use data. The Resolution also encourages Parties who are Contracting Parties or Cooperating non-Contracting Parties to regional fisheries management and conservation organisations, whose fisheries pose bycatch risks to albatrosses and petrels, to promote the

adoption and implementation of ACAP's Best Practice Advice to minimise seabird bycatch. Currently, three Parties to ACAP are also Commission Members of CCSBT, and two Parties are European Union (Member of the Extended Commission) Member States, and so are committed to implementing ACAP Resolution 8.5.

ACAP HIGH PRIORITY POPULATIONS AND OVERLAP WITH THE CCSBT AREA

ACAP has also identified nine High Priority Populations, which represent more than 10% of a species' global population, and were declining at more than 3% per year over a 20-year period for which a major underlying cause was incidental mortality in fisheries. Seven of these populations breed and forage in the CCSBT area (see **Table 1**). These include the Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans* breeding at South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)[2]. Wandering Albatrosses *Diomedea exulans* at Bird Island has been in decline since the first counts in the early 1960s (**Figure 4**). Surveys of the entire South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)[2] island group indicate an overall decrease of 39.3% from 2,105 pairs in 1984 to 1,278 pairs in 2024. The decline at Bird Island was at its steepest from 1995 to 2007 (-4.5% per year), which represented the loss, without replacement, of 90-100 adults per year. The rate has slowed in the last decade, but the population remains far below its original size and will take decades to recover.

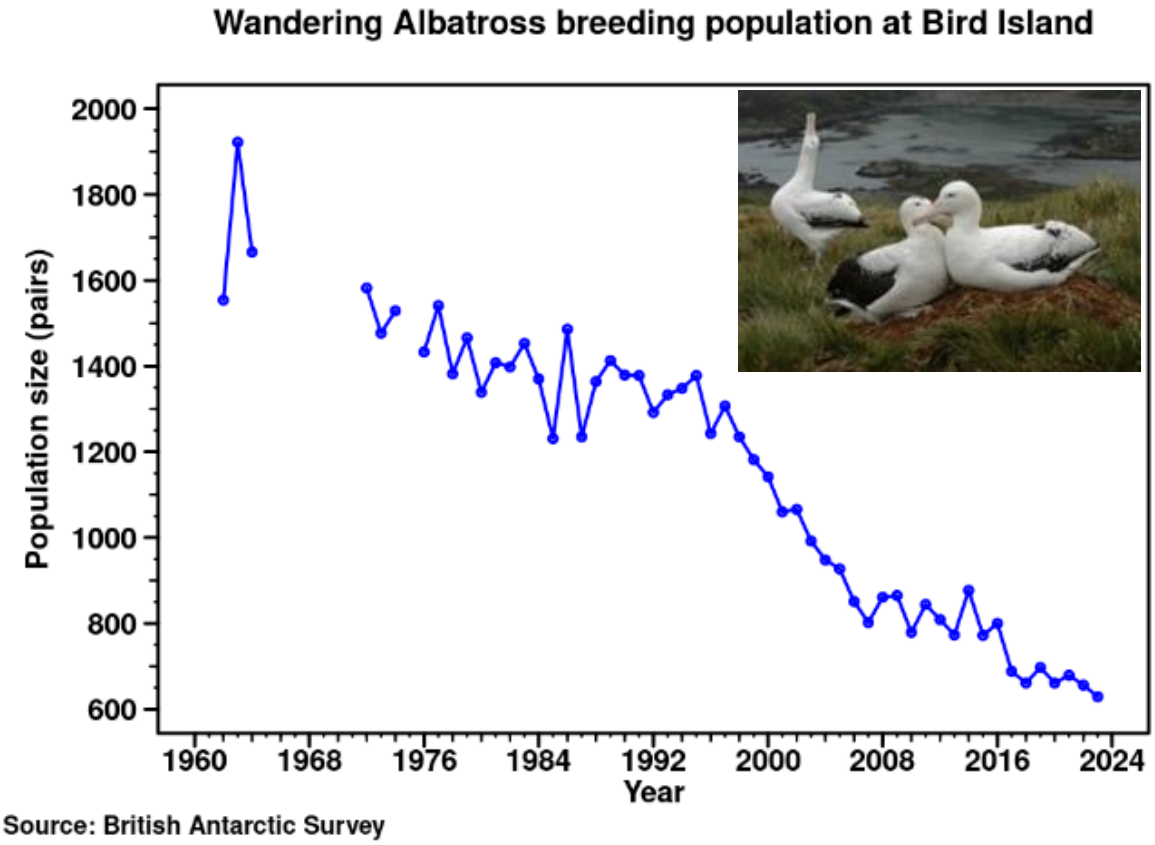


Figure 4. Breeding population trend for Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) at Bird Island, South Georgia (Islas Georgias del Sur)[2] from when records began to 2024.

[2] 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 e Islas Sandwich del Sur) and the surrounding maritime areas.

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