

Order **PROCELLARIIFORMES**

A rather distinct group of some 80–100 species of pelagic seabirds, ranging in size from huge to tiny and in habits from aerial (feeding in flight) to aquatic (pursuit-diving for food), but otherwise with similar biology. About three-quarters of the species occur or have been recorded in our region. They are found throughout the oceans and most come ashore voluntarily only to breed. They are distinguished by their hooked bills, covered in horny plates with raised tubular nostrils (hence the name Tubinarae). Their olfactory systems are unusually well developed (Bang 1966) and they have a distinctly musky odour, which suggest that they may locate one another and their breeding places by smell; they are attracted to biogenic oils at sea, also no doubt by smell. Probably they are most closely related to penguins and more remotely to other shorebirds and waterbirds such as Charadriiformes and Pelecaniiformes. Their diversity and abundance in the s. hemisphere suggest that the group originated there, though some important groups occurred in the northern hemisphere by middle Tertiary (Brodkorb 1963; Olson 1975).

Structurally, the wings may be long in aerial species and shorter in divers of the genera *Puffinus* and *Pelecanoides*, with 11 primaries, the outermost minute, and 10–40 secondaries in the Oceanitinae and great albatrosses respectively. The tail varies in length, being forked in *Oceanodroma*, forked to pointed in other forms, usually with 12 rectrices but up to 16 in fulmars. The tarsi are light and cylindrical in aerial forms; strong and laterally compressed with legs set far back in aquatic ones. The front toes are webbed; hind toe small or absent. The proventriculus is long and glandular; the gizzard small and twisted; and the small intestine often spiral in *Pterodroma*, presumably to aid absorption of the unusual lipids in their food. Chicks are helpless and covered in down, with two coats except in some Oceanitinae. Some larger species have a darker immature plumage, and the female is often darker than the male in the great albatrosses. The male is usually larger than the female, though smaller in the Oceanitinae and some other small species. Otherwise there is little difference in appearance with sex or age, except that young birds may have more pronounced pale or dark edges to the feathers. Many have simple counter-shaded markings that often appear to have given rise to uniformly dark or, less often, to pale derivatives; some species in most groups are dimorphic or polymorphic. The more complex groups have often developed distinctive markings of the extremities.

Breed more or less colonially on offshore islands, coastal cliffs, or on hills and deserts inland, where they perform complex vocal and aerial displays. The nest is a simple scrape or cup in a burrow or natural hole, sometimes under vegetation. The s. albatrosses build large cone-shaped nests in the open; may be lined with any debris available in the area. Smaller species visit it only at night, though larger ones and those breeding on remote islands may come to nests in the open by day. Parents incubate for spells of several days in turn and generally leave the chick alone soon after it hatches, only returning at long intervals to feed it by regurgitation. In consequence the chick is vulnerable to introduced predators and some species are now greatly reduced and at least two are now extinct. Some species also periodically liable to have unsuccessful breeding seasons. Many young or even old birds may be wrecked ashore and die when they meet bad weather or suffer shortage of food on migration or in the winter. Though it has been claimed that they are also vulnerable to all sorts of pollution, the evidence is weak (Bourne 1976). There is at present anxiety about the effect of some fishing methods, such as long-lining, which may be endangering species such as the great albatrosses.

All species feed at sea on a variety of fish, cephalopods and small marine invertebrates, either socially or alone; larger species may scavenge all sorts of offal or prey on other birds. Most, except perhaps *Pelecanoides*, can digest the complex lipids formed by some marine animals (Clarke & Prince 1976), and may eject them to soil the plumage of their enemies with lethal results (Swennen 1974). Some species can digest wax (Obst 1986). Many now take wastes from whaling and fishing operations (Fisher 1952). All have long life-cycles in proportion to their size; they disperse on fledging and then prospect for nest-sites for 2–12 years in their youth. They usually lay a single large white egg annually; though a successful breeding cycle may be completed in less than a year in at least one tropical species, *Puffinus lherminieri*, it may take 2 years in larger southern ones. Before laying, the birds court for weeks or months, then go to sea for feeding. Incubation lasts 6–8 weeks, and fledging 2–9 months. Once the fat chick fledges it fends for itself, even in species that immediately make a long migration, sometimes to the opposite hemisphere.

Tendency for failed breeders and non-breeders to begin moult before successful breeders. Five strategies of wing-moult in breeding adults: (1) In albatrosses, remiges replaced in staffelmauser interrupted while breeding; in nearly all other species, primaries moulted outwards; possibly simultaneously in some diving-petrels. (2) In most subantarctic and temperate species, moult begins soon after breeding and is completed shortly before next breeding season. (3) In most tropical species, moult aseasonal, between breeding attempts; resumption of breeding apparently depends on when moult completed. (4) In trans-equatorial migrants, wing-moult delayed until they reach non-breeding quarters, where it is completed; moult rapid but no satisfactory evidence for flightlessness. In

some species, body-moult also in winter quarters; in others, at breeding grounds. (5) In some species of high latitudes, rapid moult completed in summer when they breed; some begin moult long before breeding finished.

The history of the classification of the Order is very confused, as is seen by comparing Timmermann's (1965) discussion of their Mallophagan parasites with that by Klemm (1969) of their leg muscles and that by Harper (1978) of their proteins, but it is now widely agreed that the Order is best divided into four families: Diomedidae or large to huge aerial albatrosses; Procellariidae or medium-sized, mainly aerial but sometimes aquatic, petrels, shearwaters and prions; Hydrobatidae or small to tiny, aerial storm-petrels; and Pelecanoididae or small aquatic diving-petrels.

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## Family DIOMEDEIDAE albatrosses

The albatrosses are a small group of some 13-16 large petrels with long wings adapted for gliding flight and with long powerful beaks adapted for seizing prey at the surface; nine species breed in our region and one other has been recorded as a vagrant. Because they are so large, they must breed in the open, where they walk well for petrels. Most s. species build substantial conical nests but n. ones, breeding in warm climates, make only scrapes. Young birds in some species have a drab plumage but adults of many species develop bolder markings with brightly coloured stripes on the bill, used in social displays when breeding. Three distinct groups occur in the Southern Ocean but the distinction between two is blurred by intermediate forms that occur in North Pacific:

(1) The great albatrosses are huge, long-winged, long- and pale-billed, short-tailed birds that glide round the world in Southern Ocean. Until recently, there were thought to be two species: the more pelagic Wandering Albatross *D. exulans* breeding on most of the subantarctic islands, which is dark with a white underwing when young, becoming more or less white with dark wing-tips when adult; and the more coastal Royal Albatross *D. epomophora*, breeding round NZ, which resembles the extreme white adult Wanderer throughout its life but has a dark cutting-edge to the upper mandible. A few birds breeding in extreme immature *exulans*-type of plumage on Ile Amsterdam in the Indian Ocean have recently been described as a third species *D. amsterdamensis* but there is continuing debate whether this is justified owing to the occurrence of similar populations in South Atlantic and round NZ (Bourne 1989).

(2) The medium-sized albatrosses *Diomedea* (*Thalassarche*), often called mollymawks, are a compact group of white-bodied, dark-backed species with brightly marked bills in adults, all five species being found in our region. They consist of two comparatively coastal species, the Black-browed Albatross *melanophrys* with main breeding colonies round South America, and the Shy *cauta* with 3-4 rather well-defined subspecies, sometimes treated as separate species, breeding in A'asia. There are also three pelagic species: Grey-headed *chrysostoma* to the south, Yellow-nosed *chlororhynchus* in subtropical South Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and Buller's *bulleri* in equivalent parts of South Pacific.

The differences between Groups (1) and (2) are rather marked and they would doubtless be treated as distinct genera if it were not that four other albatrosses with intermediate characters breed in North Pacific: Black-footed *nigripes* with plumage resembling that of sooty albatrosses, though shape differs; Laysan *immutabilis* with plumage like that of the medium-sized albatrosses (Group 2); Short-tailed *albatrus* with a sequence of plumages rather like those of Wanderer, though smaller; and the Waved *irrorata* with dark plumage except for pale head, neck and underwing. Because it is hard to make any clear distinction between these birds they are normally all included in an unusually wide genus *Diomedea*.

(3) The sooty albatrosses *Phoebastria*. Two extremely aerial, highly pelagic and rather aggressive or predatory species with fairly small bills with a groove along the lower mandible; long wings; long pointed tails; and dark plumage; nest on steep places and have vocal aerial displays.

General characters are: body, short and broad; head, large; neck, short. Wing, long and narrow, folded in three almost equal parts, 11 primaries, p10 longest, p11 minute; up to about 40 secondaries, diastataxic. Tail, short and square in *Diomedea*, longer and wedge-shaped in *Phoebetria*, 12 feathers. Bill, heavy and composed of several horny plates; hooked; nostrils in tubes on either side. Legs, strong; three front toes joined by web; hind toe absent or vestigial. Oil gland, feathered. Sexes similar; male larger on average. Plumage mainly white except in *Phoebetria*, in which it is dark grey. Juveniles and immatures generally separable but mostly not very different from adults except in *D. exulans* and *D. albatrus*; fully adult plumage attained only after several years. Stance upright and able to walk much better than most other Procellariiformes. Swim and rest on sea buoyantly with head held high. Feed mostly on fish and squid by surface-seizing or shallow diving, but sooty albatrosses also take birds. Follow ships for scavenging.

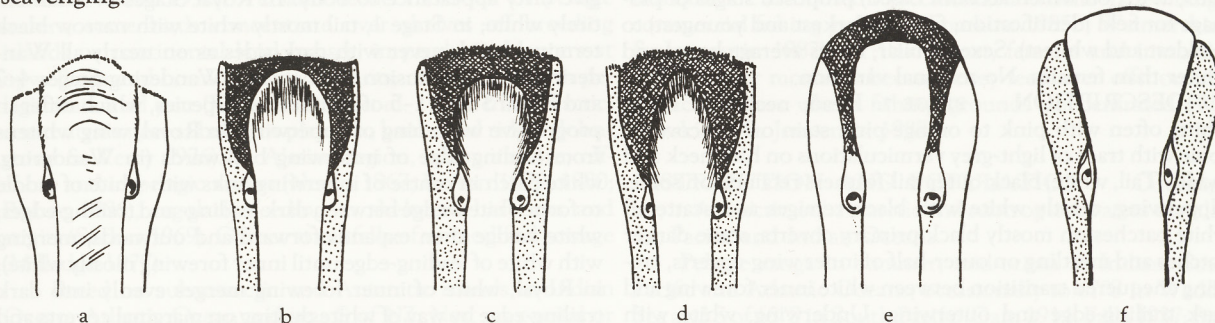


Fig. 1 Dorsal view of base of bill of small *Diomedea*

Fig. 1a Black-browed Albatross *D. melanoprys*

Fig. 1b Grey-headed Albatross *D. chrysostoma*

Fig. 1c Yellow-nosed Albatross, *D. chlorohynchos*, subspecies *chlorohynchos*

Fig. 1d Yellow-nosed Albatross, *D. chlorohynchos*, subspecies *bassi*

Fig. 1e Shy Albatross *D. cauta*

Fig. 1f Buller's Albatross *D. bulleri*

Long-lasting monogamous pair-bond. Breed colonially, pairs often returning to same site. Defend small nest-territories. Perform spectacular agonistic and sexual displays at nest in *Diomedea*; vocal aerial displays in *Phoebetria*. Eggs, white, minutely spotted reddish. Clutch-size; one; no replacement laying. Incubation by both sexes in long alternate spells. Incubation period, 2 or more months. Nestling, semi-altricial, nidicolous; hatched in down. Brooded for a short time after hatching; then left alone in nest, parents returning only to feed chick by incomplete regurgitation. Nestling period long, up to 12 months, and so in some species successful adults cannot breed annually. Young independent on fledging. Maturity reached only after several years. Some populations were reduced in the past, notably by egg-collecting, but there appear to be few threats now except that some great albatrosses are caught by long-line fishing.

#### REFERENCES

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*Diomedea nigripes* **Black-footed Albatross**

*Diomedea nigripes* Audubon, 1849, *Ornith. Biog.* 5: 327 — Pacific Ocean, 30°44'N, 146°W.

One specimen collected Dusky Sound, NZ, July 1884 by A. Reischek and held in Reischek collection in Vienna Museum (Mathews 1930; NZCL; Oliver). Apparently the only record ever made in s. hemisphere, though in Vienna Museum another specimen is labelled New Holland (Oliver). A mostly blackish-brown albatross with diagnostic white patch round base of bill and below eye. Range across North Pacific Ocean, from coastal waters of Taiwan and China in W to w. coast of

North America and Baja California in E; N of c. 15°N to Bering Sea. Breed on Tori Shima, Izu Is, off Japan and on islands of Hawaiian Chain from Kure to Kaula; formerly bred on islands of the Bonin, Volcano, Mariana and Marshall Is and on Johnston I.

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