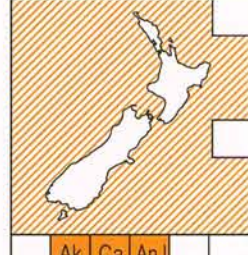


Sooty albatrosses are slender sooty brown and grey birds with black bill, long narrow wings and very long pointed tail.

**LIGHT-MANTLED SOOTY ALBATROSS** *Phoebastria palpebrata* · Uncommon native

80 cm, 2.75 kg. Adult has sooty-brown head, throat and wings; ash-grey back from nape to rump, pale brownish-grey underparts. Bill (105 mm) slender, black with blue line along lower bill; legs and feet pale grey-flesh. Juvenile similar, but brown scalloping on neck and upper back, grey eye-ring and greyish-yellow line along lower bill. **Habitat:** Breeds circumpolar subantarctic; in NZ region, at Antipodes, Auckland and Campbell Is. Ranges widely at sea, and a few reach NZ waters or are beach-wrecked, mainly in winter. **Breeding:** Oct–May.



[Sp 15]



**ALBATROSSES**

14 species, 11 with breeding restricted to the Southern Hemisphere and 3 in the North Pacific.\* In the New Zealand region, 10 species have been recorded including 2 endemic species and 5 other breeding species.

Albatrosses and mollymawks (the common name in New Zealand for smaller albatrosses) are a clearly defined group of very large seabirds belonging to the tube-nosed petrel order (Procellariiformes). Although they are among the largest of all flying birds, albatrosses are noted for their perfection of soaring flight behind boats and among the tempestuous seas of the southern oceans. In strong winds, they wheel effortlessly on very long, narrow and stiffly held wings for hours, but in almost calm conditions they have a flapping flight and more usually rest on the surface until the wind picks up. Their webbed feet are used for swimming and as rudders in flight, especially when coming in to land.

Albatrosses have long bills with a strongly hooked tip and small, raised tubular nostrils on either side near the base. The shape and colour of the bill plates can be useful in

identifying beach-wrecked specimens, but at sea the head colour and pattern of black on the wings is also important to note.

They nest in loose colonies, mainly on uninhabited and often inaccessible islands of the southern oceans. At their breeding grounds they have an elaborate series of displays accompanied by neighs, groans, baahs, wails, croaks, cackles, and bill-snapping and clapping. All species lay 1 white egg, usually in a shallow depression on top of a pedestal ('chimney pot') made of vegetation and mud. Incubation takes 66–83 days. Nestlings are downy and take many months to reach flying age. With this long breeding cycle, some species can nest only every second year if they have bred successfully.

Albatrosses feed mainly on various squids, fish and offal, on or close to the surface. Some species are readily attracted to boats and follow them for hours, occasionally alighting to pick up scraps cast overboard or food disturbed in the wake. Some are especially attracted to fishing boats, and in recent years several species have suffered high mortality from being drowned in trawl nets or after

taking baited fish-hooks on tuna long-lines. Research is under way to develop new methods to reduce seabird by-catch problems. **Reading:** Harrison, P. 1987. *Seabirds of the World: a photographic guide*. London: Christopher Helm. Harrison, P. 1988. *Seabirds: an identification guide*.

London: Christopher Helm. Murphy, R.C. 1936. *Oceanic Birds of South America*. New York: MacMillan. Serventy, D.L. et al. 1971. *The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds*. Sydney: Reed. Warham, J. 1990. *The Petrels: their ecology and breeding systems*. London: Academic Press.

**15. LIGHT-MANTLED SOOTY ALBATROSS**

*Phoebastria palpebrata* Plate 6

**Size:** 80 cm, 2.75 kg

**Distribution:** Circumpolar, breeding on subantarctic islands between 46 and 56°S, including the Antipodes, Auckland and Campbell Islands. The biggest colonies are on South Georgia, the Kerguelen and Auckland Islands. At sea, they range widely in the southern oceans, generally over deep oceanic waters between 40°S and the Antarctic coast, but are occasionally seen in New Zealand coastal waters and are most frequently beach-wrecked in July–October, especially on the Auckland west coast.

**Population:** World population is estimated at 21,500 breeding pairs, of which c. 250 are on the Antipodes, c. 2000 on the Auckland Islands and >1600 pairs on Campbell Island. **Conservation:** Protected native. The size and trends of breeding populations in the New Zealand subantarctic are poorly known, but moderate numbers of birds (6% of seabirds identified in 1988–97) have been caught recently on tuna long-lines in New Zealand waters.

**Breeding:** Biennial breeders; if they raise a chick successfully, they will not attempt to breed the following year; but if they fail (especially in the early part of the nesting cycle), they will breed the following year. On Campbell Island, birds return in early October to the same nesting site on a coastal cliff ledge or a small terrace on a steep slope of an inland peak, but they build a new nest each time. Most eggs are laid over a short period between 24 October and 7 November. They lay 1 white egg (102 x 65 mm, 233 g), with brownish-red speckling at the broader end, in a shallow cup on top of a small pedestal of soil and vegetation. The adults share incubation for c. 67 days in shifts of 12–17 days initially and then shorter shifts as hatching approaches. The parents take 2–4-day shifts brooding the downy chick until it is c. 19 days old. The chick fledges at c. 141 days old in late May to early June. Chicks are independent once they fledge. Young return to their natal colony for several years before starting to breed at an average of 12 years old. Annual survivorship is high and life expectancy is over 30 years.

**Behaviour:** Nest solitarily or rarely in groups of three or four pairs. At sea, they feed alone or sometimes in small flocks and sometimes gather to feed on scraps tossed from fishing boats. At their breeding ground they have an elaborate series of courtship displays accompanied by a distinctive clear two-syllable 'pee-oo', baas and bill-snapping. **Feeding:** Diet has not been studied in New Zealand, but elsewhere in the southern oceans it is mainly squid and krill, also fish and

carrion such as small seabirds. Prey is mainly seized on the surface, but birds occasionally plunge for food from just above the surface.

**Reading:** Bailey A.M. & Sorensen, J.H. 1950. *Subantarctic Campbell Island*. Denver: Denver Mus Nat Hist. Jouventin, P. & Weimerskirch, H. 1990. *Proc 19th Int Orn Congr*. Sorensen, J.H. 1950. *DSIR Cape Exped Series Bull No. 8*. Weimerskirch, H. et al. 1987. *J Anim Ecol* 56: 1043–1056. Weimerskirch, H. et al. 1986. *Ibis* 128: 195–213.