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VU Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri*

2005 IUCN Red List Category (as evaluated by BirdLife International - the official Red List Authority for birds for IUCN): **Vulnerable**

Justification This species is classified as Vulnerable because it is restricted to a very small area when breeding. Population trends are unclear but are assumed stable overall.

Family/Sub-family DIOMEDEIDAE

Species name author Rothschild, 1893

Taxonomic source(s) Brooke (2004), Christidis and Boles (1994), Sibley and Monroe (1990, 1993), Stotz et al. (1996), Turbott (1990)

Synonyms *Diomedea bulleri* Collar et al. (1994), *Diomedea bulleri* Stotz et al. (1996), *Diomedea bulleri* Turbott (1990), *Diomedea bulleri* Sibley and Monroe (1990, 1993), *Diomedea bulleri* Christidis and Boles (1994)

Taxonomic note *Diomedea bulleri* (Sibley and Monroe 1990, 1993) is retained as a species in the genus *Thalassarche* following Brooke (2004) *contra* Robertson and Nunn (1998) who split it into *T. bulleri* and *T. platei*.

Identification 79 cm. Small, grey-headed, white-and-black albatross. Adult, silvery-grey forehead. Grey head, throat. Black around and in front of eye. White crescent behind and below eye. Dark grey back, upperwing, tail. White rump, underparts. White underwing with black tip, broad, sharply-demarcated band at leading edge. Large black bill, yellow on upper, lower ridges, tip. Juvenile, darker brownish-grey head, brownish bill. **Similar spp.** Grey-headed Albatross *T. chrysostoma* has broader, less distinct black leading margin to underwing. Salvin's Albatross *T. salvini* is larger with different underwing pattern.

Population estimate	Population trend	Range estimate (breeding/resident)	Country endemic?
64,000	stable	4 km2	Yes

Range & population
Thalassarche bulleri is endemic **New Zealand**. There are colonies on the Snares (8,877 pairs) and Solander (4,912) Islands in the south **6,10**, Forty-Fours (16,000) and Big and Little Sister (2,130) Islands in the Chatham Island group, and Rosemary Rock, Three Kings Islands (20) off

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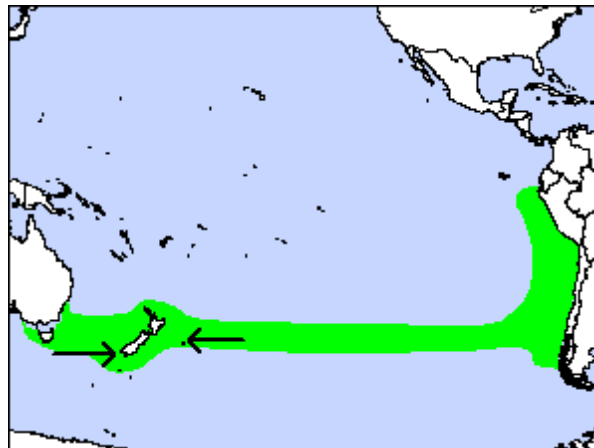

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North Island².

The Snares Islands population has almost doubled since 1969, but the rate of increase has declined in the 1990s^{6,10}. The Solander Islands population appears to have remained relatively stable during 1985-1996, and has increased by around 18% during 1996-2002¹⁰. Breeding and non-breeding adults forage between 40 and 50°S from Tasmania eastwards to the Chatham Rise^{11,12,13,17}. Females from the Snares Islands tend to conduct longer more distant foraging trips during pre-egg and brood guard periods of the breeding cycle, than males¹⁷. Juveniles and non-breeding adults can disperse across the south Pacific Ocean to the west coast of South America^{9,12,14}.



Ecology It breeds in a variety of habitats including grassy meadows, tussock-covered slopes and cliffs, scrub and under forest canopy⁴. It feeds mostly on fish, squid and tunicates, also octopuses and crustacea^{3,15}. Breeding is annual. On Little Sister, annual productivity 1994-1996 was 57-60%, and mean annual adult survival 1974-1995 was 93.5%². On the Snares, annual productivity 1995-98 was 70.8%⁸, and mean annual adult survival increased from 92.0% in 1983-85 to 95.5% in 1992-97⁷.

Threats A severe storm in 1985 almost completely removed soil and vegetation from Sisters and Forty-Fours Islands. Although *T. bulleri* seems unaffected, further habitat degradation could result in population decreases, as has been predicted for Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sanfordi*². It is one of the more common bycatch species in the longline tuna fishery in New Zealand waters, where all birds caught are adults^{1,5}. It is also caught by squid trawlers in low numbers despite the banning of net-sonde cables in 1992¹⁴. Weka *Gallirallus australis* was introduced to Big Solander and may take eggs and chicks¹⁴.

Conservation measures underway CMS Appendix II and ACAP Annex 1. Long-term studies have been initiated in all main populations¹⁴. Most islands are legally protected, but all Chatham colonies are on private land.

Conservation measures proposed Complete an accurate census on Forty-Fours and Big Sister. Census all colonies for 2-4 consecutive years every 10 years, and Little Sister at least every five years. Develop and effectively implement mitigation devices/techniques to minimise fisheries bycatch. Establish observer coverage on fisheries east of the North Island and the Chathams. Eradicate *G. australis* from Big Solander Island. Obtain legal protection for Forty-Fours and Sisters Islands, and continued access for research¹⁴.

References **1.** Bartle (1999). **2.** Croxall and Gales (1998). **3.** James and Stahl (2000). **4.** Marchant and Higgins (1990). **5.** Murray *et al.* (1993). **6.** Sagar *et al.* (1999b). **7.** Sagar *et al.* (2000). **8.** Sagar *et al.* (2002). **9.** Spear *et al.* (2003). **10.** Sagar and Stahl (2005). **11.** Stahl and Sagar (2000a). **12.** Stahl and Sagar (2000b). **13.** Stahl *et al.* (1998). **14.** Taylor (2000). **15.** West and Imber (1986). **16.** Brooke (2004). **17.** BirdLife International (2004).

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