

# Southern Royal Albatross



Agreement on the Conservation  
of Albatrosses and Petrels  
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Artwork by *Steve Erwin*

THE SOUTHERN ROYAL ALBATROSS is one of the six 'great albatrosses' in the genus *Diomedea*, along with the Amsterdam, Antipodean, Northern Royal, Tristan and Wandering Albatrosses. These are the largest of the world's 22 albatross species, with an overall circumpolar distribution in the Southern Ocean, breeding mainly on sub-Antarctic islands. The Southern Royal has a closely related 'sister'

species, the Northern Royal Albatross; both these species are endemic to New Zealand and its associated islands.

The stronghold for the Southern Royal Albatross is Campbell Island south of New Zealand, where an estimated 7600 pairs breed annually.

About 60 pairs breed on Enderby Island, part of the Auckland Island group. The species no longer appears to breed on the main Auckland Island. This represents c. 27 200 mature individuals for this biennial breeder. Information on trends suggests a stable population. As for all the albatrosses a single white egg is laid, with incubation, brooding and chick-feeding duties shared between the sexes. The species circumnavigates the Southern Ocean when not breeding, occurring most regularly in New Zealand and South American waters.

Both royal albatrosses are black and white birds, including in juvenile plumage (unlike juveniles of the other four great albatrosses which are largely chocolate brown). Differences in the amounts and positions of black and white feather tracts distinguish the two species from each other. An identifying (when viewed from close) feature for both royals is the black edging to the upper mandible, contrasting with the otherwise pink bill. Males and females are separated mainly on size. Diet is predominantly squid and fish, obtained by surface seizing.

The Southern Royal Albatross has a global threat category of Vulnerable. Conservation actions required are centred on reducing at-sea mortality caused by longline and trawl fishing vessels in the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans and off the east and west coasts of South America by adopting best-practice mitigation measures (such as deploying bird-scaring lines). Both Enderby and Campbell Islands have had all their introduced mammals removed. They are protected as national nature reserves and form part of a subantarctic World Heritage site declared in 1998. The planned removal of pigs and feral cats from the main Auckland Island may allow birds to return. Tourism is allowed under permit ashore on Campbell and Enderby Islands. It is closely managed and restricted to small day-time guided parties, with a boardwalk to protect vegetation on Campbell Island leading to the breeding albatrosses.

**Sources:**

ACAP 2012. Southern Royal Albatross *Diomedea epomophora*; <https://www.acap.aq/en/acap-species>

BirdLife International 2020. Species factsheet: *Diomedea epomophora*  
<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/southern-royal-albatross-diomedea-epomophora/text>

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 7 March 2020

