

# Westland Petrel



Artwork by **Kitty Harvill** after a photograph by Frank Valckenborgh

THE WESTLAND PETREL is one of five medium-to-large petrels within the genus *Procellaria*, along with the Black, Grey, Spectacled and White-chinned. The species is overall dark brown to black, with black legs and feet. The bill is pale yellow with a black tip. It is similar in appearance to the smaller Black Petrel.

The Westland Petrel is a New Zealand endemic that currently breeds at only one locality: in hills close to the small community of Punakaiki on the west coast of South Island. It previously had a slightly larger known breeding range. The species' population has been estimated as consisting of *around* 3000-5000 annually breeding pairs; including non-breeders the species' adult population



may be up to 14 000 birds. Population trend remains uncertain. At-sea non-breeding range extends to the east coast of Australia (rarely) and to the Pacific coast of South America. Satellite tracking reveals breeding birds tend to forage over the New Zealand continental shelf and slope. Westland Petrels breed colonially in the austral winter, laying their single eggs in burrows dug between tree roots in a dense mixed podocarp forest. Diet includes fish and squid caught by surface seizing and shallow dives. Scavenging on fisheries waste from both longline and trawl vessels also occurs.



The species is at risk to fishing, being occasionally caught on longlines and interacting with trawls when scavenging behind vessels. Land-based threats include introduced mammals (Common Brushtail Possums, rats, feral cats, dogs and goats, and potentially feral pigs) at the breeding locality and nearby street and village lights and power lines downing fledglings which can then fall victim to road traffic. Breeding birds are at risk to severe storms destroying burrows. A 2014 storm damaged half the breeding colonies. The Westland Petrel has a global threat category of Vulnerable and is nationally Naturally Uncommon.

The Westland Petrel breeding site is largely contained within a Specially Protected Area which abuts the Paparoa National Park. Entry, included by guided tourists via a walkway and viewing shelter, is by permit. Traps are set alongside the walkway to catch Stoats and rats. Recent efforts have been made to reduce downing by switching off streetlights during the fledging season with some success. The species is listed within the Albatross and Petrel Agreement (ACAP) and the Convention on Migratory Species on Appendix II. The charity Westland Petrel Conservation Trust works to promote, support and actively engage in the conservation, preservation and protection of the Westland Petrel.

#### **Sources:**

ACAP 2012. [Westland Petrel \*Procellaria westlandica\*](#).  
Bell, E.A. 2013. [Westland petrel](#). In: Miskelly, C.M. (Ed.) *New Zealand Birds Online*.  
BirdLife International 2021. [Species factsheet: \*Procellaria westlandica\*](#).  
Wilson, K.-J. 2021. Featuring ACAP-listed species and their photographers: the Westland Petrel by Kerry-Jayne Wilson. [ACAP Latest News, 16 September 2021](#)

*John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 30 March 2022*