

# Sooty Shearwater

*Puffinus griseus*

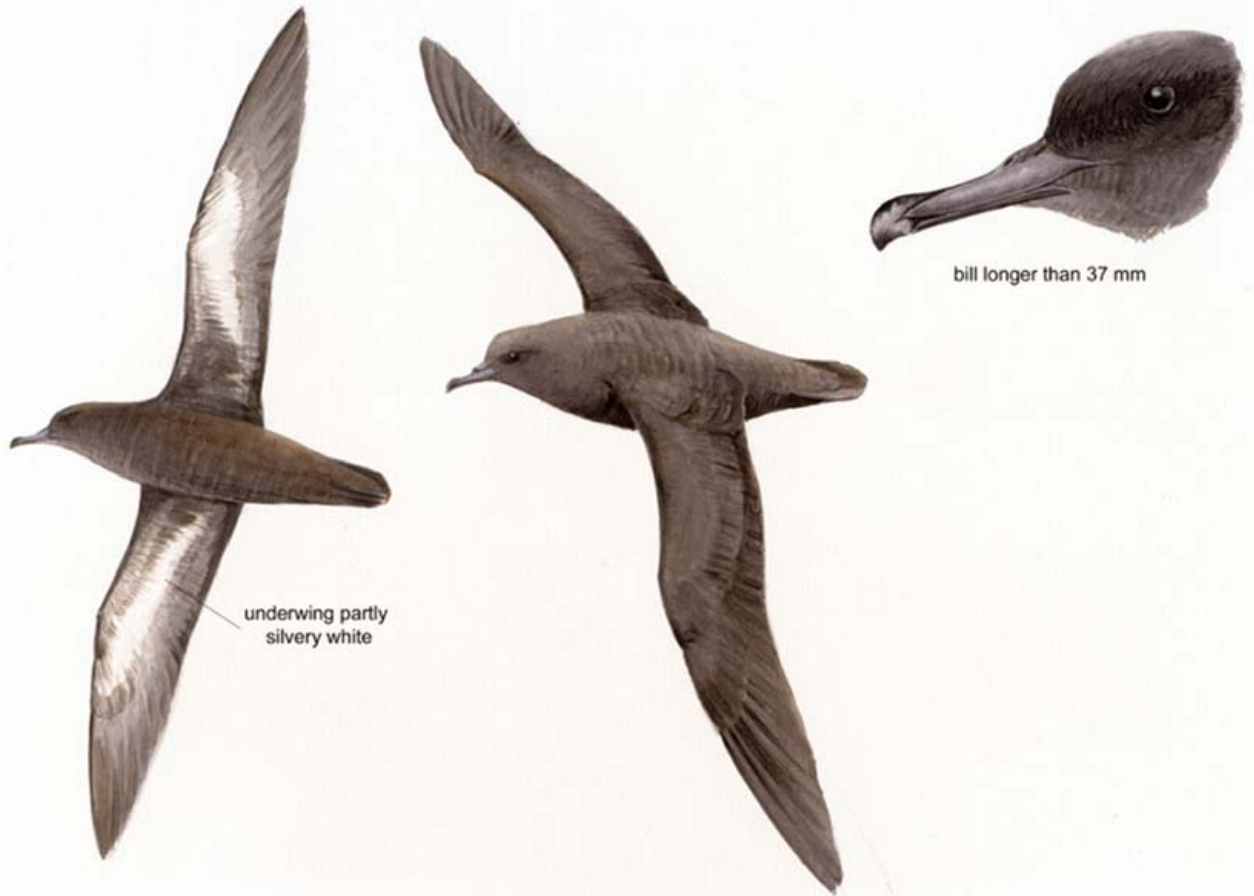


Illustration by Derek Onley

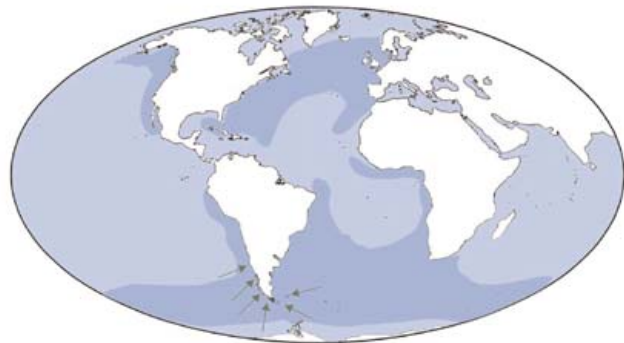
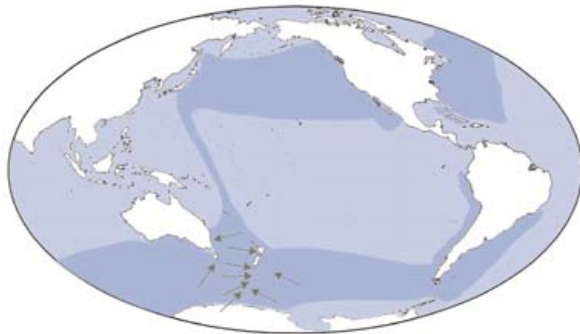
**IUCN THREAT STATUS:** lower risk – least concern

## Identification:

**WINGSPAN:** 105 cm    **LENGTH:** 44 cm    **BILL:** 39 - 46 mm

Medium-sized, blackish-brown shearwater with narrow stiff-looking wings and shortish tail. Underwing partly silvery-white. Fast gliding flight with brief bursts of rapid wingbeats. Slightly larger but very similar to Short-tailed Shearwater, usually distinguishable by white on underwing. Measure bill! Flesh-footed Shearwater (not included here) is broader winged and has a pale dark-tipped bill. See also dark Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Spectacled, Black, White-chinned and Westland Petrels.





## Range and Population :

Main breeding areas – (1) in the New Zealand region, on offshore islands (> 2 million pairs), Snares Islands (2.75 million pairs), Campbell, Auckland (1000 pairs), and Macquarie (1800 pairs) Islands. (2) on islands of S. Chile and Cape Horn (>10,000 pairs), and on the Falkland Islands (10,000+ pairs). A few (3) in Australia – New South Wales (300 pairs) and Tasmania (>1000 pairs)<sup>7,11</sup>. Numbers declining in North Pacific and in the New Zealand area, perhaps by 64% between 1961 and 1999<sup>10,15,17</sup>. Total population estimate: 23 million.

## Ecology:

Breeds annually, November–April. In summer common in seas around New Zealand, south-eastern Australia, and South America from 34–67°S, commonest over shelves. In autumn moves into the Pacific north to 5°S off Ecuador, and into the SE Indian Ocean to 60°E south of Kerguelen (49°S). In winter most migrate to the North Pacific and North Atlantic. On return, common south of 45°S off Argentina and Africa. A few in the Southern Ocean in all months. Follow ships and feeds around trawlers. Frequently dives to depths of 40–67m<sup>19</sup>.

## Threats:

Sooty Shearwaters among the most-frequently killed seabirds in global fisheries. Observed Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean high-seas drift nets in the North Pacific killed an estimated 427,000 ± 312,000 Sooty Shearwaters yearly between 1978 and 1992. The worst-case scenario for this fishery was that up to 1.16 million Sooty Shearwaters were caught annually. More recently, in large-scale coastal gill net fisheries from British Columbia to Alaska, over 63% of seabirds caught were Sooty Shearwaters<sup>8</sup>. Sooty Shearwaters, occasionally in high numbers, are caught in coastal gill nets in New Zealand<sup>6,16</sup>. Few Sooty Shearwaters are caught on tuna longlines in Australian and New Zealand seas<sup>2,3,6,9</sup>, but several thousand are killed in trawl fisheries every year<sup>1,4,5,12,13,14</sup>.

## Conservation:

New Zealand and Australian subantarctic islands are fully protected as World Heritage sites although rat and cat predation remains as a problem on Macquarie. Predation by introduced mammals may be a problem in Chile. In southern New Zealand, Maori harvest about 250,000 young birds for food every year<sup>18</sup>.

**References:** 1. Bartle (1992). 2. Bartle (unpubl. report on fisheries in the NZ EEZ for 1994). 3. Bartle (unpubl. report on fisheries in the NZ EEZ for 1995) 4. Bartle (2000a). 5. Bartle (2000b). 6. Bartle (unpubl. data). 7. Croxall *et al* eds. (1984). 8. De Gange *et al.* (1993). 9. Klaer and Polacheck (1997). 10. Lyver *et al.* (1999). 11. Marchant and Higgins (1990). 12. Robertson (2000). 13. Robertson and Bell (2002a). 14. Robertson and Bell (2002b). 15. Scofield and Christie (2002). 16. Taylor (1992). 17. Veit *et al.* (1996). 18. Warham (1996). 19. Weimerskirch and Sagar (1996).