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AUSTRALIA

Australasian Seabird Group

A Special Interest Group of BirdLife Australia



White-faced Storm-Petrel by Lachlan Hall

ASG e-Bulletin Volume 79, March 2024

Editor's note

Dear readers.

Welcome to our autumn edition of the ASG e-bulletin.

Lots of grants and conference news and as always, a good dose of exciting seabird science as well as tales of the happy and sad in seabird conservation.

We hope you enjoy,

Lorna & Nicholas.

P.S.: We would like to invite you to get in touch should you have a seabird feature story to contribute or anything else you'd like us to share among members.

Email to lorna.deppe@gmail.com or Nicholas.Carlile@environment.nsw.gov.au

Latest News & Announcements



Australasian Seabird Group Student Project Support Grants 2024

The Australasian Seabird Group (ASG) offers *small grants to support projects of current science students or those who have recently (within 3 years) finished post-graduate studies in seabirds*. Students attempting Honours, Masters or PhD projects that contribute to the knowledge or conservation of seabirds in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific will be considered. Preference will be given to applicants who are members of the ASG but those who are members of Ornithological societies can also apply.

Grants will not exceed **AUD 500**. No more than **two Project Support Grants** will be made in any calendar year. Applications should be made to Nicholas Carlile, Secretary of the Australasian Seabird Group under **asg@birdlife.org.au**. Please contact Nicholas for full details of the application process. Grant applications will be assessed by a panel of the ASG Committee. Their decision is final. The **closing date is 30 April 2024**.

2024 NZ Bird Conference – Earlybird registration ends 31 March!

Still time to register for the **2024 New Zealand Bird Conference** and AGM of Birds New Zealand will be **held in Nelson from 1 to 3 June** (King's Birthday Weekend).

Earlybird registration and abstract submission close 31 March!

Find all the necessary links [here](#).



BIRDS
NEW ZEALAND
Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

Conference on Oceania Seabirds

A beautiful initiative coming to fruition, with ASG committee member Chris Gaskin as one of the main driving forces.

Please engage and share widely if you can.

**Dates:** 23-26 September 2024

**Venue:** The Pacific Community (SPC) Conference Centre, Noumea
NEW CALEDONIA

**Co-hosts:** SPC, IRD (Noumea), SPREP & WSU

Rapa Islands survey. Photo: Tahiti Whiten, SPC, Manu

New Caledonia Seabird Project / Photo: Tahiti Whiten, SPC, Manu

2024 Oceania Seabirds

talking, listening and hands-on
« vuure, wârare, mi ngare »



Our Mission

- Connect government policy makers, seabird conservation practitioners and scientists, land managers and communities from all Pacific Island countries and territories working with seabirds.
- To increase our collective understanding of the value of seabirds to Pacific economies and communities including cultural values.
- Highlight conservation and scientific initiatives currently underway or planned, to the benefit of region's seabirds, their islands, and the seas where they occur and to the people of Oceania.

Please register your interest in attending (formal registration will follow) using this QR code:



There you can also take the opportunity to let us know what you would like to get from the symposium - 2024 Oceania Seabirds - and also what you would like to share.

Visit our website in the coming weeks for more information:
www.oceaniaseabirdsymposium.com



Highlights from the AOC in Brisbane 2023

By Nicholas Carlile

Ornithologists, both amateur and professional, gathered on the banks of the Brisbane River in late November 2023 for three days of plenary talks, short presentations, and scientific posters at the 12th Australasian Ornithological Conference.

A section of the Brisbane Conference and Entertainment Centre hosted the largest gathering of bird-minded folk ever brought together for an AOC. Integral to AOCs is the commercial booths and information displays in the main gathering area and this conference had an abundance. However, what makes these conferences so successful is the connections people make and the conference organisers provided ample opportunity for meeting up with colleagues, friends and students alike.

The seabird symposia was held on the second-half of day one, Chaired by Barry Baker. The 13 presentations, curated by Barry and Eric Woehler and provided by researchers from both New Zealand and Australia, covered a wide range of species and subjects. As always, highlights of the session were the work being done by students present, two of which were supported in their attendance by the ASG Kerry-Jayne Wilson Student Travel Award.

The session ended with the biennial meeting of the general members of the ASG and was attended by some 20 conference participants, including ASG founder from 1971, Peter Fullagar.

The conference also featured a number of seabird posters, which were attended by their authors during planned session breaks.

Day two also commenced with Eric Woehler providing a conference plenary on how Tasmania provides a national refuge of shorebirds.

A special shout-out to Monash University student Peter Vaughan, who's presentation on conserving the Vanuatu Petrel was selected as best student talk of the conference.

It was announced that the next AOC will be hosted in Perth in 2025.



2024 ASG Committee Election Results

As part of the biennial process, the special interest group ran elections at the beginning of 2024. The current active committee was elected unopposed, but we have had a few additions.

Two **new Queensland Representatives** have been included in the General Committee. **David Stewart** works in the Threatened Species Research and Monitoring section of Threatened Species Operations with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). He is joined in this representative committee role by **Nick James** who is currently the Project Manager for Reef Health Coordination with the Field Management Strategy Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). The committee's **new Student Representative** is **Peter Vaughan**, who is in the 2nd year of PhD studies at Monash University in Melbourne Victoria. Profiles of the new committee members are below:

David has worked on a number of seabirds species mostly in the northern Great Barrier Reef including Herald petrel, Wedge-tailed Shearwater and Red-tailed tropicbird. He's also volunteered on Little Penguin and Short-tailed Shearwater studies in southern Australia. His main area of research involves threatened species, investigating threatening processes, breeding biology and tracking birds' movements. His next field trip is to Raine Island in the northern Great Barrier Reef, a special place.

Nick is currently in the final year of his PhD investigating Black Noddy and Pacific Reef Egret foraging behaviour focused on populations in the GBRMP. He's used tracking data to estimate resource selection and responses to environmental conditions. He's also consulting on a population monitoring project with the Reef Authority and QPWS for Wedge-tailed shearwaters and Black Noddies on North West Island where they are trialling new methodologies to overcome difficulties and expenses in assessing population status in the GBRMP. These projects have impressed upon Nick the current lack of knowledge we have of the breeding seabird populations (from 22 different species) in this vast marine park that face great challenges such as step changes in their foraging habitat e.g., mass coral bleaching.

Peter completed his undergraduate and honours at the University of Tasmania, studying habitat occupancy in gadfly petrels off south-east Australia. Currently, he is completing a PhD studying the conservation ecology of the Vanuatu Petrel, while also working as an ecological consultant with a focus on marine fauna survey. Peter is particularly fascinated by both gadfly petrels and moult as an important life history stage in seabirds, especially in the context of a rapidly changing marine environment.

Photo: David on Raine Island with the elusive Herald Petrel; Nick taking a bag weight before mass recording of a Black Noddy chick on Heron Island, Queensland; Peter with a Vanuatu petrel chick at their breeding colony on Vanua Lava, Vanuatu.



Seabird Feature Story

[A review of records and research actions for the poorly known Vanuatu Petrel \(*Pterodroma \[cervicalis\] occulta*\)](#)

The ASG's new Student rep Peter Vaughan is sharing a summary of his latest paper - a review of Vanuatu petrel, which he published last month together with an eclectic suite of well-regarded co-authors:

*Gadfly petrels are among the most threatened bird taxa. Conservation interventions have been successfully developed and applied for many gadfly petrels, including recoveries of critically low populations on remote islands such as the Taiko/Magenta Petrel. Despite these successes, a substantial gap exists in conservation science for gadfly petrels in the tropical Pacific Ocean. Even locating breeding grounds is challenging in this region, with very remote islands and hostile conditions making searches for breeding petrels difficult. The Vanuatu Petrel *Pterodroma [cervicalis] occulta* is an ideal exemplar to develop a framework for conservation science in this group of petrels, as while it is subject to many of the challenges facing other petrel taxa in the region, a breeding colony was discovered in 2009. In this paper, we have reviewed over 40 pelagic records of Vanuatu Petrel, and summarised five research expeditions to the colony on the island of Vanua Lava, Vanuatu.*

These records, and the information they contain, provide a baseline from which to recommend conservation research actions for the taxon. The population status, taxonomy, distribution, and threat profile of the Vanuatu Petrel are all poorly known, though key threats such as invasive predators have been documented around the colony. Given these manifest concerns, we recommend these areas are high priorities for future research on Vanuatu Petrels, providing a prioritised list of actions to address these knowledge gaps.

The full open-access paper can be found at:

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959270923000382>

Photo: Vanuatu Petrel by Peter Vaughan.



More Seabird Science

Seabird assemblages are linked to the major western boundary current off eastern Australia

A sweet paper hot off the press by Daudt et al. (incl. our own Eric J. Woehler) presenting replicable methodology to assess possible changes in seabird assemblages and how they are affected by changing environmental conditions.

You can find both online version and pdf [here](#).

Photo credit: Mark Faherty

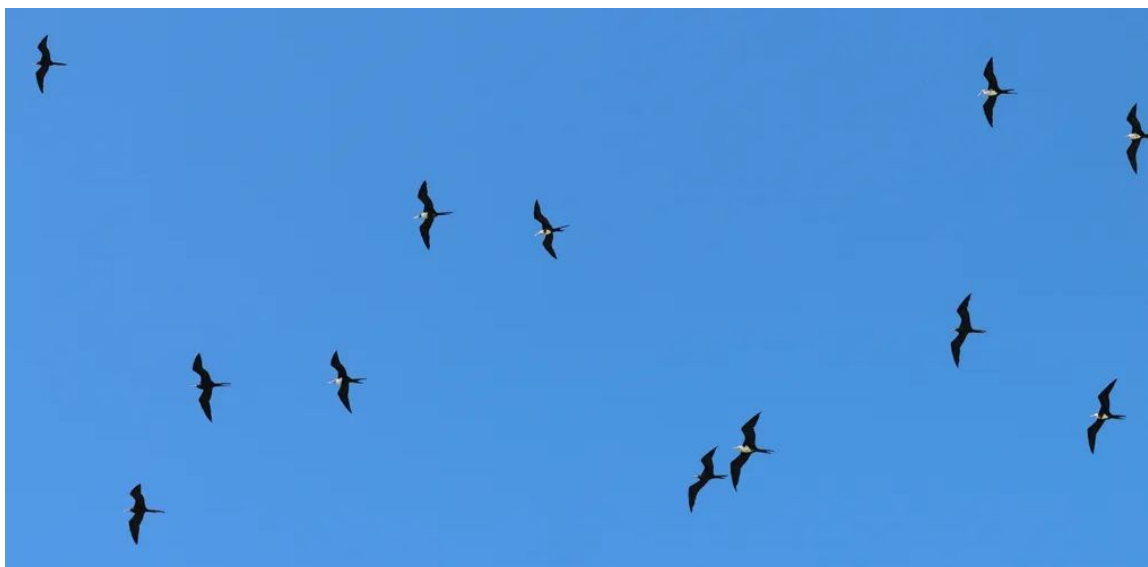


Tracking seabird migration in the tropical Indian Ocean reveals basin-scale conservation need

"Conserving Indian Ocean seabirds necessitates thinking big"

A new study published in *Current Biology* has found that wider migratory patterns of tropical seabirds in the Indian Ocean highlights the need to expand marine protections to the high seas.

You can find an informal write up [here](#) and download the full pdf under this [link](#).



Evaluating risks to seabirds on the urban-coastal interface: Modelling dog attacks on little penguin populations in Tasmania

This new paper quantifies the risks to penguin colonies as a function of colony size, and frequency and extent of dog attacks, and discussing the conservation implications.

Read more [here](#).

Photo: Two dead Little penguins after dog attack (Source: Supplied)



In other news ...

Positive Conservation outcome for WA Penguin Island

ASG committee member Belinda Cannell reports to us on a recent win against proposed development across penguin habitat on Penguin Island, Western Australia:

Penguin Island, Western Australia (WA) is a Class A Biodiversity and Conservation Reserve. It is a 12.5 ha island only 600 m offshore from a rapidly growing urban area. It has been a popular tourist destination since the early 1900s and is home to an array of seabirds including crested, caspian, bridled, fairy, and roseate terns, little shearwaters, pelicans and little penguins. Boardwalks began to be constructed around the island in 1986 to reduce public access, and hence damage, to the vegetation and the nesting sites of the seabirds. In the early 1990s, an education centre was built on the island that housed up to 10 little penguins. This centre assisted in the desire for people to see penguins on this island, given that these secretive birds cannot generally be observed during the day, and night-time visitation to this colony would result in penguins not coming ashore (Cannell pers. obs.).

Unfortunately, this western range-edge colony of little penguins is in peril. Once it had been the largest colony in WA. The population had declined by 80% from 2011-2019, and a recent study aimed at estimating the current population shows further declines. For example, during my previous population estimates on the island, I captured 10s to 100+ penguins on arrival beaches at this colony. But in 2023, I caught 10 penguins or fewer, and sometimes, none at all.

As little penguins are highly faithful to a both their nesting area and their arrival beach, it is unlikely that they have moved to different areas on the island. Rather, this marked population decline is due to a number of reasons, including 1) increasing sea surface temperatures in the foraging range of the penguins which affects prey availability (Cannell et al. 2023); 2) watercraft injuries (Cannell et al. 2016); 3) fewer penguins attempting to breed resulting in reduced recruitment into the colony (Cannell et al. 2023), 4) increased terrestrial temperatures in late spring and summer, resulting in penguins dying from hyperthermia (Cannell et al. 2012; Cannell et al. 2016); and 5) anthropogenic disturbance and modification of penguin nesting and arrival areas on the island (Cannell and Clitheroe in draft).

To this end, both Erin Clitheroe and I, the two penguin experts in WA, were very concerned about certain aspects of a proposed new interpretive centre on Penguin Island. Critically, there were plans for a boardwalk to be built over an area of vegetation that is potentially high-quality nesting habitat and is also used by penguins to escape the heat of their summer catastrophic moult (Fig. 1). However, surveys in the area had not been conducted, despite repeated recommendations to do so prior to planning any infrastructure developments on the island. Furthermore, the proposed location of the boardwalk was of significant concern as it was to be located adjacent to, and within a few metres, of a critically important arrival site on Penguin Island. As such, this could have significant access implications for arriving/ departing penguins.

We had repeatedly cautioned Western Australia's Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), which manages Penguin Island, about the potential impacts of this boardwalk, which we felt was too risky and unnecessary. But it seemed to fall on deaf ears, and so ASG lobbied both State and local government about the potential impacts of the proposed development on the little penguins, a listed marine species. Given the drastic decline in the penguin population, the loss of every nest site and breeding attempt, and potential mortality of overheated moulting penguins, would have major ramifications for the longevity of this important colony.

I am pleased to share that our concerns have been listened to and Western Australia's DBCA will not be proceeding with the construction of the boardwalk across the high-quality vegetation. Importantly, maintaining the current boardwalk alignment has minimal effect on visitor experience but will significantly contribute to the preservation and well-being of the penguin population.

References:

Cannell BL, Campbell K, Fitzgerald L, Lewis JA, Baran IJ, Stephens NS. Anthropogenic trauma is the most prevalent cause of mortality in Little Penguins, *Eudyptula minor*, in Perth, Western Australia. (2016) *Emu-Austral Ornithology*. 116(1):52-61.

Cannell BL, Kendall WL, Tyne JA, Bunce M, Hetzel Y, Murray D, Radford B. (2023) Marine heatwaves affect breeding, diet and population size but not body condition of a range-edge little penguin colony. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3354/meps14425>

Photo: Conceptual design for the new interpretive centre (light green), and new boardwalks (dark grey). The new boardwalk of concern has been highlighted in the red circle.



Fire-proof plants for future-proof penguins

Fire-retardant native plants will be used to protect Phillip Island's little penguins from increasing fire hazards in a changing climate.

Read the full story [here](#).

Photo: Little penguins breed during Victoria's fire season, and have been known to stay with their eggs even as flames surround them. (ABC News: Danielle Bonica).



Australia's offshore wind areas

OWF's, or Offshore Windfarms are coming into our waters with a force, and the associated planning as well as regulation processes have kept several of our committee members rather busy and on their toes, bringing in their expertise to ensure marine wildlife, and of course seabirds in particular, are considered.

After announcing a series of offshore wind projects across Australia and New Zealand, Blue Float Energy and Energy Estate are proposing another offshore wind farm project in an undisclosed location along the South East coast of South Australia.

A number of sites across the country have been designated as offshore wind zones paving the way for private enterprise to propose new projects.

You can find more information about it [here](#) as well as find the latest news on Australia's offshore wind area developments und the following [link](#).

Photo: Supplied (Nexsphere)



New Research mapping Seabird Migration Routes Identifies Six Major Bird 'Super Highways'

BirdLife International once more made good use of their Seabird Tracking Database, hosting more than 30 million locations recorded from 160 seabird species and contributions from more than 275 seabird researchers, in a collaborative research project identifying six brand new migration routes called 'Ocean Flyways', resulting from mapping the journeys of more than 1,000 seabirds.

This new research highlights that international collaboration is paramount to protect our oceans and meet global commitments of protecting 30% of marine areas by 2030.

Read more about it [here](https://www.seabirdtracking.org/special/marine-flyways/).

The map shown can be found under

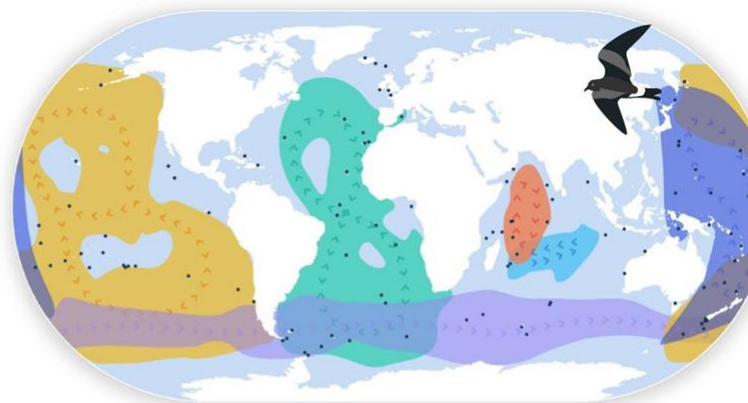
<https://www.seabirdtracking.org/special/marine-flyways/>

MARINE FLYWAYS

Marine flyways are the major routes migratory seabirds regularly use to travel between their breeding and non-breeding areas.

THE 6 MARINE FLYWAYS:

-  Atlantic Ocean Flyway
-  North Indian Ocean Flyway
-  East Indian Ocean Flyway
-  West Pacific Ocean Flyway
-  Pacific Ocean Flyway
-  Southern Ocean Flyway
- * Major Seabird Breeding Colonies



TARA - Diet and population survey, a photographic competition

Sponsored by the Birds NZ Research Fund, Nikon NZ, Photo & Video International, the Northern NZ Seabird Trust instigated a photographic citizen science research project to look into the diet of Tara / White-Fronted tern (*Sterna striata*) which was run across the 2022-2023 breeding season.

You can find more about the details of the competition under this [link](#). The final report about the project results you can find [here](#).

Foto: Overall winning shot - Axel Mertens, Shelly Beach, Kaipara Harbour



New Zealand's rarest bird is thriving

The tara iti/New Zealand fairy tern – NZ's most endangered bird with fewer than 40 remaining – has celebrated a record-breaking summer breeding season, thanks to favourable weather conditions and advancements in management practices.

You can read the latest DOC report [here](#).

Foto: Fairy tern / Tara iti. Two non-breeding adults. Manukapua, Kaipara Harbour, July 2021, by Darren Markin.



H5N1 at South Georgia

"First penguins die in the sub-Antarctic of deadly H5N1 bird flu strain", reports The Guardian. Read more on this [here](#).

Photo: Gentoo penguins by Barend (Barry) Becker.

Eulogy for Kerry-Jayne Wilson

Just about 2 weeks out from KJW's birthday, we would love to share with you a beautiful video eulogy created by Thomas Mattern from the Tawaki Project, presented on the first day of the 11th International Penguin Conference in Viña del Mar, Chile, on the 5th of September 2023, to remember the great Kerry-Jayne Wilson.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rZeAW2DuHQ&ab_channel=TawakiProject

KERRY-JAYNE WILSON

6 March 1949 – 29 March 2022



Project 'Sea Swallow'

In case you were unaware of the UK Royal Naval Birdwatching Society's near-annual reports on seabird observations (70 reports in 75 years), have a wee forage at

<https://www.rnbws.org.uk/sea-swallow>

for interesting projects and stories. The organisation, and as such their stories, have a fairly global reach through a variety of collaborations done over the years. Hence, even if you are just interested in Southern Hemisphere stuff, you will find your bit in there :)



HANZAB - Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds

HANZAB's online presence has been officially launched at the Australian Ornithological Conference in Brisbane on the 27-30 November 2023.

You can now view the original texts from the HANZAB publications via this [platform](#). While a login is required, access is free. The login will be the same as the one you use for other BirdLife platforms (e.g. Birdata).

Seabird Art

Where Art meets Science

Working with cartoon artist extraordinaire [Giselle Clarkson](#), Edin Whitehead (text) and Stephanie Tibble (Te Reo translations) the Northern NZ Seabird Trust has produced a set of eight bilingual posters on the Threats to Seabirds (of which one is shown below). These are being distributed to educational providers to help working seabirds into their programmes.

All eight posters are available in English and Te Reo Māori at the [Hauraki Gulf Forum](#).

Please also take time to check out Giselle's [website](#) which holds an eclectic array of fantastic artwork for you to enjoy and share. (Teaser: There is one on [penguins](#)! ;D)



Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

birdlife.org.au

Add your voice

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