

Sooty Shearwater

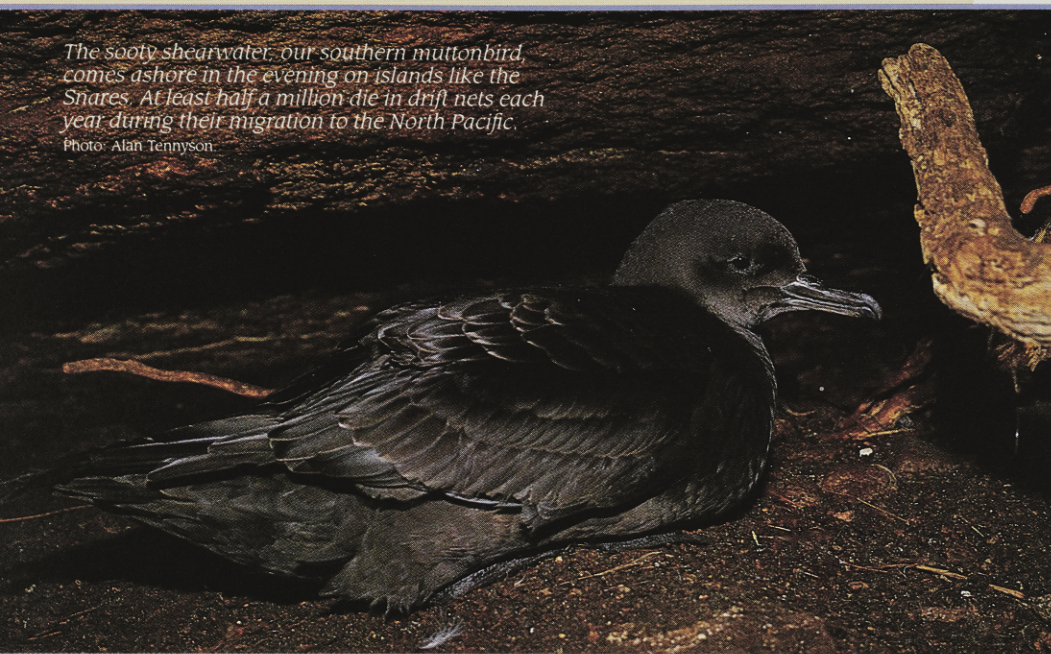
No-one knows how many sooty shearwaters breed in New Zealand waters, but there are probably tens of millions of birds in the population. They are likely to be the most common seabird in the world. Knowing this, it is not difficult to see why the species dominates the birdlife in parts of the North Pacific when the entire population migrates there in the southern winter.

Its sheer numbers and its habit of diving for food explain why more sooty shearwaters

than any other species are killed by the North Pacific drift nets. The total annual mortality in these nets, which is in the high hundreds of thousands, is estimated to be 1 – 5 percent of the total population. The sizes of most sooty shearwater populations have never been surveyed and our best hope of determining population changes may be from the memories of muttonbirders who annually harvest the shearwater's young on some islands around Stewart Island.

The sooty shearwater, our southern muttonbird, comes ashore in the evening on islands like the Snares. At least half a million die in drift nets each year during their migration to the North Pacific.

Photo: Alan Tennyson



kill. He points out that birds drown when they grab baits as the longlines are passed into the water and sink. The longer baits remain on the surface, the higher the risk of catching birds. The measures suggested by Brothers reduce the amount of time the baits are accessible to birds.

He suggests:

- Skippers should place a pole at the rear of

the boat. To this a line 150m long with several streamers is attached. The streamers dangle above the area where baits are thrown and frighten birds away. In tests, Brothers found that this method can reduce the number of baits taken by birds by up to 69 percent.

- Baits could be made to sink faster by increasing the weight on the lines. This

method has been used to lessen longline bird kills in the Indian Ocean.

- Fishers should ensure baits are properly thawed as they then sink faster.
- Baits should be thrown further from the ship when the line is being set. This way they sink faster, away from the turbulence of the ship's wake.
- Offal or rubbish which attracts birds should not be thrown overboard.
- Longlines should be set at night as seabirds mainly feed by day.

Such measures make sense: it has been estimated that losing bait to birds costs the bluefin tuna industry \$7.2 million a year. Japanese longliners off Australia have already taken steps to reduce bait loss to birds.

Acknowledgements

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Key References

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Save the Seabirds

FOREST AND BIRD believes the seabird mortality rate in the world's oceans is totally unacceptable. In order to safeguard the survival of these magnificent birds, we are calling for:

- Protection of seabirds to be extended from the 12-mile to the 200-mile economic zone. Marine mammals and turtles are already protected within the 200-mile zone.
- Compulsory reporting to the Department of Conservation of seabird by-catch in commercial fisheries and an increase in the number of Government observers onboard boats. At present many more birds are being caught than are being reported.
- The Department of Conservation to set up regular population monitoring programs for all seabird species on land and at sea.
- A marine mammal sanctuary around

the Auckland Islands, for the protection of the threatened Hooker's sealion. The 60-nautical mile trawler exclusion zone Forest and Bird is seeking would give some protection to seabirds within the area as well.

- An end to drift net fishing worldwide.
- An end to set netting around New Zealand coasts, except for flounder and yellow-eyed mullet, where fishers are attending their nets.
- Longline fishers to institute the changes outlined in this article to reduce seabird mortalities.
- The Minister of Fisheries, when setting fish quotas, to take into account the secondary effects of fishing, such as the effect on birds' food supplies.
- Fish quotas to be set at sustainable levels.



Squid baits are prepared onboard a Japanese longline boat. Photo: Nigel Brothers.