NORTHERN GIANT-PETREL | *Macronectes halli*

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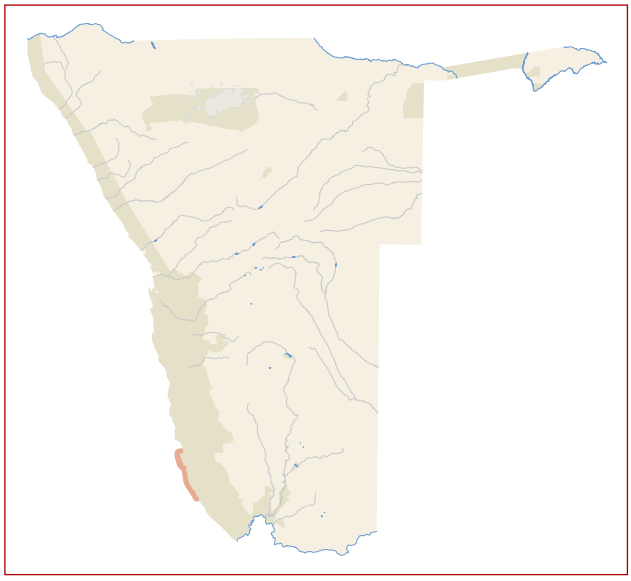
Conservation Status:	Near Threatened
Southern African Range:	Waters off Namibia, South Africa, southern Mozambique
Area of Occupancy:	Unknown
Population Estimate:	Unknown
Population Trend:	Increasing
Habitat:	Open oceanic waters, coastal waters associated with fur seal colonies
Threats:	Longline and trawl fisheries

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The Northern Giant-Petrel is widely dispersed over the southern oceans, generally north of the Antarctic Convergence. It breeds at the South Georgia, Prince Edward, Crozet and Kerguelen island groups, Maquarie Island and at several archipelagos off New Zealand (ACAP 2010). Its world population has apparently increased from about 8,600 pairs in the 1980s (Hunter 1985), to 11,500 pairs in the late 1990s (Patterson *et al.* 2008) although this perceived increase may, at least in part, be the result of better monitoring (IUCN 2012a). Reliable assessments of population trends at many breeding sites are hampered by inaccurate or scant census data (Patterson *et al.* 2008, ACAP 2010). Although numbers of Northern Giant-Petrels have decreased at some sites, they have increased at others (ACAP 2010), possibly because of a greater availability of carrion from expanding populations of fur seals *Arctocephalus gazella* and *A. tropicalis* (González-Solís *et al.* 2000, Bester *et al.* 2003) and increased waste from commercial fishing operations (Patterson *et al.* 2008).

Giant-petrels, including the closely related and difficult to distinguish Southern Giant-Petrels *M. giganteus*, are uncommon in Namibian waters (Summerhayes *et al.* 1974, Ryan 2005c); only about 900 giant-petrels are thought to frequent Namibian waters during summer and 1,800 during winter (Crawford *et al.* 1991). Although the species is



generally associated with the open ocean, Boyer & Boyer (2005) only sighted one giant-petrel between 1989 and 2003 during surveys that were restricted to open oceanic waters. However, giant-petrels also occur inshore along Namibia's coast, particularly around Cape Fur Seal *A. pusillus pusillus* colonies south of Lüderitz (Voisin *et al*. 1977, Shaughnessy & Voisin 1991, J-P Roux pers. comm.).

ECOLOGY

This long-lived species exhibits deferred maturity, a low reproductive output and strong fidelity to its mate and breeding island (Hamer *et al*. 2002). Hybridisation with Southern Giant-Petrels has been reported from several breeding sites (Burger 1978, Johnstone 1978, Hunter 1981). Although less migratory than the Southern Giant-Petrel, juveniles disperse widely, while adults generally remain closer to the breeding colonies (Trebilco *et al*. 2008). Of 24 birds ringed near Lüderitz (Voisin *et al.* 1977), two have been recovered from as far away as New Zealand and Crozet Island (AJ Williams pers. comm.). It scavenges on whale, seal and bird carcasses and predates birds, squid, fish and crustaceans (Hunter 1983, Hunter & Brooke 1992). Males and females exhibit clearly defined spatial segregation in their foraging ranges, with females feeding mostly at sea, while the larger males feed predominantly on land (González-Solís *et al.* 2000). Giant-petrels readily join mixed flocks with albatrosses and other smaller procellarids to scavenge behind fishing vessels, which may provide increased prey availability for this species.

THREATS

The Northern Giant-Petrel is mostly at risk from mortality through longline fishing for Patagonian Toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides* in the southern oceans (ACAP 2010). Globally, 2,000 to 4,000 giant-petrels were estimated to have been killed by illegal or unregulated fishing in the Indian Ocean section of the southern ocean in 1997 and 1998 (CCAMLR 1997, 1998); up to 16% of the breeding population of the Prince Edward islands may have been killed by longline operations around the islands between 1996 and 2000 (Nel *et al*. 2002). Giant-petrels are also injured or killed through collisions with trawl warps (the steel cables that tow nets) associated with trawling activities (Watkins *et al*. 2008). The number of mortalities from fishing activities in Namibian waters is unknown, but as relatively few giant-petrels occur in Namibian waters, these are probably less of a threat than to other threatened oceanic bird species. However, given this species' complex life history, even a few extra mortalities may be significant.

As Northern Giant-Petrels frequently scavenge near seal colonies (Voisin *et al*. 1977, Shaughnessy & Voisin 1991, J-P Roux pers. comm.), the increase in the number of seal colonies along Namibia's coast in the last 40 years (Kirkman *et al.* 2012) may have been beneficial to giant-petrels. Similarly, these petrels have probably also benefited from the increase in fishing activities in Namibian waters during the past half-century.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Given the small numbers, the large number of threats to modern-day seabirds and the lack of data on the status of the Northern Giant-Petrel in Namibian waters, we follow the South African classification of *Near Threatened* (Taylor *et al*. in press). It is listed in Appendix II of the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and in Annex 1 of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). Revised or new Namibian Parks and Wildlife legislation should afford it *Specially Protected* status.

ACTIONS

Although giant-petrels may be less impacted by longline and trawl fisheries in Namibian waters than elsewhere, due to their relative scarcity here, the ratification and enforcement of regulations that pertain to the implementation of mandatory mitigation measures, may result in fewer bycatch-related mortalities in Namibian waters. These measures are the same as those for the threatened albatrosses that occur off Namibia.

A number of Namibia-registered vessels may operate in the southern oceans, targeting Patagonian Toothfish, and if so Namibia, as a signatory to the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), has an obligation to ensure that international agreements under CCAMLR are fully implemented.