TRISTAN ALBATROSS | *Diomedea dabbenena*

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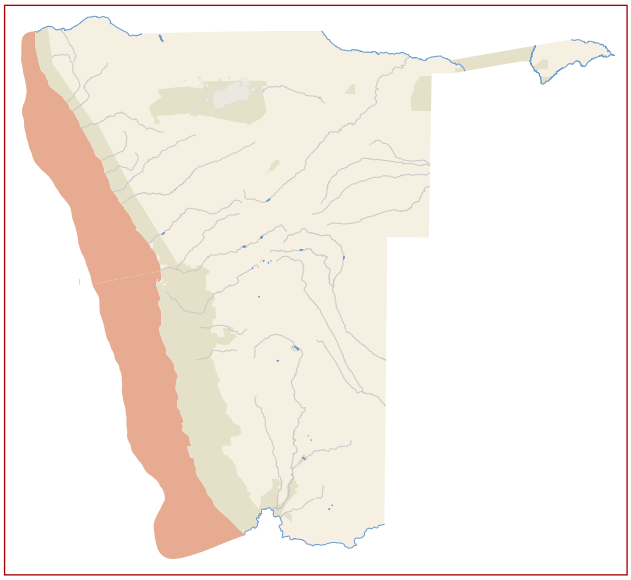
Conservation Status:	Critically Endangered
Southern African Range:	Waters off Namibia, South Africa
Area of Occupancy:	Unknown
Population Estimate:	1,700 breeding pairs, 11,000 individuals globally
Population Trend:	Declining
Habitat:	Open ocean
Threats:	Longline fisheries, poor breeding success (introduced mice), marine debris



DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The Tristan Albatross is the rarest of the four species into which the Wandering Albatross complex was split following a taxonomic revision (Cuthbert *et al.* 2003a, Burg & Croxall 2004). Virtually its entire breeding population of about 1,700 pairs occurs on Gough Island; only one to two pairs breed on Inaccessible Island in the Tristan da Cunha archipelago (Ryan *et al.* 2001, ACAP 2009c). Its global population was estimated at 11,000 individuals in 2006 (Wanless 2007); given the current rate of decrease of about 3% per year (Wanless *et al.* 2009, Cuthbert *et al.* 2014), this has likely decreased to fewer than 9,000 birds by 2014.

Satellite tracking data suggest that it is uncommon in Namibian waters and that it is more numerous on the shelf edge than in inshore waters (BirdLife International 2010), and more likely in waters off northern Namibia during winter (Reid *et al.* 2013). In August 2008, two individuals, including one that had been ringed at Gough Island, were seen from fishing vessels between 180 to 200 nautical miles offshore (J Paterson pers. comm.); another ringed individual was killed accidentally by a pelagic longline vessel in November 2007 (Albatross Task Force 2008). One live juvenile individual was found at Cape Cross in January 2009, but subsequently died (Thomson 2009). Two of 14 breeding birds from Gough Island that had been successfully tracked during the non-breeding season with geolocator loggers spent about four months in

waters off northern Namibia between March and June 2005 (Reid *et al*. 2013).

ECOLOGY

The Tristan Albatross nests in loose colonies and usually breeds biennially if successful in raising a chick. One egg is laid in January and hatches in March. The chick fledges in November to December. This long-lived (Ryan *et al*. 2001) species starts to breed at a younger age than the Wandering Albatross *D. exulans*, on average at nine years old, but may breed from as young as six years old (Ryan 2000, 2005).

Breeding birds forage in the southern Atlantic Ocean; non-breeding birds may disperse to the eastern coast of South America and south-western Australia, and as far north as Angola (Reid *et al*. 2013). They surface-feed during the day and at night. Although its diet has not been studied in detail, the Tristan Albatross probably primarily feeds on cephalopods, as well as on fish and crustaceans like other members of the genus *Diomedea,* and is known to follow fishing vessels for fisheries discards (ACAP 2009c).

THREATS

The population decline of the species is attributed to poor adult survival rates that are due mainly to mortalities as incidental bycatch during fishing activities, as well as high chick mortality due to introduced mice (Ryan 2005b, ACAP 2009c, Wanless *et al*. 2009). Fully-grown birds are mainly killed by longline fisheries in international waters, off Brazil and in southern Africa (Petersen *et al*. 2008a).

Due to the comparatively small number of Tristan Albatrosses likely to forage in waters off Namibia, bycatch mortality in Namibian waters is probably limited. However, even the death of a few breeding adults of a species with a complex life history and with an extremely small number of breeding pairs, such as the Tristan Albatross, can have a negative impact on the population. Apart from directly affecting survival rates, this threat also influences other aspects of population dynamics, for example decreased breeding success and disruption of pair bonds following the death of a partner (Mills & Ryan 2005).

Breeding success is poor because of exceptionally high mortality of chicks due to predation at Gough Island by introduced house mice *Mus musculus*, with an average of only one third of annual breeding attempts producing a fledgling; in 2014 less than 10% of attempts were successful (Cuthbert *et al*. 2004, Wanless 2007, PG Ryan pers. comm.).

CONSERVATION STATUS

The Tristan Albatross is listed as globally *Critically Endangered*, based on its restricted breeding range and an extremely rapid decline in numbers in the last 70 years (IUCN 2012a). For this reason, it is also classified as *Critically Endangered* in Namibia as well as in South Africa (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 Parks and Wildlife legislation should afford it *Specially Protected* status in Namibia.

ACTIONS

Actions required for this species are essentially the same as those listed for other threatened albatrosses. This includes the continued collection of reliable statistics on the extent of fisheries-induced mortalities in Namibian waters. The Tristan Albatross is easily confused with the similar but slightly larger Wandering Albatross, and records therefore need to be carefully vetted. The draft National Plan of Action (NPOA) for seabirds needs to be ratified by the Namibian government and its mitigation recommendations to reduce bycatch by fishing activities urgently need to be implemented and enforced. Apart from all vessels carrying adequately trained observers, the following key mitigation measures, as outlined in the draft NPOA, need to be implemented:

- Setting of lines after nautical dusk and before nautical dawn.
- Reduction of deck-lighting.
- The use of bird-scaring lines with fluttering streamers (tori lines) next to the baited longline or trawl warps (the steel cables that tow nets).
- Ensuring a fast sink rate for the baited hooks using appropriate and adequate weights and completely thawed bait.
- Discarding offal without posing an additional bycatch risk.
- Using a deck-delivery system (where feasible) that introduces the baited line directly into the ocean without exposure to foraging birds.
- Prevent baited hooks from floating to the surface by thawing bait completely.

The area outside territorial waters off Namibia, where Tristan Albatrosses are perhaps more likely to interact with fisheries, is covered by international agreements with the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) and the South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (SEAFO), but concrete seabird bycatch mitigation guidelines and legislation for these agreements are lacking.