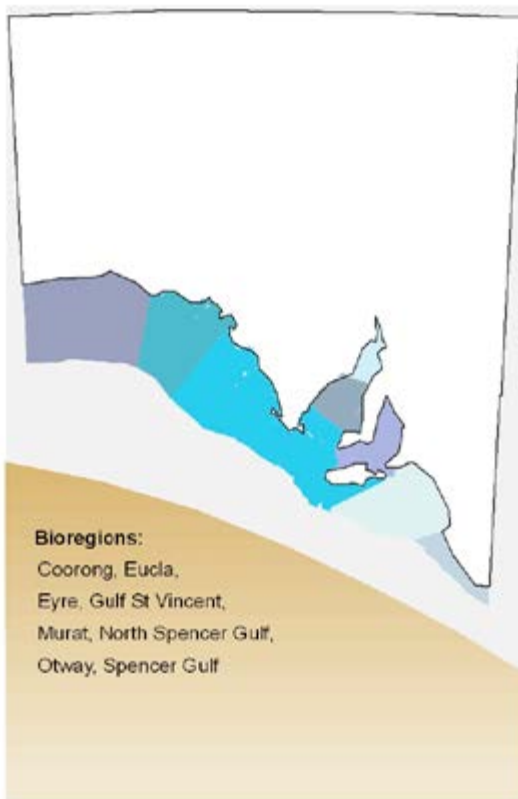


Short-tailed Shearwater

Puffinus tenuirostris



Map courtesy of Mapping Unit, Customer and Commercial Services.

Map is not intended to indicate spatial distribution of the species, only the bioregions in which the species is found.

Short-tailed Shearwater are migratory ocean birds. They usually have a lifespan of 15–19 years, but can live up to 38 years. Each year they travel around 15,000 kilometres to the Arctic and then return to South Australia during summer. Large colonies of these birds rest on the sea in the late afternoon, and this is referred to as ‘rafting’.

Diet

These birds feed on krill, small fish and other marine creatures. Food is usually caught on the surface of the water but Short-tailed Shearwaters sometimes dive down up to 12 metres to feed among the weed on the sea-bottom.

Breeding

Short-tailed Shearwaters mate and lay their eggs in burrows which are usually around one metre long. When they return to their breeding grounds in late September they usually reunite with the same partner of previous years and occupy their previous burrow or one nearby. The burrow is prepared during nightly visits and the couple is very noisy, possibly to announce that the burrow is occupied. Short-tailed Shearwaters rarely breed until they are five years old and it may take them longer than this to find a mate. They lay one egg from late November each year. All females in all the different colonies lay their eggs within the same 12 day period. The male and female take turns incubating the egg for around 53 days until it hatches. To feed their chicks they have been known to fly to Antarctica and back to collect good food. This means flying 1000km a day for four days at a time.

Habitat

Short-tailed Shearwaters migrate north in April each year to the Arctic region, where they spend the northern hemisphere summer. They travel in flocks, and return to southern Australia to breed on islands and promontories off the Australian coast.

Threats

Past hunting and egg collection has lessened the numbers of this species. Grazing stock have destroyed whole colonies in some places by trampling chicks and destroying burrows. Soil erosion after fire can make sites unsuitable for burrowing. Gillnet fisheries accidentally drown large numbers every year as they become entangled in the nests. Natural mortality of juveniles during migration due to exhaustion and starvation, and predation by feral cats, are other threats to this bird.



When sheep fly? Short-tailed Shearwaters are commonly referred to as mutton birds. They were once a common food source for early settlers. When a Naval officer referred to them as “flying sheep” the name stuck.

Conservation

You can help the Short-tailed Shearwater by:

- finding out more about the areas where these and other migratory birds breed and how important their conservation is. Then give a presentation to your class about it
- not disturbing nesting birds if you see them
- checking out a map to see how far these birds migrate each year. It's pretty amazing!

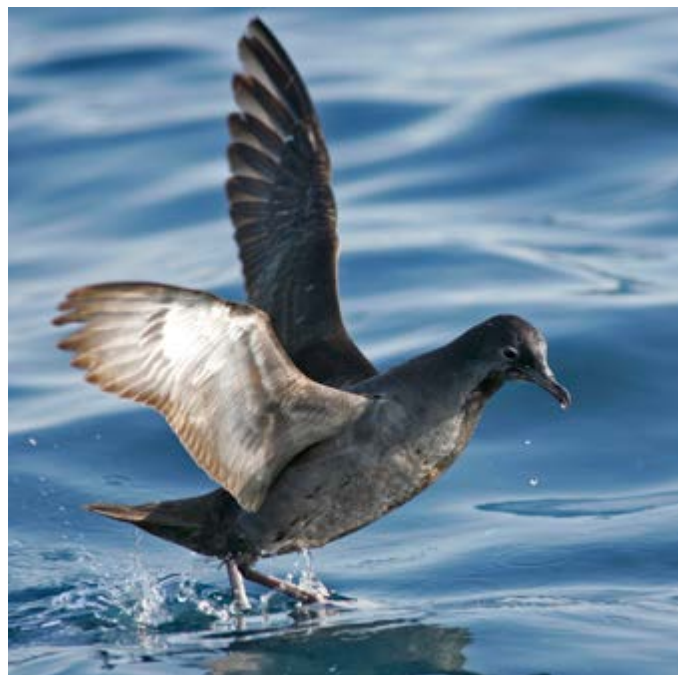


Photo by Paul Wainwright

Short-tailed Shearwater



Photo by David Paul Wainwright

Short-tailed Shearwater

For further information

Public enquiries

For more local information on any of the species in this resource please contact your nearest Natural Resource Centre office on:

Eastwood: (08) 8273 9100

Gawler: (08) 8523 7700

Lobethal: (08) 8389 5900

Willunga: (08) 8550 3400

Education enquiries

For teachers wanting more information about environmental education resources and opportunities please contact the relevant NRM Education sub regional team on:

Northern Adelaide: (08) 8406 8289

Barossa: (08) 8563 8436

Central Adelaide: (08) 8234 7255

Southern Adelaide: (08) 8384 0176

Southern Fleurieu: (08) 8551 0524

