

Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*)**Description**

Large, blackish-brown bird to 46cm. Bill heavy and straw-coloured with a dark tip, feet flesh-coloured; eyes brown.

Conservation Status

Listed as Vulnerable under the NSW TSC Act 1995.

Listed Migratory species under the Commonwealth EPBC Act.

Distribution

Widely distributed throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with many breeding localities. Lord Howe Island is the only breeding locality in eastern Australia.

On Lord Howe Island, the main breeding colony spreads from Ned's Beach to Clear Place on sandy soils. There are smaller colonies below Transit Hill and at Old Settlement beach (Harden 1993).

Ecology

Breeding: Spring – summer, arriving in September and departing in May. Disperse to the north Pacific Ocean during the remainder of the year. Lays one white egg. Adults share nest building, incubation and care of young. Incubation 57 days, fledging c. 85 days. Forms offshore rafts at dusk.

Nest: In a chamber at the end of a burrow, 1 to 2 metres long.

Diet: Squid, fish and crustaceans.

Foraging Behaviour: Feeds mainly from surface, but dives occasionally, observed retrieving scraps at 2 m depth and following baited hooks to 5-6 m (Hutton pers obs).

Population Data/Health

Population estimated at 10 000 – 100 000 pairs (Hutton 1990).

Habitat

Marine, pelagic, mainly in subtropical waters. Feeds at sea during the day returning to nesting colonies at dusk.

Nesting colonies on Lord Howe Island restricted to lowland areas with a deep sandy soil profile. Burrows tend to be excavated in heavily vegetated areas where tree roots assist in maintaining burrow profiles. Nesting colonies occur in open paddocks grazed by cattle (e.g. Big Muttonbird Ground) however excavation and maintenance of burrows in this environment is more difficult for the birds.

Threats

- Increased mortality rates due to the ingestion of floating plastic while foraging.
- By-catch of long-line fishing.
- Development in the settlement area encroaching on Flesh-footed Shearwater nesting habitat.
- Increased mortality rates due to road kills.
- Increased mortality rates due to killing of “problem” birds (e.g. birds burrowing under homes etc.) by residents.
- Increased mortality rates due predation on birds by domestic dogs (Harden 1993).

Impacts Upon Other Species

Not known.

References

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Photo: Ian Hutton

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