

Tristan Albatross

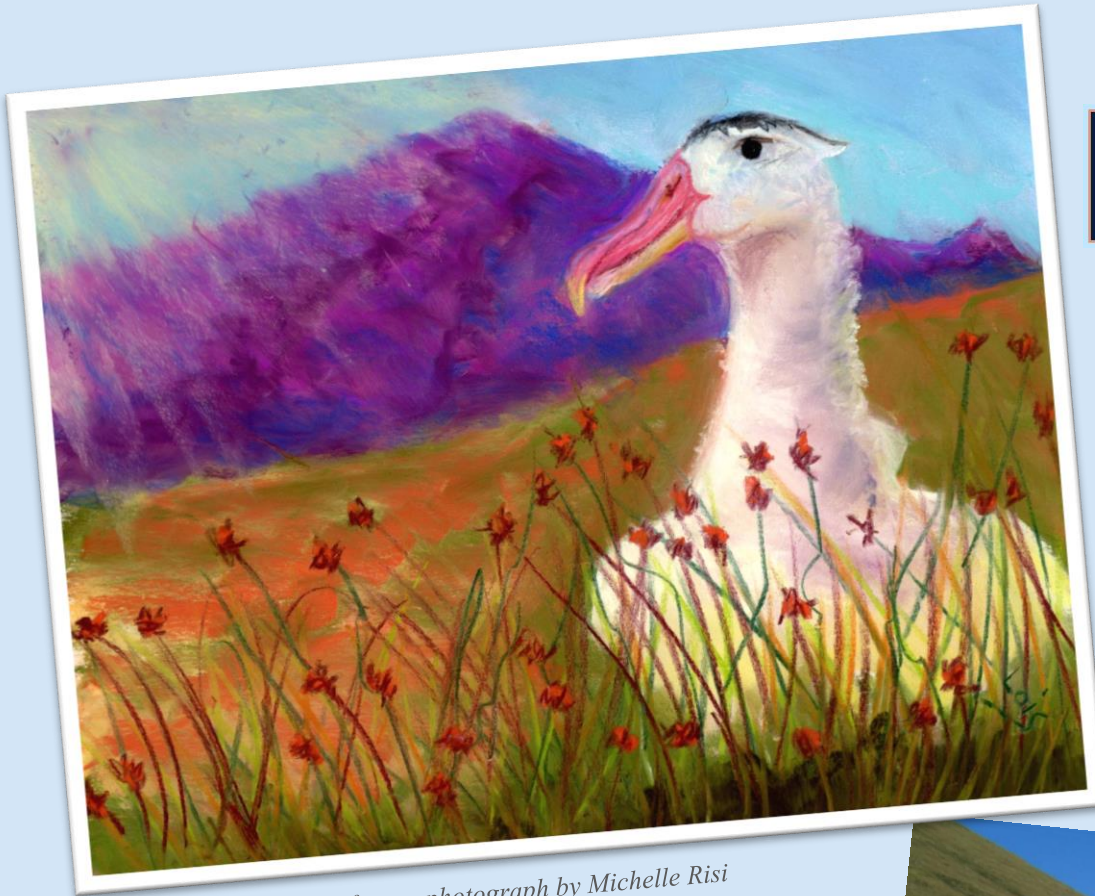


Agreement on the Conservation
of Albatrosses and Petrels

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Artwork by **Lois Davis** from a photograph by Michelle Risi

The TRISTAN ALBATROSS is one of the six 'great albatrosses' in the genus *Diomedea*, along with the Amsterdam, Antipodean, Northern Royal, Southern Royal and Wandering. All six species are biennial breeders. These are the largest of the world's 22 albatross species, breeding on sub-Antarctic islands in the Southern Ocean.



R. Wantless & A. Angel

Tristan Albatrosses breed only in the South Atlantic on Gough and Inaccessible Islands, part of the United Kingdom's Overseas Territory of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha. Gough Island currently supports 1250 to 1750 annually breeding pairs

equivalent to a total population of 5200-7300 individuals. Recent population modelling suggests a 96% decrease in population size over three generations caused by both on-land and at-sea threats. The population on uninhabited Inaccessible Island of one to three annually breeding pairs survives as a relic of perhaps 200 annual pairs that were preyed upon by feral pigs (and likely human visitors) in the 19th century (the pigs are no longer present). The species also bred on the inhabited main island of Tristan da Cunha into the late 19th century but human exploitation led to its demise.

Tristan Albatrosses are black and white birds with pink bills; juveniles on fledging are largely chocolate brown with white underwings. They progressively whiten with age, males more so than females. At sea the species is largely restricted to the South Atlantic with some birds reaching the southern Indian Ocean. Separating them at sea from closely related (but slightly larger) Wandering Albatrosses is difficult.

A single white egg is laid, with incubation, brooding and chick-feeding duties shared between the sexes. A successful breeding attempt is so long that individuals are not able to breed every year, although failed breeders often attempt breeding again the next year. Diet is predominantly squid and fish, obtained by surface seizing.

The Tristan Albatross has a global threat category of Critically Endangered. The two current breeding sites are protected as nature reserves that include their surrounding territorial waters. Both are also Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance and form a combined World Heritage Site. Conservation actions required include reducing at-sea mortality caused by longline vessels by adopting best-practice mitigation measures (such as deploying bird-scaring lines, line weighting and night setting) by vessels fishing for tuna on the high seas via Regional Fisheries Management Organizations. Introduced House Mice attack and kill many chicks on Gough Island during winter months, leading to an unsustainable low breeding success of the order of 20-30% of chicks fledged from eggs laid. Following near two decades of research and monitoring, an eradication exercise is currently planned for 2021.

Sources:

ACAP 2012. Tristan Albatross *Diomedea dabbenena*; <https://www.acap.aq/en/acap-species>
BirdLife International 2020. Species factsheet: *Diomedea dabbenena*;
<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/tristan-albatross-diomedea-dabbenena/text>

John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 08 October 2020