

TAXON SUMMARY

Australasian Gannet

1	Family	Sulidae
2	Scientific name	<i>Morus serrator</i> (G. R. Gray, 1843)
3	Common name	Australasian Gannet
4	Conservation status	
	Australian breeding population:	Least Concern
	Population visiting Australian territory:	Least Concern

5 Reasons for listing

Despite the extirpation of one Australian sub-population, the total population is increasing. Given the current expansion of colonies and the constant traffic of young gannets across the Tasman Sea, genetic interchange between populations is likely, so the Australian breeding status is linked to the global status (as per Gärdenfors *et al.*, 1999), which is Least Concern.

Australian breeding colonies	Estimate	Reliability
Extent of occurrence	5,000,000 km ²	medium
trend	stable	high
Area of occupancy	15 km ²	medium
trend	increasing	high
No. of breeding birds	24,000	medium
trend	increasing	high
No. of sub-populations	12	high
Largest sub-population	12,300	high
Generation time	20 years	medium
Global population share	25 %	medium
Level of genetic exchange	medium	low

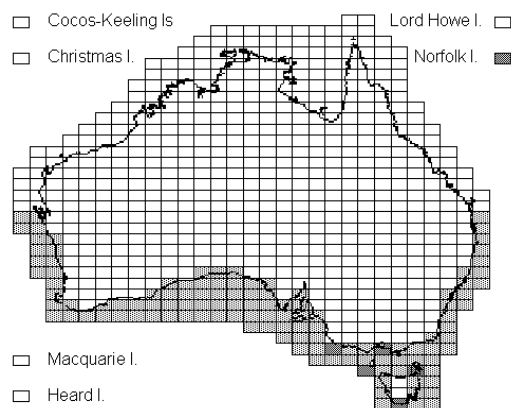
6 Intraspecific taxa

None described.

7 Past range and abundance

Before 1980s breeding recorded Wedge Light, Port Phillip Bay and Lawrence Rocks, off Portland, Vic., Black Pyramid and Cat I. in Bass Strait and Pedra Branca and Eddystone Rocks, off southern Tas. and Phillip and Nepean Is. off Norfolk I. but most breeding colonies on islands off New Zealand. Colony sizes recorded were Cat I. (5,000-10,000 birds in 1908), Black Pyramid (900 birds in 1961), Pedra Branca (1,000-2,000 birds in 1978) and Lawrence Rocks (812 birds in 1952, 1,278 birds 1961; McKean, 1966, Marchant and Higgins, 1990). Juveniles may remain near breeding colonies through the year, but most non-breeding birds disperse. Some Australian juveniles join New Zealand birds in Tasman Sea but most move west to near-coastal waters off southern Australia as far as Denham, W. A. (Marchant and Higgins, 1990). Some disperse across southern Ocean

as far west as Marion I., Crozet Is and South Africa (Marchant and Higgins, 1990).



8 Present range and abundance

Sub-population on Cat I. was extirpated by 1990 but all others have increased and several new colonies have been established (Norman *et al.*, 1998). Lawrence Rocks appears to have reached its capacity at 6,200 birds by 1996. A further 660 birds breed at Point Danger on the adjacent mainland (1999; A. Bunce). Colonies in Port Phillip Bay supported 1014 birds in 1999/2000 having expanded from Wedge Light (established 1966, now at full capacity, 116 birds) and Pope's Eye (est. 1986, at 320 birds in 1996) to three other navigation piles (Norman *et al.*, 1998). In Tasmania there are about 12,300 birds at Black Pyramid, 3,000 at Pedra Branca and 190 at Eddystone (N. Brothers). On Phillip I. there have been 4-5 pairs for many years but no apparent recruitment. In 1992, total population size in Victoria was estimated at 3,140 pairs (Norman *et al.*, 1996) and in Tasmania at 2,700 (Brothers *et al.*, 1996). In 1999 it was 7,870 and 15,500 respectively. About 20 birds nested on each of Phillip and Nepean Is. but there is no new information (Marchant and Higgins, 1990).

9 Ecology

Australasian Gannets feed on small fish and cephalopods taken from continental shelf waters (Marchant and Higgins, 1990, Norman and Menkhorst, 1995). They nest colonially on mounds of guano mixed with seaweed or earth built on rocks or

the surface of artificial structure like navigational piles (Marchant and Higgins, 1990).

10 Threats

Australasian Gannets are among many seabird species being trapped and drowned in longline fishing gear (Brothers *et al.*, 1998a, b), although apparently not yet in significant numbers. They may also suffer from competition with the fishing industry, but as yet this is not affecting numbers. At Point Danger early attempts at breeding failed, probably because of fox predation, until a fox-proof fence was erected to protect the colony (Norman and Menkhorst, 1996). Historical threats, particularly the use of young in crayfish pots which was responsible for their disappearance from Cat I., now seems to have been reduced (Marchant and Higgins, 1990). On Phillip I. Australasian Gannets have been seen mating with Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra fullagari* (H. McCoy) but no evidence of hybridisation has been reported. In Victoria they interbreed with Cape Gannet *M. capensis*, and produce offspring that are themselves breeding with Australasian Gannets (Norman *et al.*, 1998).

11 Recommended actions

- 11.1 Monitor sub-populations to determine long-term trends.
- 11.2 Develop a strategy for managing the interaction between Cape and Australasian Gannets.

12 Bibliography

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