

## Pacific mollymawk *Thalassarche undescribed sp.* 80 cm



NEAR ENDEMIC TO CHATHAM ISLANDS,  
RANGE RESTRICTED

**Other names:** Pacific albatross, northern Buller's mollymawk

### Identification

Until recently known as the northern Buller's mollymawk (*Diomedea bulleri platei*), now regarded as a separate species. It remains formally undescribed because the type specimen for "platei" is now known to be a juvenile (southern) Buller's mollymawk. Pacific mollymawks are small albatrosses (2 metre wingspan) with dark grey on the top surface of the wings, back and tail, and a black band around the edge of the under-wing. The head is medium-grey with a silvery-grey crown, and the rest of the body is white. Adults have a black bill with yellow bands along the top and bottom, while the bill is all dark on juveniles.



Pacific mollymawk off  
Chatham Islands.  
Photo: Mike Danzenbaker.

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Pacific mollymawk with  
chick, Little Sister Island,  
February 1995.  
Photo: Christopher  
Robertson (DOC).

### Distribution and ecology

This is the albatross most frequently seen around the coast and following fishing boats at the Chatham Islands. Pacific mollymawks breed on The Forty Fours, Big Sister Island and Little Sister Island in the Chatham Islands. There is also a small population, of about 20 pairs, on Rosemary Rock in the Three Kings Islands off North Cape. There have been no counts of the largest breeding colonies on The Forty Fours and Big Sister Island. However, on the basis of area of

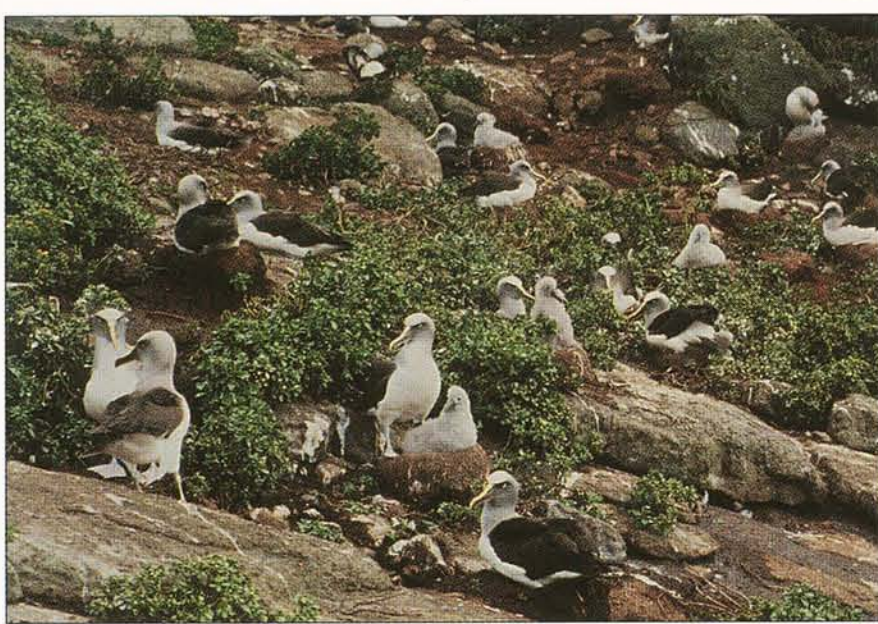
occupancy, the population is estimated to be 16,000 breeding pairs on The Forty Fours, 1500 pairs on Big Sister Island, and 630-670 pairs on Little Sister Island.

Pacific mollymawks breed annually October-June. The single eggs are laid in pedestal nests on cliff ledges and on steep faces at the top of cliffs on The Sisters, and on the plateau basins on The Forty Fours.

### Threats and conservation

Only one Pacific mollymawk is known to have been caught on a tuna long-line. However, until recently, there has been no observer coverage on long-liners operating on the Chatham Rise, an area used by Pacific mollymawks. Pacific mollymawks regularly follow crayfish boats at the Chatham Islands and take discards from the pots. One has been confirmed killed by trawling. There have been no recorded instances of illegal harvest of Pacific mollymawk chicks. The mollymawks are somewhat less affected by habitat changes than royal albatrosses on the same islands, as they mainly nest on steep cliff margins (The Sisters) or rough plateau basins (The Forty Fours) where there is more soil and vegetation than the open plateau tops. However, drought on these islands may induce greater egg and chick mortality through increased collapsing of nest structures.

Studies were conducted on the breeding cycle of Pacific mollymawks on the Chatham Islands in the 1970s and 1990s. Research on Little Sister Island has included a census of breeding pairs, and estimates of breeding productivity and adult survival.



Pacific mollymawk colony,  
Little Sister Island, February  
1995. Photo: Christopher  
Robertson (DOC).