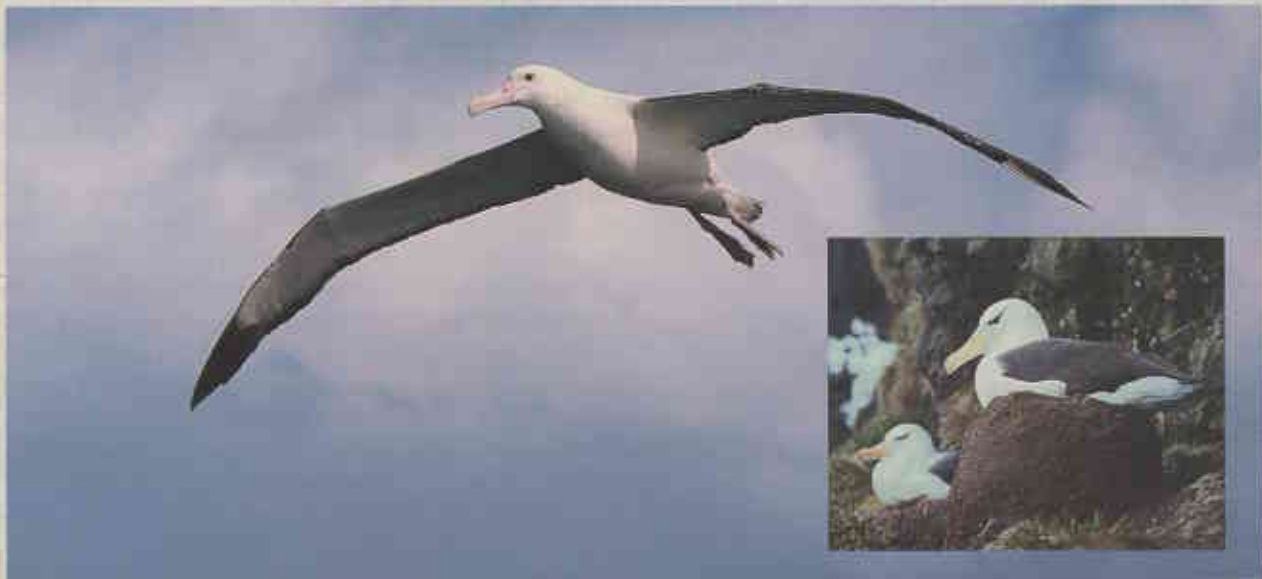




ENDANGERED!



ALBATROSSES

Albatrosses are truly birds of the oceans. Apart from sojourns on breeding islands, they spend their lives at sea, travelling thousands of kilometres riding the strong winds with seemingly effortless ease. Living in such remote places should, one would think, ensure their survival. But this is not the case—albatrosses are in trouble.

The Western Australian list of threatened fauna has recently been changed to reflect new knowledge about albatross taxonomy and conservation status. Recent taxonomic research, based on DNA analyses as well as morphology and breeding distribution, has increased the number of albatross species worldwide from 14 to 24. Twenty of these occur in the oceans of the Southern Hemisphere.

Albatross species that occur off Western Australia, and their conservation status according to IUCN Red List categories and criteria, are: wandering albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), Vulnerable; Gibson's albatross (*D. gibsoni*), Vulnerable; southern royal albatross (*D. epomophora*), Vulnerable; black-

browed albatross (*Thalassarche melanophrys*), Lower Risk (near threatened); shy albatross (*T. cauta*), Vulnerable; Salvin's albatross (*T. salvini*), Vulnerable; grey-headed albatross (*T. chrysostoma*), Vulnerable; Indian yellow-nosed albatross (*T. carteri*), Vulnerable; sooty albatross (*Phoebastria fusca*), Vulnerable; and light-mantled albatross (*P. palpebrata*), Data Deficient.

Albatrosses are in trouble because they are being killed in large numbers by the longline fishing industry. High prices for southern bluefin tuna and other pelagic fish are attracting increasing numbers of fishing boats to the world's southern oceans. Many millions of hooks are set every year on lines many kilometres long. Unfortunately, the lines not only catch fish—as the baited hooks float near the surface after setting they also capture and drown albatrosses and other seabirds. Unless something is done, several species of albatross,

including the world's largest flying bird, the wandering albatross, will become extinct.

Australia is taking a lead in combating this threat. 'Incidental catch (bycatch) of seabirds during oceanic longline fishing operations' has been listed as a 'key threatening process' in the Commonwealth Endangered Species Protection Act and a 'threat abatement plan', bringing together the ideas of scientists, conservationists and the fishing industry, has been prepared and approved. Prescribed actions, such as setting hooks only at night and using apparatus to prevent the baited hooks from staying near the surface after setting, can greatly reduce the impact of longline fishing on seabirds.

But only a small proportion of longline fishing occurs in Australian waters—most occurs on the high seas outside any nation's jurisdiction. Efforts to develop international agreements have begun, but still have a long way to go. It would be tragedy for the whole world if human greed for tuna led to the extinction of albatrosses.

by Andrew Burbidge

LANDSCOPE

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Can WA's sharefarming plantations also help fight greenhouse gases? See 'Farming Carbon' on page 17.



With increased numbers of travellers, the Canning Stock Route is in need of some TLC. See 'A Track Winding Back' on page 10.



The job of a CALM Wildlife Officer is as much about dealing with people as it is about protecting our native wildlife. See 'On the Wild Side' on page 23.



The Esperance Lakes Nature Reserves are a haven for water birds and a significant international wetland. See 'Picture the Lakes' on page 36.



There are billions of tiny white shells lining the 150-km Shell Beach in Shark Bay. But why are there so many concentrated here? Find out more on page 49.

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COVER

Two years into the Western Shield program and already three Western Australian native species have been brought back from the edge of extinction, and others are growing in abundance. 'Bouncing Back', on page 28, looks at the successes of the first two years and at where we hope to be at the turn of the century.

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