

ALBERT TIMES

"Don't get warped – trawl for fish, not birds" Apr–May 2014 Issue 75

Albert's Column

The old hoki season began a bit late and in the main Hokitika-Canyon fishing has been pretty patchy, some skippers suggesting it might be the warmer water temperatures. There's been very few warp captures of my Southern Buller's 'cousins', a good sign that hoki vessels offal control systems and mitigation devices are being well used! A little 'seabird' tells me DWG are reminding skippers to see the risk of increased warp captures and deploy additional mitigation BEFORE seeing birds dead on the deck via the warpsMakes good sense to me; what!

My long range scouts tell me those damn pesky sea lions are causing trouble again, this time in the southern blue whiting fishery after lots of young males 'crashed the fishing party' at Campbell spawning grounds last year! The first 'big steel lunch boxes' got ambushed by dozens of hungry sea lions; once more vessels turned up the sea lions had plenty of choices of which vessel to 'steal a feed from' they became less aggressive, the captures slowed and by then the DWG had sent SLEDs from shore out to the fleet and the spate of captures stopped. This season the vessels will be ready from the get-go, with SLEDs deployed!

The Hoki boys are getting new Seabird Risk Management Plans (SRMP) developed for all fresh fish coastal hoki season trawlers. The 'cousins' don't get much of a 'smorgasbord' from these boats, and while in hoki season the boats don't have a lot of juicy offal, the rest of the year at times, there's more free-feeds for us and the risk of hitting those warps. Every vessel needs to carry a warp device, and manage its fish waste discharge (most have some type of device already) and their skippers are well aware how to reduce the risk of seabird interactions with the fishing gear! Won't take these guys much to tidy things up!

Chow Albert

Mollymawk Mitigation

Last month the DWG developed and distributed a Mollymawk Mitigation sheet to raise awareness of the recent increased capture rates of Salvin's, and Buller's albatross aka mollymawks.

The mitigation sheets have been added to each of the DWG Operational Procedures manuals onboard each vessel and senior crew have been briefed. Much of the increase is in the hoki fishery but also in our squid and southern blue whiting fisheries. In order to reverse this trend, we need to reinforce and tighten up the current world's best practice mitigation measures.

The Salvin's are one of the aggressive mollymawks that are interacting with our fisheries, we are focusing on reducing captures of this species. This will also greatly reduce risk to Buller's and white capped albatross. Once there were a lot of warp captures, while this has been decreasing, the rate of net captures has increased with around 80% of all captures now in the trawl!

There are a number of factors possibly influencing this increase, less fish waste is being discharged into water from reduced fleet numbers and most remaining vessels have fishmeal plants, which leads to increased intensity of bird activity behind

each vessel. There may also be changes in oceanographic conditions and certainly the number of birds breeding alters year by year, influencing things. Most birds attend the vessel from astern; when fish-waste is being discharged we need a mitigation device over the warps. The above factors are leading to events where multiple capture events are occurring when something goes wrong. We need real diligence with onboard management processes and full awareness of when risk factors are presenting themselves, then immediate action to reduce the risk.

We need to remain firmly focussed on those things that we can practically address, while there are now a greater proportion of vessels with meal plants, at times fish waste has to be discharged, it's then that further active management procedures must be taken. While bird bafflers are always deployed, Tori lines need to be deployed at times of heightened risk of warp strikes as well. Currently there is a better tori line design and materials available, most of the trawl fleet has taken this up and we are working (with DOC) on an improved baffler system for deepwater trawlers. It is imperative that all managers and vessels undertake to improve performance in this area.



Richard with some of his Southern Buller's friends

Snares Story

The Snares islands lie about 70 nautical miles south of Stewart Island and have done so for millions of years, in fact the 3-7 metres of peat that now covers these granite outcrops has taken 10 million years of vegetation and seabird poo to form.

Its lack of good fresh water (seabird poo again!) and anything remotely like a safe harbour has meant these islands have never been settled and hence invaded by the usual mammalian predators brought to NZ shores.

Thus the Snares have had essentially uninterrupted millennia to build up an internationally significant and highly protected seabird breeding population plus some endemic species and sub-species all to itself (for instance the Snare's crested penguin, snipe and tomit).

Around 3.5 million sooty shearwaters use



SEA2015P2B3

Yacht sheltering around the back of Snares Island

the Snares as their maternity ward every spring/summer, burrowing into the soft peat all over the island (along with many other burrowing birds such as the much smaller diving petrel).

This island group is also the breeding place of most Southern Buller's Albatross (the rest have chosen the Solander Islands as their preferred spot and all spend 2-3 months a year off Chile, feeding) and this population has been subject to a consistent time-series of studies since 1969. The last full census of the population (counting every nesting bird rather than just the study sites) was undertaken in 2002, so this year DWG, DOC, MPI and NIWA worked closely together to resource another full census.

NIWA's Paul Sagar first studied these albatrosses in 1976-77 and has lead the research here for over 20 years, so was naturally the head of this team, with Richard Wells and his daughter Tamar (a marine science student at Vic Uni) volunteered as "Sagar's little helpers".

After a sometimes smooth, sometimes damn bumpy, 20-hour yacht trip we were dropped off at the small huts on the Main Island with food, binoculars and sense of purpose.

The census is undertaken by using maps of previous surveys and counting off each nest with an egg in it (or sitting bird). In the forest this is hard work but relatively easy compared to the cliffs which comprise nearly the entire coastline; here binoculars are used and counts all written down and cross referenced statistically later.

The going is heavy in thick scrub, soft ground underfoot (avoiding the literally millions of seabird burrows and the occasional grumpy sea lion kipping far from shore) and strong "breezes" usually with added moisture (not summer really). We were in full wet weather gear nearly every day – rain and sweat! Each day we ticked off another section of the island

We were able to not only complete a full census but also visit all the study sites at least twice and there band new arrivals to the area, as well as check up on previous birds.

We resighted 4 birds that had been banded in 1972! This information is invaluable to understand how often adults are breeding and what their average survival is.

The result was we counted about 8,000 pairs of Southern Buller's, remarkably similar to the 2002 count and around double the number reported breeding in 1969.

So we left the island as we found it, tired, satisfied and somewhat pecked.....some birds don't give up their identity without a fight, and enjoyed calm seas on the return voyage. Richard Wells

Who's my cousin?



Do you know what this bird is called? It is endemic only to the Snares Islands

Send us:

You Name, Answer, Postal Address and the Date of Issue to albertross@fishinfo.co.nz

Be in to win

Albert Ross' Cap Field Guide to NZ Birds



Last Month's Cousin: White Capped Mollymawk

Did You Know?

Southern Buller's:

- Only breeds in NZ, mainly at Snares Islands and Solander islands.
- Breeding period from December to September, lay one eggs annually.
- After breeding many adults and Juveniles migrate to Peru & Chile, juveniles may remain for up to 5 years.

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