

The Chatham albatross (*Thalassarche eremita*): at home and abroad

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The Chatham albatross (*Thalassarche eremita*) is one of the least known of the world's albatross taxa. Breeding solely at The Pyramid, a small and precipitous rock in the Chatham Islands, there are few published records of its biology and distribution. From 1974-1999 there have been sporadic short visits with overnight stays totalling 86 observation days. Three cohorts of chicks were banded from 1993-1995. First returns were at 4 years and no breeding had occurred by 6 years. Three breeding productivity estimates and 1 complete nest count have been made between 1995-1999. The potential breeding population is now estimated to be 5300 pairs. Satellite tracking of 13 birds, band returns, fisheries by-catch and observations at sea have provided the first definitive picture of distribution at sea in the South Pacific. Breeding

records suggest laying in August-September, incubation of 66-72 days, hatching October-December and probable chick fledging February-April. Mean annual productivity of chicks ranges from 50-65% with parts of the island as low as 34% due to seasonally adverse weather or degraded nesting habitat. Localised foraging is indicated within 300 km over the shelf edge, and slope from 1000-4500 m during the breeding season. Following breeding, birds migrate to Chile and Peru, returning via a more northerly route in July-August. As an endangered species they remain vulnerable to habitat change at The Pyramid, sporadic harvesting of chicks by Chatham Islanders and various types of fisheries by-catch in New Zealand, Chile and Peru.

The Rare Birds Committee: its functions and importance

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I was appointed Convenor of the Rare Birds Committee from 1 January 1999, with the following six additional members appointed for a term of three years from 1 July 1999: Brian Bell, Brian Gill, Mike Imber, Paul Sagar, Peter Schweigman, and Graeme Taylor.

The last published account of sightings accepted by the committee was that for 1991 which appeared in *Notornis* 39 (1992): 319-321. In the December 1999 issue

of *OSNZ News*, I mentioned that pertinent details relating to reports dealt with by the Committee for the period 1992-1998 inclusive have never been published, this has since been rectified with their publication in *Notornis* 47 (2000): 64-70. This talk will highlight the importance of the Rare Birds Committee as a means of verifying and recording rare or unusual birds in New Zealand.