

The cruelty of 'muttonbirding'

Recreational licences are handed out to anyone who applies and pays the fee. Whilst there is a written guide on how to kill 'humanely', in practice many chicks are killed in a barbaric way. Commonly these baby birds are swung around the killer's head until their neck breaks, or in some cases the chick's heads are stomped on. Although it is not legal to do so, sometimes long hooks are used to haul them from their safe havens.

Recreational killing of shearwaters requires a licence and there is a 16 day season in March/April. There are about 1100 licences issued each year. There is a bag limit of 25 chicks per day per person, (a limit of 15 chicks applies at some rookeries).

This means that a person can legally take up to 400 chicks - a lot of birds for personal use!



Activist with a pile of murdered chicks

Around 55,000 chicks are reported by licence holders as killed each year.

In addition to the recreational season, up to another 200,000 chicks may be removed from their burrows by commercial season operators and sold.

Vulnerability of the species

As well as the huge number taken by legal hunters, the birds are



vulnerable to poaching (illegal killing), and the laws against it are not properly enforced. Gillnet fisheries in the North Pacific drown many thousands of birds annually. They are also killed in gillnet fishing in Tasmanian waters. They are susceptible to ingesting plastic rubbish whilst at sea, which can cause health problems or death. Feral cats in rookeries kill chicks. Other species such as pigs, cattle and sheep destroy burrows in the fragile soil. Around 10 percent of adults die each year.

Despite current large numbers of this species, the Parks and Wildlife Service of Tasmania states that they are "still vulnerable to over-harvesting and habitat destruction". The Service gives an example, in its brochure on the species, of a similar bird, the providence petrel, that became extinct in Australia due to "massive harvesting".

Recreational hunting causes significant environmental damage to dunes, and to burrows that would normally be utilised year after year.

The Shearwater does not breed until it reaches 5 years of age and then only has one chick per year. Only one third of chicks return to breed.

Protected birds

The birds are protected in other states of Australia, with significant fines for offenders. There has not been a season in Victoria for over 30 years. They are protected by the Japan/Australia Migratory Birds Agreement, but not in Tasmania it seems!

AACT NOW!

Voice your concern. Ask the federal Minister to ensure the full weight of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 is used to protect the short-tailed shearwater and its breeding colonies that are mainly in Tasmania:

Minister for the Sustainability, Water,
Environment, Population & Communities
The Hon Tony Burke
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au

Ask the Tasmanian Minister to ban the two week long "recreational" chick killing season and make every effort to stamp out poaching:

Brian Wightman
Minister for Environment, Parks & Heritage
Parliament House
Hobart Tas 7000
brian.wightman@parliament.tas.gov.au