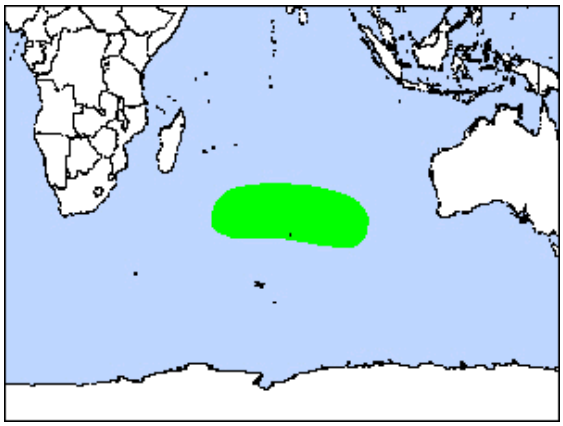
Case study

Seabird

Disclaimer: *The case study presented below is for a fictional species and is intended for training purposes only. The information presented in this account is not intended to reflect accurate information for any real species or the current situation within any particular country. This case study must not be cited for any purpose outside of Red List training.*

Range:

This seabird breeds on the Plateau des Tourbières on Amsterdam Island (French Southern Territories) in the southern Indian Ocean. The total island area is around 55 km², but the plateau where these birds breed has an area of only 800 ha. During the breeding season, birds forage both around Amsterdam Island and up to 2,200 km away in subtropical waters, but non-breeding dispersal is unknown, although possible sightings have been reported from Australia and New Zealand.



Population:

There is a total population of around 130 birds including 80 mature individuals. There are around 18-25 pairs breeding annually, which is an increase since 1984 when the first census was carried out. The population was probably formerly larger than current numbers when the species' range was more extensive over the slopes of the island. However, there has also been increased chick mortality over recent years with a high chance that this will continue into the future (see threats section) therefore the overall population trend is still considered to be declining.

Habitat & Ecology:

The Plateau des Tourbières covers the highest part of Amsterdam Island in the centre-west of the island. The plateau is an ancient lava-flow now almost entirely covered with waterlogged peatbog. A number of craters are scattered across the site.

Breeding is biennial (when successful) and is restricted to the central plateau of the island at 500 to 600 m, where only one breeding group is known. The bird's exact diet is unknown, but probably consists of fish, squid and crustaceans.

Threats:

Degradation of breeding sites by introduced cattle has decreased this bird's range and population across the island. Human disturbance is presumably also to blame. Introduced predators are a major threat, particularly feral cats. Interactions with longline fisheries around the island, in the 1970s and early 1980s, could also have contributed to a decline in the population. Today the population is threatened primarily by the potential spread of diseases (avian cholera and *Erysipelothrix rhusiopathidae*) that currently affect an albatross population 3 km from the colony. Infection risks are very high and increased chick mortality over recent years suggests that the population is already affected.

Conservation Measures:

All birds are banded and annual population is census and monitoring is carried out. In 1987, the number of cattle was reduced and a fence erected to seal off part of the island. In 1992, a second fence was erected with the aim of providing complete protection for the high plateau from possible incursions by cattle.