



Title: “Not in our place you won't!”

Description: Chatham Island mollymawks defending their nest against an intruder.

Photographer: Rod Hay

Where, when: The Pyramid, Tarakoikoia, Chatham Islands, January 1975

Sustainability? Albatrosses are magnificent icons of oceanic biodiversity and the Aotearoa/New Zealand region is the global centre for their evolution, distribution and diversity. While many of us are familiar with the mainland colony of Royal Albatross at Taiaroa Head, Otago, there are other species breeding mainly in remote, inaccessible places. The Mollymawks, while not as large as the Wandering and Royal Albatrosses, are still spectacular creatures, whether up-close or effortlessly hunting for food across the oceans.

Most, but not all, albatross breeding sites are well isolated from the predatory risk of introduced mammals, but albatrosses as a whole are hugely vulnerable to bycatch from long-line fisheries. Some species are attracted to fishing boats and will take baits before they sink. Despite mitigation measures implemented in some fisheries and regions, a number of albatross species are in real trouble from bycatch, collision with lines and discarded plastic, not to mention food disruption from warming oceans. Though the Chathams species is recorded as bycatch in artisanal South American fisheries, it doesn't routinely follow boats and the population appears stable for now.

Nonetheless, the Pyramid is its only breeding site, so the 5000 odd nests crammed onto the ledges of that rock are vulnerable to storm events during the breeding season.

Photo notes: 50 mm, ISO 100, Pentax 50mm

I was lucky to be part of a 1975 NZ Wildlife Service expedition to look at options for conservation of Chatham Island birds, including black robin, NZ shore plover, various seabird species and others. We were able to land briefly on The Pyramid or Tarakoikoia (Mori: Tcharako), the southernmost outcrop of the Chathams and I tore around with my old Pentax Spotmatic and dashed off some Ektachromes of the Mollymawks as they built their nests out of the very meagre and sought-after supply of mud and vegetation available on the rock. It was a hazardous business for intruders such as this unmated bird being driven off by an established pair (note the crimson stripe exposed under the eye). It was also risky for us dragging ourselves ashore through the bull-kelp and clambering around the slippery ledges trying to avoid the extremely well-aimed squirts of pungent albatross-poo.

Digital specs: 3,175 x 2,477 pixels (7.9 MP)

Key words: Bird, Chatham Islands, The Pyramid, Tarakoikoia, Chatham Islands, Chatham Islands Albatross, *Thalassarche eremita*, Seaweed, albatross, mollymawk

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Rod Hay

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