

# Mutton Bird Fact Sheet

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## Introduction

Each year around 100,000 short tailed shearwaters (mutton birds) are killed for their meat, oil and feathers in Tasmania.

The short tailed shearwaters negotiate an incredible 30,000 km journey from the Arctic Region all the way to the southern parts of Australia. Once on our shores, they return to the same burrow every year where each pair lays just one egg.

Shearwaters are protected in all states of Australia, except for Tasmania. Here their lives are brutally disturbed every year when the killing season opens on the 27th of March, just as the young mutton bird chicks are almost ready to embark on their northward migratory journey.



On the 27th of March, just as the young mutton bird chicks are almost ready to embark on their northward migratory journey, Tasmania's mutton bird killing season begins. Young chicks are pulled from the nests to have their necks broken, often by inexperienced hands.

## Hunting Season

The commercial hunting season runs from the 27th of March through to the 30th of April. The recreational season runs from the 3rd of April through to the 18th of April.

Recreational hunters are allowed to take 15 to 25 birds, depending on the colony. Thus a single licenced recreational muttonbirder can take up to 400 chicks per season. There is no limit for commercial hunters, however bird numbers are monitored and commercial hunting numbers are determined by the figures observed.

## Welfare

The hunting and killing of the short tailed shearwater involves a great deal of cruelty. The young chicks are ripped from their burrows and then are *supposed* to have their necks quickly broken thus resulting in death. However, there is no training for the killing procedures and particularly those involved with the recreational killing may be inexperienced.

A recommended three-step killing method is offered to hunters by the Tasmanian State Government, but it is impossible to know how frequently and effectively this method is used\*. It is

highly likely that many birds suffer unnecessarily.

## Preservation

The short-tailed shearwater colonies are often disturbed or ruined by muttonbirders whilst attempting to get birds out of the deep burrows by digging and/or damaging vegetation cover. Returning parent birds in the following season may then be unable to find alternate burrows and breeding is disrupted.

Shearwaters die in large numbers during their migration due to starvation, entanglement in ocean fishing nets, and oil spills. In 2009 the commercial hunting season on Babel Island — which has the largest mutton bird population — was closed just 1 week after opening because of reports the population had been decimated. Despite this, the State Government decided to again allow the killing in 2010.

## Industry History

The muttonbirding (commercial) industry was established by early European sealers and their indigenous families. The commercial harvest of muttonbirds is now primarily undertaken by members of the Tasmanian aboriginal community. According to Tasmanian National Parks officials, muttonbirding provides these people with a cultural connection to their ancestors.

The recreational killing of muttonbirding chicks does not share this history and is open to anyone.

## What you can do

1. [Click here to join the call](http://www.animalsaustralia.org/take_action/mutton-birds/) ([http://www.animalsaustralia.org/take\\_action/mutton-birds/](http://www.animalsaustralia.org/take_action/mutton-birds/)) to urge the Tasmanian Government to step in and ban the cruel killing of mutton bird chicks.

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## References

1 [dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/Attachments/JAAR-7ZNSPQ/\\$FILE/2010%20Muttonbird%20Info%20Sheet.pdf](http://dpiw.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/Attachments/JAAR-7ZNSPQ/$FILE/2010%20Muttonbird%20Info%20Sheet.pdf)