



Dead shearwaters an unfortunate natural event

Dead and dying shearwater birds found washed up on northern NSW beaches including, Port Macquarie over the past few days, are the result of unfortunate but natural events.

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Manning Hastings Area Manager Steve Atkins said there had been reports of dead shearwaters, also known as muttonbirds, washed up on beaches from the Tweed to the south coast.

"The vast majority of these are short-tailed shearwaters, which breed in the southern part of Australia including Tasmania," Mr Atkins said.

"The Short tailed Shearwater is regarded as one of the most common species of bird in the world with the population believed to be in excess of 18 million,' he said.

"This event is a natural occurrence and every year along the east coast, many short-tailed shearwaters die at sea during the finals stages of their annual migration.

"Every few years however, when wind and tides are right these birds wash up on our beaches dead or in advanced stages of decline.

"Unfortunately very little can be done for these birds as history has shown attempts at rehabilitation by even the most experienced wildlife carers are almost invariably futile.

"Shearwaters migrate annually between nesting areas in the southern hemisphere and back to far flung locations in the northern hemisphere with some birds covering up to 15,000km," Mr Atkins said.

"Shearwaters are long-lived seabirds with individuals living up to 38 years old, but the long journey can take it's toll and numbers of dead birds found dead on beaches can sometimes be well into the hundreds."

Some of the mutton birds have been banded by researchers.

Any one finding banded dead shearwater or any other banded seabird should report the band to the local NPWS office or contact the Australian Bird and Bat Banding scheme in Canberra:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/science/abbbs/index.html>

Four species of shearwater are found in NSW: Short-Tailed, Wedge-Tailed; Sooty; and the Fleshy-Footed Shearwater.

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