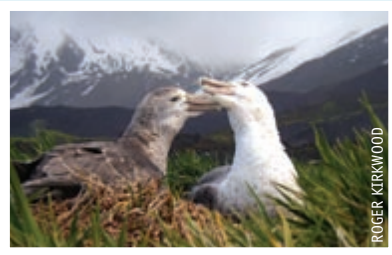


HAWKER ISLAND – PROTECTED FOR PETRELS



Hawker Island is now a protected breeding area for southern giant petrels, such as this pair on Heard Island.

A small rocky island below the Antarctic Circle might not be the favoured 'location, location, loction' for most couples, but for southern giant petrels looking to raise a family, it's prime real estate worth protecting.

Hawker Island lies just off the coast of the Vestfold Hills, a rare Antarctic ice-free oasis where Australia's Davis station has operated since 1957. Observations made since the early 1960s have shown that the breeding population of southern giant petrels on the island has decreased – this is consistent with downward trends observed at many breeding colonies elsewhere in the world. Even though Antarctic colonies represent less than 1% of the worldwide breeding population, Antarctic breeding sites are very important for the southern giant petrel, which is considered vulnerable to extinction on a global basis.

Australia has strictly managed access to Hawker Island from Davis station for many years to prevent disturbance, particularly during the breeding season. At the 29th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in June, Treaty parties agreed with Australia's proposal to formalise these protective arrangements by declaring the island an Antarctic Specially Protected Area.

The designation of Hawker Island as an Antarctic Specially Protected Area completes a suite of protected areas that safeguard the four known southern giant petrel breeding locations in East Antarctica. The management plan for the island provides for long-term protection of this important southern giant petrel nursery, while allowing periodic monitoring that will contribute to the development of conservation strategies for the species, and provide information for comparisons with populations elsewhere.

The next Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in 2007 will discuss the need for greater action to protect these birds throughout the whole Antarctic Treaty area.

EWAN McIVOR
Environmental Policy and Protection, AGAD

New marine mammal research centre for Hobart

A new Australian Centre for Applied Marine Mammal Science will be established at the Australian Government Antarctic Division, to improve the management and conservation of Australia's 40 species of whales and dolphins, 10 species of seals, and the dugong.

The Centre will receive funding of \$2.5 million over four years through the Australian Government's \$100 million Commonwealth Environment Research Facility (CERF) programme, established in 2004. The Centre will also seek direct funding from marine industry groups such as oil and gas.

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, said the initiative would provide a high profile, internationally competitive research centre that would build on existing research and address gaps in the knowledge relating to marine mammal management and conservation.

'The Centre will also help improve links between the Australian marine mammal research community, the development of strong industry partnerships, and the integration of research and policy,' he said.

'The Centre's work will be especially important as we continue our efforts to convince pro-whaling nations of the benefits of non-lethal scientific research on whales.'

Research will be conducted under six themes, including the effects of noise on marine mammals, methods to estimate population structure and numbers, human-marine mammal interactions and the development of non-lethal study techniques.

The research will be led by Dr Nick Gales and will inform the development and implementation of public management and policy through an improved ability to assess and manage threats, and ensure sustainability of marine mammal populations.

'This will result in an improved capacity to conserve and protect marine mammals, while facilitating science-based processes for the management of activities such as whale watching and trawling,' Dr Gales said.

More information about ACAMMS:
<http://www.aad.gov.au/acamms>

More information about CERF:
<http://www.deh.gov.au/programs/cerf/index.html>



The Australian Centre for Applied Marine Mammal Science aims to improve the management and conservation of whales, dolphins, seals and dugongs.