SHEARWATERS FACTSHEET

Shearwaters are the most abundant seabird in Australia. There are many different types (species) of shearwaters. In the Blue clip (Ode to the Seabirds) the shearwater is a flesh-footed shearwater (*Ardenna carneipes*) found in the warmer regions of Australia (NSW and WA). Short-tailed shearwaters (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) live in cooler regions, with other species found along the coast of Australia as well (VIC, NSW, TAS, WA and SA).

Like all living things, shearwaters have basic needs or things to keep them alive. Shearwaters need water, food, shelter or protection and a mate. Shearwaters live in colonies or groups and have very precisely timed life cycles, consisting of breeding, feeding and migration journeys.

Shearwaters mate for life, and return to the same burrow each year to lay eggs and raise their chicks. They go on a long migration journey (sometimes over 30,000 km) not touching land until they arrive home to breed. When they need to rest, they form floating rafts of birds at sea.

Shearwaters feed on small fish, squid, anchovies and white bait. They feed this food to their chicks when they are nesting deep inside their 1 metre burrow.

Shearwater chicks grow fast and put on weight with all of the oily fish they eat, sometimes they are so big they can't get out of their burrow entrances! However, it is important that they grow quickly as their parents leave on their migration when the chicks are very young. The chicks will follow the migration path, but leave after their parents have left. They use their own biological compass to find their way. Shearwater beaks are able to pick up the Earth's magnetic field, and they use this and the moon to guide them on their migrations.

Shearwaters are at risk from plastic in our oceans. The birds mistake the small pieces of plastic for food and eat the plastic, filling their stomachs. The plastics do not pass through the birds and so remain inside the bird. This means that the birds can feel full, however, they are not full of nutritious food but rather plastic. As a result, shearwaters are often malnourished, and if they don't eat enough food and put on enough weight they will starve and not make their migration journey.

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