

Leach's Storm-Petrel (LESP)

Hydrobates leucorhous

Description

Leach's Storm-Petrels (20 cm long) are charcoal and brown coloured with a black bill, distinctive whiteish wing coverts and rump patch, and a black forked tail. Their legs are black and don't extend past the tail, and their feet are webbed. They can be seen flying over the ocean, foraging for plankton, crustaceans, and fish that rise to the surface of the water. They do not dive, but "patter" their feet at the surface of the water, pecking at objects, or float to feed. Their flight pattern is often compared to bats and swallows.

Chicks are dark gray and downy when they hatch, and then molt in their burrows to attain juvenile plumage. Males and females look the same. Plumage does not vary during the breeding season.

Known and potential breeding habitat

About a third of the global population of Leach's Storm-Petrels breeds in Atlantic Canada, with the largest breeding colony in the world found at Baccalieu Island in Newfoundland.

Leach's Storm-Petrels breed in burrows on small offshore islands that are typically free of native mammalian predators. Burrows vary from rock crevices to excavated underground burrows in well-drained soils. Most burrows (>85%) are located in patches of dense vegetation low to the ground (e.g., ferns, grassy hummocks). In Newfoundland, breeding evidence has been observed from 28 April to 20 October.

Detection Tips

Habitat

During the breeding season, Leach's Storm-Petrels can be found at their colonies, but otherwise this species spends the rest of the year at sea .

Vocalization

Leach's Storm-Petrels have a variety of calls and no songs. Adults have a *chatter* call that is often heard in flight. At the colony, *purr* calls are used to attract or communicate with mates. Two calls are given in response to



Photo By: Scott Leslie



Aquatic



COSEWIC Ranking:
Threatened



NL Designation:
N/A



Storm-Petrel

Photo By: Scott Lin on Unsplash





Leach's Storm-Petrel being measured for conservation monitoring.
Photo By: Laura Tranquilla

disturbance: the screech and chip call (sounds like: *tsk*). Juveniles have three distinctive calls: a rhythmic call, used for begging (“peep-peep-peep”), a short call, and high calls used when disturbed.

Behaviour

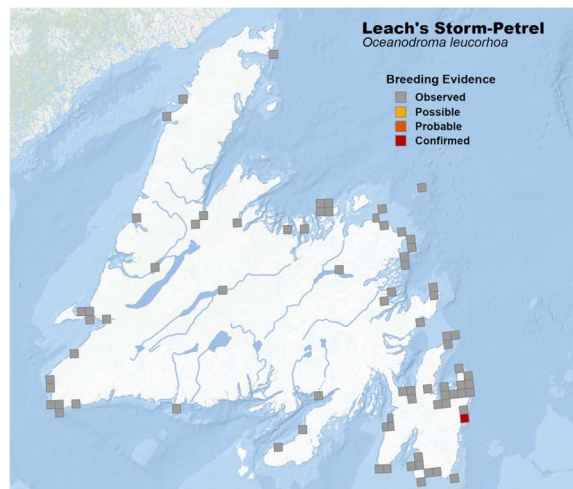
Leach's Storm-Petrels are rarely encountered on land. Birds can be observed at their offshore breeding colonies but are most active at night. Calls can be heard from underground burrows from April to September. Fledglings leave the nest site at night and are therefore difficult to see, but can be drawn to the lights of towns where they can become stranded on land. During the day, open-water sightings of Storm-Petrels can occur from boats as they hover over the water surface, foraging for planktonic organisms ranging in size from copepods to small cod.

Nesting

Pairs are formed 1–2 seasons prior to the first mating and typically remain together for life. Adults start visiting the burrow site 9 weeks prior to egg laying. Males dig a burrow with an average length of 43 cm and a depth of 34 cm which can be re-used from season to season. Females typically lay only one egg each year. The earliest recorded laying in Newfoundland was May 26 on Great Island. Chicks leave the burrows from mid-September to October.

Breeding Evidence

Because Leach's Storm-Petrels can forage far from the colony, breeding evidence should only be recorded at the colony site. The most likely codes to see at the colony are adults visiting a probable nest site (V), or adults entering or exiting burrows during incubation as they change incubation shifts (AE). Lower codes should be easily increased to V or AE with more observation. If you have permission to enter a breeding colony, you may find a burrow with eggs (NE) or young (NY). Young that fledge leave the colony immediately between mid-September and October, so FY codes are unlikely. Stranded fledglings onshore should not be given a code of FY as they are not on the breeding territory.



Leach's Storm Petrels (*Hydrobates leucorhous*) have been detected in atlas squares all around the coast of Newfoundland during the past ten years (2011–2021). Breeding records from the colonial seabird database still need to be integrated into this dataset as there are known colonies not included here.