



Threatened and Endangered Species

Short-tailed Albatross

(Phoebastria albatrus)

Status

The short-tailed albatross was listed under the Endangered Species Act as Endangered throughout its range in 2000 (65 FR 46643).

Description

With a wingspan of over 2 meters (over 7 feet), the short-tailed albatross is the largest seabird in the North Pacific. Its long, narrow wings are adapted to soaring low over the ocean. It is best distinguished from other albatrosses by its large, bubblegum-pink bill. Young birds also have the large pink bill, but their feathers are dark chocolate brown. Birds become progressively whiter with age. Adults have an entirely white back, white or light gold head and back of neck, and black and white wings.

Range and Population Level

Historically, millions of short-tailed albatrosses bred in the western North Pacific on several islands south of the main islands of Japan. Only two breeding colonies remain active today: the largest, on Torishima Island, is home to 80-90% of the world's population. The remainder breed on Minami-kojima Island, northwest of Taiwan. In addition, a single nest was recently found on Yomejima Island of the Ogasawara Island group in Japan. Single nests also occasionally occur on Midway Island, HI. Short-tailed albatrosses forage widely across the temperate and subarctic North Pacific, and can be seen in the Gulf of Alaska, along the Aleutian Islands, and in the Bering Sea. The world population is currently estimated to be over 2000 birds and is increasing.

Habitat and Habits

Like many seabirds, short-tailed albatrosses are slow to reproduce and are long-lived, with some known



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to be over 40 years old. They begin breeding at about 7 or 8 years, and often mate for life. They nest on grassy terraces on rugged, isolated, windswept islands. Pairs lay a single egg each year in October or November. Eggs hatch in late December through early January. Chicks remain near the nest for about 5 months, fledging in June.

After breeding, short-tailed albatrosses move to feeding areas in the North Pacific, often stopping

The largest of the three North Pacific albatross species, short-tailed albatrosses are best distinguished by their large, bubblegum-pink bill with bluish tip. Adults, like the one shown here, are black and white with a light gold head. Although younger birds can be much darker, they still have the large pink bill.

in the sea of Japan along the way. When feeding, albatrosses alight on the ocean surface and seize their prey with their bill. They eat squid, fish, and shrimp. They also attempt to steal bait from longline hooks and may feed on floating dead sea creatures.

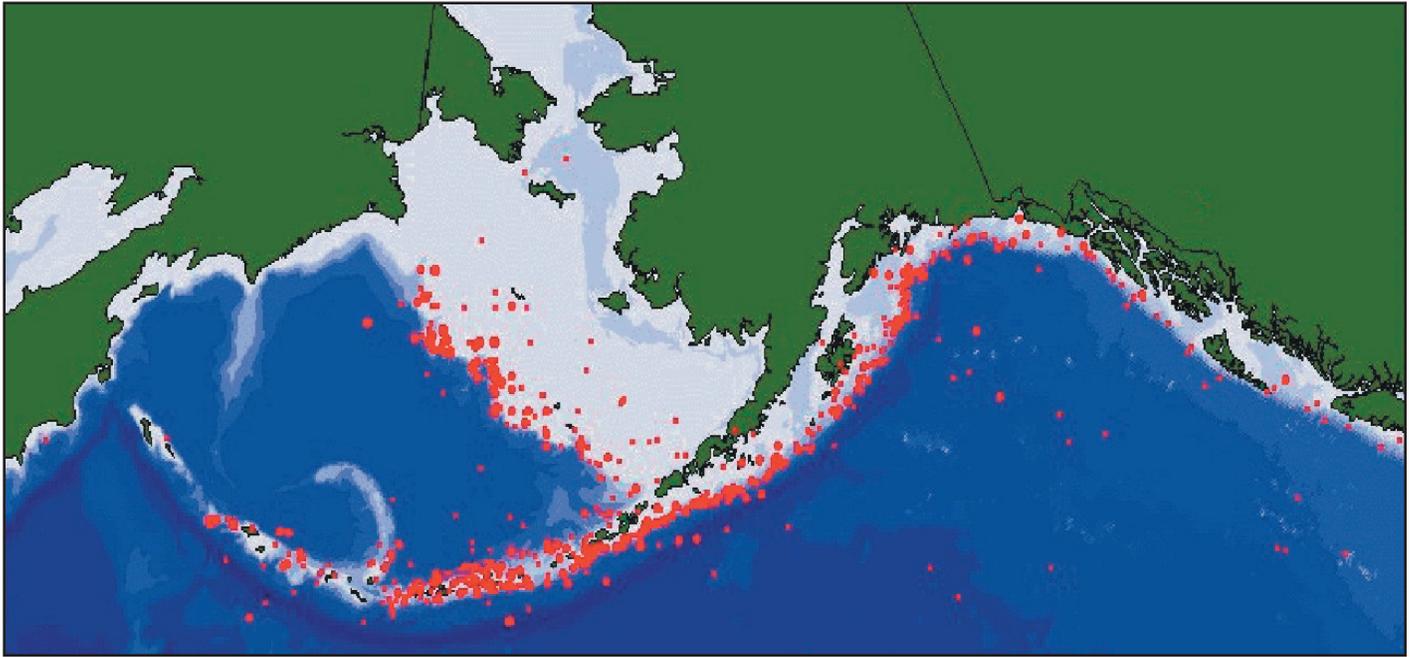
Reasons for Current Status

Short-tailed albatrosses have survived multiple threats to their existence. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, feather hunters clubbed to death an estimated five million of them, stopping only when the species was nearly extinct. In the 1930s, nesting habitat on the only active nesting island in Japan was damaged by volcanic eruptions. By the 1940s there were fewer than 50 birds. Loss of nesting habitat to volcanic eruptions, severe storms, and competition with black-footed albatrosses for nesting habitat continue to be natural threats to short-tailed albatrosses today.

Human-induced threats include hooking and drowning on commercial longline gear, collision with vessel rigging, entanglement in derelict fishing gear, ingestion of plastic debris, and contamination from oil spills.

Management and Protection

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is working with the commercial fishing



Short-tailed albatross distribution and sightings. The birds can be in any part of their range during any months in which open water is present. Map courtesy of USGS Biological Resource Division, Alaska.

industry to minimize take of this endangered seabird. To that end, the Service supplies free paired tori line (streamer line) kits to any Alaskan commercial longline vessel owner/operator who requests one.

In addition, the Service works cooperatively with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the University of Washington Sea Grant program on ways to minimize the impacts to seabirds by commercial fisheries.

To reduce the incidental take of seabirds by the fishing industry, including the short-tailed albatross, the National Marine Fisheries Service requires the Alaska longline fisheries to employ bird avoidance techniques such as using buoy or streamer lines with performance standards specified in regulations (50CFR679). Fishermen are strongly encouraged to develop new, innovative techniques to avoid catching birds.

The government of Japan provides legal protection to the short-tailed albatross as a Special National Monument and a Special Bird of Protection. The main nesting island, Torishima, is protected as a National Monument. Japan has improved the nesting habitat of the main colony on Torishima Island by planting

grass at the colony site to stabilize soils and provide cover. Efforts to establish a second nesting colony on Torishima Island continue. Minami-Kojima Island, where 10-20% of the birds breed, is currently claimed by both Japan and China. This dispute in ownership prevents scientists from aiding in the recovery of the birds that nest there.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) prohibits commercial import or export of the short-tailed albatross or the trade of its parts across international borders. Other Federal agencies permitting, authorizing, funding or conducting actions that may affect the albatross must consult with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service prior to implementing their actions.

You can help in documenting the habits of this species. Please report any sightings of short-tailed albatrosses to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Anchorage Field Office at: 907-271-2888 or greg_balogh@fws.gov.

For more information on this and other threatened and endangered species, contact the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Field Office near you. Contact information is on page 5 of this publication.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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