

NEWS



SCIENCE

New home found for albatrosses

Yomiuri Shimbun

A team of Japanese and U.S. researchers promoting the protection of the albatross, an endangered seabird, has selected the Ogasawara Islands as a potential new breeding ground for the birds.

Currently, Torishima in the Izu Islands is the nation's largest breeding ground for albatrosses, but the team fears the site could be threatened by a volcanic eruption.

The albatrosses migrate between Torishima and Alaska and have been officially designated an endangered species by the U.S. government, which is drawing up a plan for the conservation of the species.

Japanese researchers have joined the movement as well, last year setting up the Japan-U.S. albatross recovery team.

The team met in Chiba Prefecture for four days beginning Tuesday to discuss volcano-free islands that would be potential new habitats for the birds.

The Ogasawara Islands are under Tokyo's jurisdiction and are located about 300 kilometers south of Torishima. Albatrosses nested there until the 1930s.

But persuading the birds to return could be difficult. Since it is not easy to transfer chicks from one breeding ground to another, the team is researching ways to get the birds to switch islands of their own accord. This could include increasing albatross numbers on Torishima until overcrowding prompts the birds to seek a new home.

The team plans to submit its proposal to the U.S. government as early as the beginning of 2005 after listening to the opinions of other researchers.

Existing albatross conservation efforts have been fruitful, with an estimated 1,655 birds on Torishima as of April.

But after an eruption in August 2002, the team decided it was essential to find an alternative location for the bird sanctuary.

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