SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS *Phoebastria albatrus*

Conservation Status

ALASKA: Endangered **N. AMERICAN: High Concern** **GLOBAL: Vulnerable**

Breed	Eggs	Incubation	Fledge	Nest	Feeding Behavior	Diet
Oct-June	1	64-65 d	~ 5 months	ground	surface seize, scavenge	squid, shrimp, fish, fish eggs

Life History and Distribution

The Short-tailed Albatross *(Phoebastria albatrus)* was formerly the most abundant albatross in the North Pacific, numbering in the millions. Currently, the world population is less than 2000 individuals.

Breeding occurs mainly on two remote islands, south of the main islands of Japan. Eighty to eighty-five percent of the nesting takes place in one colony on an active volcano named Torishima. This volcano has erupted five times in the last century and most recently in 2002. The volcanic activity has destroyed much of the original nesting site, leaving sparsely vegetated, eroded slopes. Nests are now more prone to destruction from monsoon storms.

Japanese scientists have used decoys and recorded colony sounds to encourage breeding in a more stable area, on the northwest side of Torishima Island. Nine pairs have successfully nested at this site. The other established breeding site is on Minami-kojima Island, which is southwest of Torishima. In 2002, one Short-tailed Albatross chick was fledged on Kita-kojima Island which is near Minami-kojima. Both islands are in the Senkaku Island chain which may be slated for future oil development.

Repeated egg-laying has also occurred on Midway Island in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. To date, the reproductive attempts have not been successful. Midway Atoll would be a likely candidate for establishment of a new breeding site.

Outside the breeding season, the species spends much of its time feeding in the Alaskan waters of the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska.

Alaska Seasonal Distribution

AK Region	Sp	S	F	W
Southeastern *	+	+	+	+
Southcoastal *	+	+	+	+
Southwestern *	R	R	R	+
Central	-	-	-	-
Western	-	-	-	-
Northern	-	-	-	-

C= Common, U= Uncommon, R= Rare, + = Casual or accidental, - = Not known to occur, * = Known or probable breeder, Sp= Mar-May, S= June and July, F= Aug-Nov, W= Dec-Feb. Data provided by the North Pacific Pelagic Seabird Database **(NPPSD)**. USGS/ASC.

USFWS

The Short-tailed Albatross is the largest of the three albatrosses that occur in the North Pacific. It has a wing span of over seven feet and a body length of up to 37 inches. A massive, pink bill with a hooked, bluish tip easily identifies this species. Adults have an entirely white back, white or light golden crown and nape, and black and white wings. It is the only North Pacific albatross to develop an entirely white back in adulthood. Juveniles have chocolate brown plumage and could be confused with the Black-footed Albatross *(Phoebastria nigripes)*, but the large, pink bill, pink legs, and large size are identifying characteristics.

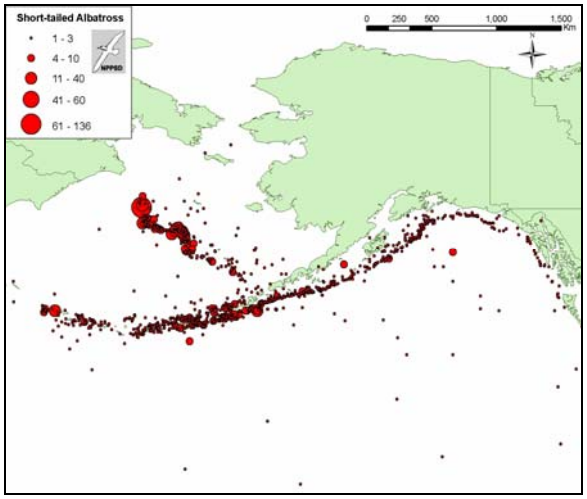
Long, narrow wings make the albatross perfectly adapted for dynamic soaring. Wind currents close to the surface of the ocean are used to cover huge distances in search of food. The bird can remain at sea indefinitely and only comes to land to breed.

Like other albatross species, Short-tailed Albatrosses are slow to reproduce, long-lived, monogamous, and mate for life. Breeding does not begin until age five or six (on average) and birds can live for forty years or more.

The marine regions preferred by Short-tailed Albatrosses for feeding are areas of upwelling and high productivity, such as continental shelf breaks. The diet includes squid, shrimp, fish eggs, fish, and crustaceans. Food is generally seized from the surface, but the species is also known to scavenge fish waste from fishing vessels.

Population Estimates and Trends

Short-tailed Albatrosses have survived numerous



Distribution of Short-tailed Albatrossess in Alaska as determined from boat-based surveys conducted between 1940-2003. Seabird distribution maps created from data provided by the North Pacific Pelagic Seabird Database (NPPSD) Version 2005.06.07 USGS Alaska Science Center, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Bird Management Office, Anchorage Alaska, and the Anchorage Fish & Wildlife Field Office http://www.absc.usgs.gov/research/NPPSD

population pressures. Between 1885 and 1903, approximately five million Short-tailed Albatrosses were harvested from Torishima for their feathers. By 1949, Short-tailed Albatrosses no longer nested at any of their historical sites and the species was thought to be extinct. After years at sea, however, the immature birds returned to their natal colonies, and in 1950, they were nesting on Torishima. By 1954, there were 25 birds and at least 6 pairs. The population slowly increased (~6-8% per year) because of habitat management projects, strict regulations, and no major volcanic eruptions. By 2001, there were 1,200 known birds and by fall of 2005, the population was estimated at about 2,000 individuals (1,712 from Torishima and 340 from the Senkakus).

Conservation Concerns and Actions

The Short-tailed Albatross was listed as endangered throughout its range in 2000 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Japanese Government declared the species a Natural Monument in 1958 and a Special Bird for Protection in 1972. The government-owned island of Torishima is also a Natural Monument and is managed for conservation. A multi-national Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Team (START) has been formed and a recovery plan is being finalized.

Currently, the main threat to the Short-tailed Albatross is the possibility of a major eruption at the main breeding site. Japan has improved the nesting habitat by planting grass to stabilize soils and provide cover. The other breeding site in the Senkaku Island group is not threatened by volcanism. However, there is a potential for oil development and a political dispute between Japan and China over ownership of the island is currently underway.

Longline fisheries for demersal groundfish in the North Pacific Ocean were a known cause of mortality of Short-tailed Albatrosses. During the 1980s, fishermen reported two takes of Short-tailed Albatrosses, one in the Bering Sea, and one in the Gulf of Alaska. Since 1990, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) observers recorded five Short-tailed Albatrosses taken in Alaskan waters.

The endangered status of the Short-tailed Albatross has engendered positive changes in the fishing industry and as a result, seabird bycatch of all species has been reduced. Ongoing efforts to reduce bycatch in Alaska include: continued collection of bycatch data via onboard observers, research on seabird deterrent devices, required use of the protective measures, and outreach and education for fishermen. Coordinated effort between state, federal, and international governments, fishermen, scientists, and fisheries managers has been made to reduce bycatch of seabirds.

Satellite telemetry indicated that Short-tailed Albatrosses move north after the breeding season to the southern tip of the Kamchatka Peninsula, then east to the western Aleutian Islands. The albatrosses spend considerable time in the western Pacific where they could be exposed to additional fisheries encounters. Thus, the Alaskan bycatch represents only a portion of the fishing mortality that occurs. Bycatch in longline fisheries conducted in the North Pacific by vessels representing Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Russia, and China also occurs.

Other human induced threats to Short-tailed Albatrosses include; ingestion of plastics, oil spills, and collisions with cables on fishing vessels.

Recommended Management Actions

- Complete a Short-tailed Albatross recovery plan update in five years (2010).
- Support ongoing population monitoring and habitat management on Torishima Island.
- Continue working with the Alaska commercial fishing industry and National Marine Fisheries Service to minimize accidental take of Short-tailed Albatrosses.
- Continue cooperation with the Japanese Ministry of Fisheries, and encourage other international fisheries organizations to attend START meetings.
- Support seabird bycatch reduction workshops for other countries in the North Pacific.

Regional Contact

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References

IUCN Internet Website (2005); Kushlan *et al.* 2002; NOAA Internet Website (2005); NPPSD Internet Website (2005); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2005a, 2005b, 2002.

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