SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER *Puffinus tenuirostris*

Conservation Status

ALASKA: Not At Risk **N. AMERICAN: Not Currently At Risk** **GLOBAL: Least Concern**

Breed	Eggs	Incubation	Fledge	Nest	Feeding Behavior	Diet
Nov-Apr	1	52-55 d	88-108 d	burrow	surface dive, pursuit plunge	crustaceans, fish, squid,

Life History and Distribution

Short-tailed Shearwaters (*Puffinus tenuirostris)* are one of the most abundant birds in the pelagic waters of Alaska during the northern summer. During the Alaskan winter, they are found on their breeding grounds in the Southern Hemisphere, making them a trans-equatorial migrant. These birds have been known to make the one-way trip (about 9,000 miles) in as little as six weeks. Shearwaters earned their name by their ability to skim the ocean surface with seemingly little effort. Their long, narrow wings enable them to dynamically soar and travel tremendous distances.

This species is the most abundant Australian seabird. It is an important part of Aboriginal culture in Tasmania and one of the few Australian birds that is commercially harvested. Chicks are taken for food, feathers, and oil. Approximately 200,000 chicks are harvested and sold annually.

Short-tailed Shearwaters have completely dark brown plumage on their upper body and head. The breast and underwings are pale gray and contrast with the darker "hood." Occasionally, the underwing has traces of white in the center. The tail is rounded and the dark grey feet trail behind when in flight. This species may be confused with the slightly larger Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus)*, which has a somewhat longer bill and more pronounced white under the wings.

The diet of the Short-tailed Shearwater consists primarily of crustaceans, but they also eat fish and squid. To catch their food, they plunge into the water or dive from the surface. The wings are used to propel the birds through the water. Shearwaters convert their food to oil which has a lower weight than the ingested prey. The oil is energy rich and is more easily carried long distances back to the chick.

Nesting occurs in densely packed colonies on coastal islands and on mainland promontories overlooking the sea. Colonies range in size from several hundred pairs to a single colony in excess of a million pairs. Burrows, up to six feet long, are dug for nesting. Occasionally, the birds nest in tunnels made in dense vegetation without burrowing. When nesting, shearwaters are nocturnal and return to the colonies in the dark after feeding at sea during the day. This behavior may reduce the risk from predators.

Breeding occurs only in Australia off the southern and southeastern coasts, around Tasmania, and on islands in Bass Strait. They are a regular nonbreeding summer visitor to Antarctica.

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During the southern winter (northern summer), most birds head for the North Pacific Ocean; the rest travel to the northeastern Indian Ocean. Birds that arrive in Alaskan waters reside there, roughly between May and September. The heaviest concentrations are over the continental shelf in the southern Bering Sea, and along the western Gulf of Alaska. Fewer birds are found in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas and the central and eastern Gulf of Alaska. Some nonbreeders may remain in Alaska throughout the northern winter.

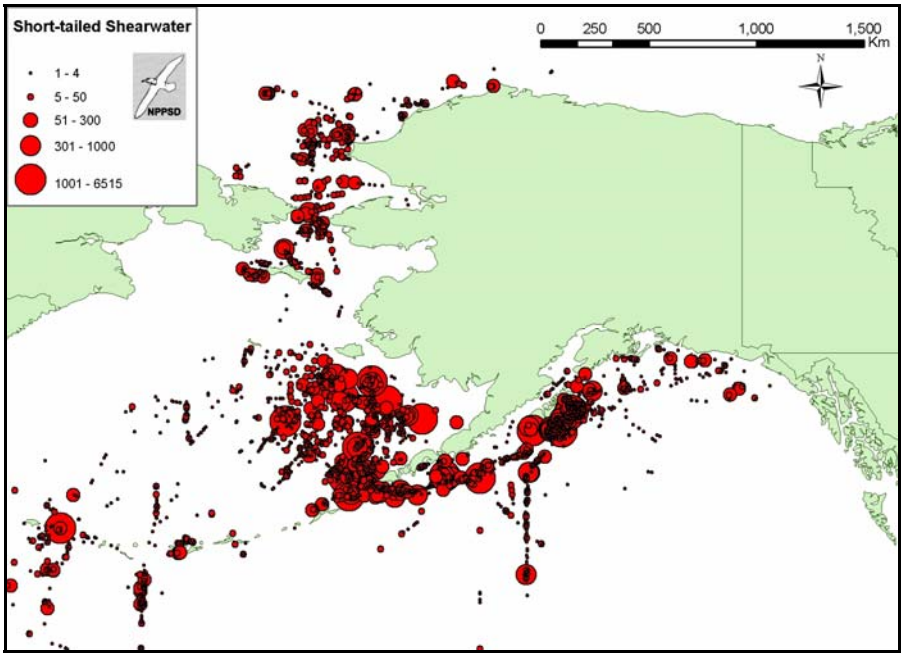
Alaska Seasonal Distribution

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

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.

Population Estimates and Trends

Approximately 23 million Short-tailed Shearwaters breed at about 285 colonies in southeastern Australia. The largest colony is on Babel Island (off the northeast



Distribution of Short-tailed Shearwaters in Alaska as determined from boat-based surveys conducted between 1975-1989. Seabird distribution maps created from data provided by the North Pacific Pelagic Seabird Database (NPPSD) Version 1.0, 2005. USGS Alaska Science Center & U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska. http://www.absc.usgs.gov/research/NPPSD

coast of Tasmania), which has about three million burrows. No global trend information is available.

Conservation Concerns and Actions

Although Short-tailed Shearwaters are a numerous species, they could still be vulnerable to over-harvesting, fisheries bycatch, predation, and habitat destruction. Because of the shearwater's international migratory habitats, it may be exposed to threats over a vast area.

In Tasmania, harvest limits are in place to prevent over-harvesting. Chicks are taken under strict controls and the season is limited.

For wide-ranging species, such as the Short-tailed Shearwater, the total magnitude of incidental fisheries bycatch is difficult to assess. In Alaska, the extent of the bycatch is examined for Short-tailed Shearwaters and Sooty Shearwaters together. Between 1993-2003, an estimated 445 shearwaters were taken annually in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands demersal groundfish longline fisheries. In the Gulf of Alaska, shearwaters are not taken in large numbers by the longline fishery. An estimated 21 shearwaters were taken annually between 1993-2003. Trawl fisheries in Alaska comprise a large portion of the total shearwater bycatch. Between 1998-2003, annual bycatch estimates in trawl fisheries ranged from <100 to 1,169.

Other potential threats to the species are: trampling of burrows by humans, pigs, cattle, and sheep; predation by feral cats and rats; erosion caused by recreational vehicles; and ingestion of plastics while feeding.

Recommended Management Actions

- Monitor population trends and distribution in Alaskan waters.
- Work with state and federal agencies and fisheries councils to better understand and minimize the negative impacts of fisheries interactions.
- Support continued research and development of mitigation measures to prevent fisheries bycatch.

Regional Contact

Branch Chief, Nongame Migratory Birds, Migratory Bird Management, USFWS, 1011 E. Tudor Rd., Anchorage, Alaska 99503
Telephone (907) 768-3444

References

Armstrong 1995; IUCN Internet Website (2005); Kushlan *et al.* 2002; Marchant and Higgins 1990; NOAA Internet Website (2005); NPFMC 2003; Parks & Wildlife Service, Tasmania, Internet Website (2005); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2002.

Full credit for the information in this document is given to the above references.