



# Short-tailed Albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*)

## *Threatened and Endangered Species*

### Status

The short-tailed albatross is listed under the Endangered Species Act as Endangered throughout its range (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, gradually turning white as the bird ages. 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: Torishima Island and Minami-kojima Island, Japan. 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 about 1200 birds and is increasing.

### Habitat and Habits

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



*The largest of three albatross species found in the North Pacific Ocean, 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. Photo by Hiroshi Hasegawa.*

over 40 years old. They begin breeding at about 7 or 8 years, and mate for life. Short-tailed albatrosses nest on sloping grassy terraces on two rugged, isolated, windswept islands in Japan. 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. When feeding, albatrosses alight on the ocean surface and seize their prey, including squid, fish, and shrimp.

### 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, leaving fewer than 50 birds by the 1940s. 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.

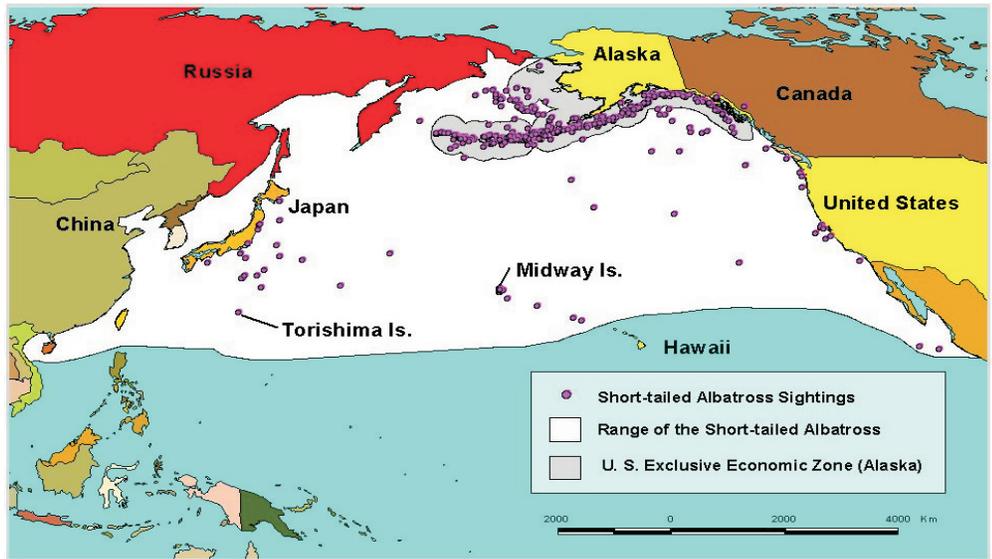
Human-induced threats include hooking and drowning on commercial longline gear, entanglement in derelict fishing gear, ingestion of plastic debris, contamination from oil spills, and potential predation by introduced mammals on breeding islands.

## Management and Protection

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is working with the commercial fishing industry to minimize take of this endangered seabird. To that end, we are supplying free paired tori line (streamer line) kits to any commercial longline vessel owner/operator who requests one. In addition, we are conducting a 50% cost-share program to reimburse owners of longline vessels that are 100 feet or more in length for half of the costs associated with installation of davits (heavy-duty tori line-deployment booms).

In addition, we periodically work cooperatively with the National Marine Fisheries Service on ways to minimize the impacts to seabirds by the fisheries that they manage. Other Federal agencies permitting, authorizing, funding or conducting actions that may affect the albatross must also consult with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service prior to implementing their actions.

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 on Torishima by planting grass at the colony site to stabilize soils and provide cover. Efforts to establishing a second nesting area on Torishima Island continue. The second nesting island, Minami-Kojima, is currently claimed by both Japan and China. This dispute in ownership prevents scientists from studying and helping the birds that nest there.



*Short-tailed albatross distribution and sightings from 1905-1996. The birds can be in any part of their range during any months in which open water is present.*

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. 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 weighted groundlines, hanging streamer or tori lines above baited hooks, deploying baited hooks underwater, and setting gear at night. Fisherman are strongly encouraged to develop new, effective techniques to avoid catching birds.

*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, Ecological Services Anchorage Field Office at (907)271-2888*

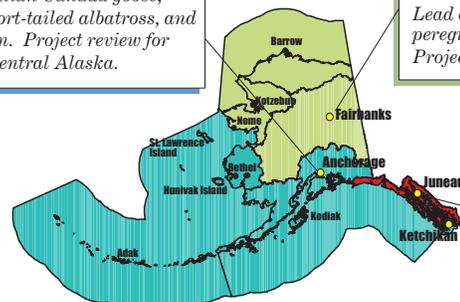
## References

- Harrison, C. 1979. The largest seabird in the North Pacific breeds on one small island south of Japan. *Oceans* 12:24-26.
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- Hasegawa, H., and A.R. DeGange. 1982. The short-tailed albatross, *Diomedea albatrus*: Its status, distribution and natural history. *American Birds* 6(5):806-814.
- Sherburne, J. 1993. Status Report on the Short-tailed Albatross, *Diomedea albatrus*. Alaska Natural Heritage Program, University of Alaska Anchorage, for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska. 33 pp.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1989. Biological Opinion on the Interim Incidental Take Exemption Program. Unpublished report. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to National Marine Fisheries Service. 13 pp.

For more information on this and other threatened and endangered species in Alaska, contact the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Ecological Services Field Office near you.

**Ecological Services Anchorage Field Office**  
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Lead office for Aleutian Canada goose, spectacled eider, short-tailed albatross, and Aleutian shield-fern. Project review for western and southcentral Alaska.

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Lead office for Steller's eider, American peregrine falcon, and Eskimo curlew. Project review for northern Alaska.



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