

DOVEKIE *Alle alle*

Conservation Status

ALASKA: None

N. AMERICAN: Moderate Concern

GLOBAL: Least Concern

Breed	Eggs	Incub	Fledge	Nest	Feeding Behavior	Diet
June-Aug	1	28-31 d	26-30 d	crevice	surface dive	crustaceans, fish

Distribution

This little bird, often called the Sea Dove or Little Auk, is the smallest and most abundant alcid in the North Atlantic Ocean. It breeds in high-arctic regions, particularly Greenland, but there are also a few small breeding colonies in Alaska and northeastern Canada.

Dovekies (*Alle alle*) are the only completely planktivorous alcid in the Atlantic and have several adaptations for plankton feeding. They have a small, stubby bill that is wide at the base; a soft, agile tongue; tooth-like projections on the roof of their mouths; and a throat pouch for transport of food to their young. To gather the plankton, the Dovekie dives from the surface of the water and propels itself as deep as possible. As the Dovekie moves back towards the surface, it gulps in as much water as can be held, taking plankton in with it. The throat is expandable which allows the bird to take in large amounts of food. The plankton concentrates in cold, surface waters in moderate to heavy offshore pack ice, over banks at sea, and at upwellings and oceanographic fronts.

In summer, the Dovekie has a jet-black head, neck, breast and upper parts, and white underparts. In winter, its breast, neck and the area behind its face change to white. The body shape is stout and sometimes the birds appear neckless. They fly with rapid, insect-like wingbeats.

Dovekies are social birds and tend to nest and fly in large groups, bunched tightly together. Females lay one pale, bluish egg in a rock crevice, among cliff rubble, or occasionally in a burrow.

This species breeds throughout the far north Atlantic, as far east as Siberia, with the majority of their huge breeding colonies located on western Greenland. Small numbers possibly breed on Little Diomed and St. Lawrence islands in the Bering Strait; they have also been seen near and possibly breeding on King Island in the Bering Strait, and St. Matthew Island and the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. The only known breeding colony in the Canadian Arctic is in Home Bay on east Baffin Island (<1,000 pairs). Breeding may also occur on Ellesmere Island, Canada.

In the Atlantic, they winter in the Labrador Sea, Grand Banks, and off the coast of Newfoundland. They can reach as far south as the Scotian Shelf, the Gulf of Maine, and the northern and eastern edges of Georges Bank. A few venture south to Long Island and as far south



USFWS Mark Rauzon

as coastal Virginia.

They are found casually in winter off the coast of Alaska and western Canada. Periodically, large groups or “wrecks” appear along the coast of the northeastern United States and occasionally at inland locations. The “wrecks” may be due to changes in Dovekie food supply, strong, easterly winter winds, or changes in overall sizes of Dovekie populations.

Two subspecies are recognized based on size. To date, only one is known to occur in North America. It is *Alle alle alle*. It is smaller in all measurements and lighter in mass than the other subspecies.

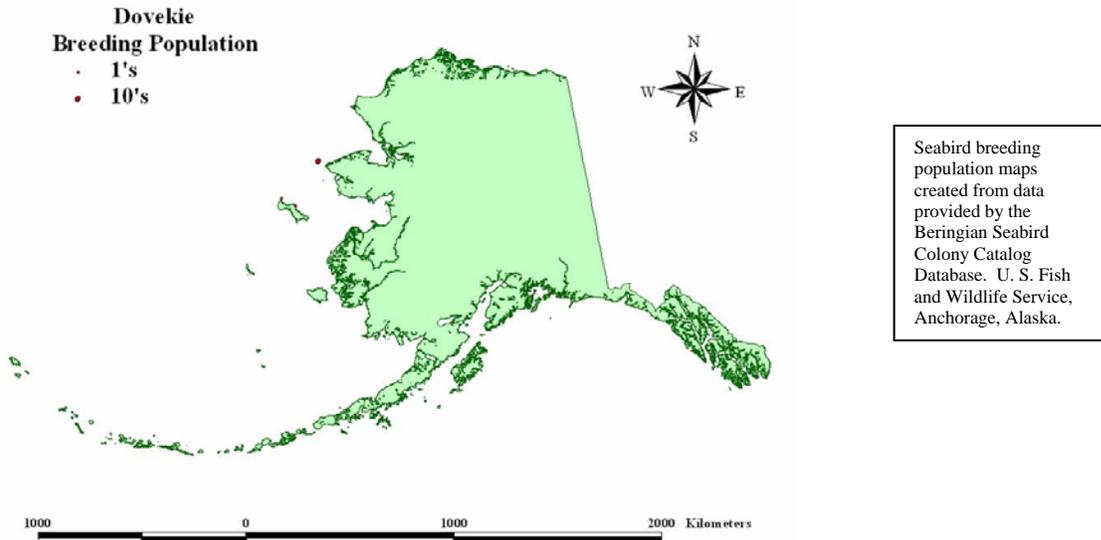
Alaska Seasonal Distribution

AK Region	Sp	S	F	W
Southeastern	-	-	-	-
Southcoastal	-	-	-	-
Southwestern	+	+	+	+
Central	-	-	-	-
Western *	R	R	R	-
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. © Armstrong 1995.

Population Estimates and Trends

World population estimates range from >30 million to 80-100 million individuals. The breeding population of Thule, northwest Greenland, is among the largest and densest breeding aggregations of all auks in the world.



Traditionally, this population has been estimated at about 30 million birds. Fewer than 1,000 pairs are estimated to breed in North America with the majority breeding at Home Bay on Baffin Island, Canada. Probable breeders in Alaska are estimated at about 60 individuals.

Like many crevice nesting species, Dovekies are extremely difficult to census. Therefore, there are no reliable data on trends.

Conservation Concerns and Actions

The Dovekie is a dominant part of the marine birdlife of the northwestern Atlantic Ocean. Because of its abundance, passive nature, accessibility at nesting colonies, and predominance in inshore waters and along ice-edges, it has been easy for humans to exploit the species. Traditionally, it has played an important role in the food economies of the Inuit people in the Thule district in northwestern Greenland and of Newfoundlanders. Inuits also traditionally used the skins of Dovekies to make clothing. Today, it is no longer hunted in Newfoundland or Labrador, but is still hunted at large colonies in northwestern and eastern Greenland, where there is no closed season and no apparent bag limits for the species. In winter, it is also hunted extensively in southwestern Greenland and less so in northwestern Greenland. A limited commercial harvest also takes place in northwestern Greenland.

Dovekies are highly vulnerable to oiling and a significant source of mortality is oiling at sea. In eastern Canada, it is the second most common species found oiled on beaches. Systematic beached-bird surveys estimate that 60,000-80,000 Dovekies may be killed by oiling at sea each year.

The Dovekies' association with arctic waters, arctic prey, and sea ice could make them susceptible to changes in ocean temperatures and nutrient-rich currents due to global warming. This species could be a potentially useful indicator of some of the ecological effects of climate change. However, before that would be possible more studies are needed of demography, population biology, winter at-sea distributions, and the impacts of natural and human caused disturbance.

Recommended Management Actions

- Implement a systematic census of the Alaskan population.
- Determine Alaskan Dovekie breeding population numbers.
- Establish a regional monitoring program.
- Complete a nesting inventory.
- Measure productivity.
- Determine wintering locations.

Regional Contact

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References

Armstrong 1995; IUCN Internet Website (2005); Kushlan *et al.* 2002; Montevecchi and Stenhouse 2002; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2006, 2002.

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