

**PARAKEET AUKLET** *Aethia psittacula*

**Conservation Status**

**ALASKA: Low**

**N. AMERICAN: Low Concern**

**GLOBAL: Least Concern**

Breed	Eggs	Incubation	Fledge	Nest	Feeding Behavior	Diet
June-Aug	1	35-36 d	35 d	crevice, among boulders, burrow	surface dives	crustaceans, fish, jellyfish

**Life History and Distribution**

The unusually shaped bill of this chunky little auklet gives it an appealing look. The bright red bill is roundish with the lower mandible curved upward. This shape enables them to feed on their favorite foods of jellyfish and the tiny marine crustaceans found among the tentacles of the jellyfish. White plumes ornament the auklets' face and extend back and downward from each of its yellow eyes. It has a distinct, pot-bellied shape, shows more extensive white in its underparts, and is larger than Least (*Aethia pusilla*) and Cassin's Auklets (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*).

This auklet does not form large colonies, but mainly nests scattered among puffins (*Fratercula spp.*) and other auklet species. Its preferred breeding sites are in crevices on steep rocky cliffs, but it also nests in burrows on talus slopes, and among loose boulders on rocky beaches or grassy slopes. It is less gregarious and in most areas less numerous than the Least and Crested Auklets (*Aethia cristatella*).

It is a highly vocal species. Whinneying displays are normally performed by males standing on a rock near the entrance to the nesting crevice. Duets are also executed by males and females and may serve in pair formation.

Formerly the Parakeet Auklet (*Aethia psittacula*) was placed alone in the genus *Cyclorhynchus*, which refers to the nearly circular profile of the bill. Now it is merged under the *Aethia* genus.

Parakeet Auklets are widely distributed from Southeast Alaska, across the Gulf of Alaska, in most of the Bering Sea, and in the Sea of Okhotsk in Siberia.

They are locally distributed in Southeast Alaska (small numbers south to St. Lazaria, Hazy and Forrester islands) and on the Kenai Peninsula. In the Gulf of Alaska, they are found on the Shumagin and Semidi islands and on Chirikof Island near Kodiak. Areas of concentrations are the Aleutian Islands west to Buldir and Agattu, and in the Bering Sea (Little Diomedea, St. Lawrence, King, St. Matthew, Pribilof, and Nunivak islands).

Winter distribution is poorly known, but it occurs offshore and moves further south and into the central South Pacific Ocean.



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**Alaska Seasonal Distribution**

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

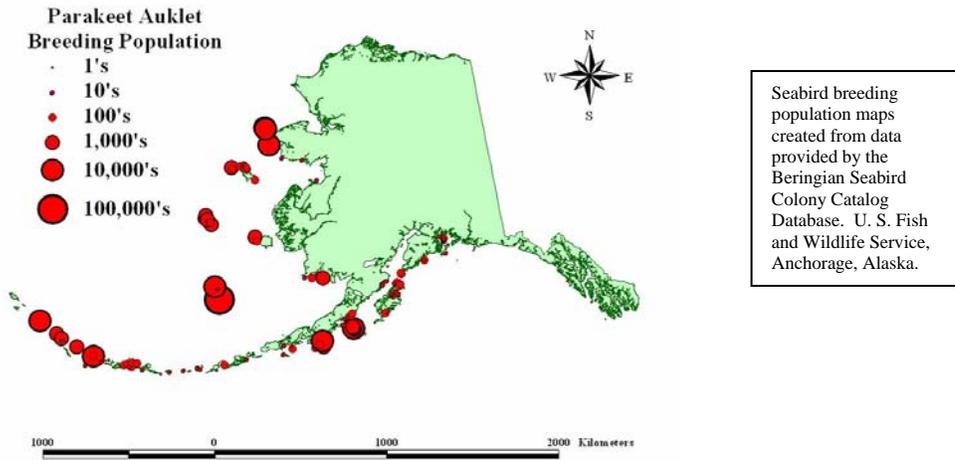
C= Common, U= Uncommon, R= Rare, += Casual or accidental, - = Not known to occur, \* = Known or probable breeder, Sp= Mar-May, S= June and July, F= Aug-Nov, W= Dec-Feb. © Armstrong 1995.

**Population Estimates and Trends**

The Alaskan population is estimated at 1,000,000 individuals at 195 colony sites. The total number of birds may be considerably higher for several reasons: the dispersed nature of breeding, lack of intensive surveys, difficulty of censusing crevice nesting species, and because the population is dispersed at sea for much of the year. St. George Island in the Pribilof Islands has the largest concentration of Parakeet Auklets in Alaska (approximately 250,000 breeding pairs).

In Asia, the population is unknown due to lack of censusing throughout most of the breeding range, but may total 300,000-400,000 pairs.

Trends are unknown. Numbers in the Aleutians may possibly be lower than before arctic fox (*Alopex lagopus*) and Norway rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) introductions,



although Parakeet Auklets were not one of the species considered to have been heavily preyed upon by foxes.

### Conservation Concerns and Actions

While the large population size and dispersed nature of Parakeet Auklets suggest no immediate conservation concern, further work needs to be done to ensure healthy populations. This species should be considered vulnerable to predation by introduced predators and expanding gull populations, ingestion of plastic particles, entanglement and mortality in fishing nets, and oil pollution.

At Buldir Island in the Aleutian Islands, Glaucous-winged Gulls (*Larus glaucescens*) are abundant and predation on Parakeet Auklets has been intense. The auklets may be susceptible in cases of increasing gull populations because they do not exhibit a mass flight, anti-predator response of some other auklet species. Mammalian predators include introduced arctic and red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and probably Norway rats.

For unknown reasons, a high percentage of Parakeet Auklets ingest plastic particles when feeding at sea. This species ranked first among 24 North Pacific seabird species sampled. Since 1969 this trend seems to be increasing, but the effects on the auklets health are unknown.

Parakeet Auklets have been shown to be vulnerable as bycatch in gillnets set in offshore waters. In one salmon driftnet fishery in the northwest Pacific, they accounted for 4.7% of seabirds caught with an estimated 7,079 birds killed in 1977 and 1,966 in 1987. In the eastern Bering Sea between 1993-1999, Parakeet Auklets made up 0.38% of seabirds drowned in Japanese salmon driftnet fisheries.

Oiled beach-cast Parakeet Auklets were found at Ushagat Island (in the Barren Islands) after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989, and at Buldir Island in 1994. Large numbers may continue to be killed by oil spilled or dumped at sea, but little quantitative information is available.

Native subsistence hunting and eggging still take place in Alaska. No good data are available on numbers of Parakeet Auklets killed or effects on the population because auklets were not identified to species in subsistence surveys.

### Recommended Management Actions

- Maintain an Alaskan population of at least 1,000,000 individuals.
- Improve population monitoring techniques.
- Survey populations at index locations and implement a monitoring program in Alaska.
- Investigate the status of the small populations in Southeast Alaska.
- Determine wintering areas.
- Continue fox removal and rat prevention programs.
- Investigate impacts of increasing gull populations.
- Support efforts to minimize the incidence of fuel spills near breeding and wintering areas and measure contaminants in Parakeet Auklet eggs.
- Measure incidence and impacts of plastic ingestion.
- Work with state and federal agencies and fisheries councils to minimize negative fisheries impacts.
  - Review plans for emerging fisheries to identify potential problems and solutions.
- Work with the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council (AMBCC), to monitor subsistence use of Parakeet Auklets.

### Regional Contact

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### References

Armstrong 1995; Dragoo *et al.* In Press; IUCN Internet Website (2005); Jones *et al.* 2001; Kushlan *et al.* 2002; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2006, 2002; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Internet Website (2005).

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