



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW Time (7:49)

SHORT-TAILED ALBATROSS (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH GREG BALOGH)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: Hello there, this is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and I'm on the phone today with Greg Balogh, the Endangered Species Branch Chief of the Anchorage Fish and Wildlife Field Office. Greg, would you mind telling us a little about the Short-tailed Albatross today?

MR. BALOGH: Sure. It's the biggest of the Northern Hemisphere Albatrosses and it used to be the most numerous as well. But back in the late 1800s, early 1900s, the species was actually clubbed to the very brink of extinction by feather hunters. They just walked into the colonies with clubs and harvested the birds with, I would say, reckless abandon. Loaded tons of feathers onto schooners for use in stuffing pillows and mattresses in Japan and probably elsewhere in the Far East. And then the carcasses were rendered down for fat. This is back in the age when people were still using whale oil for fuel. And they would get about a pint of low-grade fatty fuel from each of the Albatrosses that they clubbed.

And so over the course of time, they naturally got rid of all of the birds on most of the nesting colonies and there was just one small location on Torishima Island where they couldn't get to easily or it seems that the birds have persisted. And it was probably because this bird has a long time to reach sexual maturity so at any given point there's about five year classes that are out at sea just waiting to come of age before they start to breed. And it's probably those five-year classes that were out to sea during the final harvest that actually saved this species from going extinct.

MS. LEON: Tell us about some of the current vulnerabilities for this species.

MR. BALOGH: Well, I would say probably just the fact that there are so few of them. There's only about 2,600 of them right now. And only at two nesting locations. So, they're really vulnerable to just random events. For instance, the colony where there is 85 percent of the world population is on a steeply eroding slope at the base of a very active volcano. So, it's quite easy to imagine a scenario where could wipe out up to about 40 percent of the world population in one cataclysmic volcanic event. And that would never happen with a species that was more widespread or had larger numbers to start with. So, just random chance events that we have no control over is the biggest threat.

There are probably small numbers of birds taken by catch in the commercial fishing industry, although that by catch has been going on at whatever rate that the birds are being taken for years and yet we're still seeing six to seven percent annual growth.

So, while we look at by catch as a threat to the species, it to this point has not been limiting the population at all because six to seven, maybe eight percent growth is about as much as you can hope for from a species with these life history characteristics.

MS. LEON: All right. So, what's it going to take to recover this species and does the future look hopeful?

MR. BALOGH: Well, what we need to do is establish colonies on less hazardous sites. So, we need to get the birds that are nesting on the eroding slope at the base of the volcano. We need to get some of those birds nesting on safe sites. So, flatter land on non-volcanic islands. And that doesn't mean moving those birds that are breeding now, but what we're doing is we're taking a small number of chicks each year on the order of 10 to 15 chicks each year and moving them about 250 miles to the south from Torishima Island where the volcano is to Miyake-jima Island where there is nothing of danger really. And pandering them and hoping that their geographically imprinted on this island and that in a few years they'll be coming back and starting to breed there and forming a new colony where the population can grow unhindered and unthreatened for a long time until they reach carrying capacity of that island.

So, translocation of chicks is sort of the pathway to the future at this point. And it does look hopeful. We've had 100 percent fledgling success of the chicks that we've moved thus far. We've moved 25 of them so far. We'll move another 15 this year. Really good fledgling success, better than what the parents get with their own birds. And their fledgling with the body mass that is equal or greater than naturally reared chicks. We're putting satellite transmitters on them so that we can follow their post-fledgling survival rate and they're doing well. And they're flying up to Alaska under the feeding grounds where the naturally reared chicks fly so there's something in their biology that hard wires them to fly to the right places and hopefully they'll fly back to Miyake-jima to breed.

MS. LEON: Greg, I'm going to ask that you spend these last couple of minutes telling us about some of the key partners involved in this species recovery.

MR. BALOGH: Okay. Well, in reducing the threat of sea bird by catch in Alaska, we've

been working with the fishing industry itself and with the Washington Sea Grant Program. And in working with those two entities, along with the National Marine Fishery Service we've actually developed a program for distributing free streamer lines to fisherman throughout Alaska and we're actually now getting fisherman in Russia as well. And these are lines that -- long line vessel tow behind their boat to keep birds away from baited hooks while the baited hook are still near the surface where the birds can peck at them, possibly get hooked and drag under the drowned.

We've had just a handful of birds show up that long-line gear. We've actually had none of them show up dead on long-line gear in the past ten years which is how long we've been giving away these stream lines. So, that's a success and that's thanks to the cooperation with the University of Washington Sea Grant and the long-line fishing industry and National Fishery Service.

Now, in Japan, where we're working to translocate Short-tailed Albatross to safe sites, we're working with the Japanese government, their Ministry of the Environment, and the Yamashina Institute which is a nonprofit environmental ornithological group in Japan and we're also working with the North Pacific Research Board which has provided some of the funding that we're used to actually pull off these translocations.

And, in addition, there's one other partner. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, NWF, has also provided us with funding to help us with our translocation efforts.

And actually there are a couple of other partners as well in Japan. The Osahene News Corporation has kicked in money as well as the Sapporo Beer Company which is an interesting corporate sponsor. But we're thankful for support wherever we can get it.

MS. LEON: That actually really is interesting. But it sounds great. Thank you, Greg, for taking the time out of your day to tell us a little bit about this species.

MR. BALOGH: Okay.

MS. LEON: This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thanks for listening.