



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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Information Requested on Petition to List the Black-Footed Albatross as Threatened or Endangered

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today the reopening of a request for information from the public on a petition to list the black-footed albatross as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act. The publication of a comprehensive species status assessment and requests to comment on the status of the black-footed albatross in light of this recent report warranted the reopening.

On October 1, 2004, the Service received a petition requesting the black-footed albatross (*Phoebastria nigripes*) be listed as a threatened or endangered species and that critical habitat be designated concurrently with the listing. On October 9, 2007, the Service published a finding that the petition presented substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that listing the black-footed albatross may be warranted. The agency began a status review of the species.

The reopening of this request for additional information and comment does not change the petition finding, but merely allows additional time for interested parties to provide valuable input that will be an important source of information for the status review and decision on whether to propose listing the black-footed albatross for ESA protection.

The U.S. Geological Survey, Biological Resources Discipline recently published a formal status assessment of the black-footed and Laysan albatrosses. This new document provides a synthesis and review of all existing data and other information about these species, including an assessment of fishery-related mortality and statistical models of the species' status and trajectory. The document can be downloaded from the USGS website at:
<http://pubs.usgs.gov/sir/2009/5131/>

During the review, a species may be determined to be endangered or threatened due to one or more of the following five factors:

- the present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range;
- overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
- disease or predation;
- the inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; and
- other natural and manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

Threats to the black footed albatross are incidental mortality from longline fishing and mercury and organochlorine contaminants such as PCBs and DDTs. These substances, used in industry and agriculture, pose a toxicological risk and interfere with reproduction. Rising sea levels and the loss of low-lying oceanic islands due to climate change is another threat.

Of the three North Pacific albatross species, the black-footed is the only dark-colored species. The plumage is uniformly sooty brown in color with a whitish ring at the base of the bill and a white patch behind the eye. Mature birds display a white patch above and below the tail. The bird's wingspan can reach 6 to 7 feet and their average weight is approximately 6 pounds. A surface feeder and scavenger, the primary natural prey of the black-footed albatross is thought to be flying fish eggs and squid.

The total breeding population of the black-footed albatross numbers roughly 61,000 pairs, with 97 percent of the population nesting in the predator-free Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, now included within Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. The majority of those are found on Midway Atoll and Laysan Island. The remaining 3 percent of the birds nest on several remote islands in Japan. Exploitation of the species for eggs and feathers in the 19th and early 20th centuries eliminated breeding colonies on four islands or atolls and in two island groups across the Pacific.

Black-footed albatross can live as long as 40 to 50 years and are slow to mature with the first breeding typically occurring at 8 to 10 years of age. Pairs mate for life and breed a maximum of once each year with both adults providing care for the chick. Birds arrive in the Hawaiian nesting colonies in October, producing a single egg usually by early December. Eggs hatch between January and February, and chicks fledge by mid- to late July.

The Service is soliciting data and other information regarding the species to ensure a comprehensive review. To be considered in the 12-month finding for this petition, data, information, and comments must be submitted to the Service by September 25, 2009. Comments may be sent via the Internet to <http://www.regulations.gov>. Comments may also be mailed or hand-delivered to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R1-ES-2007-0004; Division of Policy and Directives Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222, Arlington, VA 22203.

All comments and material received will be made available for public inspection. Information previously submitted does not need to be resubmitted. Comments received during the first comment period are part of the public record and will be incorporated into the 12-month finding.

For more information contact: Loyal Mehrhoff, Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, HI 96850 (Telephone 808-792-9400, Fax 808-792-9581).

Copies of the *Federal Register* notice may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>. Copies are also available by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service office in Honolulu at (808) 792-9400.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.