

Pacific Seabird Group and Aleutian Tern Technical Committee

2017 Annual Report

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BACKGROUND

During the 2016 PSG Annual meeting, the Aleutian Tern (*Onychoprion aleuticus*, ALTE) Working Group was formalized as a PSG Technical Committee, with co-coordinators Susan Oehlers (U.S. Forest Service, Tongass National Forest, Yakutat Ranger District) and Mike Goldstein (U.S. Forest Service, Alaska Region). This group includes members from multiple government organizations (including U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and National Park Service), universities, and national and international non-government organizations (including National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Bird Life International), as well as independent researchers. Objectives of this group include; 1) expansion of the committee to include additional resource management agencies including those with marine and coastal jurisdiction, federal research agencies, and additional non-government organizations and international partners, such as the East Asian flyway council; 2) international networking with resource professionals, academic researchers, and local ornithological groups in other countries within the species range; and 3) production of a peer reviewed publication or white paper summarizing current available information on ALTE.

The approximately 30-member committee fosters state, provincial, national, and international collaboration to study the Aleutian Tern, and meets in conjunction with the PSG annual meeting as well as formally and informally throughout the year. Several new technical committee members were added in 2017, primarily as a result of networking through PSG and the Alaska Bird Conference, as well as referrals from existing committee members.

This annual report summarizes accomplishments of the technical committee, including highlights of individual member's contributions, during the 2017 fiscal year.

MEETINGS

A subset of members met in Juneau in January 2017, to focus on the collaborative process in developing proposals and implementing research and monitoring. The technical committee formally met twice (February 22 and 24) during the annual PSG conference in Tacoma, Washington. Several additional side meetings between members took place during the conference, and collaboration was ongoing throughout the year.

ACCOMPLISHMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Several steps towards elevating the international status of ALTE were accomplished:

- Technical committee members provided input (a formal letter from PSG to BirdLife International) to the ongoing IUCN assessment of range-wide Aleutian tern status. The status has since been elevated from “least concern” to “vulnerable.”
- Aleutian terns were discussed during the January meeting of the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership Seabird Working Group, attended by technical committee members Robb Kaler (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Birds Management) and Simba Chan (BirdLife Asia).
- The possibility of adding Aleutian terns to the list of species receiving official Russian – U.S. bilateral cooperation is also currently under investigation.

A subset of committee members collaborated on a pilot study deploying PTT transmitter tags in 2 regions; Yakutat and Dillingham. Fifteen PTT tags were deployed, and multiple colony surveys were conducted throughout the season. Additionally, a pilot nest monitoring study utilizing remote cameras was implemented on Yakutat are colonies. Project results will be presented at the 2018 Alaska Marine Science Symposium, Aleutian Tern Conservation Planning Meeting, and the 2018 Pacific Seabird Group Annual Conference.

In addition to the Yakutat and Dillingham area surveys, monitoring was conducted by committee members on the Kenai Peninsula (Kenai National Wildlife refuge and Homer area), Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge (including nest camera monitoring and collection of nest-site habitat data), the Alaska National Maritime Wildlife Refuge, and from Naknek to Port Moller on the Bering Sea coast (Alaska Peninsula/Becharof National Wildlife Refuge). Additionally, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge staff conducted pilot work utilizing an unmanned aerial system (i.e. UAS or “drone”) to survey a mixed Arctic and Aleutian Tern colony.

Committee members provided technical review of the Aleutian Tern section of Audubon’s Ecological Atlas of the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas. Several committee members submitted comments to the North Pacific Research Board, to include Aleutian Terns as a research priority for the next annual funding cycle. Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge wildlife biologists are working with the new USFWS "Pacific Seabird Program" data manager to update online records of ALTE colonies.

GRANTS

A subset of committee members was approved for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant for continued tagging and monitoring work in several regions (Yakutat, Dillingham/Platinum, and Kodiak) as well as conservation planning (i.e. a workshop/meeting to further refine and be consistent in our colony monitoring methods) during 2018.

Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge wildlife biologist Heather Renner, in collaboration with Don Lyons and Don Roby from Oregon State University and U.S. Geological Survey, applied for and

successfully secured funding through the Department of Interior's Science Support Program/ Quick Response Program to begin collaboration with Russian ALTE experts. Initial networking has been initiated, with the intent for a field expedition to Sakhalin Island (site of a number of historically large breeding colonies) in 2018.

With support and collaboration from the technical committee, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Landscape Ecologist Dawn Magness submitted a proposal to the NASA DEVELOP program to utilize NASA imagery to map potential Aleutian Tern nesting habitat, including, if feasible, a time series of potential habitat to understand if habitat is shifting. This proposal was chosen for further development.

University of Alaska Southeast professor Sanjay Pyare submitted a proposal for a 2018-2019 Fulbright Scholar award titled "Aleutian-tern migration research as a flagship for Indonesian-U.S. collaboration, conservation and education." The proposal would support 5 months of Aleutian tern international research and outreach/networking with Indonesian researchers, government agencies, and students. The Fulbright Foundation's Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) has completed its review of the proposal, has recommended it for a Fulbright award in Indonesia, and its award is pending budgetary approval.

Several additional grants were applied for through committee member collaborations and either were not accepted or are pending approval.