

Pacific Seabird Group and Aleutian Tern Technical Committee

2018 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 2018 fiscal year.

MEETINGS

Collaboration between committee members occurred throughout the year. The committee formally met during the annual PSG conference in La Paz, Mexico, and several additional side meetings between members took place during the conference. A subset of committee members also attended the Northeast Asia Conservation Committee meeting to present ALTE migration data and to discuss opportunities for collaboration.

The committee, with primary financial support from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, convened an Aleutian Tern Conservation Planning meeting in Anchorage, Alaska, January 26-27. The overarching goal was to work towards methods for assessing statewide Aleutian Tern population size and trend, with a specific focus on developing methods for estimating abundance at the local (i.e. colony) scale. Methods recommended for investigation as a result of this meeting, including ground based visual counts,

ground-based photos, aerial photos obtained through drones, and acoustic recordings, were then pilot tested at multiple study sites in Alaska (including Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Homer area, Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, Yakutat Forelands, Naknek, and Dillingham). Data are being analyzed with follow-up work to refine the techniques anticipated for the 2019 field season.

ACCOMPLISHMENT HIGHLIGHTS

A subset of committee members continued to collaborate on a pilot study deploying PTT transmitter tags in 2 regions; Yakutat and Dillingham. Twelve PTT tags were deployed, and multiple colony surveys were conducted throughout the season. Additionally, a pilot nest monitoring study utilizing remote cameras was continued on the Yakutat area colonies.

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), Copper River Delta, Naknek, and Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge (including nest camera monitoring and collection of nest-site habitat data).

Committee member Martin Renner collected diet data from Aleutian terns by photographing bill loads carried by adults feeding young. Several targeted colonies failed to produce young, but bill load data were obtained on Kodiak Island and in Naknek, Bristol Bay.

Committee members Heather Renner, Daniel Roby, and Don Lyons, with support from the U.S. Geological Survey Science Support Partnership Project, implemented the project “Survey and assessment of large Aleutian Tern *Onychoprion aleuticus* colonies in northern Sakhalin, Russia.” During 20–27 June, Renner, Lyons, and private consultant Martin Renner (Tern Again Consulting) visited three major island colonies on the northeast coast of Sakhalin Island, and conducted surveys with the participation and support of Russian experts. They assessed colony size using counts of flushed individuals, the size and density of nesting areas, and aerial imagery obtained using drones. The observed numbers were less than previously reported, however analyses of aerial imagery to confirm this conclusion is ongoing, and other mitigating factors are being considered. Short and long-term actions have been identified to maintain engagement between Russian and American experts and to improve population assessments across the entire species range, and a number of additional actions and products will be developed subsequent to the preliminary project report and trip summary.

In October, committee member Sanjay Pyare traveled to Indonesia to begin 5 months of Aleutian tern international research and outreach/networking with Indonesian researchers, government agencies, and students. This project is supported by a 2018-2019 Fulbright Scholar awarded to Dr. Pyare titled “Aleutian-tern migration research as a flagship for Indonesian-U.S. collaboration, conservation and education.”

GRANTS

A subset of committee members was approved for 3 collaborative National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants for continued tagging and monitoring work, colony-level methods refinement, and beginning development of a statewide monitoring framework.

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