

## 2016 PSG Aleutian Tern Technical Committee Annual Report

Susan Oehlers and Mike Goldstein, Coordinators

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.

### ACTIVITIES AND UPDATES

Prior to formation of the PSG committee, the working group developed a conservation synthesis for ALTE, entitled Summary of Information Needs and Research Priorities for Aleutian Tern Conservation (November 24, 2015), led by Dr. Sanjay Pyare (University of Alaska Southeast). A sub-group of committee members expanded on this effort and further developed a draft research and monitoring proposal, with the overall goal to develop methods that address key challenges to studying ALTE and evaluate potential causes for the decline in Alaska. Members of this sub-group also convened in Yakutat in July, 2016 to further collaborate and conduct site visits to the Yakutat area colonies. This draft proposal is a highly valuable tool as we continue to build interest and partner support and pursue research and monitoring funding for ALTE.

While continuing to refine information, conservation, and research needs for ALTE, committee members and their colleagues have continued to pursue research, monitoring, and outreach as funding allows. The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Yakutat Tern Festival was held on June 2-5, led by Susan Oehlers and Teresa Swanson (U.S. Forest Service) along with multiple partners and sponsors, with the primary purpose to build awareness of the importance of the Yakutat area tern colonies amongst local residents (including youth) and visitors. Susan Oehlers and Nate Catterson (U.S. Forest Service, Yakutat Ranger District), assisted by Kelly Nesvacil and Jon Barton (Alaska Department of Fish and Game), conducted population surveys of known Yakutat area tern colonies. Jon Barton and Christine Schmale (Alaska Department of Fish and Game) conducted a site visit to Dillingham and Platinum to document observations and assess logistics for future ALTE work in the area. Robin Corcoran (USFWS, Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge) surveyed known Kodiak area breeding colonies and monitored ALTE nests with remote cameras, and is

coordinating with Don Lyons (Oregon State University) on analyzing the photos for various parameters including nest attendance, vigilance, and nest survival rate.

As identified through a recent marking study (Goldstein et al. unpublished manuscript), the Aleutian tern winters, in part, in Indonesia. Mike Goldstein (U.S. Forest Service) and Sanjay Pyare (University of Alaska Southeast) traveled to Indonesia in September 2016 to begin building collaborative relationships with government, non-government, and university personnel, and to locate the species in areas where it has been seen by birders in recent years. Working with rangers from West Bali National Park, Goldstein and Pyare visited one site in southern Bali (Serangan Island) and two sites in west Bali (near Gilimanuk and Menjangan). Working with local birders from Burung Nusantara, they visited two sites on Java Island (Sunda Strait and Jakarta Bay). The U.S. Forest Service International Programs Asia Pacific Office co-sponsored this trip and participated with liaisons from both Washington DC (Eric Hoenig) and Jakarta (Harityas Wiyoga).

International connections were further enhanced by Martin Renner and others providing input to the ongoing IUCN assessment of range-wide Aleutian tern status as well as by Robb Kaler (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Birds Management), Simba Chan (BirdLife Asia), and colleagues including Aleutian terns on the agenda of the January meeting of the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership Seabird Working Group. The possibility of adding Aleutian terns to the list of species receiving official Russian – U.S. bilateral cooperation is also currently under investigation.

Committee members are currently collaborating on planning for 2017 field work. Research and monitoring will be conducted at several regional sites, including Yakutat, Bering Sea, and Kodiak Island. Proposed research activities include repeated colony size estimation across the breeding season, monitoring of nesting success using motion sensor cameras, and deploying satellite telemetry tags. 2017 is considered a pilot year for most of these activities, and results will inform our future planning, including a methods workshop planned for winter 2017/2018.