



North Pacific Albatross Working Group 2022 Annual Report

Presented to
Pacific Seabird Group, Executive Committee

February, 2023



Background

The North Pacific Albatross Working Group (NPAWG) was established over 15 years ago out of concern for apparent increases in albatross bycatch and mortality rates among several North Pacific commercial fisheries and the need for better understanding of populations and demography of the three North Pacific albatross species (Black-footed albatross, Laysan albatross, and Short-tailed albatross). These issues prompted awareness and resulted in more coordination among researchers and managers to foster collaboration and advancement in albatross conservation.

Each year in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Pacific Seabird Group, the North Pacific Albatross Working Group holds a meeting to enable managers, scientists, researchers, and conservation management professionals with backgrounds in seabird ecology, albatross biology and management, fishery management, and albatross conservation to share updates on their work and discuss ongoing and emerging threats, actions being implemented or planned, and advancements and challenges toward achieving conservation priorities.

2020-2021 NPAWG Activities

Most of the activities that are associated with NPAWG are brought to bear during the annual working group meeting. The group comprises numerous interested attendees and core presenters who share updates on albatross policy initiatives, population monitoring and management, fisheries bycatch, habitat restoration, invasive species control, contaminants and disease research, at-sea habitat and resource utilization, education and outreach. The annual meetings are usually well attended and in 2021 and 2022, due to health and safety standards during the Covid-19 outbreak, the meetings were held virtually. The 2023 meeting will once again be in-person.

In 2021 and 2022, we incorporated policy updates and activities of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) Advisory Committee and relevant work being performed by the Seabird Bycatch Working Group and Population and Conservation Status Working Group (Mi Ae Kim, NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs).



In 2021 we reviewed and discussed updates on the 5-year status review for Short-tailed Albatross and various conservation management initiatives overseen by the Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Team and in 2022 we received a briefing on recently documented 3rd generation presence of Short-tailed albatross on Mukojima Island (Jennie Spegon, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Anchorage, Alaska).

Population monitoring of Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument is an important part of NPAWG meetings and greatly informs annual and current trends. In 2021 and 2022 we received a summary of trends, nest counts, and updates on winter wave impacts at French Frigate Shoals, Midway, and Kure Atolls and reviewed some of the early results of managing the impacts of mice on nesting albatross at Midway Atoll (Beth Flint and Jon Plissner, USFWS). The North Pacific Albatross Demography Project being spearheaded by Roberta Swift (USFWS, Migratory Birds and Habitat Program) has been a focus of interest for the last several years and continues to be an important action item that receives considerable attention by NPAWG.

A significant amount of content is discussed within NPAWG pertaining to albatross bycatch in several regional fisheries covering albatross bycatch monitoring and take estimation for US West Coast trawl and longline fisheries and albatross bycatch in federal fisheries off Alaska (Tom Good, NOAA Fisheries, Northwest Fisheries Science Center, Seattle and Anne Marie Eich, NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Regional Office, Juneau).

We have also been reviewing and monitoring results of collaborative research and field demonstrations using tori line deployment to minimize interaction with Laysan and Black-footed albatross in the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery and changes to blue dye and strategic offal discard standards. In addition, we receive annual summaries of bycatch, bycatch reduction measures, and other relevant biological information such as observer effort (John Peschon and Colby Brady, NOAA Fisheries, Pacific Islands Regional Office).

NPAWG also remains fully engaged with research collaborators on albatross bycatch demographics in West Coast, Alaska, and Hawaii fisheries and in 2021 and 2022 reviewed findings derived from necropsy examinations performed in 2020 that included age, sex, and body condition of birds (Jessie Beck, Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge, Santa Cruz).



Each year we review all of the Short-tailed albatross fishery interactions and receive a briefing on Alaska Fisheries Sciences Center strategic planning for seabird-related activities (Shannon Fitzgerald, NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Fisheries Science Center).

Rachael Orben and Leigh Torres at Oregon State University have been utilizing remote-sensing technologies to integrate Global Fishing Watch AIS data and albatross tracking data in order to investigate factors influencing albatross-fisheries encounters in the North Pacific. They also have reported on the use of High Resolution Satellite Imagery to develop a reliable system to count Short-tailed albatross and tracking the presence and movements of Laysan and Black-footed albatrosses using radar-detecting tags and associated vessel detections.

NPAWG has also been engaged with BirdLife International who report annually on their work to develop sustainable partnerships between regional fisheries management organizations and BirdLife's High Seas and Pacific Program. These efforts include considerable outreach, training, and development of educational content that elevates effective community engagement.

Active conservation efforts focusing on albatross reintroduction and translocation, social attraction, and colony establishment activities on the island of Oahu, including enhancing protections of albatrosses that are exhibiting dispersal to formerly less occupied areas in the main Hawaiian Islands is considered an important element of NPAWG's interest. Several of these programs, including the translocation of Black-footed albatrosses from Midway Atoll, Hawaii to Guadalupe Island, Mexico and the associated monitoring these programs entail are the results of productive collaborations between Pacific Rim Conservation (Lindsay Young and Eric VanderWerf) and Grupo de Ecología Conservación de Islas (Julio Hernández-Montoya).

Future Objectives

Going forward, as a group, NPAWG anticipates that its purpose will continue to be enabling productive and open exchange of scientific information on the diverse range of issues affecting albatross populations in the North Pacific and how these are being addressed through research and conservation actions. The information sharing platform (wiki) once used to share reference materials and current literature related to North Pacific albatross conservation was discontinued in 2019. We started up a Google share platform in 2020 but this has not proven sufficient for our ongoing needs. Setting up a



new shared space to facilitate productive exchange of information will be a key ambition in 2023.

Enhancing the exchange of information and generating working discussion among participants throughout the year is important for NPAWG and helps facilitate existing and new collaboration among participants and particularly in the lead up to the annual working group meeting.

One area that has always been foundational to the NPAWG and needs to see a renewed emphasis is identifying key objectives for the group following the meeting and in the year leading up to the subsequent annual meeting. A lot of information gets presented and discussed during the annual working group meeting but there needs to be clear targets set to encourage continuity and facilitate collaboration. This is going to be an important initiative that the Chair will take responsibility for shepherding through 2023-2024 based on the content covered and discussions emerging from the February 2023 meeting. Importantly, during the February 2023 meeting will evaluate how progress has been made toward achieving some of the key objectives and action items outlined in *A Conservation Action Plan for Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses* (USFWS Version 1.0, 2007). There is a high probability that NPAWG will make a formal recommendation to USFWS to update the plan and initiate the production of Version 2.0 based on advancements and the emergence of new threats or challenges affecting the success of priorities identified in Version 1.0 sometime in the next 1-2 years.

Similarly, the group needs to coordinate and set up a new web-based file and information sharing platform. This is critical, especially as we continue to adapt to exercising collaboration remotely owing to uncertainties related to future public health measures that might emerge and could be similar to what we experienced during the 2020-2022 SARS-Cov-02 (COVID-19) cycle.

Finally, NPAWG can do more to expand the virtues of its ambitions by demonstrating that the issues and actionable initiatives it facilitates, through exchange of information and updates on the status of conservation management initiatives are, as discussed above, being used to effectively gauge progress on these issues. NPAWG would also like to move forward and engage with the Executive Committee on the pros and cons of NPAWG transitioning into a more recognized group within the PSG sponsored committee network.



The annual reports going forward will aim to summarize what the NPAWG identifies as new or exacerbated threats or concerns, noteworthy changes or advancements in policies that affect albatrosses in U.S. waters and beyond, and key projects that are proposed or already in progress, including ongoing collaborations (i.e. STAL Recovery Committee) and their respective status.

Summary

NPAWG wishes to thank the Pacific Seabird Group for continuing to recognize our working group as a vibrant and focused group of professionals with a diverse background in seabird ecology, fishery science, and conservation management. Typically, we grow stronger each year because we work hard to bring the most current and compelling issues in albatross conservation to bear and work toward identifying challenges and achievements in a collaborative, forward thinking capacity.

2021 and 2022 were unusual due to public health measures affecting everyone. Some of these restrictions may have affected NPAWG's capacity to conduct business but we believe 2023 will be an important year for reestablishing many of the foundational support mechanisms we typically use to consolidate and facilitate the exchange of information among the group.

We look forward to an exciting meeting on Tuesday, February 14, 2023 at 9:00 AM (Pacific Time) in association with the 50th Annual Meeting of the Pacific Seabird Group in La Jolla, California.

Respectfully prepared and submitted by:



Gregory Spencer, Chair
North Pacific Albatross Working Group
gspencer@harveyecology.com
(808) 269-6480