

PSG NPAWG Delegate Annual Report



North Pacific Albatross Working Group
2023 Annual Report

Presented to
Pacific Seabird Group, Executive Committee

February 2024

Background

The North Pacific Albatross Working Group (NPAWG) was established over 15 years ago out of concern for increases in albatross bycatch and mortality rates among several North Pacific commercial fisheries. NPAWG formed to address 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). Many of the high priority conservation actions identified in *A Conservation Action Plan for Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses* (Naughton et al. 2007, Version 1.0) have achieved traction and strong collaborative efforts across agencies, institutions, and disciplines. More on this below in Future Objectives.

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.

The structure of NPAWG meetings is to facilitate an orderly yet casual atmosphere in which individuals are afforded an opportunity to provide a short briefing/update on their work that includes international and intergovernmental affairs (ACAP), US federal and state fisheries management, and bycatch monitoring, bycatch avoidance and minimization tools, population demographics, genetics, active conservation initiatives, and capacity-building with national fisheries partners (Japan, Taiwan). The updates are highly informative and enable an open discussion and dialogue to unfold. This format enhances the capacity to build collaboration within NPAWG.

2022 and 2023 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, translocation, contaminants and disease research, at-sea habitat and resource utilization, education, and outreach.

Mi Ae Kim (NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs) usually kicks our meetings off with policy updates and activities of Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) Advisory Committee, Seabird Bycatch Working Group, and Population and Conservation Status Working Group. Beth Flint (USFWS), Tom Good (Northwest Fisheries Science Center, NOAA), and Ed Melvin (University of Washington ret.) will be providing this context during the 2024 meeting in Seattle.

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 the groups understanding of annual and current trends. Updates include a summary of nest counts and trends at French Frigate Shoals, Midway, and Kure Atolls, and status of habitat vulnerable to wave impacts, particularly at French Frigate Shoals.

The North Pacific Albatross Demography Project 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. This is a project that the group will be looking to USFWS to provide updates on during the 2024 meeting.

Each year NPAWG receives updates from USFWS on Short-tailed Albatross conservation management initiatives and activities of the Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Team. These include 5-year status reviews and updates on the 3rd generation presence of Short-tailed albatross on Mukojima Island and relevant regulatory actions (Jennie Spegon, USFWS).

NPAWG has facilitated exchange 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 through good collaboration at NOAA (Seattle-Juneau). Numerous individuals have participated in NPAWG meeting discussions related to seabird bycatch reduction in several key fisheries and we expect to see this continue with several projects now beginning to show promise.

NPAWG carefully monitors results of field demonstrations and use of tori lines to minimize interaction with Laysan and Black-footed albatross in the Hawaii deep-set longline

fishery and changes to baiting and discard standards. John Peschon from the Pacific Islands Regional Office (NOAA), or his staff, usually provides a comprehensive overview and annual summaries of bycatch, bycatch reduction measures, observer effort, and other relevant biological information.

Jessie Beck is a strong driver on the Oikonos-NOAA collaborative Pacific Seabird Necropsy Program that is sampling all three species of North Pacific albatross collected as bycatch in U.S. federally managed fisheries and includes demographics and preliminary results of genetic stock identification of U.S. Black-footed albatross bycatch.

Each year NPAWG is briefed by Alaska Fisheries Sciences Center on Short-tailed albatross fishery interactions over the preceding year, trends, and observations, including strategic planning for seabird-related activities and collaborative studies ongoing with Oikonos and other collaborators.

Rachael Orben and colleagues at Oregon State University are utilizing remote-sensing technologies to investigate factors influencing the distribution of albatross-fisheries encounters in the North Pacific, using AIS data and albatross tracking data. The OSU team and their collaborators are also utilizing High Resolution Satellite Imagery to develop a reliable system to count Short-tailed albatross in the Senkaku Islands and is tracking the presence and movements of Laysan and Black-footed albatrosses using radar-detecting tags and associated vessel detections.

BirdLife International has also remained active with NPAWG. Yasuko Suzuki and Stephanie Borrelle usually provide updates on BirdLife's activities and engagement with industry in Japan and elsewhere to raise awareness and reach agreements on fishery bycatch reduction measures and public and industry education. During the 2024 meeting David Kroodsma will update NPAWG on disparate albatross bycatch rates relative to time-of-day gear is set, for longline fisheries.

Successful conservation efforts focusing on albatross reintroduction and translocation, social attraction, and colony establishment activities are exciting conservation actions that help highlight efforts made to achieve goals set forth in the 2007 Action Plan. Laysan albatross on the island of Oahu (Pacific Rim Conservation) and Black-footed albatross translocation from Midway Atoll to islands off Mexico (Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas), including Guadalupe, are enhancing protection of albatrosses which show indications of more frequent dispersal to formerly less occupied areas in the main Hawaiian Islands.

Future Objectives

Going forward, NPAWG core participants are being asked to add project updates to the list of conservation action items identified in the 2007 Action Plan. The worksheet will receive some attention during the 2024 meeting. The intent of this exercise is to evaluate how progress has been made toward achieving some of the key objectives and action items and whether it may be appropriate to propose a revision to Version

1.0 that would synthesize and update information gathered since 2007, and would include Short-tailed albatross, given the significant advancements in the conservation management of this albatross species and importance in the North Pacific albatross community. During the 2024 meeting in Seattle, NPAWG may discuss potential timelines and rationale for future recommendations to USFWS concerning an updated revision of the Conservation Action Plan that would constitute Version 2.0

Setting up a new cloud-based or similar shared workspace to facilitate productive exchange of information will be a key NPAWG ambition in 2023.

NPAWG is considering the value of holding a mid-year virtual meeting to exchange program and research updates, review issues affect projects, and discuss regulatory processes that are pending or relevant to projects and all matters related to albatross conservation.

In closing, NPAWG wishes to thank the Pacific Seabird Group for continuing to recognize the working group as a vibrant and focused group of professionals with diverse experience in seabird ecology, fishery science, and conservation management. NPAWG is more widely recognized each successive year because we work to bring the most current and compelling issues in albatross conservation to bear, identifying challenges and achievements in a collaborative, forward thinking capacity.

We look forward to an exciting meeting on **Tuesday, February 20, 2024, from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM** (Pacific Time) in association with the **51st Annual Meeting of the Pacific Seabird Group** in Seattle, Washington.

Respectfully submitted by:



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