

The Packard Foundation have offered WSU a three-year grant of \$25k per year unrestricted funds towards implementation of the strategic plan, completed in 2023.

#### **WSU Website and Social Media**

Carrie Kovalik, WSU Communications Coordinator, has completed significant updates to the WSU website. The site is currently available at <https://worldseabirdunion.org/>. Please note that this is a new domain (replacing seabirds.net). The site has seen large Increases in active and new users since launch with more people visiting multiple screens or engaging with the website. Home page and conference/events pages are getting the most traffic. Referrals are coming primarily through Google, Facebook, and some direct access. There has been lots of engagement from Europe, South Africa, Oceania, and Argentina (great to see a truly global distribution of visitors!). Most of the engagement has come from younger demographics (18-24, 25-34).

#### **New WSU Logo**

The WSU has developed a new logo! Moving forward it will be used on all WSU communications and virtual platforms.



Report #2q. PSG NPAWG Delegate Annual Report

## **North Pacific Albatross Working Group 2024 Annual Report**



Presented to  
Pacific Seabird Group, Executive Committee

**January 2025**

### **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.

The annual meeting is open to interested attendees and core presenters who share updates on albatross policy initiatives, population monitoring, fisheries bycatch, breeding colony re-establishment, invasive species control, contaminants and disease research, ocean ecology and resource utilization, education, and outreach.

## **2023-2024 NPAWG Activities**

### ***Marine National Monuments of the Pacific***

#### Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge

- Black-footed Albatross nests on Midway were up to 27,562 in 2024, continuing an upward trend evident over the last 20 years.
- Laysan Albatross nests were down a bit with 498,448 documented in 2024. This is consistent with an observed “high/low” pattern typically observed on Midway. However, the 20-year trends remain upward.
- Reproductive success of Black-footed Albatross was estimated to be 39% in 2024 and is somewhat lower than recent years. This may be due in part to one of the nesting plots experiencing catastrophic nest loss caused by flooding. Excluding this plot from the analysis results in Black-footed Albatross reproductive success of 64%. This more closely aligns with what was documented on Kure Atoll.
  - Past performance is not necessarily a good indication of what we should expect in future years. For example, eighteen breeding colonies of Laysan Albatross and 17 colonies of Black-footed Albatross were analyzed using R-TRIM (Trends and Indices for Monitoring Data) this past year. Though increasing rates were documented, the vast majority of both albatross species nest on only a few, low lying islands that are increasing at risk of climate change induced stress and exposure to severe weather events, indicating the importance of some of the smaller colonies where exposure to these stressors may be less acute.
- Wisdom, the famous Short-tailed Albatross is back! She is currently incubating an egg that was laid on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024.
- The Short-tailed Albatross on Midway appear to be doing well. During the 2023/2024 season, another chick fledged from Sand Island. Chicks from 2019 and 2020 were once again present in the nesting area. A known Short-tailed Albatross pair is back on Midway and currently incubating an egg that

was laid on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Both the 2019 and 2020 juveniles have also been documented in the area again in 2024.

- Staff have resumed monitoring nest success based on different habitat types; Laura Brazier (USFWS) will be presenting a poster on the results of this work at the Joint Waterbird Society-Pacific Seabird Group Meeting poster session.
- No pox was detected in albatross chicks in 2024.
- There were no significant die-offs of adults in June or July on Midway in 2024.
- A mid-February 2024 winter storm resulted in the loss of 95% of the nests in the largest Black-footed Albatross monitoring plot comprising 300+ nests overall.
- Following treatment to reduce the impacts of mice on albatross at Midway, the mouse population appears to have rebounded quickly. In 2023 and most of 2024, there were no detected mouse attacks on albatross, but over the last month there have been several documented attacks; this unfortunately has resulted in the death of 30+ adult albatross and 180+ nests being abandoned within a 1-hectare area of Sand Island.
- The albatross count is currently underway at Midway. This year we conducted the first concurrent drone surveys along with the albatross count to help develop the methods for employing remotely operated aerial surveillance tools in albatross monitoring both on Midway and across the Pacific Monuments region.

#### Kamole (Laysan Island)

- USFWS supported Oikonos in the deployment of satellite and GLS tags on Black-footed Albatross on Kamole in February 2024. This project will continue in 2024 and 2025.
- There are currently plans to conduct the first albatross count on Kamole since 2011 using the drone methods that are being developed on Midway this February.

#### Wake Atoll

- The Wake Atoll Rat Eradication Project was completed in 2024. The last documented rat was removed on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024, but surveillance is ongoing.
- In 2023/2024, there were 12 pairs of Laysan Albatross adults, and 7 chicks hatched on Wake Atoll. Severe flooding in January 2024 resulted in the loss of all but 2 chicks. Both were banded and one fledged.
- This December there have been 20 confirmed nests with 13 currently still incubating. Three of those nests have two eggs.

#### **Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Surveillance**

- Avian influenza (HPAI) surveillance guidelines for the Marine National Monuments of the Pacific were developed by US Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with the National Marine Fisheries Service. These guidelines and associated training were delivered to all field staff that went into the Monument in summer of 2024. Supplies for testing were also distributed.
- Birds from Kamole (Laysan Island), Lalo (Tern Island/French Frigate Shoals), Midway Atoll, and Wake Atoll were all tested; none of the results were positive and thus there have been no confirmed cases of HPAI within these sampled populations, so far.
- In the Hawaiian Islands, the first cases of HPAI were detected on Oahu in November 2024. HPAI was first detected in a backyard flock of domestic birds but has since been documented at James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge in one asymptomatic duck.
- Surveillance is ongoing and USFWS will be working with partners to update surveillance and monitoring plans and response procedures for the upcoming field seasons.

### ***Conservation of the Laysan Albatross on Guadalupe Island, Mexico***

Conservation efforts for the Laysan Albatross on Guadalupe Island are focused on habitat restoration, predator control, direct interventions, and social attraction to enhance the species' breeding success. Habitat restoration includes a feral cat control program initiated in 2003, the installation of a 62-hectare predator exclusion fence in 2014, and ongoing eradication efforts since 2017. Direct interventions such as artificial incubation, assisted hatching, and feeding underweight chicks address challenges caused by storm events that can negatively affect nesting. Social attraction techniques, including decoys and sound systems implemented since 2015, have successfully encouraged colony establishment.

Key results demonstrate significant progress, with no albatross predation recorded in the past 12 years. The breeding population of Laysan Albatross has grown to 1,770 pairs, including 56 new pairs nesting in an artificial colony between 2017 and 2024. Social attraction methods have facilitated over 1,200 interactions with decoys, while juveniles show a 70% return rate to the island within 2-3 years. The colony has achieved a reproductive success rate averaging over 77%.

Biological sampling and collection is underway and will be used in future analyses of genetics, stable isotopes, diet, sex ratios, and plastic ingestion to better understand the population's ecology. Studies examining the spatial overlap between albatross foraging areas and industrial and artisanal fisheries are ongoing, aiming to mitigate potential threats. Together, these initiatives strengthen the resilience of the

Laysan Albatross population on Guadalupe Island and contribute to the species' global conservation.

### ***Translocation of Black-footed Albatrosses from Midway Atoll to Guadalupe Island***

To address the threat of sea-level rise and destructive storm surge affecting Black-footed Albatross at Midway Atoll (and other important low-lying breeding areas in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands), a collaborative 4-year translocation program (2021- 2024), with many partner agencies in the United States and Mexico, was established to translocate Black-footed Albatrosses from Midway Atoll to Guadalupe Island to create a new breeding colony. The program moved 129 eggs and 12 chicks from Midway Atoll, fostering eggs with Laysan Albatrosses and hand-rearing chicks, resulting in 127 fledged chicks and achieving a 90% success rate.

The first translocated bird returned to Guadalupe Island in February 2024, and eight individuals have been observed as of April 2024, including some returning earlier than expected for the species. These returning birds displayed species-specific courting behavior, confirming successful imprinting on Guadalupe Island as their breeding site. These results highlight the program's success in establishing a new and resilient Black footed Albatross breeding population, offering a critical safeguard against the impacts of climate change.

### ***Short-tailed Albatross***

- 2024 was a successful year of Short-tailed Albatross nest monitoring for breeding colonies on Torishima and Mukojima.
- Reproductive success on Torishima has been above 70% for the past 5 years and the population continues to increase at approximately 7-8% per year.
- The total population estimate for Short-tailed Albatross is 10,931 birds, including 9,188 individuals from colonies on Torishima, 1,720 individuals from colonies on the Senkaku Islands, and 23 individuals from the colony on Mukojima.
- Population estimates for the Senkaku Islands are unconfirmed and based on the last census that occurred 22 years ago in 2002. Satellite imagery provides some confirmation that colonies have probably increased, but it is still uncertain, and studies are ongoing to determine whether the population is growing at the projected rate.
  - The Mukojima translocation colony is still small, 3 breeding pairs in 2024, but attendance and visitation metrics remain encouraging, and the current

growth trajectory is similar to new colonies that were established on Torishima.

- Observed bycatch in U.S. fisheries remains low, with two observed Short-tailed Albatross taken in 2020 and one in 2023. There are also no observed takes documented in Canadian or Japanese fisheries during this period. Recent reports from Russia Far East fisheries also show no takes. While these reports are positive and buoyed by strong population growth on colony, the Recovery Team uses caution in interpreting bycatch reports given limited observer coverage throughout the species' range.
- A 5-year review of the Short-tailed Albatross recovery plan will occur in 2025. We do not expect major changes to current recovery priorities but have noted new concerns for offshore wind energy development on the east coast of Japan and avian influenza, even though no detections have occurred on remote breeding colonies of Japan.

### ***BirdLife International's Continued Outreach with Communities and Industry***

In 2024, BirdLife International continued to advocate for improvements on seabird bycatch-related issues by working closely with tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (tRFMOs). The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission initiated a review of its seabird bycatch avoidance and minimization measures against ACAP best practices. However, proposed changes were blocked by certain members and further discussion is planned in 2025. BirdLife International also supported industry-facing workshops organized by another tRFMO in collaboration with the fisheries agencies of Japan and Taiwan. In an effort to drive change through industry collaboration, a Port-Based Outreach and Due Diligence project was launched with Taiwan's largest tuna trader (through partner organizations).

### ***NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office***

Main highlights:

- In April 2024, NMFS published a final rule that requires Tori Line use for deep-set longline vessels fishing north of 23° N (or side setting) and eliminated blue-dyed bait and strategic discard requirements in this fishery.
- April/May NMFS conducted a Shallow-Set Tori Line experiment which showed much higher seabird interaction rates with the use of Tori Lines as compared to night setting with blue-dyed bait.
- In August the Western Pacific Regional Management Council recommended further Shallow-Set research be conducted to evaluate:

- the efficacy of blue-dyed as opposed to non-dyed bait when night setting;
  - the utility of Hook Pods
- Funding was obtained to provision the deep-set fishing fleet with tori lines.
- International work includes:
  - Strengthening CMM in WCPFC to conform to ACAP best practice recommendations, the measure was not ratified but further work will proceed next year
  - Cooperated with Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission on the implementation of the seabird action plan
- Expanded protected species workshop training that includes seabird identification, handling, and reporting requirements beyond vessel owners/captains to ensure the training directly reaches vessel crew.
- The Pacific Islands Regional Office published an annual seabird report, and quarterly and annual observer program reports, and satisfied other regional, national, and international seabird bycatch reporting requirements.
- Obtained a new seabird salvage permit that covers U.S. West Coast, Alaska, and Pacific Islands regions (Jessie Beck).
- Arranged formal procedures for the use of salvaged seabirds by Hawaiian cultural practitioners once necropsies are performed.
  - Continued to report all banded seabirds and maintain banding records.

***Collating albatross tracking data, modelling distributions, and mapping overlap with fisheries to inform management***

Main highlights of the work being driven by Tommy Clay and collaborators at the Environmental Defense Fund in 2024:

- Finalized analyses for the North Pacific albatross bycatch risk assessment and presented results at the Pacific Seabird Group meeting in Seattle and 7<sup>th</sup> International Albatross and Petrel Conference in Ensenada, as well as the meetings of ACAP and the WCPFC. Paper in-prep and expected to be submitted to a peer reviewed journal in 2025.

Plans for 2025:

- Assisting the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission with a bycatch risk assessment for seabirds in the eastern Pacific Ocean as part of their Seabird Action Plan (2025-2029). The results will be presented at the 3rd Meeting of the Permanent Working Group on Ecosystem and Bycatch in May 2025. Plans to present the results of the EDF North Pacific assessment (above) at this meeting.

- Assisting BirdLife International with their Humboldt Bycatch Risk Assessment.  
The goals of this project are to collate data on 1) industrial and artisanal fishing effort and 2) seabird distributions in the southeast Pacific, and 3) identify the species and fishing fleets with the highest bycatch risk categories.
- Assisting Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas (GECI) with a risk assessment for Laysan Albatrosses from Guadalupe Island in Mexican fisheries.
- Collaborating with Justin Suca (formerly NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Fisheries Sciences Center, currently University of Hawaii at Manoa) to examine the effects of climate variability and the expansion of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument on bycatch rates of albatrosses in Hawai'i longline fisheries.

Several other projects and conservation initiatives associated with NPAWG will be discussed during the annual working group meeting in conjunction with the Joint Waterbird Society-Pacific Seabird Group Meeting in Costa Rica.

NPAWG maintains engagement on policy updates and activities of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels Advisory Committee and relevant work being performed by the Seabird Bycatch Working Group and Population and Conservation Status Working Group in close coordination with NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs (Mi Ae Kim) and other delegates.

### **Summary**

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

We look forward to an exciting meeting on Monday, January 6, 2025, in association with the Joint Waterbird Society-Pacific Seabird Group Meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Respectfully prepared and submitted by:



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