Photo: Forest and Kim Starr, USFWS

Seabirds

Short-tailed Albatross

Phoebastria albatrus

SPECIES STATUS:
Federally listed as Endangered
State listed as Endangered
NatureServe Heritage Rank G1 - Critically imperiled
North American Waterbird Conservation Plan – High concern
IUCN Red List Ranking - Vulnerable

SPECIES INFORMATION: The short-tailed albatross is the largest seabird (Family: Diomedeidae) found in Hawai'i, although currently it is very rare and only found on Midway Atoll. Adult males and females are mostly white, with varying amounts of black, mostly on the upper side of the wings, and a golden wash on the head. Huge pink bill has a bluish tip and legs and feet are pale pink. Like other albatross, uses air currents to glide and soar for long periods of time. Compared to other albatross forages closer to land, and similar to other albatross, feeds by seizing prey from the surface while sitting on the water. Scavenges from carrion and follows fishing boats. In Japan, diet consists primarily of shrimp, squid, and fish, including bonita, flyingfish, and sardines. As far back as the 1930s, individuals have occurred among nesting mōlī or Laysan (*P. immutabilis*) and ka'upu or black-footed (*P. nigripes*) albatross at Midway Atoll. In the 1990s a pair of short-tailed albatross produced two infertile eggs. See fact sheets for mōlī (Laysan albatross) or ka'upu (black-footed albatross) for details of breeding biology. Like other albatross, short-tailed albatross likely have a life span of at least 50 years.

DISTRIBUTION: Small numbers of individuals regularly visit the NWHI, particularly Midway Atoll. Outside of Hawai'i, the short-tailed albatross breeds on two small islands off of Japan. Outside the breeding season, short-tailed albatross disperse widely across the temperate and subarctic North Pacific.

ABUNDANCE: See distribution for Hawai'i numbers. Worldwide population is estimated at 1,700 individuals.

LOCATION AND CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT: Terrestrial: Short-tailed albatross breed on oceanic islands and atolls. Nests are similar to other albatross species. **Marine**: Pelagic.

THREATS:

- Humans. Historically the most common albatross in the North Pacific, numbered in the million. By the 1930s the short-tailed albatross was thought to be extinct as a result of wanton killing for their feathers (i.e., millinery trade).
- Commercial fishing. In Hawaiian waters, the principle threat to short-tailed albatross is the longline fishery.

- Marine pollution. Similar to other albatross, ingestion of plastic debris and oil likely a threat.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS: The following management goals are important to Pacific seabird conservation: maintain, protect, and enhance habitat; eradicate or control non-natives; minimize bycatch and other negative effects of fishing; improve the effectiveness of oil spill response efforts; identify contaminates and hazardous substances; and minimize the effects of powerlines, towers, wind turbines and lights (USFWS 2005). The goal of these management actions is not only to protect seabird populations and their breeding colonies, but also to re-establish former breeding colonies thereby reducing the risk of extinction. In addition to these efforts, management specific to short-tailed albatross should include the following:

- Continue attempts (e.g., decoys and playing of vocalizations) to establish a breeding population on Midway Atoll.
- Determine the number of short-tailed albatross that are killed as a result of fishing industry.
- Develop a recovery plan.
- Continued protection and management of existing wildlife sanctuaries and refuges.

MONITORING: Continue surveys of population and distribution in known and likely habitats.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES: Most research priorities for seabirds are related to determining the most appropriate methods for achieving the above goals**.** Research priorities specific to short-tailed albatross includes the following:

- Support efforts to estimate annual mortality from U.S. and foreign fisheries and use demographic models to determine the effect of this mortality on population.
- Continue research and development of techniques and gear that will minimize mortality and continue to explore alternatives to mitigate mortality (i.e., take) of short-tailed albatross by fishing industry.

References:

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Available at: http://www.redlist.org.

NatureServe. 2003. Downloadable animal data sets. NatureServe Central Databases. Available at: http://www.natureserve.org/getData/vertinvertdata.jsp (March 10, 2005).

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