



Agreement on the Conservation
of Albatrosses and Petrels

Eighth Meeting of the Advisory Committee
Punta del Este, Uruguay, 15 -19 September 2014

**2014 Report on conservation actions relevant
to the Agreement's Action Plan – United States**

United States

Report for the Meeting of Parties - MOP-5 (2015)

Submitted by - USA

Coverage of report - USA

Highlights 2004-2014 and challenges remaining

1. Please provide a summary of the Party's key achievements in improving the conservation status of albatrosses and petrels over the last decade (or the period since joining the Agreement).

• The listing of 3 Northern albatross species (Short-tailed Albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*), Laysan Albatross (*P. immutabilis*) and Black-footed Albatross (*P. nigripes*) in Annex I in 2009 improved efforts to coordinate conservation activities for these species with those of the Southern hemisphere. • Laysan and Black-footed Albatrosses demographic monitoring at Midway, Laysan, French Frigate Shoals colonies: reproductive success and survival rates (USFWS and USGS) -- A demographic monitoring program for Laysan and Black-footed albatrosses was initiated by the USFWS in 2005 on Midway, Laysan and Tern Islands which followed a new protocol designed to maximize data quality and collection efficiency. Now that almost a decade of data has been collected under this new protocol, data is being processed and analyzed with products expected out late this summer. Results of future analyses and modeling will help guide monitoring and management of albatross in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands. • Enhanced protection at some US breeding sites using mammal-proof fences -- The first one completed at Kaena Point, Oahu in 2011 and subsequent predator eradication within the fenced area had immediate positive impacts on nesting Laysan albatrosses and other nesting seabirds. Additional fences of this kind are planned for construction at Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge on Kauai, Hawaii, and at James Campbell NWR on Oahu. Private-landowner initiatives on Kauai have protected additional nesting areas. Large scale eradication efforts to eliminate the invasive, non-native plant *Verbena encelioides* at Midway and Kure Atolls has resulted in measurable improvements in reproductive performance in the large Laysan and Black-footed Albatross colonies at those sites. • Short-tailed Albatross populations continue to increase at near maximum rates and breeding range extensions to the Ogasawara Islands and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands may be in part due to joint recovery actions taken by Japan and the United States.

2. Please provide a brief summary of key challenges remaining for the Party in achieving and maintaining a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels in the coming years.

• The United States continues to participate as an observer while it continues to progress toward U.S. accession to ACAP. Such participation does not include voting, chairing of working groups, or proposing amendments to the Agreement and its Annexes. • The lag between data collection and analysis and products may be resulting in delays of updates to regulations to address changes in fisheries where seabirds are incidentally caught. • Breeding colonies continue to be threatened or lost due to predators and climate change

1. Overview of implementation of Agreement and Action Plan

1.1 Has action been taken to implement the decisions of previous MoPs? Not answered

1.2 Is action for national implementation planned to occur in the next three years? Not answered

2. Species conservation

2.1 Has the Party provided any exemptions to prohibitions on the taking or harmful interference with albatrosses and petrels? Yes
USFWS issued 3 scientific collecting permits and 3 to airport facilities for human safety. For the scientific collecting permits, these permits allowed the collection of eggs, but one permittee was authorized take of 2 adults. Regarding the permits to airport facilities, these allowed the collection of eggs to discourage birds from being near the air strips. There has been no need to take adults.

2.2 Has any use or trade in albatrosses or petrels occurred? No

2.3 Has the Party implemented any new single or multi-species conservation strategies / Action Plans? Yes
A five-year status review has been initiated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the Short-tailed Albatross to ensure that the species has the appropriate level of protection under the Endangered Species Act. The review will include an assessment to determine if population status has changed since the time of the species listing, or since its last status review to determine if it should be classified differently. The best available scientific evidence and commercial data regarding this species will be gathered as well as new information and assessments of ongoing conservation efforts.

2.4 Has the Party taken any emergency measures involving albatrosses or petrels? No

2.5 Has the Party conducted any re-establishment schemes? Yes
A site on James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is being prepared for establishment for an albatross breeding colony. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began to implement an action identified in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for James Campbell NWR on Oahu to establish an albatross breeding site. The habitat has been restored to native vegetation and a predator-proof fence is proposed to protect the nesting albatrosses. One source for founders of this new colony would be Laysan albatross eggs from the egg swap program at Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF) on Kauai where eggs are removed from albatrosses nesting at the airport in order to reduce bird air strike hazard. The chicks from these eggs would be hand reared at James Campbell NWR and allowed to fledge from the site.

2.6 Has the Party introduced any new legal or policy instruments for species protection of albatrosses and petrels? Yes
National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on July 17, 2012 to promote conservation of migratory birds. This NMFS-FWS MOU encompasses all relevant seabird-related NMFS activities and identifies specific areas of collaboration and cooperation with FWS, including seabird bycatch reduction, habitat conservation, information sharing and coordination, and international policy. The MOU also aims to strengthen conservation of migratory birds and their habitat and reduce adverse impacts on migratory birds through enhanced collaboration between NMFS and FWS. NMFS published final fishing regulations for the Marianas Trench, Pacific Remote Islands, and Rose Atoll Marine National Monuments, which were established by President George W. Bush just before he left office in January 2009. Consistent with President Bush's proclamations, the regulations prohibit commercial fishing of the monuments, but allow recreational and non-commercial fishing under certain guidelines. The rule takes effect on July 3, 2013. See: <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/06/03/2013-13113/western-pacific-fisheries-fishing-in-the-marianas-trench-pacific-remote-islands-and-1>

2.7 Has the Party implemented any legal or policy instruments for environmental impact assessments? Yes
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is drafting new guidelines for offshore energy developers to reduce or eliminate the effect of new developments on birds. The guidelines follow a collaborative stressor management approach through which parties can identify each stressor associated with a project, and its potential effects on birds.

2.8 Does the Party have any species it would like to submit for addition to Annex 1? No
The United States is not submitting any species for addition to Annex 1. However, in light of the continuing re-affirmation of predictions for significant and irrevocable sea level rise due to anthropogenic climate change the United States suggests revisiting the scoring scheme for the inclusion of new species in Annex 1 (Cooper J. and B. Baker, 2007. AC3 Doc 18) to allow the identification of species that breed in 2 or more countries and stand to lose the entirety of their known breeding area in worst case projections of sea level rise in the next 200 years. Two species that were identified in the original analysis because of high scores for their conservation status are Phoenix Petrel (*Pterodroma alba*) and Polynesian Storm Petrel (*Nesofregatta fuliginosa*). These species would score even higher if level criterion were applied. Another species that had a lower ranking due to growing population size and current protection, the Bonin Petrel (*Pterodroma hypoleuca*) should also be evaluated in this light because of opportunities for international partnerships to restore higher elevation colonies in Japan.

2.9 Are there any other conservation projects for ACAP species not already mentioned? Yes
A research and management program at Johnston Atoll (former North Pacific albatross breeding site) to eradicate the Yellow Crazy Ant (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) implications for all seabird colonies in tropical and subtropical areas because of the extremely detrimental effect this ant species has on all island species but ground-nesting seabirds. A project to eradicate two species of introduced rodents at Wake Atoll (breeding site for Laysan and Black-footed Albatross) was implemented in 2012 by the U.S. Air Force with assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Island Conservation. The effort has proven to be partially successful with apparent eradication of one of the two *Rattus* species present – (*Rattus tanezumi*). The other species present (*R. exulans*) survived the eradication attempt. Research about possible causes for the failure to kill all the Polynesian rats is ongoing and another attempt to eliminate all rodents from Wake may happen at a future date.

3. Habitat conservation

3.1 Has the Party introduced any legal or policy instruments or actions to implement protection and management of breeding sites, including habitat restoration? Not answered

3.2 Has the Party implemented any sustainable management measures for marine living resources which provide food for albatrosses and petrels? Yes
The Bering Strait/Aleutian Island Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and the Gulf of Alaska FMP continues to include management objectives to protect the integrity of the food web through limits on harvest of forage species, as reported for the MoP4 report.

3.3 Has the Party implemented any management or protection of important marine areas for albatrosses and petrels? Yes
A multi-agency planning process has begun to develop a Monument Management Plan (MMP) for the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are working together in the development of the MMP in cooperation with the Secretary of Defense, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Government of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (<http://www.fws.gov/marianastrenchmarinemonument/planning.html>). The northernmost boundary of the Monument is ~500 kilometers from a newly discovered breeding site of the Short-tailed Albatross in the Ogasawara Islands of Japan.

4. Management of human activities

4.1 Has the Party completed any new environmental impact assessments related to albatrosses and petrels? Yes
The United States Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has produced a report entitled "Aerial Seabird and Marine Mammal Surveys off Northern California, Oregon, and Washington, 2011-2012." This report summarizes new and previously collected data on seabird occurrence using boat-based and aerial surveys in order to assess and avoid impacts of future offshore energy development of the West Coast of the United States. BOEM is working with the U.S. Geological Survey – Western Ecological Research Center (USGS-WERC) to document habitat affinities and at-sea ranging behaviors for several petrel species nesting in the Main Hawaiian Islands to assess risks from offshore renewable energy projects to seabirds.

4.2 Has the Party implemented any new measures to minimise discharge of pollutants and marine debris (MARPOL)? Not answered

4.3 Has the Party introduced any new measures to minimise the disturbance to albatrosses and petrels in marine and terrestrial habitats? Not answered

5. Research programmes

5.1 Does the Party have any ongoing research programmes relating to the conservation of albatrosses and petrels not already reported on? Yes
• In the Hawaii longline swordfish fishery, 75% of seabird captures are occurring during hauling. Recent research of the factors affecting the rate of bycatch during the haul suggest that future haul mitigation should focus on reducing bird access to hooks as crew coil branchlines (Gilman, E. et al. 2014). • Washington Sea Grant, along with collaborators at Oregon State University and NOAA Fisheries, are refining and developing effective and practical tools to reduce seabird bycatch in the US West Coast longline fishery for sablefish. Work will focus on smaller vessels (less than 55ft LOA) and those vessels using combinations of weights and floats on the groundline. Use of floats on the groundline appears to be relatively unique to a portion of the fleet and is needed for fishery operations. It poses challenges to sinking the gear within the effective span (aerial extent) of streamer lines. Solutions are being addressed in research by Washington Sea Grant and collaborators. • National Science Foundation has recently funded studies to link foraging behaviors to demography to understand albatross population responses to climate change and quantify how bioenergetics and foraging determine population dynamics in threatened Antarctic albatrosses. • The Seabird Tissue Archival and Monitoring Project (STAMP) began in 1999 as a joint project of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS-AMNR), the U.S. Geological Survey Biological Resources Division (USGS-BRD), and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The goal of STAMP was to monitor long-term trends in environmental quality by (1) collecting eggs seabird colonies without inadvertently contaminating them, (2) processing and banking the samples under conditions that ensure chemical stability during long-term (decadal) storage for current and future researchers, and (3) analyzing subsamples of the stored material for anthropogenic contaminants. Laysan and Black-footed Albatross eggs are collected and processed for archiving annually from sites around the Hawaiian Islands.
1) Gilman et al. 2014 (Haul bycatch).pdf (size 643945 bytes) ■

5.2 Does the Party have any additional national institutions (authorities or research centres), or NGOs involved in albatross and petrel conservation? Yes
Audubon Society, American Bird Conservancy, BirdLife International, Washington Sea Grant, Freezer Longline Coalition, Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, Fishery Management Councils

6. Education and public awareness

6.1 Has the Party conducted training or provided information for user audiences (eg scientists, fishers, etc)? Yes
The National Marine Fisheries Service trains Fishery Observers in species identification, Protected Species data collection, and handling methods, fishing gear descriptions, catch and interaction rates of protected species, and the collection of samples and specimens from selected species. Another important component to the observer's duties include outreach to the fishers on some fishing regulations and protected species handling. The goal is to help fishers comply with certain regulations pertaining to bycatch mitigation rules.

6.2 Has the Party conducted training or provided information to the general public? Yes
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pacific Region provides ongoing information about albatrosses and petrels on its (<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/>) and associated Tumblr and Flickr sites. Midway Atoll also has a website (http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Midway_Atoll/) and Facebook page that features stories related to seabirds breeding at the Refuge. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has installed a webcam aimed at a Laysan Albatross nest on private land on Kauai Island in Hawaii (http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/41/Laysan_Albatross/). To date this site has received over 1 million hits from more than 180 countries. The National Marine Fisheries Service, National Seabird Program, maintains a comprehensive website of seabird efforts undertaken internationally, nationally, and locally (<http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/protectedresources/seabirds/national.htm>). The NMFS Office of International Affairs recently launched websites dedicated to seabird issues (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ia/species/seabirds/seabirds.html>).

7. Other

Does the Party have any new information to report on research into observed impacts, or mitigation of, climate change on albatrosses and petrels? Yes
Detailed models of sea level rise and wave driven inundation of the islands with the two largest albatross colonies in the North Pacific are described in Storlazzi et al. 2013. Storlazzi, C.D., Berkowitz, P., Reynolds, M.H., and Logan, J.B., 2013. Forecasting the impact of storm waves and sea-level rise on Midway Atoll and Laysan Island within the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument—a comparison of passive versus dynamic inundation models: U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2013–1069, 78 p. (Available at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2013/1069/>.)

8. Additional Comments

The United States is preparing a report on the implementation of the National Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries, to be completed by the summer of 2014.

Final submission details

Report is closed for editing.

Status - New -

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