

# Black-footed Albatross



Agreement on the Conservation  
of Albatrosses and Petrels

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Artwork by *Joyce Hartmann* from a photograph by *Wieteke Holshausen*

THE BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS is one of four species in the genus *Phoebastria* that inhabit the Pacific Ocean; the others are the Laysan, Short-tailed and Waved. The group's range extends from Ecuador's Galapagos Islands on the Equator (where the Waved Albatross breeds) to islands south of Japan, home of the Short-tailed.



Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses tend to breed together with the highest numbers on the USA's North-western Hawaiian Islands.

Black-footed Albatross are distinctive in their all dark-brown plumage, easily distinguishable from the other two albatross species that occur within their range (Laysan and Short-tailed). Although juveniles of the rare Short-tailed are also all brown they have a pink rather than a black bill and are noticeably larger than are Black-footed albatrosses. The breeding range extends from the Japanese island of Torishima to the Hawaiian Islands (a few birds have bred on a couple of Mexican islands in the past). Non-breeding birds travel to waters off the North American Pacific coast from Alaska to Mexico, feeding on flying fish eggs, squid, fish and crustaceans – but also scavenging from fishing vessels.

A recent population estimate is of c. 70 000 breeding pairs. The largest populations are on the North-western Hawaiian Islands of Midway and Laysan, with 25 000 – 30 000 breeding pairs on each. The species tends to breed along the islands' edges leaving their interiors to the much more abundant Laysan Albatrosses.

Because of its large breeding population, numbers of breeding localities and largely stable populations it is categorized as globally Near Threatened. However, it faces threats from longline fishing when birds seize baited hooks and then drown. In the longer term sea-level rise and increased incidence of storm surges are predicted to lead to loss of the species' sea-edge breeding habitat on the low-lying Hawaiian atolls. As a consequence of this, efforts are being made by a Hawaii NGO, Pacific Rim Conservation, to create a new colony on the Hawaiian island of Oahu by hand-rearing translocated chicks in the expectation they will return to breed at a safe site away from the sea's edge.

**Sources:**

ACAP 2012. Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*; <https://www.acap.aq/en/acap-species>

BirdLife International 2020. Species factsheet: *Phoebastria nigripes*; <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/black-footed-albatross-phoebastria-nigripes/text>

*John Cooper, ACAP Information Officer, 12 January 2020*