

NOAA FISHERIES NATIONAL SEABIRD PROGRAM 2015 Accomplishments



Laysan Albatross. Photo credit: Robert L. Pitman

In 2001, NOAA Fisheries created the National Seabird Program to protect seabirds and migratory birds in general. Since its creation, the National Seabird Program has grown to embrace two primary goals: 1) Mitigate Bycatch - NOAA Fisheries is directly responsible for mitigating bycatch in US fisheries, and supports a variety of international agreements and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations with bycatch mitigation goals and 2) Promote Seabirds as Ecosystem Indicators - seabirds are excellent indicators of ecosystem state. As highly migratory, near-apex predators, they integrate across trophic levels, space, and time, and are easily studied relative to other marine species.

Conservation Actions

Update to National Ocean Service (NOS)

Environmental Sensitivity Index Maps

Provided key seabird data for the ten-year update of the NOAA Environmental Sensitivity Index (ESI), a GIS-based set of coastal map data that provides the basis for planning, assessment, and strategic deployment of personnel and resources to sensitive habitats affected by oil-spills in U.S. coastal waters.

Pacific Seabird Group, Ocean Salmon Ecology Annual Meetings

Presented preliminary results from spatially-explicit models of interactions between MBTA-protected seabirds and ESA-listed juvenile salmon to annual meetings of Pacific Ocean research and conservation professionals.

Seabird Survey

Completed annual U.S. Washington/Oregon ocean shelf seabird survey in June 2015.

Partnerships and Outreach

NOAA Fisheries' National Seabird Program representatives are active with various working groups and steering committees focused on national and international coordination of efforts to manage and conserve seabirds. Some examples include:

Safina Center

NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office partnered with Safina Center under a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant. For the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery, researchers will use observer data to investigate the significance of various factors that may affect seabird interaction rates. Findings may identify opportunities or methods to further reduce interactions. For the Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery, researchers will demonstrate of combination of methods to possibly reduce seabird interactions during gear hauling on board active fishing vessels.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Department of State

In coordination with USFWS and the Department of State, we published a report on the implementation of the U.S. National Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries. The report describes the research, outreach and education on, and domestic management of incidental seabird catch which has resulted in a significant decrease in seabird incidental catch in the U.S. fisheries.

(http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ia/resources/publications/ccrf/longline_fisheries.pdf)

US Forest Service (USFS) and USFWS

Supported conservation planning by USFS and USFWS by reviewing marine sections of updated conservation plan for ESA-listed Marbled Murrelet, “Northwest Forest Plan—the First 20 Years (1994-2013): Status and Trends of Marbled Murrelet in the Pacific Northwest.”

Washington State and National Ocean Service (NOS)

Generated models of seabird distribution and abundance for coastal Washington used in state marine spatial planning processes in collaboration with Washington State and NOS.

Oregon State University (OSU), University of Washington (UW), Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU), and U.S. Geological Society (USGS)

Created partnership with OSU, UW, OHSU, and USGS to evaluate Columbia River Plume and the region between the Columbia River and Grays Harbor, WA (outside of marine sanctuary) as key habitat for seabirds.



Common Murres on log in Columbia River Plume. Photo credit: Jen Zamon

Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST)

The largest beached bird program worldwide continues to inspire bird conservation by involving over 800 members of the public in scientific data collection and improving seabird information available to all stakeholders, via requested data summaries, and the COASST annual report. COASST provides specialized seabird identification training, including use of the COASST field guide, annually, for approximately 500 NOAA Fisheries observers on commercial fishing vessels. (<http://depts.washington.edu/coasst/>)

Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge

Partnered to maximize the scientific value of birds caught incidentally in fisheries through a regional necropsy program and more than 2,500 seabirds from the North Pacific, Gulf of Alaska, and Bering Sea have been examined. Examinations can inform conservation policies by documenting patterns of fisheries-associated mortalities, specifically age or sex-related differences. Such examinations can also give insight into plastic and contaminants loads, life-history traits, and seabird ecology. (<http://oikonos.org/seabird-bycatch/>)

National Audubon Society

Provided requested documents via FOIA process regarding management of Double-crested Cormorants in the Columbia River Estuary.

International Conservation

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)

Continued to engage with ACAP, an international forum that strives to achieve a favorable conservation status for 31 species of procellariiformes. NOAA Fisheries contributed results of U.S.



Black-footed Albatross. Photo credit: Robert L. Pitman

efforts and technical expertise to the discussions related to seabird bycatch mitigation in longline fisheries and the use of electronic monitoring on vessels to obtain information on seabird bycatch and the use of mitigation measures. These contributions are for the development of best practice guidelines that could be applied to marine fisheries in various parts of the world. Assisted NOAA Office of International Affairs in reviewing science/conservations briefings for U.S. delegation in preparation for the 2016 ACAP conference in Chile.

Other Highlights/Accomplishments

- The 2015 recipient of the Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award was awarded to NOAA Fisheries for their project, “Preventing Migratory Seabird Mortality in U.S. West Coast Groundfish Longline Fisheries.” NOAA Fisheries, in collaboration with many partners, is succeeding in keeping seabirds off the hooks of vessels using bottom longline gear in fisheries off of the U.S. West Coast. As a result, fewer seabirds are dying and that number is expected to continue to decline as the efforts of the partnerships continue to bear fruit. Efforts off the west coast are especially benefitting three North Pacific albatross species: Laysan, Black-footed, and Short-tailed Albatross. (<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/marine-mammals-turtles/other-protected-species/streamer-lines-saving-seabirds>)
- On December 1, 2015, Dr. Lisa T. Ballance, Southwest Fisheries Science Center, became NOAA Fisheries’ National Seabird Program coordinator with the retirement of Kim Rivera. (<http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/national-seabird-program/>)

Web Address:

NOAA Fisheries National Seabird Program: <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/national-seabird-program/>