

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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North Pacific Pelagic Seabird Observer Program: In 2006, the Migratory Bird Management Division of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began a collaborative project with NOAA-Fisheries and other projects to place seabird observers on research vessels in Alaska waters. The primary goal is to update and add to the North Pacific Pelagic Seabird Database. In addition, the seabird data will be analyzed in conjunction with the associated oceanographic and fisheries data to examine changes in distribution and abundance of seabirds relative to environmental changes. Between May and September of 2006, surveys were conducted during 12 cruises, primarily in the northern and eastern Bering Sea. In addition to NOAA-Fisheries projects, seabird observers were part of the Shelf-Basin Interaction Project (Dr. Jackie Grebmeier, Univ. Tx), the GLOBEC studies (Dr. Russ Hopcroft, Univ. Alaska, Fairbanks), and Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge cruises in the Aleutian Islands. The surveys are supported (roughly half) by the Service and a grant from the North Pacific Research Board.

Kittlitz's Murrelet: Due to the elevated concern for the Kittlitz's murrelet, a candidate species for listing under the Endangered Species Act, surveys have been conducted on the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge over the past few years. Nearshore boat surveys at Attu, Agattu, Adak, Atka, and Unalaska islands have revealed substantial populations in the Aleutian Islands Unit of the Refuge. Estimates of birds present in nearshore waters of the larger islands include 300 at Attu, 750 at Atka, 1,500 at Unalaska, and at least several hundred at Adak. Kittlitz's murrelets are known to nest on scree slopes typical in mountains, although up to 2004 only 22 nests had ever been discovered. In 2005 a nest was found in the western Aleutians at Aggatu Island, and more intensive searches in the mountains of Agattu in 2006 resulted in the discovery of 10 nests. Study of the species' breeding biology is now possible for the first time.

Pacific Walrus Survey: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in collaboration with the U.S. Geological Survey and Russian scientists from GiproRybFlot and ChukotTINRO, conducted a range-wide survey of the Pacific walrus population in March and April of 2006. The primary goal of the survey was to estimate the size of the Pacific walrus population across its spring range, which is the ice-covered continental shelf of the Bering Sea. U.S. and Russian scientific crews coordinated aerial survey efforts on their respective sides of the international border. Walrus were counted using a combination of aerial thermal imagery and photography. The final population estimate will be developed cooperatively by U.S. and Russian scientists, and results are expected in late 2007.

Northern Sea Otter: The next sea otter recovery team meeting will be held October 24-25, 2006, at the North Pacific Research Board Office in Anchorage. Due to limited

funding, no major sea otter surveys were conducted in 2006. In the Southwest Alaska Distinct Population Segment, Adak Island was the only population trend site monitored in 2006; results from the survey are not yet available from USGS. An unusual number of sea otters are dying of heart lesions (valvular endocarditis) in the Kachemak Bay area (Southcentral population stock) and the Service is in the process of evaluating the mortality event under the Marine Mammal Protection Act as an Unusual Mortality Event.

Once the Service receives a letter from the U.S. Coast Guard, we can initiate interagency Section 7 consultation. This consultation is intended to determine whether, and to what extent, U.S. Coast Guard activities in Alaska may affect spectacled eiders (*Somateria fischeri*), the North American breeding population of Steller's eiders (*Polysticta stelleri*), short-tailed albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*), and the Southwest Alaska DPS of northern sea otters (*Enhydra lutris kenyoni*), and whether these activities in Alaska's Exclusive Economic Zone may jeopardize the continued existence of the Kittlitz's murrelet (*Brachyramphus brevirostris*), a candidate species. If it is determined U.S. Coast Guard activities are likely to adversely affect listed species, formal consultation would be initiated. Consultation could take 12 months to complete.

North Pacific Albatross: The Service, in cooperation with Oregon State University, has placed 52 satellite tags on all three species of North Pacific albatross over the past 4 years (3 charter trips to Seguam Pass and surrounding waters in Central Aleutians; 20 Laysan albatross, 20 black-footed albatross and 12 short-tailed albatross captured at sea and tagged). The study is investigating movement patterns of the birds as they relate to a number of variables (for example, wind direction, bathymetry, chlorophyll a concentration, commercial fishing activity, etc.).