

USFWS B-report for the  
North Pacific Fisheries Management Council  
June 2-10 Kodiak Meeting

**Sea Otter Critical Habitat Update:**

Presentation by Douglas Burn, USFWS marine Mammals Management Office.

**Salmon Bycatch**

- **Yukon River Salmon Management:** The outlook for the 2008 Yukon River Chinook salmon return is anticipated to be similar in run abundance to the 2007 return – which was less than average. The Service remains concerned about the bycatch of Chinook salmon in the groundfish fisheries because of the increasing difficulty of meeting our domestic agency responsibilities in Title VIII of ANILCA. Subsistence fishermen will enter the fishing season on the “windowed” subsistence fishing schedule, which restricts salmon fishing to two time periods per week. Subsistence fishermen will likely remain on the schedule until mid-June or longer in response to the anticipated below average run abundance. A decision by the Department in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to prosecute a directed Chinook salmon commercial fishery in the Lower Yukon River will be delayed until near the mid-point of the run.
- All sixteen National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska were established in part for the purpose of conserving fish and wildlife populations in their natural diversity. The Service is also responsible to provide for the continuation of subsistence opportunities and uses for federally qualified fishermen on federal waters. We recognize that NOAA Fisheries and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, through the Council, are responsible for minimizing salmon bycatch. Ensuring decreased salmon bycatch would improve spawning ground natural diversity, increase the potential that salmon escapement targets are met, and decrease the time subsistence harvests are restricted for federally qualified fishermen.

**Spectacled Eiders**

- About 350,000 spectacled eiders were observed on March 23, 2008 during the BEST project from personnel aboard the USCGC Healy. The estimate was a very rough one made from sea level, we may eventually derive a more accurate estimate from BBC’s “Frozen Planet” film crew. The main group of birds was about 80 km off SW Cape on St. Lawrence Island. The birds observed are about equal in number to the world population estimate when the birds were last surveyed from the air about a decade ago.
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) personnel are in the field on the Yukon Delta to implant satellite transmitters in spectacled eiders. The USFWS is collaborating with USGS, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), and others, to implant satellite transmitters in spectacled eiders on the North Slope in 2009. Thanks to the high priority placed on the project by the Council, the NPRB has announced

funding for the follow-up winter aerial surveys. The Council previously expressed interest in obtaining more up-to-date information on the winter distribution of spectacled eiders south of St. Lawrence Island.

### **Bering Sea**

- Field season in full swing for BSIERP. Broad-scale USFWS seabird and marine mammal surveys are currently or soon underway in conjunction with NOAA researchers onboard the Oscar Dyson, Tiglax, and Healy. In July-August, we will also start the Patch Dynamics Study (PDS) around the Pribilofs. The PDS will examine predator-prey dynamics within 200-300 km of the Pribis, with a focus on fur seals, thick-billed murrelets, and black-legged kittiwakes, juvenile Pollock and other forage fish. The PDS is part of BSIERP and also funded by NPRB.
- As part of the BSIERP, crews have begun studies in the Pribilofs. Field crews are now occupying study sites for the ongoing FWS seabird monitoring program designed to track trends in a diverse suite of top level marine predators around Alaska's coastline. These data provide input as indicators of ecosystem fluctuation for the Aleutian Islands Fisheries Ecosystem Plan and for other planning and research efforts.

### **Kittlitz's Murrelet**

- During the March/April BEST seabird surveys, a FWS observer found relatively high concentrations of Kittlitz's murrelets ~ 50 km NW of Nunivak Island (in open leads in the ice). This may indicate an overwinter hangout or spring migratory route for Kittlitz's murrelets, previously undocumented.
- NOAA will begin the 2<sup>nd</sup> of its 2-year study on the Salmon set net gillnet fishery in the Yakutat area. The study will provide estimates of bycatch of marine mammals, birds and non-target fish. Last summer, marbled murrelets comprised 55% of marine bird bycatch in salmon set nets. Past salmon setnet studies in Prince William Sound have documented take of Kittlitz's murrelets, which will become an issue if the Kittlitz's murrelet should ever become a listed species. It is now a candidate species under the ESA.
- A study of breeding ecology of Kittlitz's murrelet is beginning at Agattu and at Kodiak to try to characterize basic life history parameters to contribute to future recovery efforts.

### **Polar Bear**

- The polar bear was listed as Threatened on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008. In making the decision to list the polar bear as a threatened species, Interior Secretary Kempthorne also announced he was using the authority provided in Section 4(d) of the ESA to develop a rule that states that if an activity is permissible under the stricter standards imposed by the marine Mammal Protection Act, it is also permissible under the Endangered Species Act with respect to the polar bear.

## Short-tailed Albatross

- Ten short-tailed albatross were translocated from their main and highly eroding nesting colony beneath the active volcano on Torishima Island to non-volcanic and relatively flat Mukojima Island about 150 nm south. All ten chicks were hand reared and all 10 successfully fledged as of May 25<sup>th</sup>. Five of the translocated chicks, along with 5 naturally reared chicks were sent off with satellite GPS transmitters on their backs. The story has been all over the Japanese press, with perhaps 40 stories carried thus far, including a TV documentary and many newspaper articles.

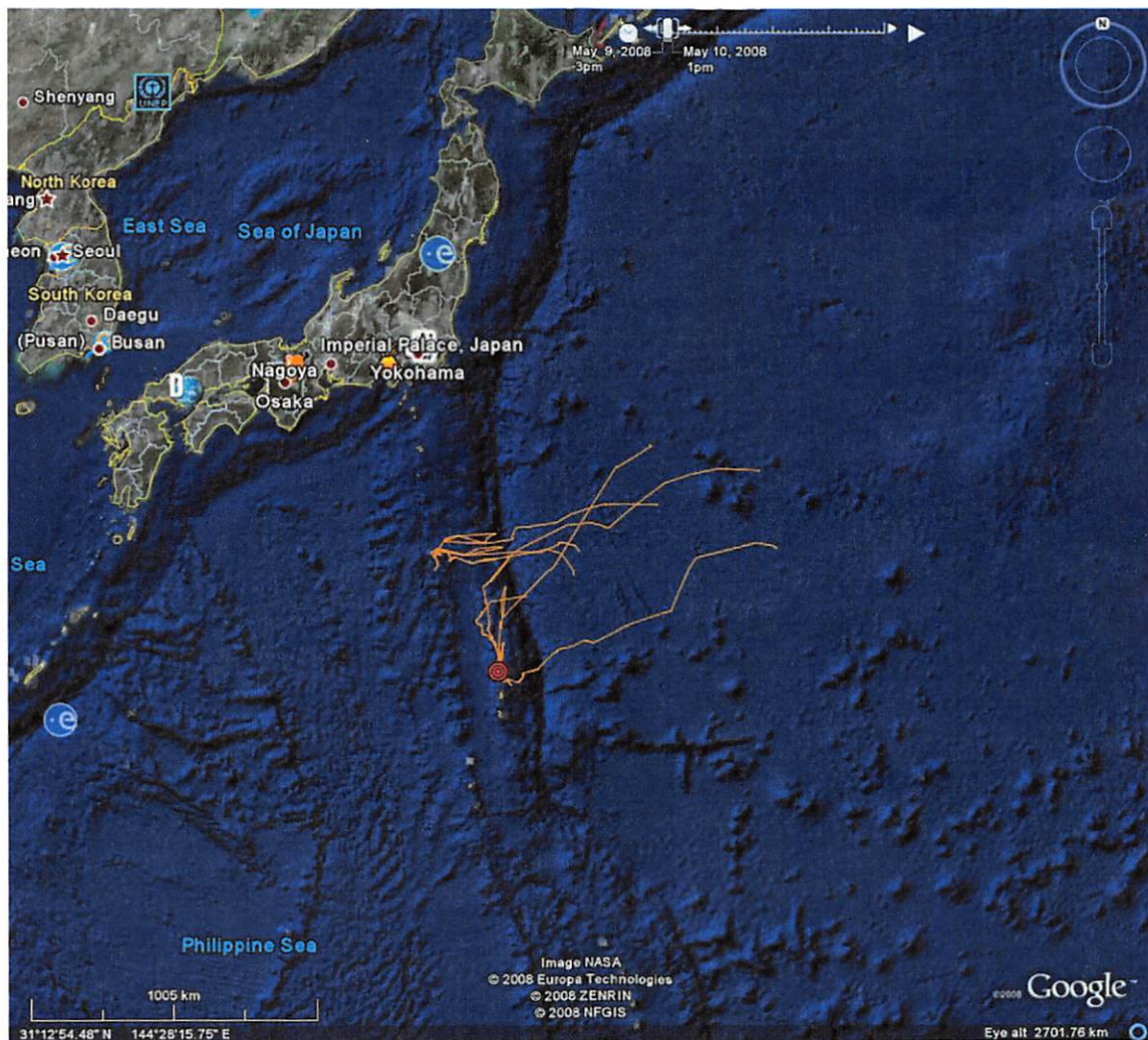


Figure 1. Dispersal of satellite-tagged short-tailed albatross fledglings from Torishima Island and from Mukojima Island to the south. Tracks through June 1, 2008 are shown.