

# LISTING NORTH PACIFIC ALBATROSSES WITHIN THE AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF ALBATROSSES AND PETRELS

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## SUMMARY

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The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels at the Third Session of its Meeting of Parties held in Bergen, Norway, April/May 2009, added the three North Pacific albatrosses, the Short-tailed *Phoebastria albatrus*, the Laysan *P. immutabilis* and the Black-footed *P. nigripes*, to Annex 1 of the Agreement. It is believed that this listing will result in benefits to both domestic and international efforts to conserve these and other albatrosses and petrels already listed under the Agreement.

Key words: Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, ACAP, *Phoebastria*, albatrosses, conservation

## INTRODUCTION

The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) is an international instrument that aims to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels. It was developed because of global concern over the status of albatrosses in particular and the knowledge that highly migratory species that cross national boundaries require international efforts for their effective conservation (Cooper *et al.* 2006). Until now ACAP has been essentially a regional agreement, with only species breeding in the southern hemisphere being listed in its Annex 1. Notably, not all the world's albatrosses were included within the Agreement from the outset, with three species of the genus *Phoebastria* (Short-tailed *P. albatrus*, Laysan *P. immutabilis* and Black-footed *P. nigripes*) that are restricted in their breeding ranges to the North Pacific being left out. However, the Agreement text does not have any geographic restrictions, allowing for geographic expansion by adding new species of albatrosses and petrels to those already listed within it.

## CONSERVATION LISTINGS, ASSESSMENTS AND PLANS

The World Conservation Union has categorized the Black-footed Albatross as Endangered, and the Laysan and Short-tailed albatrosses as Vulnerable, in its Red List (BirdLife International 2009). In addition, the Short-tailed Albatross is listed under Appendix I (migratory species categorized as being in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant proportion of their range) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals [CMS or Bonn Convention (www.cms.int)] and Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered

Species [CITES (www.cites.org)]. The Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses are listed under Appendix II (migratory species that have an unfavourable status or would benefit from international cooperation) of the CMS.

The Government of Japan designated the Short-tailed Albatross as a Special Natural Monument in 1962 and as a Special Bird for Protection in 1972. Torishima Island, the species' main breeding colony, is also a Japanese Natural Monument (Hasegawa & DeGange 1982, USFWS 2005). The Short-tailed Albatross was federally listed in the United States as Endangered throughout its range in July 2000; and in 2005, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published a draft recovery plan for the species (USFWS 2005). The final version of that plan was published in 2008, and notification of the initiation of a five-year status review followed (USFWS 2008, 2009). In 2003, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC 2003) designated the Short-tailed Albatross as Threatened (a wildlife species likely to become endangered if limiting factors are not reversed). In May 2008, Canada posted the "Recovery Strategy for the Short-tailed Albatross (*Phoebastria albatrus*) and the Pink-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus creatopus*) in Canada" on the Species at Risk Public Registry (Environment Canada 2008).

In October 2007, the United States released its first version of a conservation action plan for both Laysan and Black-footed albatrosses (Naughton *et al.* 2007). A status assessment for these two species was published in 2009, covering the period 1923 to 2005 (Arata *et al.* 2009). In 2007, COSEWIC listed the Black-footed Albatross as a species of Special Concern [a wildlife species that may become a threatened or an endangered species because

of a combination of biologic characteristics and identified threats (COSEWIC 2007)]. The Black-footed Albatross has now been formally listed under Canada's Species at Risk Act with a category of Special Concern, roughly equivalent to the Near Threatened status used by the International Union for Conservation of Nature ([www.sararegistry.gc.ca/document/dspHTML\\_e.cfm?ocid=7390](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/document/dspHTML_e.cfm?ocid=7390)).

The Short-tailed and Laysan albatrosses are listed as "High Concern" and the Black-footed Albatross as "Highly Imperiled" in the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (Kushlan *et al.* 2002). The Laysan and Black-footed albatrosses are both listed in four separate bilateral conventions for the protection of migratory birds between the United States and Canada, Japan, Mexico and Russia (see van Heijnsbergen 1997 for a description of these instruments). The Black-footed and Short-tailed albatrosses are similarly listed in a bilateral agreement for protecting migratory birds between China and Japan.

### PROGRESS TOWARDS INCLUSION

At the First Session of its Meeting of Parties in 2004, ACAP agreed to consider which new species might be added to Annex 1 in the future and requested that a discussion paper on the subject be prepared for consideration by its Advisory Committee [Resolution 1.5, Annex 2 Work Programme for the Advisory Committee for 2005 to 2007 (ACAP 2004)]. Accordingly, a paper [AC2 Doc 21 ([www.acap.aq](http://www.acap.aq))] that applied a simple ranking system to the members of the order Procellariiformes, assessing their status as candidates for ACAP listing, was co-drafted by Australia and South Africa and submitted to the Second Meeting of ACAP's Advisory Committee held in 2006. In this ranking exercise, the three North Pacific albatrosses scored highly and were thus deemed worthy of listing. In consideration of that submission, the committee decided after discussion that a new version should be prepared for its 2007 meeting (ACAP 2006). A revised paper was then considered at the Third Meeting of the Advisory Committee, held in Valdivia, Chile, in June 2007 [AC3 Doc 18 (latterly published as Cooper & Baker 2008)].

At its Third Meeting, ACAP's Advisory Committee agreed that the addition of the three North Pacific albatrosses should be progressed intersessionally by requesting the ACAP Interim Secretariat to prepare species accounts assessing their conservation status for consideration at its next meeting, to be held in August 2008 in South Africa (ACAP 2007). The various conservation assessments and plans (see above) for the three species were taken as starting points in that preparation. Following discussion of these accounts, the Fourth Meeting of the Advisory Committee recommended that the three North Pacific albatross species be listed on Annex 1 of the Agreement at the Third Session of the Meeting of Parties to be held in 2009 (ACAP 2008).

The Third Session of the Meeting of Parties, held in Bergen, Norway, during April/May 2009, considered the species accounts for the three North Pacific albatrosses [MoP3 Inf 6-8 ([www.acap.aq](http://www.acap.aq))] and then adopted Resolution 3.1, "Proposal to amend Annex 1 of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels." The proposed amendment to list the three North Pacific albatrosses, jointly made by the United Kingdom, Australia and South Africa, was adopted by unanimous vote by the 11 Parties present (ACAP 2009). The amendment also changed the spelling of the scientific name of the Black-browed Albatross to *Thalassarche melanophris* in Annex 1 in accordance with a proposal made to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (Carlos & Voisin 2008).

As a consequence of the new listings, the three species accounts have been updated and are under review before being added to the ACAP web site as ACAP Species Assessments.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Inclusion of the North Pacific albatrosses has far-reaching implications in terms of having increased the number of range states for ACAP-listed species (including Japan, Mexico and the United States as breeding range states) and thus the potential membership of ACAP. The United States had already initiated a formal process towards accession via the intended adoption of the Albatross and Petrel Conservation Act of 2009 ([www.gc.noaa.gov/gcil\\_seabirds.html](http://www.gc.noaa.gov/gcil_seabirds.html)). Further, as listed above, domestic and international efforts are underway to address the conservation concerns of these species, including via the US-led Short-tailed Albatross Recovery Team (USFWS 2008), a similar Canadian recovery team led by Environment Canada that includes the Short-tailed and Black-footed albatrosses, and the international North Pacific Albatross Working Group ([npawg.wikispaces.com](http://npawg.wikispaces.com)).

The synergy created by coordinating with the above-noted international arrangements, the information exchange that is fostered by ACAP, and the potential for increased involvement in the relevant North Pacific Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs) to reduce bycatch are three arguments that led to the addition of the three North Pacific albatross species to Annex 1 of ACAP.

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