

## The Conservation of Endangered Albatross Species



A short - tailed albatross flies over the sea of Torishima Island.

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**A**t one time, Short-tailed Albatrosses formed large breeding colonies on Torishima in the Izu Islands and in the Ogasawara Islands, in the Daito Islands, the Senkaku Islands, and other islands near Tai-wan. Due to the collection of feathers, for which there was high foreign demand, from the mid-Meiji period (1868–1912) these albatrosses were overhunted, and in 1949 it was reported that they were extinct. In 1951, however, they were rediscovered when around ten birds were found to have survived on Torishima.

Following this, in 1954 Japan established a national Wildlife Protection Area that covered the whole of Torishima (453 ha); in 1958, the short-tailed albatross was designated a national Natural Monument; and in 1962, it was promoted to a



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Special Natural Monument. Additionally, in 1965 the whole of Torishima was designated a Natural Monument (Natural Protected Area) in its capacity as a breeding site, and in 1972, the albatross was designated as one of the species covered by the Act on the Regulation of Transfer of Specialized Birds. At present, the albatross is covered by the Act on Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Species Conservation Law), while conservation and management of nesting grounds is based on conservation and breeding programs.

To date, active measures to protect short-tailed albatrosses have been implemented on Torishima. From the 1950s to mid-1960s, staff from the Meteorological Agency Torishima observation post looked after nesting sites and eradicated feral cats feared to be preying on chicks. From the 1980s, Hasegawa Hiroshi of Toho University carried out erosion control and grass planting to protect and manage nesting sites. As a result, a rate of albatross breeding success was maintained to 70%. In addition, from 1992 the Ministry of the Environment and the Yamashina Institute for Ornithology began a project to create a new nesting site. Since the existing nesting site in the Tsubamezaki area of Torishima was on a steep slope that was liable to slippage and collapse, they attracted the birds to a gentle and stable location on the northwest slope using decoys and audio recordings. Meanwhile, the Fisheries Agency established a special sea area extending 20 nautical miles from Torishima, and asked fishing boats operating in this area to use devices that reduce albatross bycatch. Thanks to this comprehensive approach, the number of breeding individuals on Torishima increased at a rate of more than 7% per year, while at the current time (2017), the population has recovered to around 800 pairs and a total 4,600 individual birds.

But while the albatross has continued to steadily recover, new problems have also emerged as the number of individuals has increased. The short-tailed albatross is a migratory bird, and it spends the summer-to-autumn non-breeding season in the vicinity of the Aleutian Islands or visiting the Bering Sea. But since 1995, there have been conspicuous reports of bycatch deaths from the demersal longline fishing that is widespread in these sea areas. In response to this situation, and having judged that there was a high likelihood of similar accidents continuing, in 2000 the American government designated the short-tailed albatross a US endangered species. Following this, inter-national cooperation on activities to protect the albatross has continued; with Japan's main role being to work on breeding sites, while the United States has mainly focused on non-breeding season feeding grounds. Both parties have reported their progress during regularly held meetings.

Last year's edition of this publication (*Seibutsu kagaku iden*, Vo1. 71 No. 4) covered in detail both the particulars of this international cooperation and the Japanese initiatives. Now, in this issue's special feature Robert Suryan of Oregon state University and Kathy Kuletz of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have made a close comparison between the

short-tailed albatross and other species, focusing on the features of albatross distribution in the Alaskan sea region. The measures to reduce bycatch in this same sea region are bearing fruit, and have been an essential factor in albatross recovery; while there is an extremely interesting situation of northwards shift in distribution due to global warming. Eda Masaki of Hokkaido University Museum examines the two genetic lineages among albatross and the need for separate conservation measures for each of these. This difficult problem remains as yet unaddressed, but when finally it is solved we may be able to say that albatross conservation is complete.

Meanwhile, Watanuki Yutaka of Hokkaido University's School of Fisheries Science has provided a detailed and comprehensive examination of the problems encountered by albatross species as a whole in sea areas, and the research methods that seek to find solutions by using the latest attachable devices. (see "New Developments in Albatross Conservation—Using biologging to elucidate behavior in the ocean") There is no doubt that the real-time information gained from these devices attached to birds will be invaluable to the formulation of future conservation plans. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to these authors. It is my sincere wish that this special feature should share a deep understanding of albatross conservation with a wide group of people, and that both academic research and conservation and breeding programs make even greater strides forward.

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