

# Black-footed Albatross

*Phoebastria nigripes*

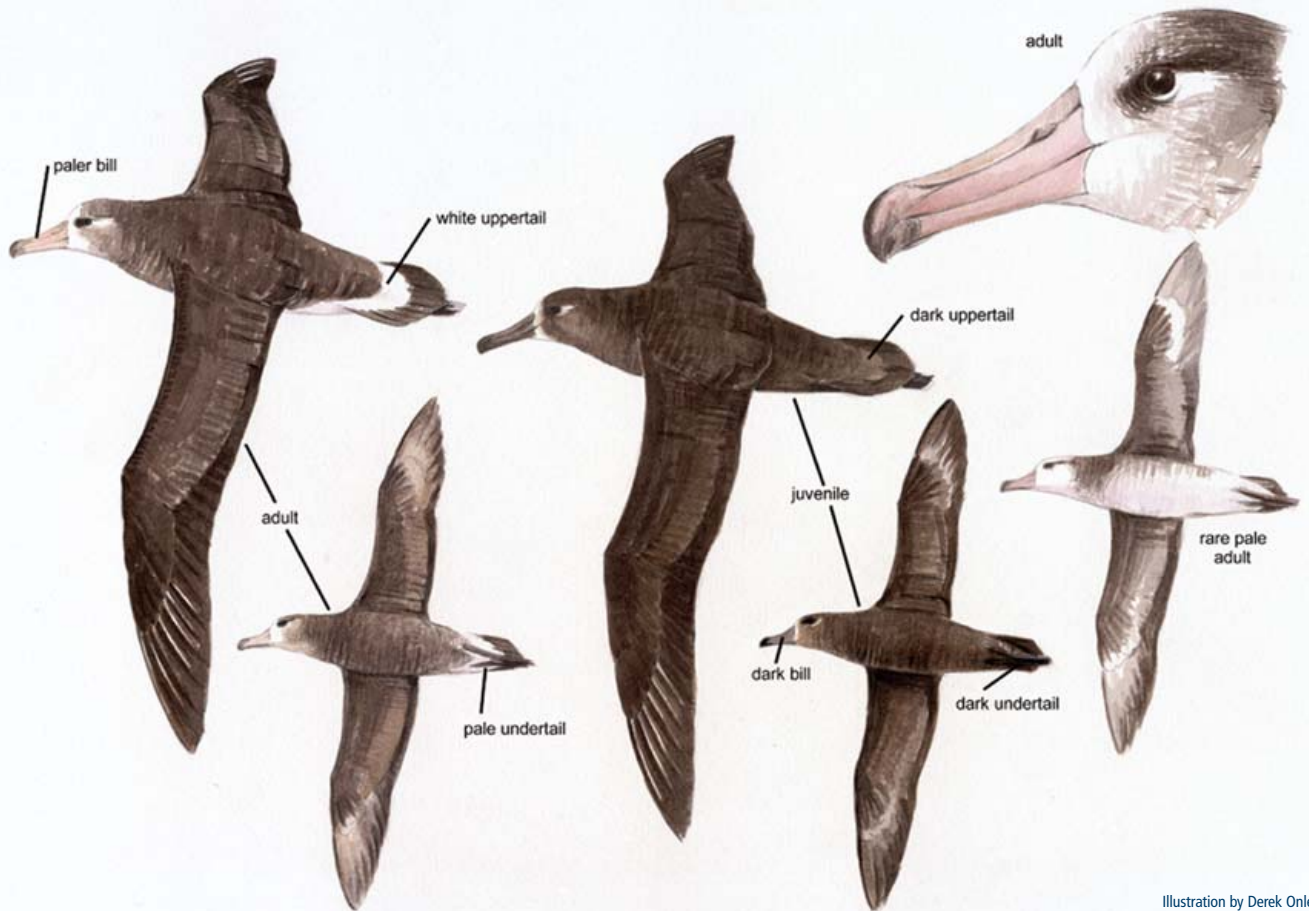


Illustration by Derek Onley

**IUCN THREAT STATUS:** Vulnerable, population declining

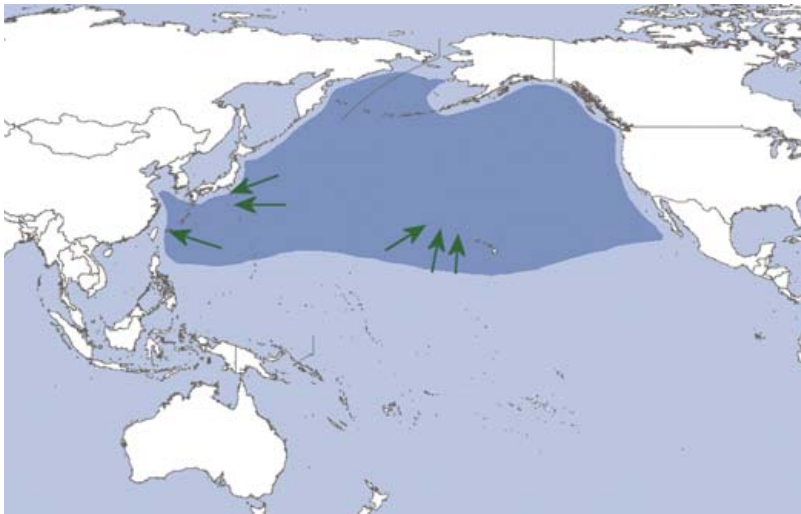
## Identification:

**WINGSPAN:** 220 cm    **LENGTH:** 81 cm    **BILL:** 85-95 mm

Small, dark albatross with a pale patch at base of dark bill. Juveniles dark brown. Adults usually slightly paler, with white at base of upper and under tail. A few birds are much paler. Juveniles look like newly fledged dark billed Short-tailed Albatrosses but have pale feathers at base of shorter bill and different head and bill shapes.



## Black-footed Albatross (*continued*)



### Range and Population:

The Black-footed Albatross breeds on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (USA) and three outlying islands of Japan, colonies having been lost from other Pacific islands<sup>3,14</sup>. In 2000, the population was estimated at 109,000 breeding birds (278,000 total) at 12 localities, including c.23,000 and 20,500 pairs on Laysan and Midway Islands, respectively<sup>4,13</sup>. Although declines have been noted 1992–1999 trend data for Laysan, Midway and French Frigate Shoals (78% of breeding population) suggested stability<sup>4</sup>. However, the 2000 counts were lower than in 1999 and indicate a decline since 1995<sup>13</sup>. On Torishima, 20 chicks were reared in 1964, compared to 914 from 1,219 pairs in 1998<sup>4</sup>. The species disperses widely over the north Pacific Ocean, with occasional records in the Southern Hemisphere<sup>2</sup>.

### Ecology:

It breeds on beaches and slopes with little or no vegetation, and on short turf. It feeds mainly on fish, squid, flying fish ova and crustaceans<sup>9</sup>, but also fish offal and human refuse<sup>3</sup>. Individuals do not breed until at least four years of age and generation time is at least 20 years<sup>4</sup>.

### Threats:

Until 1992, it suffered high mortality from interactions with squid fishing gear and drift-nets in the north Pacific<sup>11</sup>. Currently, it interacts with longline fisheries, with mortality thought to be at least 3,000 birds per year in US-based fisheries<sup>5,7</sup>, possibly many more elsewhere<sup>4</sup>. Other threats include loss of nests to waves<sup>5</sup>, pollution<sup>1,12</sup>, introduced predators<sup>10</sup>, oiling, plastic ingestion and volcanic eruption on Torishima<sup>8</sup>.

### Conservation:

Listed in Appendix II, Convention on Migratory Species. All Hawaiian breeding localities are part of the US National Wildlife Refuge system or State of Hawaii Seabird Sanctuaries. Nearly 80% of the breeding population is counted directly or sampled every year. Up to 100,000 birds are banded. All sites except one have been surveyed since 1991<sup>5</sup>.

### Targets:

Continue monitoring population trends and demographic parameters<sup>6</sup>.

- Continue satellite-tracking studies to assess temporal and spatial overlap with longline fisheries<sup>6</sup>.
- Adopt best-practice mitigating measures in all longline fisheries within the species' range.

### References:

1. Auman *et al.* (1997).
2. Carboneras (1992b).
3. Cousins (1998).
4. Cousins and Cooper 2000.
5. Croxall and Gales (1998).
6. R. Gales *in litt.* (1999).
7. Gould and Hobbs (1993).
8. Harrison, C. S. (1990).
9. Harrison *et al.* (1983).
10. Hasegawa (1984).
11. Johnson *et al.* (1993).
12. Jones *et al.* (1996).
13. USFWS data *per* E. Flint *in litt.* (2000).
14. Whittow (1993).