

Laysan Albatross

Phoebastria immutabilis

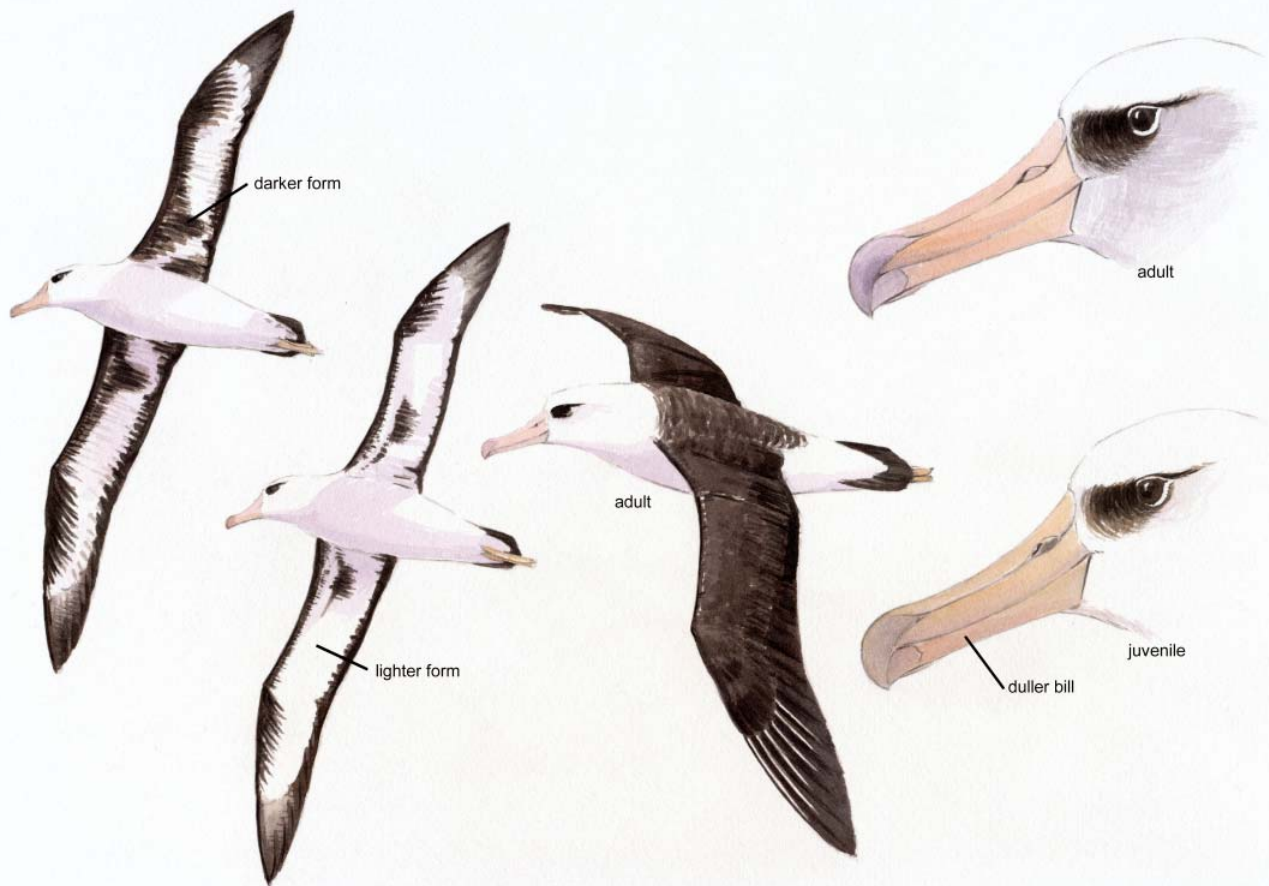


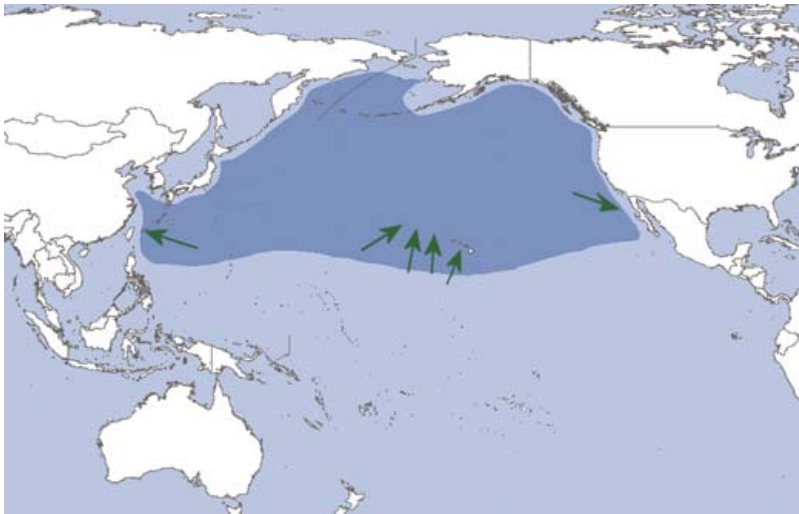
Illustration by Derek Onley

IUCN THREAT STATUS: lower risk – least concern, population declining

Identification:

WINGSPAN: 220 cm **LENGTH:** 80 cm **BILL:** approx. 85-110 mm

Small black and white albatross with dark upperwing, back and tail, white body and head, and black eye patch. Some variation in amount of dark on white underwing. Adult bill is pink with a bluish tip. Juvenile bill slightly duller. Bill color similar to Short-tailed Albatross but smaller, head whiter with dark eye patch and completely dark upperwing and back. Occurs very rarely in South Pacific where bluish-tipped pink bill distinguishes it from similar plumages of Black-browed, Campbell, Indian and Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses.



Range and Population:

Laysan albatrosses range throughout the North Pacific between 20°N and 58°N latitude. Knowledge of their distribution comes primarily from reports of encounters with banded birds, from scientific transects, and from observations. The Laysan is common in the Gulf of Alaska, the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea. In addition, more Laysan sightings are being reported on the California coast, perhaps due to the relatively new colony in Mexico. The species occurs off the East Coast of Japan¹. Whereas the great majority of pelagic encounters of Laysan albatross have come from west of the 180° meridian³. It is estimated that before the feather hunters reached Marcus Island, the island had a population of one million Laysan albatrosses (Rice and Kenyon 1962). Feather hunters also raided Laysan albatross colonies in the NWHI taking at least 300,000 birds from Laysan Island in 1909 (Dill and Bryan 1912). The current world population of breeding Laysan albatrosses has moderately recovered to an estimated 2.4 million, with 558,415 breeding pairs in 15 colonies

Ecology:

It breeds colonially on oceanic islands. It feeds mainly on fish, squid, flying fish ova and crustaceans, but also follows ships and feeds on fish offal and human refuse².

Threats:

Only two direct counts (i.e., a count of every bird seen during a complete survey of an island or a portion of an island) have been completed on Midway Atoll, one in 1991 (427,556 breeding pairs) and the second in 1996 (387,854 breeding pairs). The results from these counts suggest that the population has decreased by at least 10% in five years. Given that Midway Atoll is the largest colony for the species, concern should be raised by this finding.

Conservation:

The threat of accidental mortality by long-lines and the noted dramatic population declines could lead the species to receive a vulnerable conservation status.

References:

1. H. Hasegawa (1978).
2. Harrison *et al.* (1983).
3. Robbins and Rice (1974).