

Midway's first Short-tailed Albatross chick survives tsunami to fledge

Title A Short-tailed Albatross *Phoebastria albatrus* chick has fledged on Midway Atoll in the Hawaiian Archipelago, the first time this globally Vulnerable species has been known to breed outside Japanese territory. Although swept out of its nest by the tsunami which followed the Japanese earthquake of March 2011, the chick survived and has now flown from the Atoll, not to return for another four to six years. The chick is the offspring of a pair of albatrosses ringed/banded as fledglings at the species' main breeding stronghold on Japan's Torishima Island. Their nest is located in the centre of the Short-tailed Albatross decoy plot, which was initiated in 2000 when three different short-tails from Torishima were visiting Midway Atoll. The decoys include ten models of Short-tailed Albatrosses in adult plumage, and six in immature plumage, replicated from an original model by Japanese wild bird carver Haruo Uchiyama. They were supplemented with decoys donated to the project by the National Audubon Society's Seabird Restoration Program. Originally used in a project to attract Laysan Albatrosses, these stylized decoys were repainted to look like Short-tailed Albatrosses.



Using decoys is thought to have helped attract albatrosses to nest (John Klavitter/USFWS)

“Social attraction for long-lived, highly philopatric species such as albatross needs to run for many years until birds are induced to pioneer new sites”, said Stephen W. Kress, director of

Audubon's Seabird Restoration Program, who pioneered the social attraction method using decoys and recordings. Of course the role of the decoys is difficult to assess, but these and the sound recordings likely played a key role in this first nesting. I followed this project closely and I am thrilled at the outcome. Dr Kress added: The first nesting of a Short-tailed Albatross at Midway Island provides a new outpost for this much beleaguered seabird- demonstrating that the species is adaptable to this new part of its world range. It also demonstrates how people can effectively encourage new colonies that reduce risk to the species by creating multiple nesting sites. The pair of Short-tailed Albatrosses had been returning to Midway since 2007. In 2009 they built a nest, but no egg was seen. Then in November 2010, an egg was discovered under the presumed male of the pair. It hatched on January 14, and the fledged youngster left the island on June 11, according to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1954, 25 birds were present on Torishima. With conservation efforts the species has undergone a substantial increase, with about 426 breeding pairs on Torishima in 2008. Conservation measures away from the breeding grounds have included working with both the Alaska demersal longline fishery and the Hawaii-based pelagic longline fishery to prevent albatrosses from dying on longline hooks as they are set. Designing and freely distributing streamer lines to the fishing fleets have reduced albatross deaths at sea and helped increase the albatross population. "The United States Senate need to ratify the Agreement to Conserve Albatross and Petrels (ACAP), " said Audubon's Glenn Olson. "It will help lead to wider adoption by other nation's fishing fleets of measures to reduce mortality of seabirds during longline fishing".