

BLACK-FOOTED ALBATROSS

Phoebastria nigripes

breeding visitor, indigenous

monotypic

Black-footed Albatross breeds primarily in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, with 2-3% of the population breeding on Kaula Rock and Lehua Islet near Ni'ihau, and in the Izu, Bonin, and Senkaku Islands off southern Japan (AOU 1998, Flint 2008, BLI 2009). Former breeding occurred in the Mariana Is (Reichel 1991), a single egg was noted on Johnston Atoll in 1923 (Amerson and Shelton 1976), and they have recently shown interest in recolonizing Wake Atoll (Jones 1995, Rauzon et al. 2008); reports of breeding in the Marshall Is are erroneous (Amerson 1969). They breed in Oct-Jun and are completely absent from colony sites and Hawaiian waters in mid Jul-mid Oct (e.g., Bryan 1906), dispersing primarily to coastal ne. Asian and N American waters (King 1967, Sanger 1974b, Hyrenbach et al. 2002), and they are rarely recorded at sea S of 20° N, although there is at least one valid record for the S Hemisphere, in New Zealand (Marchant and Higgins 1990). The three N Pacific species were placed with the other albatrosses in the genus *Diomedea* until the AOU (1997) split them as *Phoebastria*. Confusion about species identification resulted in many records of what were likely Black-footed Albatross in Hawaiian waters being called "[Short-tailed Albatross](#)", "*D. albatrus*", and/or "*D. chinensis*" (e.g., Peale 1848, Cassin 1858, Dole 1879, Wilson and Evans 1899) until cleared up by Rothschild (1900). Earlier, Isenbeck (*in von Kittlitz* 1834) noted two species of albatross on Laysan in 1828 but thought the dark one might be a Sooty Albatross (*D. fuliginosa*). See Bailey (1952, 1956), Whittow (1993b), Cousins and Cooper (2000), and Rauzon (2001) for general information and recent concerns about the conservation of Black-footed Albatross.

The total breeding population for the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands* in the 1980-early 2000s was 55-62,000 actively breeding pairs (Fefer et al. 1987, Harrison 1990, McDermond and Morgan 1993, USFWS 2005b, Naughton et al. 2007, Flint 2008; [Table](#)), which extrapolated to a total estimated population of 275,000 individuals (Cousins and Cooper 2000). During the late 1800s and early 1900s populations were decimated by feather hunters (Bryan 1906, 1911; Munro 1944; *E* 2:34, 3:12-13, 16) but recovered slowly during the 20th century. On *Midway*, for example, "a few small colonies" were present in 1913 (Bailey 1956) and populations were estimated at 2,000 pairs in 1923 (Rice and Kenyon 1962), 13,000 pairs in 1946 (Fisher and Baldwin 1946, *E* 6:12), 4,700-8,250 pairs during the late 1950s and early 1960s (Rice and Kenyon 1962, Robbins 1966), and 18-25,000 during the early 2000s ([Table](#)). During the 2000s, atoll-wide censuses of nests by USFWS ranged from a low of 17,617 in 2000 (following a food shortage in 1999) to a high of 24,320 in 2008, with a recent increasing trend (Flint 2008). It is possible that reductions following 1945 were due to efforts to reduce numbers as related to military air strikes (Kenyon et al. 1958, Rice 1959, Robbins 1966). There are more recent concerns about the effects of long-line fishing in the Gulf of Alaska (McDermond and Morgan 1993, Cousins and Cooper 2000, USFWS 2005b; *HE* 8[3]:10-11), and it was being considered by USFWS for endangered species status in 2007-2009.

Comparable numbers to those on *Midway* are found on *Laysan*, where USFWS censuses from 1998-2007 ranged from 19,456 (2006) to 23,292 (1999) nests, with a mean of about 21,000 (Flint 2008). In *French Frigate*, censuses from 1980-2007 ranged from a low of 2760 (1996) to a high of 5725 (2008), with most counts being between 3300 and 4600 (Flint 2008, Keller et al. in press). On *Kure* seven counts of chicks in May-Jun between 1997 and 2007 showed a generally increasing population, ranging from 775 in

1998 to 2033 in 2006 (VanderWerf and David 2000, Vanderlip 2005, 2006, 2007) indicating an extrapolated breeding population (assuming 75% success) of 1033-2711 breeding pairs. Population estimates from other Northwestern Islands from 1995-2003 (Naughton et al. 2007, Flint 2008) range from 30 on *Nihoa* to 6,100 on *Pearl and Hermes* (Table). There are as yet no records for Gardner Pinnacles, Information on the history of the species and data on breeding phenology for each Northwestern Island, compiled as part of the POBSP, can be found in the Atoll Research Bulletins for each breeding locality (see [Seabird Page](#)). McKee and Pyle (2002) discuss anomalous plumages in Black-footed Albatross and hybridization of Black-footed and Laysan albatrosses (cf. [HRBP](#) page) at Midway (see [Laysan Albatross](#)).

The only breeding among the Southeastern Islands occurs on Lehua Islet and Kaula Rock near *Ni'ihau* (Table). On Lehua, Caum (1936) noted them in 1931 and Vanderwerf et al. (2007) recorded up to 31 adults and 8-16 chicks in 2002-2005. Fefer et al. (1987) noted the Kaula populations to consist of about 100 breeding pairs, although Harrison (1990) indicated only 20-70 pairs nested there, and only 9 individuals and no eggs were observed there 16-17 Nov 1998, perhaps before all eggs would have been laid for the season (Flint 2008).

One or sometimes two or more Black-footed Albatross are observed occasionally from the shores of the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands*, primarily from *Kaua'i* and *O'ahu*, and more often from boats farther offshore. During the 1950s through 1980s a few were attracted to a wastewater outfall off Sand Island near Honolulu harbor, O'ahu, where up to 7 Black-footed Albatross were recorded on Christmas Counts there until the outfall was closed in the late 1980s (see [Pomarine Jaeger](#)). Birds are regularly observed off Kilauea Point NWR, Kaua'i, and have landed briefly on Mokuaeae Islet and among [Laysan Albatrosses](#) at Kilauea Point (e.g., a pair 29 Apr-1 May 2005) and at Pacific Missile Range Facility (e.g., Byrd and Zeillemaker 1981; also a banded bird in Feb 2006 that had been recorded at French Frigate the month before, and one was observed 12 Apr 2009). Otherwise, Black-footed Albatrosses seldom land in the Southeastern Islands. There is a report of one landing on Ni'ihau in 2008 or 2009. One was reportedly flushed from Mokumanu Islet, off O'ahu, 3 Jan 1900 (Seale 1900), but this could have referred to a [Laysan Albatross](#). On O'ahu a bird found exhausted on Kailua Beach in April 1946 soon died (BPBM 10005; *E* 6:79, 7:28), another was found at Kaneohe 30 Nov 2002, turned into the Sea life Park rehabilitation center and released on 9 Dec, and one landed briefly among Laysan Albatrosses at Kaena Point 11 Feb 2007. Two photographed 6 Dec 2008 off Kona ([HRBP](#) 5632) and 2-3 others observed here 19 Apr-1 May 2009 are the only specific records for *Hawai'i I* and the southernmost in Hawaii. Perkins (1903) mentioned that they were occasionally noticed on the Southeastern Islands but did not mention which ones.

At sea, Black-footed Albatrosses are commonly seen during the breeding season and in northern Hawaiian waters but rarely during times of colony absence or in waters south of Hawai'i I. During monthly surveys near the Southeastern Hawaiian Islands in Mar 1964-Jun 1965, King (1970) recorded 497 individuals in Nov-May, 3 in Jun, and 0 in Jul-Oct. During daily surveys of all Hawaiian waters in Aug-Nov 2002, Rowlett (2002) recorded none during 6 Aug-13 Oct and 20 during 14 Oct-28 Nov. Spear *et al.* (1999) recorded none during surveys S to SE of Hawai'i I. in spring and fall, 1984-1991.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)
[Literature cited](#)