



NOAA FISHERIES

National Observer Program and National Seabird Program

The NOAA Fisheries' **National Seabird Program** is a cross-disciplinary group of managers and scientists who work domestically and internationally to protect and conserve seabirds. The NSP works through representation on steering committees and working groups within and external to NOAA Fisheries, and through partnerships with other NOAA line offices, science centers, regional offices, regional fishery management councils, state partners, and various federal agencies.

NOAA Fisheries' **National Observer Program** provides coordination for regional programs covering fisheries of the Greater Atlantic, Southeast, West Coast, Pacific Islands, Northwest, and Alaska. Our eyes and ears on the water, observers and at-sea monitors are professionally trained biological technicians gathering firsthand data on what is caught and discarded by U.S. commercial fishing vessels to support a wide range of science, conservation, and management activities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/fishery-observers

Observer Know-How: Reporting Banded Seabirds

An Important Role in Conservation

The work of observers, including reporting banded seabirds, is critical to effective fisheries management and to safeguarding protected species. **Without trained observers, most fishery interactions involving banded birds would go unreported.**

Why are Birds Banded?

Scientists and resource managers band birds to track the fate of individuals within a population and, by extension, the population(s) they represent. The “recovery” or “recapture” rate of bands is low (0.1%-20% or 1 to 200 of every 1,000 birds banded), which makes **observer reports critical and the largest, most reliable source of band recoveries at sea.**

How are Birds Banded?

Birds are typically banded on the leg, with a metal United States Geological Survey (USGS) Bird Banding Lab ring that has an 8- or 9-digit number and contact information, e.g., www.reportband.gov followed by the band number. Some older bands have instructions, “WRITE LAUREL BIRD BAND MD 20708 USA” or “AVISE BIRD BAND WASH DC.”

Occasionally observers find bands from other countries, or USGS bands paired with other bands or tags that allow the birds to be recognized from a distance or that serve as tracking devices that allow researchers to follow bird movements—observers should watch out for these auxiliary markers.

What is the Process for Reporting a Banded Bird?

Observers who find a banded bird (dead or alive; within or outside of their composition sample) **should note the band number, take photos, and save the carcass, if possible.** NOAA Fisheries staff submit observer data to USGS. Even if observers record part of a band number or only an auxiliary band, the nesting location and year can often be tracked down. Observers should submit any/all information they can, e.g., “red band with white letters, A1380 or A1880”.

What Happens to the Data?

USGS reports the data back to the bird bander. The majority of carcasses collected by observers undergo a full necropsy (postmortem analysis) that provides age, reproductive status, overall body condition, stomach content, and contamination (e.g., ocean plastics) data—all vital information about the population-level, human-caused impacts to seabirds.



Banded Black-footed Albatross seen at sea. Credit: NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office



Top photo: Stomach contents of a Northern Fulmar. Credit: Oikonos

Bottom photo: USGS band. Credit: NOAA Fisheries Alaska Fisheries Science Center

BY THE NUMBERS (2010-2020)

Total bands recovered **415**

Total species: **9**

Source: NOAA Fisheries, 2022