

RED-LEGGED KITTIWAKE

Rissa brevirostris

Critical —
Endangered —
Vulnerable A1a



This species qualifies as Vulnerable owing to a rapid population reduction, equivalent to 21% in ten years, between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s. The main population appears to have stabilised and, unless declines recommence in the near future, the species will be downlisted to Near Threatened.

DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION The Red-legged Kittiwake breeds in the Pribilof (St Paul, St George and Otter), Bogoslof (Bogoslof and Fire) and Buldir (Buldir, Outer Rock, Middle Rock) islands, USA, and the Commander Islands (Arij Kamen, Toporkov, Bering and Mednyi), Russia; in the mid-1970s, the population was estimated at more than 259,000 individuals, but had declined to c.168,000 by the mid-1990s (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996, Byrd *et al.* 1997). Most of this decline was on the Pribilofs: by 44% in breeding numbers on St George, where over 80% of the 1970s population bred, and by 55% in the small population on St Paul, although numbers on St George have apparently now stabilised at c.123,000 birds, still 73% of the total population (Byrd *et al.* 1997). There is some evidence of a slight decline on the Commander Islands, but no counts are available prior to the late 1980s and it is unclear whether this is a trend or just interannual fluctuations; apart from that on Bering, no other colony holds more than 2% of the population, but the number of nests had increased threefold on the Bogoslof Islands and twofold on Buldir Island by the mid-1990s (Byrd *et al.* 1997).

ECOLOGY It nests in colonies on ledges on vertical sea-cliffs, and feeds on small fish (e.g. lampfish), squid and marine invertebrates; birds arrive at nesting colonies in April and leave around September, dispersing southwards over the north-east Pacific and east to the Gulf of Alaska (Byrd and Williams 1993).

THREATS The recent population decline remains unexplained, but it may be related to a reduction in food supply caused by excessive commercial fishing (Byrd and Williams 1993). The construction of a harbour in the Pribilof Islands has increased the risk of rat colonisation, which would pose a serious threat (Byrd and Williams 1993).

MEASURES TAKEN The Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge protects many of the breeding colonies, and a rat prevention programme is underway in the Pribilofs (Byrd and Williams 1993).

MEASURES PROPOSED • Monitor breeding populations to assess decline rates. • Assess the status of rats at breeding colonies. • Assess the impact of commercial fishing. • Establish the proposed buffer zone around the Pribilof Islands in which trawl fishing would be prohibited (Lensink 1984).