

Rat Free Aleutians:

An unbroken chain of islands thriving with life

A Refuge for People and Wildlife
 Since time immemorial, the 1000 mile long Aleutian Archipelago has been stewarded by the Unangan people. Today, the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge shares in the stewardship of these storied, volcanic islands where nearly forty million seabirds nest every summer. The Refuge was established to conserve these seabirds as well as marine mammals, other migratory birds, and the marine resources on which they rely for generations to come.

Islands Are Biodiversity Hotspots
 Although islands account for just 5% of the world's land-mass, they are home to approximately 20% of the world's bird and plant species. Since the 1700's, shipwrecks, trappers, homesteaders, military, and other government agencies have accidentally and intentionally brought new species to the Aleutian islands. Islands are particularly important to seabirds for nesting habitat. Seabirds evolved to nest in burrows, on the ground, or on cliff ledges on the treeless Aleutian islands that were once free of predators. Without natural instincts to escape predation, many island bird populations plummeted or were entirely extirpated by rats and foxes that feed on adult birds and chicks. Seabirds are one of the most threatened bird groups on the planet, with approximately 30% at risk of extinction from invasive species impacts. With native species driven out, the entire natural ecological order on islands from nutrients, to plants, and birds is disrupted.

A Legacy of Restoration
 Removing invasive species is key for protecting at-risk seabird species and restoring island ecosystems. Together with partners, the Refuge has worked for over 60 years to return natural balance to the Aleutians by removing the nonnative predators. Since the 1940s, nearly 50 islands representing more than 1 million acres have been restored through invasive species management. In the absence of introduced predators, populations of nesting birds have increased five to ten times. Yet, rats remain on 12 Refuge islands where they continue to pose threat to native wildlife.



Following the removal of invasive rats from Hawadax Island, Aleutian Archipelago, ground nesting seabirds like Glaucous-Winged Gulls could once again rear their chicks.
 Credit: Island Conservation/Rory Stansbury

Rat Spills are Forever
 Every year, nearly 3000 ships pass through the islands on the great circle shipping route between Asia and North America. With an average of two shipping mishaps a year, the Aleutians are at risk of "rat spills" from shipwrecks. Rat spills can be far worse than oil spills. Oil degrades over time while rats multiply, and multiply, . . . and multiply! The Refuge has prepared by assembling shipwreck response kits and training rat spill responders.

Hope For the Future
 Rodents have been successfully removed from over 500 islands worldwide - including Hawadax Island in 2008. The explosive recovery of bird populations and other organisms occurred in the absence of rats. The Refuge and its partners are committed to applying lessons learned from these successes to safeguard Refuge islands and create a Rat Free Aleutians!

The mission of Rat Free Aleutians is to collaboratively prevent new introductions of non-native rats and remove existing infestations in order to steward native island ecosystems for generations to come.




Alaska Maritime NWR

Strategies

a mosaic of coordinated actions

- **Biosecurity:** The Refuge and partners developed and implement strict protocols aimed at preventing unintentional releases of invasive species.
- **Restoration:** The Refuge and partners are currently in the process of assessing the possibility of rat removal on 4 Aleutian Islands - Great Sitkin, Amchitka, Kiska and Attu.
- **Communication:** Engage with stakeholders to gain local knowledge, gather input, provide updates, and more.
- **Monitoring & Rapid Response:** There are planned rapid response mechanisms in place should a rat spill, or other invasive species infestation occur.

Learn more: 

<https://www.fws.gov/ratfreealeutians>

Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge
 95 Sterling Highway Suite 1
 Homer, Alaska 99603
rateradication_AKMNWR@fws.gov