



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Endangered Species

Alaska Region

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Steller's Eider (*Polysticta stelleri*)

Designation: Threatened

Steller's eiders are the smallest of four eider species, weighing about two pounds. They nest in the Arctic tundra in the spring/early summer, laying up to eight eggs in a nest that is lined with a thick bed of down. Young hatch in late June. After breeding, they move to near shore marine waters to molt and winter. They dive underwater to feed on invertebrates such as amphipods, aquatic insects, and clams.

Critical Habitat: Five units of critical habitat have been designated: breeding habitat on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and four units in marine waters of southwest Alaska that are important for molting, resting, feeding, and wintering. Approximately 2,800 square miles and 850 miles of coastline are included in critical habitat.

Distribution and Abundance: Three breeding populations are recognized, two in Arctic Russia and one in Alaska. Only Steller's eiders that nest in Alaska are listed as threatened. In Alaska, the northern breeding population historically nested along the northern Arctic Coastal Plain from Wainwright to Cape Hallett. The western breeding population was reported nesting on the Seward Peninsula, St. Lawrence Island, and southern Norton Sound, but primarily nested on the central Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (Y-K Delta). Currently, the only known North American nesting population is concentrated near Barrow in northern Alaska. Aerial surveys indicate abundance of roughly a few hundred individuals. The western Alaska subpopulation appears to have nearly disappeared; since 1970, only 11 nests have been reported from a few locations on the Y-K Delta.

Threats: Reasons for initial population decline and range contraction are unknown. Ingestion of lead shot, shooting, and changes in predation patterns may have contributed to the decline, and may currently be limiting population growth.

Conservation efforts: We work with partners to:

- 1) Protect adults and increase the number of young produced by the Alaska-breeding population on the Arctic Coastal Plain. Conservation activities include reducing arctic fox and raven populations (common nest predators) near the highest concentration of breeding Steller's eiders, and community outreach focused on habitat protection and reducing shooting, use of toxic lead ammunition, and disturbance during the breeding season.
- 2) Re-establish a healthy and stable population on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta through reintroduction. Please [click here](#) for more information on the reintroduction program.
- 3) Monitor the population through aerial and ground surveys to measure the effectiveness of conservation efforts; and,

4) Continue research to better understand the biology and needs of this species. Current research projects include studying the breeding behaviors of Steller's eiders near Barrow, and updating statistical models that enable us to evaluate the current health of the population and determine the number of birds needed to achieve recovery.

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[U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Species Profile](#)

- [Photo Gallery](#)
- [Range Map](#)
- [Fact sheet \(3/4/2014\)](#)
- [Protocol for Handling Dead Spectacled and Steller's Eiders, July 2010](#)

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