

ISLANDS IN A STORM



In the remote south-western corner of the Bering Sea between the tip of the Aleutian Islands and Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, lie islands of global importance to the conservation of biodiversity.

The entire Commander Islands archipelago, including a 30-mile-wide marine protected zone, are part of Russia's extensive system of strictly protected federal nature reserves, called zapovedniks (zap-o-VED-niks). The 9-million-acre Commander Islands Nature Reserve is managed by the Russian Ministry of Nature Conservation and Natural Resources.

The Nature Reserve's two largest islands are Bering, named after its discoverer Captain-Commander Vitus Bering who shipwrecked on the island in 1741 on return from his ill-fated voyage of discovery to America, and Medniy, meaning "copper" in Russian and named for its low-grade copper deposits. Two smaller islands, Toporkov and Ariy Kamen, and numerous small islets and offshore rocks constitute this wildlife-rich archipelago.

The Nature Reserve's importance to the conservation of Earth's biodiversity is dramatized by the fact that it has been included in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves by UNESCO. It has also been nominated as a World Heritage Site, identified by WWF as globally significant for conserving biodiversity in the Bering Sea ecoregion, and listed as a globally Important Bird Area by BirdLife International, the National Audubon Society, and Russian Bird Conservation Union.

The 30-mile-wide protected marine zone that surrounds the islands is the largest in Russia and one of the few protected continental shelf areas in the world. From the beginning, the Nature Reserve was planned consistent with UNESCO's biosphere reserve zonal concept to protect biodiversity, as well as perpetuate the lives of the 800 local residents in the village of Nikol'skoye on Bering Island.

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

For more information on what WWF and its partners are doing to help protect the Commander Islands Nature Reserve and entire Bering Sea ecoregion in which it is located, visit our website at www.worldwildlife.org or contact one of our program staff.



Sea otters

Cover: Bering Island, red-legged kittiwakes, northern fur seals
All photography used in this flyer by Yuri Artukhin



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World Wildlife Fund (WWF), known worldwide by its panda logo, leads international efforts to protect endangered species and the diversity of life on Earth. Now in its fourth decade, WWF works in more than 100 countries around the globe and is supported by one million members in the United States.

Russia's

Commander Islands Nature Reserve

Islands of Biodiversity
in the Bering Sea



BERING SEA ECOREGION PROGRAM

BIODIVERSITY TREASURE HOUSE



Northern fulmars and chick

Birds Among the Nature Reserve's most outstanding wildlife phenomena are its 203 species of birds. These include six endemic species and/or subspecies found nowhere else such as the ancient murrelet, 25 species listed in the Russian Red Data Book as threatened or endangered, and an annual gathering of some one million seabirds representing 19 species.



Arctic fox

recorded in Nature Reserve waters, 10 (56 percent) are listed in the Red Data Book of the Russian Federation as threatened or endangered.

Although there is a scarcity of land mammals because of the islands' extreme isolation, distinct races of Arctic fox constitute the most ancient and isolated populations of canines in the world.

Mammals The Commanders are also noted for their diversity and abundance of marine mammals. Some 225,000 northern fur seals – 22 percent of the world population – breed on island rookeries. After being hunted to near-extinction along with fur seals during the 18th century "Fur Rush," Steller sea lions and sea otters can again be commonly seen. Of the 18 species of whales, dolphins, and porpoises

Fish The Nature Reserve's diverse and food-rich marine habitats in the marine and littoral zones are responsible for high fish abundance. Although little studied, 216 fish species of 56 families have been identified. Among the anadromous fishes are five species of Pacific salmon. Dolly Varden and Arctic char inhabit some freshwater streams and lakes.



Sockeye salmon

Invertebrates Nutrient-and oxygen-rich waters surrounding the Commanders promote unusually high phytoplankton production resulting in one of the most prolific assemblages of marine invertebrates in the Bering Sea. Included are squid, golden and blue king crabs, and snow (Tanner) crab. The primordial environment characterized by surging waters of the littoral zone provide haven to an amazing diversity of colorful starfish, sea cucumbers, sand dollars, barnacles, sea urchins, clams, and myriad other invertebrate forms.



Chocolate lily

nearshore waters provide shelter to a diversity of marine life.

Northern fur seals

Plants Botanists report the presence of nearly 500 species of vascular plants. These include 35 that have been introduced and at least 37 that are considered rare. A colorful assemblage of lichens and mosses adorn rock faces at seabird colonies where they are enriched by bird guano. Extensive kelp forests and eelgrass beds in

INTERNATIONAL HELP NEEDED

With the collapse of the Soviet communist government and the painful economic transition that has ensued, Commander Islands residents and Nature Reserve managers are facing many difficulties. The dramatic decline in central government support combined with absence of a viable and sustainable island economy has resulted in serious socioeconomic and environmental consequences. The local human population is suffering and declining, and financial resources are inadequate for Nature Reserve managers to fulfill their mission. Poaching of fish and wildlife has become commonplace, pollution is worsening, and there are serious threats from invasive species, especially rats and mink. The Commander Island Nature Reserve is indeed in need of support.

WWF LENDS A HAND

WWF is committed to helping the Commander Islands Nature Reserve as well as its residents in Nikol'skoye village. Organization priorities include: supporting science and stewardship in the Nature Reserve; addressing factors that threaten its wildlife and habitats such as oil spills, pollution, and illegal fishing; building public support for and local involvement in Nature Reserve conservation programs; and promoting international collaboration and funding support. Only with local and world community participation and support will this globally important protected area be able to thrive.

