BirdLife INTERNATIONAL

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Sea Change

BirdLife International Marine Programme newsletter

Albatross Task Force celebrates 10 year anniversary

- Protecting seabirds in Namibia
- Reducing gillnet bycatch
- Tracking ocean wanderers

Celebrating 10 years of effort to save albatrosses

Oli Yates, Albatross Task Force Programme Manager, reflects on the achievements in reducing seabird bycatch, and considers the challenges ahead.

Since the launch of the Albatross Task Force (ATF) a decade ago, we have never tried to shelter people from the reality of life as an ATF instructor. Together the teams have racked up as many as 700 days a year standing on the decks of fishing vessels in wild weather, waiting to record the number of seabirds that met their end on hooks, cables and nets. This seemingly thankless task has been one of the most important in global albatross conservation.

These trips built our understanding of the baseline levels of seabird mortality. Levels that we aimed to cut markedly by implementing ground-breaking changes in some of the most dangerous fisheries in the world – a farfetched, yet visionary, aspiration. This aspiration often seemed unattainable, but on the 10 year anniversary of the ATF we are reflecting on some remarkable results.

The team has tackled seabird bycatch in 10 target fisheries: hake trawlers in Argentina, Chile, Namibia and South Africa, swordfish and tuna longliners in Brazil, Chile, Namibia, South Africa and Uruguay and hake longliners in Ecuador. In these fisheries, ATF instructors have conducted experimental mitigation trials in collaboration with industry and local governments, producing convincing results.

These results have been presented at the international Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels meetings and we have worked with governments to include seabird bycatch reduction objectives in their National Plans of Action. Thanks to these efforts, seven out of 10 of these fisheries now have regulations that require the use of mitigation measures.

The three fisheries without bycatch regulations are the Argentinean and Chilean hake trawl fisheries and the hake longline fishery in Ecuador. The Argentinean Federal Fishery Council is considering introducing regulations in the hake trawl fishery. Following a pilot study, they are conducting further testing on the practicality of adopting bird-scaring lines in the fleet. We hope these regulations will be passed in 2016.

In Chile, the hake trawl fleet has suffered a significant reduction in fishery quota, essentially reducing the fleet to a minimal operating capacity while stock assessments are performed. While we do not claim to have solved the problem in Ecuador through direct intervention, the trend toward using heavier weights in the longline fishery appears to have reduced seabird bycatch. In our last three years of monitoring we recorded no seabird mortality.

So, where to next? We believe that for seabird bycatch reductions to be sustainable in the long-term, we must increase our collaborative efforts with government, industry and local observer programmes to ensure mitigation measures and monitoring become routine practice across all fleets.

It feels like the hard years of experimental trials and lobbying for regulations are drawing to a close, but the path to more sustainable fisheries is a long one, full of great challenges. However, with an experienced team, and many supporters across academia, industry and civil society, we are hopeful for the future.

Want to know more?

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Leo Tamini

The ATF was set up to prevent accidental deaths of albatrosses and petrels in fisheries

New law to protect seabirds in Namibia

In 2013, we reported that seabird mortality in the Namibian longline fishery was as high as 22,000 seabirds a year, plus another 8,000 in the trawl fishery.

The number of vessels responsible for this deadly tally included 70 trawlers and 12 longliners. Namibia, it seemed, was home to the worst fisheries in the world for seabird bycatch.

In 2014, we lobbied hard for regulations to be introduced that would make seabird bycatch mitigation measures obligatory in the two fleets. This would be bird-scaring lines for the trawl fishery, and bird-scaring lines, line weighting and night setting in the longline fishery. At the end of 2014, we met the Minister of Fisheries and the Chief Fisheries Scientist, who then drove forward the regulations.

The process was longer than we anticipated, but good things come to those who wait! In November 2015, the regulations were published in the Namibian ministerial gazette and have become a legal requirement.

Early this year, the Minister gave an address to the fishing industry in which he advised all vessel owners to ensure their vessels are fishing in compliance with seabird safe measures. Our ATF team in Namibia is busy providing bird-scaring lines to even the most reluctant companies. The team is providing port training and are gradually progressing towards demonstrations at sea for all vessels in the fleet.

We are working with the observer agency to include compliance monitoring in onboard duties and we hope to report on fleet-wide seabird bycatch reductions soon.

Want to know more?

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Clemens Naomab

The ATF delivering bird scaring lines to Namibian trawlers, and raising awareness of the new regulations

Love your work Benjo!

Oli Yates bids fond farewell to seabird conservation stalwart Ben Sullivan.

It is with grateful thanks that we say farewell to long standing Marine Programme member Dr Ben Sullivan, better known as Benjo.

Ben joined the team in 2004 after leading albatross conservation efforts in the Falklands, where he inspired a successful National Plan of Action for seabirds. That seminal seabird work was the vision behind the Albatross Task Force.

Ben's work to develop and raise awareness of mitigation measures is probably what many people will most associate him with. In 2010 Ben was awarded a prestigious Pew Marine Conservation Fellowship, which helped him develop our mitigation work.

There are plenty of great scientists and inventive engineers in the world, and many wise advocates, but there are few who can seamlessly switch between the three. The reason Ben is so well known and respected is his ability to effortlessly glide across these disciplines like an albatross across EEZs. His endless enthusiasm and optimism make for a great mix.

See you in Tasmania Benjo! We wish you all the very best in Hobart.

Oli Yates

Benjo – the inspiration behind the ATF

Tackling recreational fishing threats

BirdLife is applying an ATF approach to work with recreational fishers in the seabird-rich Hauraki Gulf.

New Zealand is considered the seabird capital of the world. The Hauraki Gulf is a hot spot for seabird biodiversity, and is the only known breeding location for vulnerable species such as Buller's shearwater and black petrel.

Set beside the nation's most populated city, Auckland, it is also the area used most by New Zealand's recreational fishers. Nearly five million hours of recreational fishing occur in this region annually. It's estimated that 11,500 birds a year are accidentally tangled or hooked. Species affected include the flesh-footed shearwater and the black petrel, which are already at risk from commercial fishing.

Biz Bell WMIL

A rescued black petrel with a recreational fishing hook in its wing

Most bycatch programmes in the region have targeted commercial vessels. Funding from the David & Lucile Packard Foundation has enabled partner Forest & Bird to recruit a Seabird Liaison Officer to engage with recreational fishers to raise awareness of bycatch and encourage care for seabirds.

Charter fisher operators have given welcome advice, which has focused action on the day-to-day recreational fishers – a diffuse and diverse 'target' that we are reaching through a variety of means including fishing competitions and community events. We are using social media, videos with famous fishing TV show hosts, brochures and an identification guide with advice on keeping seabirds 'off the hook'.

Want to know more?

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Hope on the Humboldt

Since 2007 we've been tackling seabird bycatch along the Humboldt Current Large Marine Ecosystem. We're getting closer to finding solutions for two fishing gears.

Stretching along the Pacific coast of South America, the Humboldt Current is home to albatrosses, penguins, turtles, sharks and marine mammals.

These productive waters provide a livelihood to many fishers in Chile, Peru and Ecuador. Recently we have taken on the challenge of tackling bycatch in small-scale fisheries. These are important because of the scale of the fishing effort, the interactions with threatened species, and the use of purse seine and gillnet fishing gears, for which there's no best practice mitigation.

Our efforts to find solutions to gillnet bycatch have been highlighted before in *Sea Change* (and see pg.5). The ATF partner in Peru, ProDelphinus, has been trialling mitigation methods including testing LED lights attached to gillnets. Tests suggest that illuminated nets could reduce non-target bycatch, including green turtles, without impacting fish catch.

Purse seine fishers encircle shoaling fish with a net and close it up like a purse. In Chile, many vessels use 'baggy' nets, which accidentally trap birds. Working with a local gear manufacturer (KraNet), the ATF team have modified nets, eliminating bycatch in trials and reducing net handling time for crew. Initial trials recorded one bird killed every other set using baggy nets versus no birds killed with modified nets.

Thanks to further funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, we'll extend trials to improve our confidence in these early promising results.

Want to know more?

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Widening the net

Our work to prevent gillnet bycatch has expanded in the last year, with several projects now up and running. The main aim is to figure out how we can minimise seabird bycatch in this gear and start reducing the estimated global toll of 400,000 seabird deaths in gillnet fisheries each year.

At the time of writing, the Seabird Task Force in Lithuania is completing a successful first season of testing high visibility (black and white) panels placed at regular intervals along bottom-set cod gillnets. We still need to analyse the results, but the initial signs seem promising with regard to target catch and bycatch rates. There have been no major operational issues with deploying this mitigation measure either.

After workshops with the gillnet fishermen this summer, we'll be planning for another season of bycatch mitigation trials, potentially testing net lighting. This involves clipping LED lights along the headline of the net as a bycatch deterrent. Trials in Mexico demonstrated that this measure can successfully reduce turtle bycatch and it has also shown promise for birds in Peruvian trials undertaken by our ATF partner, ProDelphinus.

Excitingly, through funding from the European Commission, we're also going to be testing the high visibility panels in Portugal (working with BirdLife partner SPEA) and net lights in Poland (working with the National Marine Fisheries Research Institute and BirdLife partner OTOP). This work will include a comprehensive economic impact analysis by consultants the Marine Resources Assessment Group. This means, alongside the gillnet work we kicked off with the ATF in Chile last year, we are building an important overall picture of whether these mitigation measures are effective in reducing bycatch, how well they can be integrated into fishing operations and their economic impacts. Of course, we hope that the measures will be effective and that they can be used easily and economically – we'll keep you posted with progress!

In addition to the mitigation work, we took our first foray into bycatch issues in Iceland. A few years ago, the Icelandic lumpsucker gillnet fishery attained Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification for their product – which is predominantly the roe found in female fish, which is popular in Germany, Sweden and Denmark.

One of the conditions of their certification was to collect data on seabird bycatch so that an assessment of the impact of the fishery could be made. In the past there had been large estimates of bird bycatch in the fishery.

Last year, working with BirdLife partner Fuglavernd and a local contractor called BioPol, we conducted a small number of trips on vessels to start to examine the scale of bycatch in the fishery. We discovered that black guillemots, cormorants, shags and eiders were the species that suffered the highest bycatch rates. We are carrying out more field work to produce an overall estimate of bycatch in the fishery. We then hope to work with the fishermen to develop mitigation measures to significantly reduce bird bycatch.

With thanks to Fondation Segré and the David & Lucile Packard Foundation for supporting this work.

Want to know more?

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Rory Crawford

We are working with partner Fuglavernd to investigate bycatch issues in Iceland

Seabird symposium held in Tokyo

In January, Japan's Ministry of the Environment hosted an event for seabird and marine biodiversity conservation.

About 250 people attended the symposium, which was held to celebrate Professor Hiroshi Hasegawa's National Maritime Award in the 'Natural Environment Conservation' category. Professor Hasegawa is Professor Emeritus from Toho University, Tokyo. The award recognises his inspiring work on the recovery of short-tailed albatrosses, a species for which Japan has key breeding and feeding sites.

MoEJ

Symposium celebrates growth in numbers of short-tailed albatrosses

The symposium included presentations from Professor Hasegawa and Dr Hiroshi Minami from the National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries. There was also a panel discussion about marine biodiversity conservation and the use of marine Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs). Panel members included the Wild Bird Society of Japan and BirdLife.

Professor Hasegawa's presentation was about his 40 years of work on the short-tailed albatross. Their key breeding site was threatened, so he successfully relocated some birds to establish a new colony on the island of Torishima. There were only 50 recorded short-tailed albatrosses in 1970; there are more than 3,500 today.

Dr Minami's presentation focused on seabird and sea turtle bycatch in longline fisheries. He discussed international rules to mitigate bycatch and described his research to reduce the capture of birds and turtles.

The panelists discussed what should be done to protect Japan's seabirds and marine biodiversity. This included how marine IBAs can be used for conservation, particularly by establishing a network of Marine Protected Areas. A life-sized short-tailed albatross decoy was displayed as well as albatross eggs and feathers.

Want to know more?

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Protecting European seabird sites

Malta meeting takes steps towards transboundary seabird protection in the Med.

More than 3,000 important sites for seabirds globally have been identified by BirdLife's marine IBA programme.

In Europe, 670 sites have been identified – mostly in national waters.

Pep Arcos

The Balearic shearwater, the most endangered European seabird, requires transboundary conservation efforts

Identifying and protecting these sites is extremely important, but as seabirds are wide ranging we have to consider areas beyond national jurisdictions.

As the seabird tracking database has increased in size and coverage it is more possible to identify priority 'transboundary' areas for seabirds – those beyond a single country. Pinpointing and protecting these sites requires collaboration between officials, scientists and managers from multiple countries. The Mediterranean provides an excellent example, with 22 countries sharing the coastline and large areas beyond any national jurisdiction.

BirdLife, BirdLife Malta and the RSPB held a workshop in Malta in 2015, focusing on transboundary site identification.

The participants, from 18 countries, identified priority gaps in seabird conservation across the region. The lack of basic information on seabirds breeding and feeding in North African, Middle Eastern and some Adriatic countries was highlighted and potential project ideas were developed to ensure that future conservation work is carried out cohesively across the Mediterranean sea basin.

Want to know more?

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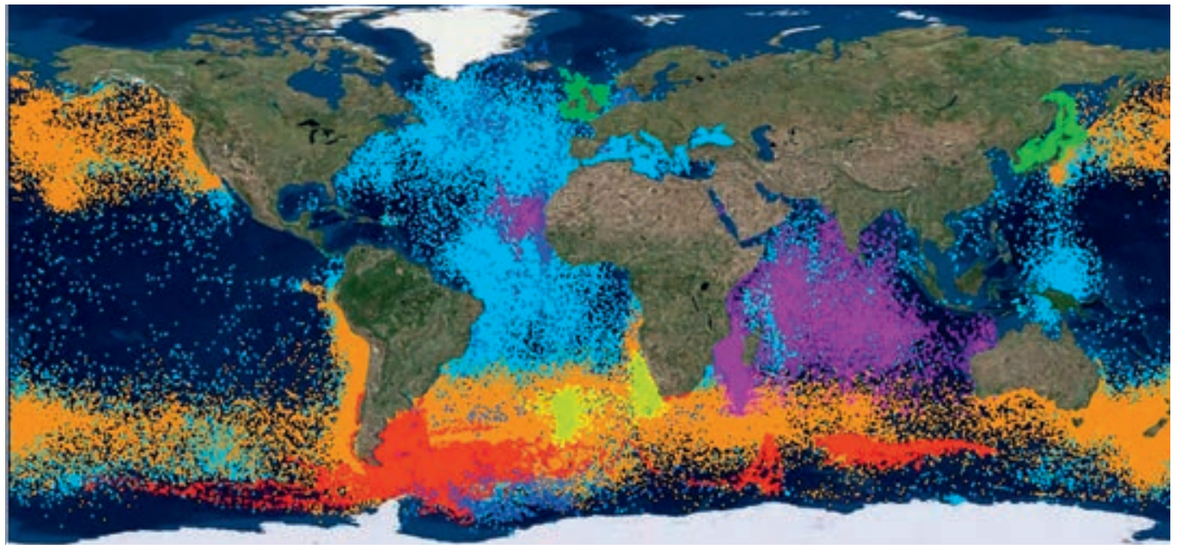

www.seabirdtracking.org

Six million data points for the world's seabirds, provided by 120 research institutes

Tracking seabirds shows their incredible journeys

A landmark tracking database is having more impact as it passes six million data points.

The Global Seabird Tracking Database – one of the biggest marine conservation collaborations in the world – continues to be a key tool for seabird conservation. It now holds information about more than 100 seabird species (91 shown online) and 15,000 individual tracks. The database gives unprecedented insights into the movements of these birds and is guiding where conservation action is most urgently needed at sea.

Each new study and data contribution adds to the knowledge of how and why seabirds use the oceans. The tracking data has helped BirdLife to identify marine IBAs, which are the most important places for seabirds at sea. It has also led to seabird conservation measures being adopted by all the key tuna management organisations to help tackle the problem of seabird bycatch in longline fisheries.

The database was relaunched at the 2nd World Seabird Conference in South Africa in 2015 with a new interactive website (seabirdtracking.org), which can hold data for all seabird species for the first time. Conference delegates particularly liked the new data for penguins, and promised to contribute further information.

A new paper published in the journal *Diversity and Distributions* further highlights the benefits of this collaboration, allowing big data analyses of key sites for marine conservation globally. The paper identified new marine IBAs by assessing tracking data collected between 1992 and 2012. It assessed species including albatrosses, shearwaters, Pterodroma petrels, giant-petrels, Procellaria petrels, sulids, tropicbirds and frigatebirds. More than 1,000 sites were defined for 52 species. Many of the sites are in productive waters associated with boundary currents, upwellings, canyons, seamounts, river outflows and other ocean features, which help to regulate food availability.

The total area of the marine IBAs identified amounts to 4.3% of the world's oceans. With over 50% of the species assessed listed by the IUCN as Globally Threatened, the network of sites is of key importance and would benefit from enhanced protection.

Recommendations from the paper have been echoed in the United Nations World Ocean Assessment, which provides a critical new baseline on the state of our marine environment and the pressures acting upon it.

With this data and recognition as a key benchmark, the BirdLife Partnership is working to ensure more seabird and marine sites are protected in future.

Thanks to the funders who have made the database possible and to the scientists contributing the tracking data that makes this extraordinary resource available to the marine conservation community.

Want to know more?

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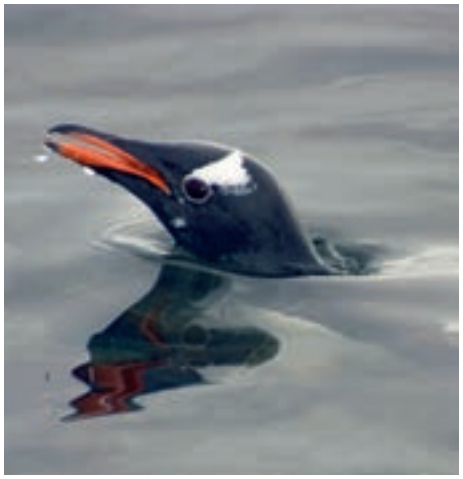
Protecting penguins in the Antarctic

More than 200 new IBAs have been documented in the white continent.

These areas have been welcomed by the Commission for Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources who state the IBAs should be monitored and assessed to determine which warrant Specially Protected Area status. They should also be used by signatories to the Antarctic Treaty to plan and conduct their activities in this sensitive region.

This work has been supported by the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, Norway, the UK and the USA, as well as the Pew Charitable Trusts and the British Bird Fair 2014.

At sea, another project funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative, was successfully completed. For the first time it brought together penguin tracking data in the Weddell and Scotia Seas, as well as the waters around South Georgia. Work is ongoing to use this data to describe IBAs in the marine environment and input to discussions on establishing Marine Protected Areas and managing expanding Antarctic krill fisheries.



Ben Lascelles

Of the 18 penguin species, 15 are Globally Threatened or Near Threatened

Upcoming events

July/August	
30 July – 3 August	4th International Marine Conservation Congress, St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada
September	
1–10	IUCN World Conservation Congress, Hawaii, USA
5–9	9th International Penguin Congress, Cape Town, South Africa
6–9	13th International Seabird Group Conference, Edinburgh, UK
19–23	6th International Albatross and Petrel Conference, Barcelona, Spain
October	
16–21	14th Pan-African Ornithological Congress, Dakar, Senegal
November	
29 Nov– 1 Dec	2nd Forum of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean, Tangiers, Morocco
December	
4–17	13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Cancun, Mexico

End notes

The BirdLife International Marine Programme is co-ordinated by the RSPB (BirdLife Partner in the UK) on behalf of the BirdLife International Partnership,

For more information, please contact Berry Mulligan (BirdLife International Marine Programme Officer)
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giving nature a home

The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.

The RSPB is a member of Birdlife International, a partnership of conservation organisations working to give nature a home around the world.

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Front cover: Antipodean albatross by Ben Lascelles