

Seabirds under threat



Northern Royal Albatross

Welcome to the first issue of *Sea change* – the BirdLife Global Seabird Programme newsletter. We hope you find it a useful and interesting resource.

Seabirds pay little heed to national boundaries, and many species spend most of their lives migrating and foraging in waters distant to their breeding grounds. They are often in high seas areas where no national jurisdiction exists. Consequently, in 1997, BirdLife International established a BirdLife Global Seabird Programme. This programme is international in its nature and scope, and operates through a developing alliance of regional task groups, supplemented by close links to BirdLife partners based in each region (America, Pacific, Africa, Middle East and Central Asia, Asia and Europe).

The headquarters of the programme is based at the RSPB, the UK BirdLife partner.

While the programme addresses a range of issues, its main focus, exemplified by BirdLife's 'Save the Albatross' Campaign, is the mortality caused by longline and other fisheries. The programme aims to raise awareness of the issue within the fishing industry and wider community and to help implement measures to reduce the level of seabird mortality. Programme personnel are also actively involved in lobbying international organisations to make agreements to develop and implement appropriate regulatory frameworks.

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SAVE THE ALBATROSS – THE RACE IS ON

The Volvo Ocean Race and BirdLife Save the Albatross Campaign are joining forces to raise awareness of the plight of the albatross and to gain international support for the urgent need to take action to save these majestic birds.

The Volvo Ocean Race (formerly the Whitbread Round the World Race) has been held every four years since 1973, and has been at the forefront of ocean racing and endurance/adventure sporting events. The race follows the traditional route of the old clipper ships, sailing around the world with the prevailing winds. In 2005, the race starts in Vigo (Spain) and heads south, where it traverses the Southern Ocean via South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil, before heading north to the UK, Holland and finally finishing in Göteborg (Sweden).

It is in the icy, wild waters of the Southern Ocean that the vessels and crews face their toughest test, in some of the most unforgiving conditions on the planet. And it is



here that Albatrosses can be seen gliding above the waves, as the race follows the migratory routes of several species of Albatross, including some that breed in New Zealand and forage in South American waters in the non-breeding season. Grey-headed Albatrosses from South Georgia undertake one of the most fascinating crossings of the Southern Ocean. During their

year-long break between breeding attempts they can circumnavigate the globe twice, the fastest such crossing occurring in a remarkable 46 days.

The Save the Albatross campaign will be promoted in the official race programme, in media briefings, on-line and at various port stops throughout the race. There will be an update in the next issue.

PARTNER NEWS

SEO and Marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs)

A 1.1 million euro project, run by SEO/BirdLife until 2008 is seeking to identify key areas to conserve Mediterranean seabirds. Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are essential sites to ensure the long-term viability of bird populations, particularly for species of conservation concern.

The level of quantitative data on bird populations and their distribution rapidly decreases with increasing distance from shore. Therefore it is not surprising that the designation of Special Protected Areas (SPAs) in coastal and pelagic waters and the definition of marine protected areas for seabirds

(in the European Union, as SPAs under the Birds Directive) is still a major gap of the Natura 2000 network.

Project objectives

The project will carry out a detailed survey using a range of methods to determine Marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) for seabird species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive that live in Spanish waters. The inventory will include a characterisation of each IBA, with GIS maps and a description of the main threats affecting it.

Certain species will be monitored through satellite and radio tracking. Analysis and mapping of ringed seabirds in Spain is going to be carried out and coastal waters surveyed. Observers will conduct at-sea surveys from fishing vessels and a database of beached birds is being created. Once marine IBAs are identified, management actions will be proposed. At the same time, a standard methodology to identify and delimit IBAs at sea will be developed and shared so that it can be applied in other countries. The project will work in co-ordination with a similar EU-funded project being undertaken by SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal).

For more information, please contact Carles Carboneras, Seabird Conservation Officer at ccarboneras@seo.org

www.seo.org

Cory's Shearwaters



Tackling seabird mortality in Argentina

The Seabird Campaign of Aves Argentinas (BirdLife in Argentina) is working with the National University of Austral Patagonia, and the fishing company Argenova SA, to identify and implement measures to reduce seabird bycatch in Argentina. In September 2001, University researcher Patricia Gandini started working with Argenova SA to evaluate the incidental mortality of seabirds caused by the company's longline vessels that operate in Argentina's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Late in 2002 they began working on a project called 'Minimizing Seabird Mortality in the Argentinean Demersal Longline Fisheries' that involved two non-government organizations Aves Argentinas/BirdLife International and the National Audobon Society, with funding provided by the US Fish & Wildlife Service and Wildlife Conservation Society (USA).

An estimated minimum of 6,000 seabirds are killed per year in Argentina's EEZ. The main species affected are Black-browed Albatrosses and White-chinned Petrels. There are no current mandatory measures imposed by the state to reduce mortality of seabirds in fisheries. To address this problem, in conjunction with our partners, Aves Argentinas has produced a pamphlet to show fishermen that there are cheap and effective mitigation measures available to reduce seabird mortality.

www.avesargentinas.org.ar/aa/index.html

Black-browed Albatross



Tony Pallise/BirdLife

Southern Giant-petrel chick



Nic Huin, Falklands Conservation

Falklands Conservation: good news for Southern Giant-petrels

Falklands Conservation staff recently completed the first full census of Southern Giant-petrels breeding in the Falkland Islands as part of the Albatross and Petrels Conservation Programme, (funded by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Overseas Territories Environment Programme).

Forty-seven sites were visited during the census, which revealed a total of 19,810 breeding pairs in the Falkland Islands. The estimated size of the breeding population is much greater than the previous estimation of between 5,000 and 10,000 breeding pairs, which suggests that the world population of around 31,000 breeding pairs should be re-evaluated.

For further information contact Tim Reid tim.reid@conservation.org.fk or Nic Huin nic.huin@conservation.org.fk or visit www.falklandsconservation.com

Squid trawling in New Zealand

Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand (Forest and Bird) welcomed the recent dramatic developments in the New Zealand Squid fishery. In May 2005, the Minister of Fisheries directed all squid trawlers not taking adequate measures to reduce seabird mortality, to return to port to pick up an onboard observer. Forest and Bird believe this action is a result of the lack of commitment of the fishing industry to implement the codes of practice to reduce seabird

mortality as required under the New Zealand National Plan of Action-Seabirds. Forest and Bird feel that the move has vindicated their repeated call for the inclusion and adoption of mandatory mitigation measures in a regulatory framework.

www.forestandbird.org.nz/index.asp

The RSPB launches Operation Ocean Task Force

The RSPB recently held a gala dinner to launch an exciting international initiative to tackle seabird mortality in the world's bycatch 'hotspots'. On 27 April 2005, HRH Prince of Wales and Ellen MacArthur were special guests at a Save The Albatross Campaign fundraising dinner held at Trinity House, London. Around 100 guests heard informative and impassioned speeches by HRH, Prof John Croxall

(Chairman of the RSPB) and seabird artist Peter Harrison, who all emphasised the urgent need to take action to save Albatrosses. One of the highlights of the night was an auction of works of art that were donated by prominent seabird and marine artists. Money raised on the night and through pledges made after the dinner, which already total around £100,000, will go directly to Operation Ocean Task Force.

Many programmes around the world place observers on vessels to monitor and record seabird bycatch. However, there is a real shortage of qualified at-sea practitioners to train fishers on how to adopt appropriate mitigation measures. Target 'hotspots' currently being considered are South Africa, Brazil and Peru.

We hope to raise enough money to establish a team of up to 10 instructors. If the project is successful, it may be expanded, hopefully with the support of relevant governments.

The RSPB would like to thank everyone who attended the dinner and those who donated auction items for helping to make the evening such a success. Please consider pledging money to support the Task Force, as it will ensure action is taken to help save these magnificent birds. Watch this newsletter and the RSPB website for updates on the project.

For more information on the task force, contact:
ben.sullivan@rspb.org.uk

RSPB Chief Executive Graham Wynne with HRH, the Prince of Wales and Ellen MacArthur at the gala dinner





The programme aims to reduce seabird mortality through training courses

Taiwan improves training for longline fishers

The BirdLife Partner in Taiwan, Wild Bird Federation Taiwan (WBFT), has initiated a Seabird Conservation Programme that extends the traditional training for Taiwan's distant water fishermen to include overseas ports. In accordance with the Taiwan National Plan of Action—Seabirds, WBFT is supported by the Taiwan Tuna Association and the Fisheries Agency, Taiwan. The programme aims to:

- investigate and minimise the impact of the Taiwanese longline fleet on seabird populations
- publish training materials and video tapes for Taiwanese fishermen
- conduct training workshops on how to reduce seabird mortality for fishermen in overseas supply bases/ports
- co-ordinate the deep sea tuna boat owners, fishermen, the fisheries agency and conservation groups to create an forum to tackle seabird mortality
- increase the sustainability of Taiwan's distant water longline fleets.

www.bird.org.tw

Regional Fisheries Management Organisations

Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) are obliged to conserve all non-target species affected by fishing. The States have a duty to collaborate with RFMOs, which was established by the international legal framework governing the oceans, such as, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement.

BirdLife has conducted an assessment of the 13 (of 19) RFMOs whose areas overlap with albatross distribution, to evaluate their effectiveness at minimising bycatch within their fisheries. [Regional Fisheries Management Organisations: Their duties and performance in reducing bycatch of albatrosses and other species, (www.birdlife.net/action/science/species/seabirds/rfmo_report.pdf). The assessment used criteria based on the principles established by the Code of Conduct and United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement. The report was launched at the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) Committee of Fisheries (COFI) meeting in March 2005, where it received considerable attention as the responsibility and performance of RFMOs was a major theme of the meeting.

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) had the highest performance of the RFMOs in almost all categories that were assessed. The report also highlights other RFMOs that have yet to take action. Of key importance are the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Blue Fin Tuna (CCSBT), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and the International

Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). A key objective of the Global Seabird Programme in the next few years is to develop targeted information packages for specific RFMOs. Thus providing them with the support and information required to ensure that they take appropriate action, as required under various international instruments, to reduce bycatch of seabirds and other non-target species.



Loggerhead Turtle caught on longline

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

In recognition of rapidly declining Albatross and Petrel populations, the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), was established under the auspices of CMS. ACAP came into force on 1 February 2004 and aims to achieve and maintain favourable conservation status for defined albatross and petrel species.

Accession to the agreement is open to any Range State with jurisdiction over an area inhabited or overflowed by Albatrosses or Petrels protected by ACAP, or whose fishing fleets interact with these birds. The first session of the Meeting of the Parties (MoP1) to ACAP was held in Hobart from 10 to 12 November 2004, and was attended by five of the six parties that have currently ratified the Agreement: Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom. Three Signatory States (Argentina, Brazil and France) and three Range States (Namibia, Norway and the USA) were also present, as well as representatives from ten non-government

organizations, including BirdLife International. At the meeting, there was a strong sense of co-operation, and Australia's offer to permanently host the ACAP Secretariat in Hobart was unanimously supported.

The first meeting of the Advisory Committee was held from July 20 to 22, also in Hobart. Since the first MoP, Peru and France also ratified the agreement, bringing the number of parties to eight. The Advisory Committee was established to provide scientific, technical and other advice to the Meeting of Parties, guiding the implementation of the Action Plan for the Agreement. At the first meeting of the Advisory Committee, delegates heard about the considerable progress of working groups that were established to review the status and trends of albatrosses and petrels and albatross taxonomy. In addition, they discussed the use of remote tracking data to identify the overlap between Albatross and Petrel populations and fisheries. The committee agreed to fund BirdLife to analyse the spatial and temporal overlap between ACAP species and fishing effort (as contained in *Tracking Oceans Wanderers*) for the top five Regional Fisheries Management Bodies.

Mortality as a result of interaction with fisheries is a serious threat to Albatrosses and Petrels, and mitigation measures were identified as a priority issue to be addressed under the ACAP Action Plan. ACAP also gave priority to protecting the breeding sites of Albatrosses and Petrels from introduced species. The challenge now is to build on the consensus and co-operation achieved and make progress towards ACAP's goals.

To find out more about the agreement, please visit www.acap.aq or contact Barry Baker at barry.baker@aad.gov.au Tel: +61 3 6232 3407, or Warren Papworth warren.papworth@aad.gov.au Tel: +61 3 6233 3123, ACAP Interim Secretariat, GPO Box 824, Hobart, Tasmania

Wandering Albatross



Hedoram Shirihai, *Tubenoses of the world*, © A&C Black

STOP PRESS

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In the last week of July, several members of the Global Seabird Programme attended the Third International Fishers Forum in Yokohama, Japan. The meeting provided valuable information on the latest developments in seabird, shark and turtle bycatch. They also had the opportunity to meet the Global Seabird Programme Steering Group (Asia) and map out future workshops in Asia to educate fishers and fisheries management bodies on how to reduce seabird bycatch.

Save the Albatross website

In an exciting development, BirdLife, the RSPB and Seabird Programme partners will launch a new Save the Albatross website (www.savethealbatross.net), which will provide a launch pad for our involvement with the Volvo Ocean Race and raise money for Operation Task Force and other programme partner initiatives.

Global seabird tracking database

To reduce the threat to Albatrosses and Petrels we need accurate knowledge of their distribution throughout their life cycle stages and annual migrations. Such data is invaluable in identifying important foraging and migratory areas, and assessing the dangers to Albatrosses and Petrels from fishing vessels, as well as to other changes in marine systems, including climate change.

Given the substantial value of this data, BirdLife co-ordinated a unique collaboration between scientists from around the world, to establish the global *Procellariiform* tracking database on the at-sea distribution of remote-tracked albatrosses and petrels. Over 90% of all extant Albatross and Petrel tracking data has been submitted to the database, representing 17 of the 21 species of Albatross and three species of Petrel.

The results from analysing the database have been published in the report 'Tracking Ocean Wanderers' (BirdLife, 2004). The database is a vital international conservation tool for albatross and petrel conservation.

Key priorities for future application

of the database will include:

- further assessment of spatial and temporal overlap between fishing effort and Albatross and Petrel distribution to identify areas of higher risk
- identification of areas within EEZs and areas managed by RFMOs which have significant risk of incidental bycatch of albatrosses and petrels
- assisting in the identification of the most important foraging and migratory habitats, and in the development of management

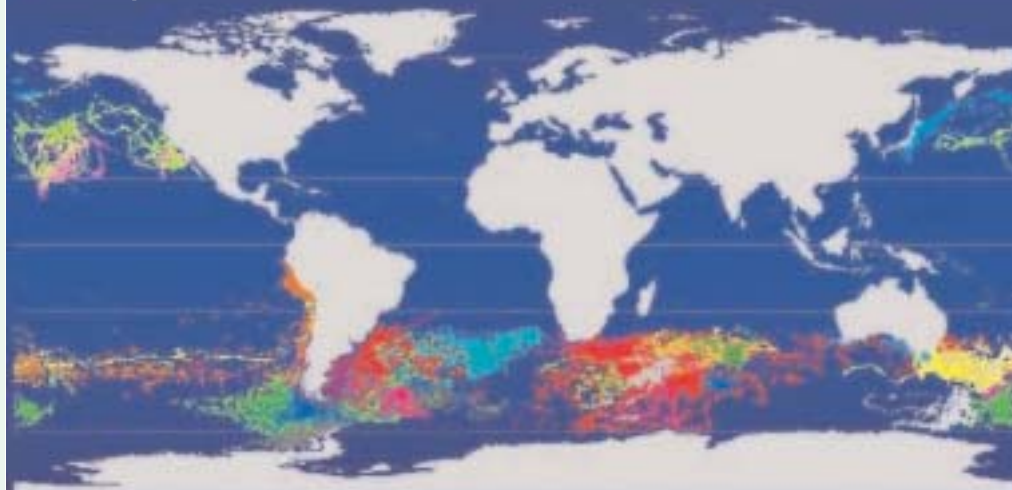
plans for them

- identification of marine areas critical to the survival of albatrosses and petrels.

You can download a pdf version at : http://www.birdlife.net/action/science/species/seabirds/tracking_ocean_wanderers.pdf

For more information on the database contact cleo.small@rspb.org.uk.

All data points submitted to the database



UPCOMING EVENTS

23–28 October 2005

The First International Marine Protected Areas Congress will be held in Geelong, Australia, www.impacongress.org

13–16 November 2005

SEO (BirdLife in Spain) will be hosting a workshop in Vilanova i la Geltrú (Barcelona, Spain) entitled Conserving our seabirds: how to identify Important Bird Areas in the marine environment (marine IBAs). This expert meeting is held in the framework of the EU Life

Funds project Important Bird Areas for Seabirds in Spain and aims to create a breakthrough in the development of scientific criteria to identify key conservation sites for seabirds at sea. Attendees are being invited by SEO.

For a more complete list of meetings related to seabird and marine conservation in general, including meetings of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations bycatch working groups go to: <http://seabirds.birdlife.org>

This site is updated quarterly, so keep on eye on upcoming events and please let us know if we have not included any relevant meetings.

WRITERS' CORNER



Early in the breeding season it looked like this year was going to be as disastrous as last year for the UK's primary seabird colonies, when there was close to zero breeding success in many colonies. However, a late flurry of activity suggests that this year, although patchy and with evidence of some interesting prey switching, may be as bad as last year. Below is a thought provoking piece by Dr Euan Dunn, Head of Marine Policy at the RSPB, about last year's disastrous season.

Silent cliffs

Biologists with salt in their veins know a vibrant, confident seabird colony when they see one. It's not the caterwauling of mates hailing partners and parents fretting over young, nor is it the slightly sickly sweet smell of guano from marine protein coursing through the system, though that's all part of it. Rather it's the palpable buzz the colony exudes from knowing that the fish are coming in as they should and that every seabird's neighbour is prospering and adding to the collective feel-good factor. Such colonies are good places for seabirds to be. They signal a rich halo of food in the hinterland, a dating agency for finding a new mate, and strength in numbers for protecting yourself against predators, the so-called 'selfish group' effect.

In the Northern Isles summer, the airborne birds plying back and forth and seeking a landing slot create a cat's cradle of wing whirr against a blue sky which glitters and sharpens with an intensity you only find in these sub-arctic latitudes and further north, swept daily as they are by Atlantic jet streams. For centuries, breeding tenements of these birds have been drawn to this outposted archipelago by plentiful shoals of small fish, which the local fishermen have also shared, with plenty for all. Another bonus for raising chicks in an ephemeral summer is the 24-hour daylight from May to July which allows foraging around the clock, the noon glitter giving way to the midsummer 'night' sky glow known in Shetland as 'simmer dim'. But even in summer, you can live through every season's weather in a day, and a fog regularly engulfs the cliffs to soften the wails, grunts and rattles of the birds. These colonies are fine-tuned, resilient and there is not much they haven't seen and survived.

For centuries, the massive seabird colonies of Orkney, Fair Isle and Shetland have pulsed with the energy of a thriving metropolis, making them one of the great wildlife spectacles of Europe. Shetland alone has around a million seabirds, a substantial slice of the UK's eight million. Last year the cliffs of these Northern Isles fell eerily silent as tens of thousands of seabirds failed to raise any young at all. The species hardest hit included

Continued on p8

Silent cliffs *(contd from p7)*

the Great Skua, Arctic Skua, Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes. The total Shetland population of nearly 7,000 pairs of great skuas, known in the north from their Viking name of 'bonxie' produced only a handful of chicks. One thousand pairs of Arctic Skuas had no young at all, likewise 24,000 pairs of Arctic Terns. Sixteen thousand pairs of Kittiwakes also experienced near total failure. In Orkney, the pattern was similar. Nearly all of these species have one thing in common – they all depend on an abundant supply of Sandeels, lance-like silvery fish rich in oil, to nourish and raise their chicks to fledging. Sandeels have been in short supply in Shetland, especially in the south, in recent years but this year's failure of Sandeels to appear was catastrophic in its severity and geographic spread.

Some have argued that such periodic downturns in seabird colonies are not unknown but, apart from the unprecedented scale of what is unfolding in Shetland, it seems that Sandeels are deserting a much wider area of the North Sea, and evidence is accumulating that this may be a symptom of global warming. The North Sea has warmed by about 2°C in the last 20 years. Continuous plankton recording over decades by the Sir Alister Hardy Foundation has identified a change so dramatic as to be called a 'regime shift' in the plankton composition of the North Sea since about 1986, coinciding with an increased influx of warm Atlantic water. The main driver for this is the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), a large-scale climatic phenomenon. It is thought that long-term warming of tropical waters, caused by global warming, has pushed the NAO towards an extreme 'positive phase' during the last half century, propelling powerful winter storms cross the Atlantic to give us warmer, windier and

wetter-than-average winters.

While the Kittiwake appears to be an excellent 'canary down the mine' for how Sandeels are performing, there is another predator higher up the food chain – man himself. The industrial fishery for Sandeels in the North Sea is the biggest commercial fishery in tonnage terms, with annual quotas allotted of up to one million tonnes in the recent past. While fisheries management will continue to be closely scrutinised, and further spatial and temporal restrictions above those already in place will be considered, currently, the fishery is not held responsible for depleting the sandeel stock, and the picture emerging is that a bigger kid – climate change – is on the block and holding the commercial fishery and seabirds alike to ransom.

What of the future? In the first place, there is an urgent need to conduct much more research at sea and at seabird colonies to unravel and pin down the potential links between global warming, sea temperature rise, and the productivity of plankton, Sandeels and seabirds respectively. Reining in the fishery will be of no avail if global warming does prove to be the real engine of change. A recent paper in the journal, *Nature*, co-authored by the RSPB's Rhys Green, showed that, owing to climate change, up to a third of land-based plants and animal species in various regions of the world are headed for extinction by 2050. The spectre of long term seabird breeding failure in the Northern Isles could be evidence on our own doorstep that this is not scaremongering but rather a wake-up call that we ignore these predictions at our peril.

Global seabird programme calling card

In May 2005, the latest programme brochure was produced. It is currently available in English and Japanese, and within the next few months it will also be

available in Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish. You can download a version at <http://seabirds.birdlife.org>

End notes

The Global Seabird Programme is co-ordinated, on behalf of the BirdLife International Partnership, by the RSPB (BirdLife Partner in the UK). Programme staff at the RSPB include Euan Dunn (Head of Marine Policy), Cleo Small (International Marine Policy Officer) and Ben Sullivan (Global Seabird Programme Co-ordinator). Please feel free to contact Ben Sullivan ben.sullivan@rspb.org.uk with comments and potential articles. The next edition will be sent to you in early 2006.

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