

Sea Change

BirdLife International Marine Programme newsletter



Seabird Task Force launches to tackle bycatch in Europe

- Big breakthroughs in high seas seabird bycatch
- Finding important places for penguins
- Investigating small-scale fisheries in Chile

Waved albatrosses wave goodbye to bycatch in Ecuador

In 2010, the Albatross Task Force (ATF) began monitoring the demersal (bottom-set) longline fishery that targets hake from small ports around Santa Rosa, Ecuador.

Initial seabird bycatch levels were alarming, especially of the critically endangered waved albatross, which breed in the Galapagos but travel to feed along the south Ecuadorian and north Peruvian coast.

In 2011, the ATF began trials to test the effect of line weighting on seabird bycatch and fish catch levels in the fishery. Doubling fishermen's standard weights significantly increased the sink rate of the baited hooks and had no negative impact on the fish catch. However, as we observed no birds caught on either the heavier weights or standard fishing gear, we were unable to draw conclusions on seabird bycatch.

We continued to monitor the fishery until the end of 2014 and seabird bycatch is now negligible. We believe this is closely linked to a general evolution of the fishing



Francisco Bernado

A stunning waved albatross off the Peruvian coast.

gear toward heavier fishing weights. Due to the variable nature and social dynamic associated with this small scale fishery, we don't have definitive evidence that this change in gear configuration is due to our line weighting trials, although the coincidence is interesting! Having continued the monitoring for several years, without observing

any bird bycatch, we have taken the decision to halt monitoring for the time-being, with the provision that we maintain contact with the fleet.

Want to know more?
Please contact Oli Yates at oli.yates@rspb.org.uk

Bird scaring lines are good news for albatrosses

In October 2014, the Federal Fisheries Council in Argentina approved a six-month pilot study to use bird scaring lines as a seabird bycatch mitigation measure.



ATF Instructor Nahuel Chavez demonstrates how to build bird scaring lines on deck.

The study is being carried out in the industrial trawl fishery, which kills an estimated 13,500 black-browed albatrosses each year. The ATF carried out workshops with 45 observers and fishery inspectors, training them for trips on large industrial vessels and to deploy bird scaring lines, which have been successfully tested in Argentina.

So far, 10 trips have left from Mar del Plata with eight vessels, each supplied with two sets of bird scaring lines. The observers were equipped with data protocols, seabird identification guides and information for the captains.

At the time of writing, most vessels are still fishing, but on arrival in port, the ATF will work with stakeholders to present the results to industry and government and identify the next steps toward full implementation of this simple but effective measure.

The pilot study was approved thanks to collaborative work with several academic organisations including the Institute of Marine and Coastal Research (University of Mar del Plata-CONICET) and the FVSA – the Argentinean partner of the World Wildlife Foundation.

Want to know more?
Please contact Oli Yates at oli.yates@rspb.org.uk

Small scale fisheries with big scale plans in Chile

After a substantial effort to understand bycatch in small scale fisheries along the immense Chilean coastline, the ATF has joined forces with local net makers to trial modified nets in the purse-seine fishery.

In early 2014, the ATF was asked by Dr Guillermo Luna of the Northern Catholic University in Chile to participate in a national effort to assess the impact of small scale fisheries on the marine ecosystem. The priority of this project was to characterise the incidental capture of vulnerable marine life in different gear types, which fitted with the work of the ATF.

The Chilean ATF, represented by Luis Cabezas, Cristián Suazo and Juan-Carlos Gonzalez, combined forces with several universities and NGOs to form a team of 10 seabird, marine mammal and fishery specialists. Their core purpose was to look at bycatch across five regions along the Chilean coastline, from Arica in the north to Puerto Montt in the south.

The team managed an impressive total of 336 trips in 12 months aboard the small scale gillnet and purse-seine vessels that are typical throughout ports in Chile.

Observations showed surprisingly low levels of seabird, sea turtle and marine mammal bycatch. In the gillnet fishery, we had expected to see a considerably higher level of seabird bycatch, due to the overlap between marine and Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas along the coast and high fishing effort.

A total of 18 birds, including threatened species such as Humboldt penguins and Guanay cormorants, were observed caught in the gillnet fishery. However, the most extensive bycatch was uncovered in the purse-seine fishery, with 122 birds caught, including threatened species such as Peruvian pelicans, sooty shearwaters, pink-footed shearwaters and endemic Peruvian boobies.

The results of this assessment of bycatch were presented to industry, local authorities and other fishery stakeholders at a series of four workshops along the Chilean coast. This generated industry feedback on the study results and potential mitigation measures, including the observation that our recorded bycatch was perhaps at the low end of the spectrum, and that considerably more could be occurring. Fishermen noted that many more birds are thought to be caught in surface gillnets versus bottom-set gillnets. The good news is that the industry is aware of the problem, and is keen to work with us to find and test potential solutions.

Our team in Chile is already working with a local purse-seine net designer to trial a modified net to reduce shearwater bycatch. The trials began

in late 2014 and will continue through 2015. Early indications suggest that by using an improved net design, it is possible to reduce shearwater bycatch in purse-seine nets and simultaneously improve the fishing efficiency of the vessel, catching the same amount of target fish in fewer sets, potentially saving on at-sea time and reducing fuel costs for local fishers. The ATF is conducting experiments in gillnet fisheries; see the gillnet article on page 6 for more on this.

There are busy and exciting times ahead for the team in Chile!

Want to know more?
Please contact Oli Yates at oli.yates@rspb.org.uk



Cristián Suazo

A skipper's eye view from the wheelhouse of a gillnet vessel in Chile.



Atlantic yellow-nosed albatrosses – a species vulnerable to longline bycatch – feeding on fisheries discards.

High hopes for the high seas

New funds are helping us to make links with important fishing fleets in the Far East.

The techniques and technologies for reducing seabird bycatch have been developed to the point that for most fisheries, most of the time, killing seabirds need not be a significant concern.

Thanks to our team working on tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), strong conservation measures for tuna longline operations have been established. However, as our ATF work has shown, transitioning fleets from theory to practice is a challenging task that can take a very long time. Where will the capacity and funding to do this critical work come from?

Enter The Common Oceans programme, managed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and funded by the Global Environmental Facility. The programme aims to improve the management of tuna fisheries on the high seas, with multiple partners tackling a broad range of issues, including bycatch.

The huge strides that the BirdLife Marine Programme has made – funded by the David and Lucile Packard

Foundation and achieved through grassroots ATF work combined with developing conservation measures in the RFMOs – positioned us to take the lead on seabird bycatch for the Commons Oceans programme. Our team in South Africa – well-placed at the confluence of the Indian and Atlantic oceans – plans to help high seas fleets to comply with seabird bycatch reduction requirements. We're running workshops with key fishing nations, identifying their current use of bycatch-reducing mitigation measures and offering assistance in deployment.

Recently, we made vital links with the Chinese fleet. China is one of the only countries still expanding its longline fishing operations and, historically, has not reported seabird bycatch to the tuna RFMOs. After two years of negotiation, we held a successful seabird identification, mitigation and observer protocol workshop in Shanghai in April.

This workshop was a collaborative effort with the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, the New Zealand Department

of Conservation and independent seabird expert Chris Gaskin all getting involved. It is a positive step and China appears keen to meet its international obligations.

The Common Oceans Programme complements work already underway with fleets in the Far East, supported by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. In March this year, we developed a course for fisheries observers to give specialised training on researching the effectiveness of mitigation measures. With this training, observers will be able to undertake studies to compare the fishing performance of mitigation measures against regular fishing gear. This work is already underway with the South Korean fleet and a member of our team is expected to join a three month line weighting experiment on a Korean vessel in July. There are also plans to conduct port-based outreach with Taiwan's longline fishermen.

Want to know more?
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A black-footed albatross in flight.

Tackling bycatch on the Pacific high seas

This year, the BirdLife Marine Programme is helping to make the case to the Pacific tuna fisheries management organisations to strengthen seabird bycatch reduction in their fisheries.

The South Pacific and Humboldt Current is a migration and non-breeding foraging area for several threatened species, including pink-footed shearwaters, black petrels, Buller's albatrosses and the Critically Endangered waved albatross. The North Pacific is home to Laysan, black-footed and short-tailed albatrosses – meaning that overall, the Pacific Ocean is hugely important for seabirds.

BirdLife is working with key member states of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) to advise and support the development of new seabird conservation measures.

In the North Pacific, this is particularly to ensure that small vessels are required to use seabird bycatch mitigation measures, and that the area where these measures apply

is updated to reflect where albatrosses are foraging and being caught.

If these measures are adopted, huge numbers of albatrosses and other seabirds can be spared death in longline fisheries, as the ATF's work with national fishing fleets shows.

Want to know more?
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Task Force launches in Europe

BirdLife launches the Seabird Task Force in Europe, bringing the successful Albatross Task Force model to European seas for the first time.

For many years the Albatross Task Force has been successfully tackling seabird bycatch in fisheries around the world. However, it has been a long and steep journey to implement the same programme in Europe.

Seabird bycatch is a big problem in Europe. Longlines and gillnets are estimated to catch at least 200,000 seabirds across the region each year. Europe's most threatened seabird species, the Critically Endangered Balearic shearwater, is vulnerable to being caught on longlines in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. In the Baltic Sea, seabirds that are threatened and declining, including velvet scoters and long-tailed ducks, are caught in large numbers in gillnets.

While Governments continue to grapple with how to deal with the issue, it was clear to BirdLife that a Seabird Task Force was needed to collect and provide detailed information on bycatch in key areas, and collaborate with fishermen to

develop solutions that work for their vessels and fishing methods.

The Seabird Task Force was launched in January 2015 to initiate this collaborative approach to tackling European bycatch. The Task Force currently has two expert teams – one working in the Spanish Mediterranean and one in Lithuania. In Spain, the team is focused on demersal longlines, with fishing vessels operating along the Catalan coast, a particularly important feeding area for Balearic and other shearwaters. In Lithuania, the team is working with gillnet fishers, who catch large numbers of birds in the autumn and spring as they set nets for cod.

Our current focus is on monitoring bycatch levels in both regions and fishing gears so that we can build a more detailed picture of incidental bird deaths in these fisheries. The next critical step, beginning in 2016, will be to develop solutions with our collaborating fishermen.

After many years trying to get this work off the ground, we're delighted to have The Seabird Task Force working in Europe to bring about real conservation benefits for seabirds. You can read about our progress at seabirdbycatch.com.

With thanks to Fondation Segré for funding the Task Force.

Want to know more?
Contact Marguerite Tarzia at marguerite.tarzia@birdlife.org



The Seabird Task Force on an early morning trip in Lithuania.

Bycatch and flyway conservation

A bird's eye view of gillnet bycatch

Since the last issue of *Sea Change*, lots has been happening in our push to reduce the impact of gillnet fisheries on seabirds. Perhaps the most exciting development has been the launch of the Seabird Task Force, but progress is also being made in other areas.

To inform the workshop and our future gillnet work more broadly, BirdLife commissioned sensory ecologist Dr Graham Martin to undertake a review of how bycaught animals – birds in particular – see, hear and feel the underwater world. By understanding the fundamentals of what target fish species and non-target bycatch species can see, we hope we can develop better-tuned mitigation measures that reduce bycatch without affecting target catch.

Dr Martin's review, alongside the discussions held at the workshop, is feeding into Seabird Task Force work in Lithuania, where we hope to start testing mitigation measures this autumn.

An idea proposed in the review is to alert birds to the presence of a net by

adding checkerboard panels at regular intervals along the surface of gillnets.

Cristián Suazo, from our Albatross Task Force team in Chile, has already had some prototypes made, and will be testing them with gillnet fishermen in the south of Chile to see how well they work.

With thanks to the David and Lucile Packard Foundation for making the US workshop and the review papers possible.

Want to know more?

Please contact Rory Crawford at rory.crawford@rspb.org.uk



Cristián Suazo, ATF Chile, shows off a checkerboard panel.

In January this year, we ran a workshop, together with the American Bird Conservancy, to develop projects to test gillnet bycatch mitigation measures for seabirds, turtles and marine mammals. This workshop, held over three days at the US Fish and Wildlife Service National Conservation Training Centre, brought together fishermen, conservationists and scientists to discuss potential approaches to solving this problem.

Not only were several projects proposed from both sides of the north Atlantic, and from the Humboldt Current to the north Pacific, but the workshop provided an ideal opportunity to learn lessons from work on different species in fisheries all over the world. This is clearly an area of active research and we'll be very involved with any developments.

Saving seabirds from Arctic Russia to New Zealand

The East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) is one of nine major migratory routes recognised globally, extending from Arctic Russia and Alaska through Asia to Australia and New Zealand.

The East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) was established in 2006 as an informal, voluntary international framework aimed at co-ordinating conservation for migratory waterbirds and their habitats. BirdLife is a member, alongside other NGOs, governments and a private enterprise.

In 2012, the Seabird Working Group was officially formed to push forward

seabird conservation across the flyway. Out of 186 seabird species on the flyway, the Seabird Working Group has identified a small number of seabirds that would benefit most from conservation action – including the critically endangered Chinese crested tern, Kittlitz's murrelet and the Christmas Island frigatebird.

In February 2015, Mayumi Sato, our Asia co-ordinator, presented a poster



Chinese crested terns are a species that will benefit from the work of the EAAFP.

on behalf of the EAAFP Seabird Working Group at the 42nd annual conference of the Pacific Seabird Group (PSG), held in San Jose, California. This highlighted the partnership's plans for seabirds over the next two years, including:

1. Updating the Seabird Working Group's prioritisation process.
2. Co-ordinating breeding data entry into the Seabird Breeding Colony Registry (managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service).
3. Preparing a tern conservation plan.

4. An information update on breeding Aleutian terns in Russia.
5. Encouraging nomination of Flyway network sites – the most important places for seabirds on the flyway.

The poster raised much-needed awareness of the EAAFP and its Seabird Working Group, which will be an important vehicle for seabird conservation in the eastern Pacific.

Several PSG attendees requested additional information and were interested in joining the Working

Seabird tracking

Group, which should help bolster action for seabirds on the flyway. Members of the Seabird Working Group will continue to promote the Partnership and the conservation of seabirds to a global audience at the 2nd World Seabird Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, from 26–30 October 2015.

Want to know more?
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Important places for penguins

BirdLife has been working with penguin experts on a project to find the most important at-sea places for these well-loved birds.

While there have been many studies of penguins, including using miniaturised devices to track their movements, the results haven't been gathered in one place. To remedy this, the BirdLife International Marine Programme team has been working with the British Antarctic Survey and the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) to compile a "penguin tracking database."

Penguins are largely confined to the southern hemisphere, with strongholds in the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic islands. After albatrosses, penguins are the next most threatened group of seabirds. Of the 18 species, 15 are globally threatened or Near Threatened. Despite their hardy nature, they struggle to cope with alterations to the environment brought about by commercial fishing, pollution, coastal development and climate change.

Some penguins now face the prospect of extinction, with 12 species having undergone declines. Breeding and moulting sites on land are often poorly protected and work to conserve them at sea is hampered by insufficient data

about where penguins go when away from their breeding grounds.

The project, which began in September 2013, has been funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative. It has brought together existing penguin tracking data in the Weddell and Scotia Seas of Antarctica, as well as the waters around South Georgia. More than 20 scientists and research institutes have contributed data amounting to nearly a million point locations for nine species of penguin.

The data is being used as part of ongoing discussions within the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to establish Marine Protected Areas and manage expanding krill fisheries within the Antarctic.

To explore the tracking data and view all the contributors, visit seabirdtracking.org

Want to know more?
Please contact Ben Lascelles at ben.lascelles@birdlife.org



No penguin, indeed no other bird, breeds further south than the Adelie penguin. Tracking data from a number of sites has contributed to the new database.

British birdwatchers raise record funds for marine conservation

The Birdfair is an annual event attended by tens of thousands of birdwatchers, at Rutland Water, England, in August.

Each year all the profits from the Birdfair are channelled through BirdLife to support pressing conservation topics. In 2014, the Birdfair raised funds for marine conservation, specifically to help BirdLife Partners to protect key seabird sites on land and at sea. The 2014 Birdfair pulled in a huge £280,000 towards this worthy cause, the largest amount raised to date! The funds will be targeted towards work in the Antarctic, West Indian



Martin Fowle

BirdLife staff with the big cheque! Ben Lascelles, Senior Marine Officer, Patricia Zurita, CEO, John Croxall, Chair of Marine Programme, Cleo Small, Head of Marine Programme.

Ocean, Mediterranean and North East Atlantic, where there are real prospects for new Marine Protected Areas for seabirds being designated

in the coming years. A huge heartfelt thanks to all who attended and supported this crucial work.

Upcoming events

September

14–18 4th International Conference on Progress in Marine Conservation in Europe, Stralsund, Germany

TBC CBD EBSA workshops for Caspian and Black Seas

October

26–30 World Seabird Conference, Cape Town, South Africa

November

2–7 19th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to the CBD, Montreal, Canada

23–25 BirdLife workshop Protecting Seabirds in the Mediterranean: Advancing the Marine Protected Area Network, Malta

December

TBC CBD EBSA workshop for East Asian Seas

End notes

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

For more information, please contact Rory Crawford (BirdLife International Marine Programme Senior Policy Officer) at rory.crawford@rspb.org.uk



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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