BirdLife INTERNATIONAL

SEACHANGE

The newsletter of the **Global Seabird Programme**

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Ben Lascelles

Welcome to the 9th issue of *Sea Change*. Last year was a busy one for BirdLife's Global Seabird Programme (GSP) team. It led us into work in new countries, new fisheries and for species that we haven't worked for previously, plus our existing work, from the decks of trawlers to meeting rooms, and from uninhabited islands to international conferences!

In this issue, we catch up with the Albatross Task Force (ATF) teams, hear of expanding work in South America, and find out about two new collaborative penguin projects for BirdLife.

In the past year, both New Zealand and the EU announced new action plans to reduce seabird bycatch in fisheries after years of hard work by BirdLife partners and staff. It's fantastic news, but the real work starts now. These action plans must be implemented effectively, with tangible reductions in seabird bycatch the barometer for success.

Asia co-ordinator Mayumi Sato tells about re-building an extinct tufted puffin colony in Hamanaka, Japan, where it is the town symbol. Rory Crawford, new Senior Policy Officer in the GSP team, details BirdLife's recent global review of gillnet bycatch, and emerging plans for dealing with it. BirdLife's Ben Lascelles writes about an exciting seabird development – the launch of BirdLife's online e-atlas of marine Important Bird Areas. More than 3,000 critical areas have been identified, from coastal waters to the high seas, and are a vital conservation tool for seabirds. **For further information contact rory.crawford@rspb.org.uk**

Nahuel Chavez, of our Albatross Task Force in Argentina, takes measurements of an albatross on the deck of a trawler

Nahuel Chavez

ATF progress in 2012

The Albatross Task Force, BirdLife's team of sea-going bycatch reduction specialists, is pushing forward. It is testing new mitigation measures and identifying operationally simple and effective combinations of methods to reduce seabird bycatch in pelagic and demersal longline and trawl fisheries.

With ATF teams in Chile and Ecuador, and the recent expansion of the ATF into Peru, we now have good coverage along the length of the Humboldt Current. This is a critically important region for fisheries and seabird bycatch, with a wide range of albatrosses and petrels using this rich marine system, from as far afield as New Zealand.

As part of the Global Seabird Programme's recent expansion into gillnet fisheries, the ATF received funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in the USA to investigate bycatch of pink-footed shearwaters (and other seabirds) in gillnet fisheries in this region – read more about this project in the article over the page.

This issue of *Sea Change* provides details of the first ATF workshop in the UK. It was a great opportunity for members of all eight teams to meet and work face to face with the RSPB and BirdLife Secretariat for the first time, but most of all it allowed planning for our target to reduce bycatch by 80% in the fisheries where the ATF works.

The combination of our traditional work in industrial longline and trawl fisheries and our emerging focus on small-scale fisheries, particularly gillnet fisheries in the Humboldt Current, has us well placed to expand the impact of the ATF and continue to achieve tangible reductions in bycatch levels through working directly with fishermen.

For further information contact ben.sullivan@rspb.org.uk

ALBATROSS TASK FORCE

Bycatch in small scale fisheries of the Humboldt Current

The Global Seabird Programme has a new and challenging project: identifying the level of bycatch of vulnerable seabird species in gillnet and purse seine fisheries in the south east Pacific.

The impact of small-scale fisheries on fish stocks and the broader marine environment is poorly understood on both local and global scales. In many regions, small-scale vessels constitute the majority of fishing effort, yet their impact remains largely unquantified. In the south east Pacific, the Humboldt Current Large Marine Ecosystem is one of the world's richest regions for seabird diversity with 17% more species than any other large marine system.

Small-scale fisheries along the Pacific coast of South America are extensive and diverse, with an estimated 15,000 and 10,000 small-scale fishing vessels in operation in Ecuador and Peru respectively. These vessels range in size from small 8 m open fibras to 18 m vessels that are capable of operating at sea for several days. About one third of the Peruvian small-scale fleet consists of net vessels, and surface driftnets are the most commonly used gear. In Chile, around 1,700 small-scale purse seine vessels fish off the central coast, with an additional 127 industrial vessels registered.

Few studies have considered the impacts of these fleets on the marine environment and the interactions with vulnerable species. Furthermore, limited focused efforts have been made to investigate the scale and nature of seabird mortality in these fisheries, let alone identify effective mitigation measures. The greatest barrier is the lack of data to identify those fisheries that pose the greatest seabird bycatch threat, and efforts to identify a suite of effective mitigation measures for such artisanal fisheries.

Chilean gillnet fishermen haul their nets

Christián Suazo

This new project will be developed through the Albatross Task Force in Peru, Chile and Ecuador, to identify the spatial and temporal nature of bycatch of a range of vulnerable seabirds, and conduct initial pilot investigations into the development of potential mitigation measures.

For further information contact oli.yates@gmail.com

The Task Force invades Cambridge

In April, 25 seasoned marine conservationists arrived in the UK, wielding a range of peculiar devices, allegedly related to seabird conservation in marine fisheries. Despite their suspicious appearance, the salty horde was ushered through customs controls and descended on Cambridge.

They came for the ATF Instructor's Workshop at Fitzwilliam College. Since the ATF started in 2006, two members have visited the UK. This is the first time we've been able to welcome the whole team, including staff from the eight teams and regional co-ordinators from the Global Seabird Programme. ATF countries include Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Namibia, Peru, South Africa and Uruguay.

Periodic team workshops have always been an important part of the strategic plan for development, and they have proved invaluable as the ATF has extended the coverage of the GSP's hands-on seabird conservation effort in target fisheries. Holding the workshop in the UK was particularly beneficial this year, with closer involvement and interaction between the Task Force teams and members of the Global Seabird Programme from the RSPB and BirdLife International staff. It strengthened links between the ATF and the wider GSP team.

Christián Suazo of the ATF in Chile chats to supporters at a Meet the Heroes event.

Charles Goulding

Killer communication

The impact of trawl fisheries on seabirds, particularly albatrosses and large petrels, has been a focus of attention during the 2000s. Trawl vessels have an impact on seabirds mainly through entanglement in fishing nets, collisions with trawl warp cables and collisions with the third wire or netsonde cable.

The netsonde cable is a thick electronic wire cable used to communicate between the ship's bridge computer and sensors on the net. Remarkable information is available through this monitoring system. It shows how full the net is, net dimensions and behaviour. Fishing masters can visualise the fishing gear at depth, and make more informed decisions, such as when to haul the catch.

The ATF has worked with Argentinean trawl fisheries for several years, and recently extended work to a trawl fleet in Chile. Together, these two southern cone fisheries see varied and large numbers of foraging seabirds from breeding colonies in the south Atlantic and south Pacific. Estimates developed through our Task Forces working in these countries indicate that seabird bycatch may kill more than 10,000 albatrosses each year, while the smaller fleet in Chile may be killing as many as a couple of thousand birds a year.

While collisions with trawl warp cables can be reduced to negligible levels through the use of a bird-scaring line, less has been done to investigate the mitigation of seabird mortality through collision with the third wire. This is partly because it is banned in many trawl fisheries around the world. In Chile and Argentina it is still in use, and as much as half the seabird mortality may be down to collisions with this cable. So something needs to be done urgently. The third wire often enters the water a long way beyond the stern of the vessel, directly in the path of birds foraging on floating fish discards in the vessel wash.

After several hundred hours of ATF monitoring on trawl vessels, we have found that bird-scaring lines, deployed to protect trawl warp cables, can reduce mortality associated with the third-wire, and in some cases completely remove the risk. Other studies have suggested different measures may be successful, although they have not been tested in the southern oceans, where there is a high abundance of seabirds.

Alternatives to the third wire exist, but captains suggest they are less efficient. Bird-scaring lines may be a temporary measure to reduce the scale of seabird mortality, and more work is required to discover what should constitute Best Practice mitigation.
For further information contact oli.yates@gmail.com

Third wire on a trawler in Argentina extending far behind the vessel – this can pose significant problems for seabirds

Nahuel Chavez

Cory's shearwater hooked in a longline fishery

Vero Cortés

At last! EU Plan of Action on seabird bycatch launched

In November last year, the European Commission finally launched an EU Plan of Action to reduce seabird bycatch.

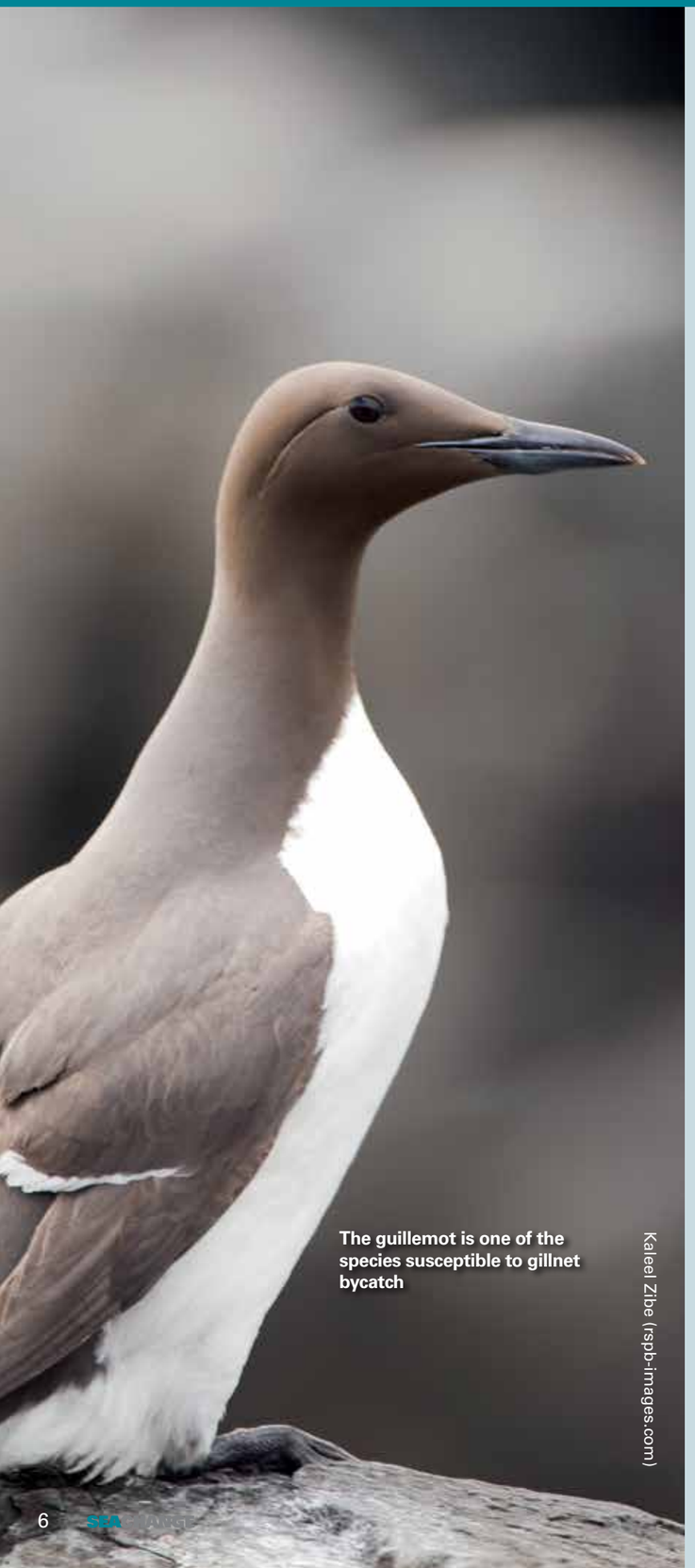
BirdLife has advocated an action plan since 2001, when the European Commission first committed to proposing one. Since then, we estimate over two million seabirds have died in the fishing gears of vessels in EU waters. There's additional impact from EU-flagged vessels outside EU waters, too. It's good news that the EU is calling time on the needless deaths of seabirds. This plan, shaped by the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Best Practice Technical Guidelines (2009), covers all kinds of fishing that incur seabird bycatch. But, in keeping with the FAO International Plan of Action for reducing incidental catch of seabirds in longline fisheries (IPOA-Seabirds), the plan is voluntary. To have real teeth, it needs to be underpinned with legally-binding measures under the Common Fisheries Policy, and require fishing boats to use technical mitigation measures, and to collect and report data on seabird bycatch.

The EU Seabird Plan of Action has a strong aim to minimise and, where possible, eliminate the bycatch of seabirds in EU and external waters. It sets out to achieve this through a range of actions, calling on vessels to apply mitigation measures to prevent seabirds coming into contact with fishing gears. BirdLife considers the plan to be best practice, drawing heavily on other regions of the world where non-EU fleets have already embraced the often simple solutions proven to stop seabirds being killed.

For threatened species, the plan can't come soon enough. In EU waters, most seabird bycatch arises from gillnets and longlines, and to a lesser extent trawls and purse seine nets. A Spanish longline fishery for hake off Ireland probably kill tens of thousands of seabirds annually, mostly great shearwaters. This slaughter flies in the face of the EU Birds Directive.

So it's thus hugely disappointing that in April, at the Council meeting of EU Fisheries Ministers, there was no collective political will to implement the plan. Only the UK supported the plan. Other Member States called for more scientific evidence and an impact assessment. The Irish Presidency of the EU Council decided not to take the plan forward, saying more background work is needed. The European Commission will start implementing what it can, promising to deliver a database by the year end and to report next year on how it is progressing.

Contact euan.dunn@rspb.org.uk for more information.



The guillemot is one of the species susceptible to gillnet bycatch

Kaleel Zibe (rspb-images.com)

Untangling the problem of gillnet bycatch

Last year *Sea Change* reported on the substantial bycatch of seabirds in gillnets. These fine nylon nets catch a variety of fish in coastal waters, but are virtually invisible underwater to diving bird species. Auks, seaducks, penguins, shearwaters and cormorants are particularly vulnerable to entanglement, due to their feeding behaviour.

BirdLife and marine biologist Ramunas Zydelis published a global review of seabird bycatch in gillnet fisheries this year in the journal *Biological Conservation*. The figures make stark reading, and serve as a call for immediate action – at least 400,000 birds are estimated to be killed in gillnets each year. The highest bycatch rates reported are in the Baltic Sea, Northwest Pacific and Iceland. Of the 148 species considered susceptible, five are classified as Critically Endangered, 14 are Endangered, 29 are Vulnerable and 15 are Near-Threatened.

Multiple factors confound the problem. Gillnet fisheries worldwide are usually small-scale and often poorly monitored, with no ready-made solutions for bycatch, as there are for trawl and longline fisheries. There have been a limited number of studies on mitigation measures, so further work is urgently needed to reduce the toll of seabird deaths.

BirdLife is instigating a programme of work focused on gillnet bycatch. Informed by a workshop we co-hosted with NABU (BirdLife Germany) in Berlin last year and our global review, we are hoping to establish mitigation measure research and testing in collaboration with fishermen. We want to "find a fix" that is broadly applicable for gillnet fisheries worldwide. This will be combined with data collection on fishing effort, bird distribution and bycatch levels in countries where data are limited, but where bycatch rates are expected to be high based on the species present.

Gillnet bycatch projects commenced this year in both Peru and Germany. The aim is to expand this programme of work in the coming years. Through this work, we hope the Global Seabird Programme can translate its success in developing novel mitigation measures for other fisheries to gillnets. Watch this space!

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Tufted puffin – truly stunning seabirds

Ben Lascelles

Tufted puffins: an emblem on the edge in Japan

You can find tufted puffins across the whole of the north Pacific ocean. The Russian and Japanese populations used to breed in the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Kuril Islands and the island of Hokkaido. Worryingly, the Japanese population around Hokkaido has declined drastically since the 1960s, from several hundred pairs to around ten. Accidental bycatch, in the near-shore gillnet and salmon drift-net fisheries, is thought to be a key driver. It has been estimated that 1,600,000 seabirds were accidentally killed by the Japanese salmon drift-net fisheries in Russian waters between 1992 and 2008, an average of 94,330 birds a year, including 15,300 tufted puffins. With bycatch in Russian fisheries estimated at around 46,099 birds a year, including 13,299 tufted puffins, it is clear that bycatch is a substantial cause of death for this charismatic species.*

In Hamanaka (Hokkaido, Japan), where the tufted puffin is a symbol of the town, a wide range of conservation actions have been taken by the tufted puffin conservation group (Etopirika Fund), workers in the Hamanaka town hall, the Ministry of the Environment and local citizens, to recover the population. Decoys were installed in the water and on land to attract birds, a marine protected area was established and patrolled by local fishermen, and educational seminars were held to inform people of the threats facing tufted puffins. Conservation measures required to improve their fortunes have been developed and tested, including gillnet bycatch mitigation measures. Despite this, the number of breeding puffins sadly dwindled. No birds have nested in Hamanaka since 2008.

In January this year, the Etopirika Fund held a workshop, sponsored by the Japan Fund for Global Environment, to discuss future action plans. BirdLife and WBSJ (BirdLife Japan) joined the workshop in an advisory capacity, alongside other seabird experts, including Dr Stephen Kress from the National Audubon Society (BirdLife USA). Dr Kress has been leading Project Puffin, which has served as a global model for other seabird colony rebuilding projects.

At the workshop, all the current issues were reviewed and future conservation actions discussed, including potential translocation of chicks, in the hope that young tufted puffins will fly out of Hamanaka once again in the future.

Meanwhile, we hope our developing work on gillnet bycatch mitigation will start to identify solutions that work for both seabirds and fishermen.

*Source: Artukhin, YB ***et al*** (2010) *Accidental by-catch of marine birds and mammals in the salmon gillnet fishery in the northwestern Pacific Ocean*. Moscow: Skorost' Tsveta, 2010. 264pp.

For more information contact
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Tufted puffin decoys, ready to be deployed!

Yoshihiro Kataoka

New Zealand gets a new National Plan of Action for Seabirds

After several months of intense discussions in 2012, New Zealand's Seabird Stakeholder Advisory Group met in February this year to finalise a new National Plan of Action for Seabirds. The group is comprised of commercial fishing representatives, environmental NGOs and government agencies. National plans are required under the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN's 'International Plan of Action-Seabirds', where a nation has identified a seabird bycatch problem in its waters. With all the stakeholders in hard-won agreement, the plan was published at the end of April this year.

The new plan, which replaces the 2004 version, has some good objectives. We are particularly pleased that: "All New Zealand fishers implement current best practice mitigation measures relevant to their fishery and aim through continuous improvement to reduce and where practicable eliminate the incidental mortality of seabirds". This goal proved to be a particularly tricky issue to negotiate, and was not achieved until the final hour, but consensus was eventually reached. It gives a strong focus for the coming years.

A central tenet of the plan is the risk assessment process, and the need to move high risk species to lower risk categories. This will focus efforts on achieving rapid results for birds that are most in need. The species most at risk from bycatch in New Zealand are black petrel, Salvin's albatross, flesh-footed shearwater, Southern Buller's albatross, Chatham albatross, New Zealand white-capped albatross, northern Buller's albatross, Gibson's albatross, Cape petrel and Antipodean albatross.

Forest & Bird (BirdLife New Zealand) were initially concerned that specific bycatch reduction targets were not set within the plan itself. However, the objective is that the National Fisheries Planning Process, with five-year National Fish Plans and Annual Operating Plans, will achieve the reduction targets. These will be reviewed annually and new targets set. The challenge is to make sure that each of the Fish Plans – Deep Water, Inshore and Highly Migratory – set more specific goals and objectives, based around the new Plan of Action.

Karen Baird from Forest & Bird feels relatively optimistic about the recent developments. She said: "We have a potentially great process but my greatest fear is that there is still not a clear path from research results and risk analysis to management outcomes, something the New Zealand government agencies have struggled with in the past. We will have to be involved every step of the way to make sure the words on paper in the Plan of Action are put into practice."

For further information contact k.baird@forestandbird.org.nz

Hadoram Shirihai ©Tubenoses Project & Extreme Gadfly Petrel Expeditions

Black petrels are the birds most at risk from bycatch in New Zealand fisheries

Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

Balearic shearwater

Balearic shearwater bycatch in Portuguese fisheries

Preliminary results from the Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment (FAME) project point to worryingly large numbers of critically endangered Balearic shearwaters being caught in Portuguese fisheries.

Between January 2010 and December 2012, on-board observers, with volunteer support from several boat captains, monitored around 500 fishing nights aboard Portuguese vessels. They covered a variety of fishing gears operating in Portuguese mainland coastal waters.

From 190 nights spent aboard purse seiners, three Balearic shearwater bycatch events were recorded, with 30 individuals captured dead. A parallel survey was conducted on land, with questionnaires or interviews completed by 51 purse seine captains from 17 different harbours. These port-based surveys confirmed the levels of bycatch reported by on-board observers.

Although further analysis is necessary, these figures seem to indicate that the annual bycatch of Balearic shearwaters in Portuguese waters is counted in the hundreds, and may be up to two thousand birds each year. It is thus likely that bycatch is a key contributory factor in the alarming decline of this species.

The FAME project in Portugal has also identified the bycatch of northern gannets and auks in demersal longlines and gillnets respectively. Such data further strengthen the case for legally binding measures to underpin the new EU Seabird Plan of Action.

Find more information about the FAME project at **www.fameproject.eu**, where the full project report will be available soon. Expect more on the final results in the next issue of *Sea Change*!

For further information contact nuno.oliveira@spea.pt

Screenshot from the marine e-atlas – explore for yourself at maps.birdlife.org/marineIBAs/default.html

BirdLife's global inventory of marine Important Bird Areas takes flight

The e-Atlas of Marine Important Bird Areas has arrived. It was launched by BirdLife International at the Eleventh Conference of the Parties (COP11) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), in Hyderabad, India. The side event showcased marine Important Bird Area (IBA) work from around the world. It was covered by Indian newspapers and television. This sparked global news stories, which were published in four languages across six continents: Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, North America and South America.

The **e-Atlas** includes detailed information on more than 3,000 IBAs worldwide. It is the result of six years of effort from 40 BirdLife Partners, with the world's leading seabird scientists in collaboration with government departments of conservation, environment and fisheries, and the secretariats of several international conventions, including the CBD, EU Birds Directive, and the Nairobi Convention.

The e-Atlas provides essential information for conservation practitioners and policy makers, as well as energy sector planners (windfarms, gas and oil exploration and drilling), fisheries managers, marine pollution management planners and the insurance industry.

Sites in the atlas have already been used to inform Special Protection Area (SPA) designations in the EU, more than 200 Ecologically or Biologically Significant marine Areas (EBSAs) under the CBD, and have been requested for regional Marine Spatial Planning initiatives.

This is a breakthrough in the format of BirdLife's IBA inventories, as it will be available exclusively online. Like a Google Map, the e-atlas will be dynamically updated as new sites are identified and new data about them become available. It will be linked to other BirdLife data resources, including BirdLife's species accounts, IBA fact sheets and *State of the World's Birds* case studies. It provides a model for inventories of areas of conservation importance for other mobile pelagic taxa, such as whales, turtles and sharks.

BirdLife at CBD COP 11 — Nature Protects if She is Protected

Ben Lascelles, Global Marine IBA Officer at BirdLife, said: "We hope that the e-atlas of marine IBAs will be a key resource for management of the oceans for years to come, and show the wider marine community the benefits that can be achieved when data are shared for conservation purposes."

Contact ben.lascelles@birdlife.org for further information.

Chinstrap penguin, one of the species covered by the new Darwin Plus project

Ben Lascelles

BirdLife partners for penguins

Eleven of the eighteen penguin species are on the IUCN Red List. Some species have declined by 80% in recent years. Penguins face the same threats as other seabirds, including disturbance, habitat destruction, introduced predators on land, overfishing, bycatch, climate change and pollution at sea. The BirdLife Partnership has identified 150 IBAs for 13 penguin species as conservation priorities, the majority of them breeding colonies. In 2013, the BirdLife Global Seabird Programme is focusing on two new collaborative penguin projects that aim to enhance penguin conservation at sea.

The British Antarctic Survey, BirdLife International and Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) are heading an EU Board of European Students of Technology (BEST) project on Macaroni penguins in the UK and French Overseas Territories, where 82% of the world population breeds. The project aims to identify marine IBAs, develop site management plans with local stakeholders and seek site designation as MPAs.

The second is a Darwin Plus project collaboration between the British Antarctic Survey, SCAR and BirdLife International. It aims to identify critical penguin foraging areas in the west Antarctic, to guide sustainable fisheries management, and identify where MPAs are needed in the Weddell and Scotia Seas.

These projects will gather the region's penguin tracking data into a central database, so that, in the future, penguin tracking data from other regions may also be incorporated. An existing, similar **global albatross and petrel tracking database** is already a vital conservation tool. These projects will complement other projects in the BirdLife Partnership:

- penguin-tracking work by Falklands Conservation
- research and monitoring by the RSPB (UK BirdLife Partner), to investigate causes of the decline of northern rockhopper penguins
- BirdLife South Africa partnership aiming to understand and reduce competition between fishing and penguins, including experimental closures to fishing around some breeding islands.

BirdLife SA are also trying to establish a new colony in prime habitat. If successful, this will build spatial resilience into the population, as well as increase their numbers.

For further information contact cleo.small@rspb.org.uk

UPCOMING NEWS

Wandering albatross

Ben Lascelles

BirdLife World Congress is in Ottawa, Canada from **19–22 June 2013,** with the theme **"Partnerships for Nature and People".** Members of the GPS team will run marine-themed sessions.

Global Seabird Programme staff will be attending the eighth International **Penguin Conference (IPC8)** in Bristol, UK, from **2–6 September 2013**. We will be helping to run workshops.

BirdLife South Africa will be running their annual **"Save Our Seabirds"** festival **in Cape Town** from **7–11 October** 2013, including the prestigious Oceans of Life photographic competition. Visit **www.sosfestival.co.za** for details.

The 17th meeting of the **Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice to the Convention on Biological Diversity** will be held in Montreal on **14–18 October 2013**, and the **3rd International Marine Protected Areas Congress in Marseille/Corsica** on the **21–27 October 2013**.

Expect more results from our Hook Pod trials in Brazil soon!

The Global Seabird Programme team

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 Cleo Small (Head of the BirdLife Global Seabird Programme Unit), Rory Crawford (Global Seabird Programme Senior Policy Officer) and Ben Sullivan (Global Seabird Programme Co-ordinator).
For comments & potential articles feel free to contact Rory Crawford rory.crawford@rspb.org.uk

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