

BirdLife International Report to the Twelfth meeting of the Ecologically Related Species Working Group (ERSWG12)

1. Introduction

BirdLife International is a global partnership of over 120 conservation organisations. Since 1997, in response to the dramatic declines in many albatross populations worldwide, BirdLife International has undertaken a body of work to try to improve the conservation status of albatrosses through collaborative work with fishers, fishery managers and scientists. The sections below provide an update to our work since ERSWG11.

2. Albatross Task Force

BirdLife's Albatross Task Force (ATF) celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 2016. The ATF is a team of seventeen instructors, operating across 7 countries in southern Africa and South America (*South Africa, Namibia, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Peru*). The ATF works collaboratively with fishermen and fishery managers in ports and at-sea, to find solutions to albatross bycatch. Our aim is to minimize seabird bycatch in the 14 fisheries in which the Albatross Task Force works. These fisheries include 2 demersal longline, 5 pelagic longline and 7 trawl fisheries. The Albatross Task Force is operated by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, the UK BirdLife Partner) on behalf of the BirdLife Partnership.

3. Regional Fisheries Management Organisations

BirdLife has been an active participant across the five tuna RFMOs since 2005, and makes contributions to each of the Ecosystem and Bycatch Working Groups. In 2015 -2016, we have:

- Provided input to ICCAT, IOTC and WCPFC to their seabird assessments, and monitored the first review by the WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee of the implementation of the WCPFC seabird measure. In 2016 these processes were hampered by lack of data.
- Reviewed national reporting on seabird bycatch in IOTC and ICCAT and submitted these reports to the relevant RFMO. In the case of ICCAT we identified that current national reporting requirements are both complex for member states and ineffective for ICCAT's monitoring of seabird bycatch. We made constructive suggestions on how reporting procedures could be both simplified and improved.
- Advocated for the strengthening of tuna RFMO seabird conservation measures in the Pacific, including highlighting the need for vessels <24m in the North Pacific to use mitigation measures, advocating for the seabird measure in IATTC to be brought in line with the other tuna RFMOs, and highlighting the importance of the 25-30°S WCPFC area for certain threatened albatross species including Antipodean albatross.
- Drafted BirdLife's position on best practice for monitoring presence of seabird bycatch mitigation measures through port inspection (not yet published)

4. BirdLife's element of the GEF/FAO Common Tuna Oceans Project

BirdLife South Africa leads the BirdLife International element of the GEF/FAO Common Oceans Tuna Project (also known as the ABNJ project). BirdLife's element aims to support pelagic

longline fisheries to implement the seabird bycatch mitigation regulations that have been adopted by the tuna RFMOs.

Following the recommendations arising from the CCSBT Seabird Bycatch Mitigation Technical Workshop (SMMTG) and ERSWG11, the BirdLife element of the GEF project was adapted to be able to provide resources to support some of the recommended actions. In particular, the CCSBT SMMTG meeting and ERSWG11 identified that a key step to achieving seabird bycatch reduction was to strengthen the network of national scientists who are analysing seabird bycatch data, and to facilitate a harmonized and joint-tuna RFMO approach to assessment of impact of tuna fisheries on albatross populations. The GEF project is organizing two national scientist regional workshops in 2017, with global seabird bycatch workshops planned for 2018 and 2019.

In 2016, work included:

- Preparation for national scientist regional workshops in February and April 2017, to share and build experience on analysis of seabird bycatch (Atlantic/Indian Ocean workshop in South Africa; Oceania workshop in Vietnam)
- National seabird bycatch awareness workshops in Korea, Indonesia, Namibia and Fiji (for Chinese skippers and crew), with 6 more workshops planned for 2017
- Port-based education work in Cape Town (reported under section 7 below)

5. **Global Seabird Tracking Database**

BirdLife continues to manage the Global Seabird Tracking Database, which was established in 2003 (www.seabirdtracking.org). Through the collaboration of scientists worldwide, the database now includes 688 datasets from 170 scientists, contributing nearly 10 million data points for 112 species.

BirdLife has made a request to the tracking database data owners to produce an updated analysis of global albatross distribution, which will update the analysis produced for the 'Kobe 3' meeting in 2011 (which has been submitted as an information paper to ERSWG12). This analysis will be produced in 2017, in time to feed into the first of the global tuna RFMO seabird bycatch workshops, planned under the GEF/FAO Common Oceans Tuna Project for February 2018.

In February 2017, we have begun a collaborative project between the RSPB, British Antarctic Survey and the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands to identify the global fishing fleets which have highest overlap with albatrosses from South Georgia. This project responds to the findings of the recent albatross census in South Georgia (Georgias del Sur), which confirmed that grey-headed, wandering and black-browed albatrosses have declined by at least 44%, 18% and 19%, respectively, over the last decade ([Poncet et al 2017](#)).

6. **IUCN Red List updates**

BirdLife International is the authority for the IUCN Red List updates for birds. In 2016, as part of the 4-yearly update, we sought input from scientists worldwide to update data on albatross and petrel species, undertaken in collaboration with ACAP. The updated fact sheets will be published in March 2017.

Discussion forums are underway for potential Red List changes to Amsterdam albatross and black-browed albatross (proposed for a reduction in threat category), as well as shy albatross and Antipodean albatross (proposed for an increase in threat category).

7. **Public Relations and Education Activities**

Public Relations Activities

- We have produced seabird bycatch education videos in Japanese, Korean, English, Spanish,

Filipino, Bahasa Indonesian, Mandarin and Taiwanese Hokkien. This has been undertaken with funding from the International Sustainable Seafood Foundation (ISSF). Further description is provided in an information paper to ERSWG12.

- We have worked with the Fishing Entity of Taiwan on a new seabird identification guide.
- We assisted IOTC to develop their seabird identification guide
- Within WCPFC, we assisted SPC with a review of the seabird identification guide for their observers and undertook seabird identification training for observer trainers.

Education

- As described above, we continue a comprehensive program of education and outreach work to fishermen as part of the work of the Albatross Task Force.
- As described above, we have held national awareness-raising workshops through the GEF project.
- As part of the GEF Common Oceans Project, we have started (February 2016) a port-based outreach project in Cape Town where the officer meets with crew of foreign-flagged vessels that operate on the high seas and discusses their operations and RFMO regulations relating to seabird bycatch mitigation
- Working with the Taiwanese Fisheries Agency, we have also undertaken a pilot project of port-based outreach to Taiwanese vessels (August-November 2016), reaching 83 longline vessels in Port Louis, Mauritius.

8. Terrestrial conservation work for albatrosses

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK BirdLife Partner) is planning and fundraising for the eradication of mice from Gough Island, the stronghold for the Critically Endangered Tristan Albatross. If fundraising is successful, this eradication is planned for 2019. BirdLife South Africa is planning and fundraising for the eradication of mice from Marion Island

Annex 1

Summary of papers submitted to ERSWG

Information papers:

- BirdLife/ISSF seabird bycatch education videos (Agenda item 7)
- Albatross and giant-petrel distribution across the world's tuna and swordfish fisheries: albatross tracking analysis produced for the 2011 Joint Tuna RFMO meeting (Agenda item 5.1.4)