



MEDIA RELEASE

EMARGO: immediate

High-seas heroes saving albatrosses from extinction: a decade of success

An international team of experts that works to prevent seabirds from being killed unintentionally during commercial fishing is celebrating ten years of conservation success on World Oceans Day.

Albatrosses are one of the most threatened groups of birds in the world. Every year, an estimated 100,000 albatrosses are incidentally killed on longline fishing hooks and trawl cables. This fishery mortality is the main driver of albatross population declines, and 15 of the 22 species of albatross are threatened with extinction.

- The Albatross Task Force (ATF), a team of experts led by the RSPB and BirdLife International, was launched ten years ago to reduce the number of albatrosses and petrels accidentally killed by fisheries in the Southern Ocean.
- The ATF has been highly successful in that time, achieving a 99% reduction in albatross deaths in the South African hake trawl fishery through the introduction of bird-scaring lines, a simple solution which prevents seabirds from interacting with fishing equipment.
- Thanks to their work, seven out of the ten fisheries originally identified as seabird bycatch hotspots have now adopted regulations to protect seabirds during fishing.
- The ATF is working with local governments to ensure all target fleets are complying with the recommended mitigation methods

The RSPB and BirdLife International launched the ATF to reduce the number of albatrosses and petrels deaths through the introduction of simple and effective mitigation measures, and ultimately to improve the conservation status of threatened seabirds. Measures include the use of bird-scaring lines, setting baited hooks under the cover of darkness and weighting hook lines to help them sink rapidly out of reach of foraging birds.

A new report shows that, since its launch in 2006, the Albatross Task Force has been extremely successful. BirdLife South Africa's team has helped reduce albatross deaths by 99% in the South African hake trawl fishery and, in South Africa and elsewhere, experimental trials demonstrate at least 85% reductions in seabird bycatch are possible in six other fisheries where regulations that require the use of bird-safe methods on their boats are now in place.

The ATF works through BirdLife International partners and local NGOs in the Southern Hemisphere, and the team members have spent over 5,000 days at sea to demonstrate how to keep seabirds off the hook. ATF recommendations are based on rigorous scientific testing, working side by side with the fishing industry.

Andrea Angel, Albatross Task Force Leader for BirdLife South Africa, said: "Twelve years ago I spent a year studying breeding albatrosses on a remote sub-Antarctic island and it changed me forever. I have never looked back and today working to further mitigate the many threats they face at sea or land is something I just have to do".

Oliver Yates, ATF Programme Manager, said: "The ATF has made some great achievements over the last ten years but we still need to ensure all vessels in all fleets are effectively implementing the mitigation measures recommended for the fishery, and that this becomes sustainable in the long-term."

Patricia Zurita, CEO at Birdlife International, said: "By saving albatrosses from accidental death behind fishing boats, we are saving one of the most threatened groups of birds from extinction.

"BirdLife has proven this works with a decade of research, refining solutions and working with fishermen. Now it is time to expand this model worldwide so we can ensure no bird is needlessly caught by fisheries ever again in the future."

Large reductions in seabird bycatch have been achieved where governments have supported the adoption of regulations and the ATF has demonstrated that similar reductions of albatross deaths are possible in other target fisheries if these mitigation methods are put into practice. This requires improving levels of compliance through national fishery monitoring initiatives.

"With the support of BirdLife International and the RSPB, the Albatross Task Force team in South Africa is now helping change the way fishing is conducted at a global scale. They're implementing a programme to assist high seas tuna fleets to emulate the results they've helped local fisheries to achieve." said Dr Ross Wanless, Seabird Conservation Programme Manager at BirdLife South Africa.

To find out how you can help save the albatross visit BirdLife South Africa ATF page on our [website](#)

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For more information:

To download a selection of images and video clips relevant to this press release, please click [here](#) (images) and [here](#) (video)

Broadcast-quality radio interviews:

To arrange an ISDN broadcast-quality radio interview please contact Katie Prewett at the RSPB press office.

Notes to Editors:

- The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to see a country and region where nature and people live in greater harmony, more equably and sustainably. BirdLife South Africa's mission is to strive to conserve birds through scientifically-based programmes, through supporting the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources and through encouraging people to enjoy nature.

- BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organisation in the country, and relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work.
- Albatross Task Force teams are based in the bycatch 'hotspots' of southern Africa and South America, where albatrosses come into contact with large and diverse longline and trawl fishing fleets.
- For more information, visit on BirdLife South Africa visit www.birdlife.org.za or for the Albatross Task Force visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/albatross/>
- The South Africa hake trawl fishery is certified by the [Marine Stewardship Council](#) which certified sustainable fisheries based on stock status, ecosystem effects and monitoring and compliance.
- The most widely used technique to avoid seabird bycatch is the “tori line” or bird scaring line, invented by a Japanese longline captain. Use of bird scaring lines is mandatory in South Africa for the trawl and longline fisheries.
- Albatross Task Force [video](#)