

BirdLife International Statement to the 29th Regular Meeting of the ICCAT Commission

Bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries is a primary driver of albatross and petrel declines. Many populations are at critical levels (Annex 1). ICCAT management measures for seabirds have the potential to minimise seabird bycatch to very low levels, if consistently and effectively implemented. However, continued seabird population declines in the Atlantic indicate this is not happening. BirdLife International call for the following actions to ensure seabird bycatch mitigation measures are effective and implemented consistently.

ASKS OF THE COMMISSION

Urgently increase observer coverage

Comprehensive observer coverage, by human observers or electronic monitoring systems (EMS), is critical to transparent and effective implementation of ICCAT conservation and management measures, and independent verification of fisheries activities and bycatch.

SCRS advice indicates 5% observer coverage is inappropriate to provide reasonable estimates of total bycatch (Rec. 16-14).

BirdLife International calls on the Commission to commit to a rapid increase in observer coverage to the SCRS recommended level of 20% (Rec. 16-14) and develop a time-bound plan for an urgent increase to 100% observer coverage.

Improve seabird bycatch mitigation measure compliance reporting

A BirdLife International assessment of seabird bycatch mitigation measure compliance reporting indicates that while some CPCs have reported consistently over the last four years, other CPCs have not.

BirdLife International calls on CPCs to report on implementation of seabird bycatch mitigation measures, as required by Recommendations 07-07 and 11-09.

BirdLife International calls on the Commission to increase scrutiny of seabird bycatch compliance reporting.

Mandate scientifically proven seabird bycatch mitigation measures

BirdLife International calls on the Commission to adopt hook shielding devices as an optional seabird bycatch mitigation measure at this meeting, as recommended by the SCRS.

BirdLife International calls on the Commission to request SCRS advice on the most effective seabird bycatch mitigation measures, based on the best available science, to be considered at the 2027 Commission meeting.

BirdLife International thanks the Secretariat, Chair and Members for preparations of the 29th Regular Meeting of the ICCAT Commission. We welcome the opportunity to participate in important discussions on the management of this globally important fishery.

ANNEX 1: ALBATROSS AND PETREL CONSERVATION CRISIS

The conservation status of Atlantic albatross and petrel populations bycaught in pelagic longline fishing is continuing to worsen. Populations are at critical levels - experiencing significant, long-term, and ongoing population declines. Bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries is a primary driver.

For Atlantic-breeding populations of wandering albatross, bycatch in longline fisheries outweighs impacts caused by climate change and predation by invasive species^{1,2}.

Populations of the endemic Tristan albatross and the Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross predominantly forage in the ICCAT Convention Area and are at high risk of bycatch in pelagic longline fisheries.

Table 1: Population status of key albatross and petrel species overlapping with ICCAT fisheries.

Species	IUCN status	Population increasing or decreasing	Population size trend	Estimate of breeding population	Breeding location
Tristan albatross (<i>Diomedea dabbenena</i>)	Critically endangered	↓	Declining (Gough Island) 1.0-1.2 % per year ³ .	3,000-4,000 ⁴	Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha
Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross (<i>Thalassarche chlororhynchos</i>)	Endangered	↓	Declining (Gough Island) 2008-2014: 3.0-5.6 % per year. 2014-2020: 0.9-4.1 % per year ³ . Declining (elsewhere) 1.1-5.0 % per year ³ .	35,000-73,000 ^{5,6}	Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha
Grey-headed albatross (<i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i>)	Endangered	↓	Declining (South Georgia) 1984-2004: 0.4 % per year. 2004-2015: 5.0 % per year. 2015-2024: 4.1 % per year ¹ .	27,000 ¹	South Georgia
Wandering albatross (<i>Diomedea exulans</i>)	Vulnerable	↓	Declining (South Georgia) 1984-2004: 1.5 % per year. 2004-2015: 1.7 % per year. 2015-2024: 0.1 % per year ¹ .	2,600 ¹	South Georgia
White-chinned petrel (<i>Procellaria aequinoctialis</i>)	Vulnerable	↓	Declining (South Georgia) 1.6-1.9 % per year ³ . No trend for Prince Edward Island	1,180,000-2,370,000 ⁷ 9,000-15,000 ⁸	South Georgia Prince Edward Island
Black-browed albatross (<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>)	Least Concern	↓	Declining (South Georgia) 1985-2004: 1.2 % per year. 2004-2015: 1.8 % per year. 2015-2024: 1.1 % per year ¹ .	33,500 ¹	South Georgia

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- ¹ Mackley et al. 2025. [Endurance or extinction: long-term declines in albatrosses at South Georgia highlight threats from South Atlantic fisheries and climate change](#). Endangered Species Research.
 - ² Warwick-Evans et al. 2025. [Spatial segregation and bycatch risk as potential drivers of population trends of wandering albatrosses at South Georgia](#). Conservation Biology.
 - ³ BirdLife International 2024. IUCN Red List for Birds. Downloaded from <https://datazone.birdlife.org/> on 15/01/2024.
 - ⁴ Oppel et al. 2022. [Cryptic population decrease due to invasive species predation in a long-lived seabird supports need for eradication](#). Journal of Applied Ecology.
 - ⁵ Ryan et al. 2011. [The plants and birds of Stoltenhoff and Middle Islands, Tristan da Cunha](#). Polar Record.
 - ⁶ Bratt 2023. [From Mark-Resight to Management: Bayesian Hierarchical Models for Endangered Bird Populations](#). PhD Thesis. University of Washington, Seattle, WA.
 - ⁷ Martin et al. 2009. [The white-chinned petrel \(*Procellaria aequinoctialis*\) on South Georgia: population size, distribution and global significance](#). Polar Biology.
 - ⁸ Ryan et al. 2012. [The distribution and abundance of white-chinned petrels \(*Procellaria aequinoctialis*\) breeding at the sub-Antarctic Prince Edward Islands](#). Polar Biology.