

ACAP - coordination of by-catch fisheries issues in the South Atlantic (XOT401)

In 2004 the United Kingdom, including on behalf of its South Atlantic Overseas Territories (SAOTs) – Falkland Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, British Antarctic Territory and Tristan da Cunha - ratified the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). Of the 26 species presently covered by the Agreement, 12 occur as breeding species in the SAOTs. For most of these, the SAOTs host significant proportions of the global breeding population, three of which are endemic as breeders to the Tristan da Cunha group. Albatrosses and petrels of the South Atlantic face a range of threats both on land and at sea. Chief among these is fisheries-related mortality. In most cases, this is exacerbated by a suite of other threats, the most critical of which is the impact of introduced predators, which is especially severe at Gough Island where introduced house mice prey on chicks of the Tristan Albatross and other seabirds.



A black-browed albatross Thalassarche melanophrys (one of the listed ACAP species). Photo: Sarah Crofts, Falklands Conservation

A number of initiatives have been funded and undertaken to address the range of threats at international, national and local levels. These initiatives are collaborative in nature, involving a range of Government departments both in the UK and the SAOTs, Non-Government Organisations, research institutions, industry and private landowners. As a result of constructive interaction with the fisheries industry and strong collaboration with the research and NGO community, mitigation measures to reduce seabird by-catch have been developed, tested and implemented, leading to substantially reduced levels of seabird by-catch in the fisheries of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia. Indeed, these two SAOTs are world leaders in the development and research of by-catch technology. However, in spite of these successes, the populations of most albatross and petrel populations continue to decline, indicating sustained or increased mortality in foraging areas. The vast foraging movements of these seabirds take them on to the High Seas and the national waters of other nations. This highlights the importance of engaging with other nations to promote an

ecosystem approach to fisheries management, which includes minimising seabird and other by-catch.

In March 2008, Anton Wolfaardt was appointed on a three-year contract to coordinate activities in the SAOTs and metropolitan UK in implementing ACAP, and will be based in the Falkland Islands for the duration of this contract. Initial work has focussed on fulfilling the ACAP reporting requirements, conducting and contributing to reviews for ACAP Working Groups, preparing for the fourth meeting of the Advisory Committee of ACAP, which took place in Cape Town, South Africa in August 2008, and reviewing the specific needs of SAOTs in relation to ACAP. Whilst there are differences between the SAOTs in terms of albatross and petrel conservation, there are also many similarities, and the cross-cutting nature of this project has already led to coordination efficiencies and opportunities for sharing lessons and experience. The ultimate objective of ACAP is to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels, and this project is being implemented to ensure that the UK and the SAOTs help meet this objective.

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