



CLARENCE HOUSE

Indiscriminate longline fishing is estimated to kill 100,000 albatrosses every year, a rate of loss which we now know to be completely unsustainable for many species. As the assessments of BirdLife International tell us, the plight of these majestic birds grows more serious every year, with all twenty-one species now threatened with global extinction. For my part, I simply refuse to accept that these remarkable birds should be allowed to slide quietly into extinction, and particularly not when the damage is both entirely man-made and easily preventable.

It is due to the scientific effort of BirdLife International's 'Save the Albatross' campaign that the scale of the problem was first brought to my attention. I have been a firm supporter of their work ever since, and am delighted to endorse their new report '*Tracking Ocean Wanderers*'. The report is the synthesis of a remarkable collaboration of scientists around the world who have freely pooled their findings derived from satellite-tracking of albatrosses. It brings together real data for the first time to show us where these gravely threatened birds are roving the oceans, enabling us to identify where they are most vulnerable and to safeguard their critical habitat.

Having often watched albatrosses from ships in which I have served, it is a revelation to discover from this report how systematically they distribute themselves at sea, and heartening to realize that we can harness this information to help protect them from the intense fishing activity which is inevitably drawn to the same areas of high ocean productivity.

To save these birds from extinction, governments, the fishing industry, and conservationists must collaborate to devise effective ways of eliminating the appalling slaughter of seabirds throughout the oceans. To me, the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels offers the best framework for galvanizing this international cooperation, without which the future for these birds is utterly bleak.

In many ways I happen to think that the albatross may be the ultimate test of whether or not, as a species ourselves, we are serious about conservation: in other words, capable of co-existing on this planet with other species. There is not much time left for them and the reality is that in the current dangerously critical situation the only effective actions will be those that are implemented immediately, and continued indefinitely. I do commend BirdLife International's new report to the first meeting of the ACAP Parties in Hobart and am hopeful it will help them to take the right actions and with the necessary speed and urgency.

