

### PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

#### **Balearic Shearwater** *Puffinus mauretanicus*



**Species Guardians:**

**Sociedad Española de Ornitología (SEO: BirdLife in Spain); Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves (SPEA: BirdLife in Portugal)**



A Balearic Shearwater in flight (© Tom Brereton/Marinelife)

### **Background**

Balearic Shearwater breeds in the Balearic Islands, Spain. In winter, it occurs in the Balearic Sea and off the north-east Spanish coast with most of the population traditionally concentrated between Valencia and Catalonia from November to February. Some birds migrate north in summer to seas off the British Isles and the south of the Scandinavian peninsula.

Breeding colony data in 2005 led to an estimate of 2,000-2,400 breeding pairs at 24 different sites, but marine censuses suggest more than 25,000 individuals. Some breeding colonies have undergone steep declines, and modelling indicates that the population is currently declining at 7.4% a year. Threats include predation by introduced cats, rats, genets, habitat degradation from rabbits, bycatch in long-lining fisheries, pollution and climate change.

In 2000, the Balearic government designated three new Special Protection Areas such that all the Important Bird Areas for breeding colonies are now protected. Rats have successfully been eradicated from Estell Xapat, Esclatasang, Redonda and Imperial (all Cabrera), and are under control on Dragonera, Conills and Malgrats. Local, national and international Action Plans have been published.

### **Actions being implemented**

- 1. The wintering and passage distribution** of the Balearic Shearwater is being **monitored**. SPEA has surveyed the continental coast biannually since 2005, under an agreement with the National Fisheries Research Institution, and a network of observers carries out simultaneous counts of birds off the Catalunyan coast. Most recently, a total of 50 surveys were accomplished between January and September 2009 at five different capes. **Aerial and oceanographic surveys** have been carried out, revealing hotspots for the species along the continental shelf. This has allowed the production of a map by SPEA which depicts Balearic Shearwater densities between 2008 and 2009.
- 2. One thousand copies of a best-practice guide for fishermen**, with information on bycatch and seabirds, were produced by SPEA in a calendar format for December 2008 - March 2010 and distributed to Portuguese fishermen.
- 3. Coordinated efforts to estimate the global population size** are underway through updated information at the breeding colonies and censuses at sea. It is hoped that this will clarify the discrepancy between counts at the breeding groups (8,000 - 10,000 individuals) and counts at sea (25,000 - 30,000 individuals).

**4. Research is underway on mortality in longline fisheries.** This has confirmed that bycatch is a very important threat, often affecting large numbers at a time (up to 100+ birds caught on a single line have been reported). Results were presented at the meeting of the Working Group on Seabird Ecology of ICES, hosted by SPEA last March in Lisbon, and will be presented in the annual report of this advisory group. To gather further information, SPEA produced a questionnaire for fishermen, interviewing roughly 250 fisherman in seven different ports by April 2009. Efforts to produce a bycatch assessment report are ongoing.

**5. The first inventory of marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs)** in Portugal was published in 2008, identifying important areas for Balearic Shearwater. The LIFE Project aimed at creating a Spanish marine IBA inventory ended in 2009 with the publication of a book of marine IBAs in Spain. A new LIFE+ project started in 2009 with the aim of integrating the marine IBAs into the Natura 2000 network, and developing appropriate management plans for the Special Protected Areas. The results of the marine IBA project will be presented to regional governments, and preliminary meetings working towards this aim began in February 2009.



Onshore and offshore monitoring of the species is ongoing and is conducted by a variety of organisations. Such work aids tracking population trends, migration routes and distribution of the species. (Left: Seabird observation © J Andrade; right; aerial surveys © Ivan Ramirez and Pep Arcos)

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