Massive Marine Protected Area announced in the Southern Indian Ocean

Title
Using Marine Protected Areas (MPA) is a core strategy that national governments can employ for protecting the oceans and ensuring sustainable use within territorial waters.

BirdLife South Africa applauds the Department of Environmental Affairs for their announcement that South Africa's sub-Antarctic territory, the Prince Edward Islands, has had an enormous MPA declared. BirdLife congratulates both departmental officials, independent scientists and others who were involved in the work to define and declare this MPA. At around 18 million ha, it's a gigantic protected area and one of the largest MPAs in the world.

"Many of the world's most important areas for seabirds remain unprotected, so the news of the Prince Edward Island MPA is very welcome as it will safeguard one of the "crown jewels" for seabirds in the southern oceans. The MPA includes many of the critical feeding areas for the vast seabird colonies the island supports", said Ben Lascelles, BirdLife's Marine IBA Programme Officer.

"The site had been identified as a priority for seabird conservation in BirdLife's new marine e-atlas. The e-Atlas has been designed to give governments the data they need to make these momentous decisions. Protection of the sites within the e-atlas will help them to achieve the target of protecting 10% of marine and coastal areas by 2020 that was agreed to through the Convention on Biological Diversity."

Explore the Marine e-Atlas

The islands are internationally renowned for their important seabird colonies, including holding nearly half of the global population of Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans*, 13% of the world's King Penguins *Aptenodytes patagonicus*, and one of the highest numbers of breeding seabird species (26) of any island in the world. BirdLife International lists the islands as an Important Bird Area in recognition of its irreplaceable biodiversity value. BirdLife is also working at identifying marine Important Bird Areas across the world's oceans, and the new MPA overlaps with several proposed marine IBAs. The establishment of the multi-zoned MPA will afford protection for many of the breeding seabirds (and other marine life). For example, the establishment of a 12 nautical mile no-take zone around both islands will help to ensure that seabird species such as Gentoo Penguins *Pygoscelis papua* and the Crozet Island

subspecies of Imperial Shag *Phalacrocorax (atriceps) purpurascens*, which feed exclusively within this area and which have suffered large decreases in recent times, will not face additional pressures from new activities in their feeding ranges.

Dr Ross Wanless, Seabird Division Manager at BirdLife South Africa, commented “This declaration represents the culmination of a lot of work by many dedicated scientists and conservationists over many years. Marine Protected Areas have great potential to protect seabirds and other marine biodiversity, and the scale and nature of the Prince Edward Islands MPA is impressive.”