

Albatross Task Force Diaries

? Argentina

Title

The last trip I went on was from Puerto Madryn, in the South of Argentina. The crew was completely new to me, as is often the case when you visit a new port, but they all knew Leo Tamini so they were quite aware of what my work involved. This is great as I was received warmly and allowed to carry on with complete liberty onboard.

The trip started well, going through the usual process of getting to know the crew and the vessel, the best places to work and the dangers that should be avoided. I noticed at once that there was a lot of seabird activity. The Southern Royal Albatross were present in large quantities as were the Grey-headed Albatross which I don't see as often in the north.

In my observations of seabird interaction with the vessel I recorded a lot of heavy impacts and many injured birds. Whilst completing this work I observed ten birds that were killed on this trip alone. One of these was one of the Southern Royals. At this time of year the strong winds and snow that blow from the south make our work much more complicated.

I remember one night we had a full-on snow storm. The crew had just finished working; I was on the bridge recording the trawl information and having a coffee with the captain, when all of a sudden gusts of wind threw a storm of Cape Petrel against the side of the vessel. These birds hit the bridge and fell in shock on the deck of the vessel, and there were loads of them. I had recently changed from my outdoor clothes into some more comfortable gear to sleep in, including my slippers! I had to grab my thick coat and in my slippers dashed out to the deck where I gathered up around 40 Cape Petrel! Imagine what the rest of the crew must have thought, laughing uncontrollably at me – the ridiculous ornithologist in his slippers! It was pretty funny, and it didn't bother me whilst I hurried to help the petrels back to the sea. On deck they would have been covered in grease and dirt which does nothing for their carefully preened feathers which keep them safe from the intense storms in the south of Argentina. As I worked, several of the crew recovered enough from their laughter to come and help me. I explained (in my slippers) how to hold the birds correctly and liberate them without causing them harm. They were surprised as they thought that surely the birds would prefer to be onboard during a storm. For their help I handed them warm hats from Aves Argentinas (BirdLife Partner) as a reward. Although my slippers will never be the same again, we helped the Cape Petrel and the guys on deck learned some important bird-handling techniques.