

# Spain opens the public process to designate 41 marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs), totalling almost 50,000 km<sup>2</sup>

## Title

On 18 October, the Spanish Ministry of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs (MARM), published a proposal designating 41 marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Spain. This proposal mirrors the marine IBAs inventory elaborated by SEO/BirdLife in Spain within two LIFE projects, 'Marine IBAs in Spain' (2004-2009), complemented by the project 'INDEMARES' (2009-2013), both funded by the European Commission.

Only three of the 44 areas proposed by SEO/BirdLife have been left aside by the MARM proposal: the Gibraltar Strait, the Concepción Bank and the Chafarinas islands, because their limits extended beyond Spanish waters. Once formally designated, these 41 protected sites will be the first complete national network of marine SPAs in Europe, and will represent a model for other countries.

The proposal, based on the results of two LIFE projects and supported by BirdLife, is guaranteed to be credible and serious, and will be, for sure, automatically endorsed by the European Commission. 'This achievement would have not been possible without the support of the whole BirdLife community', said Asunción Ruiz, CEO in SEO/BirdLife. 'We want to highlight the support from the beginning from the BirdLife International Secretariat, the European Division and several partners, in particular SPEA/BirdLife in Portugal'.

SEO/BirdLife congratulates the MARM and encourages the new government to speed up the process of designation, as well as to add the three remaining areas to this process. The following step will be the elaboration of the management plans. SEO/BirdLife is already working on it through two projects funded by the European Union programmes LIFE+ and Interreg IV, and has already started to involve the relevant stakeholders to the process.

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Stichting BirdLife Europe gratefully acknowledges financial support from the European Commission. All content and opinions expressed on these pages are solely those of Stichting BirdLife Europe.