

Supporters rally to save Europe's rarest seabird

Title

During the summer of 2010, forest fires ravaged parts of Madeira, a Portuguese island and home to Europe's rarest seabird, Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira*. On 13 August they hit the heart of the central massif, where many Zino's Petrel nestlings were still in their burrows. Two days later, as soon as the ground and soil had cooled sufficiently, staff from Parque Natural da Madeira (PNM) visited the breeding cliffs to assess the damage. The results were shocking: 25 young and 3 adults were found dead, and only 13 young fledglings were found alive in their underground chambers. But with vegetation burned away, the remaining chicks were exposed to predators, and many more were taken by cats and rats in the following weeks. Fire and the loss of vegetation had also exacerbated soil erosion, and several nesting burrows had disappeared completely. Staff from SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) and PNM set to work immediately to stabilise and then restore the breeding area. BirdLife International and SPEA launched an appeal for the funds needed to carry out the work that had to be done before the winter rains set in, and washed away the remaining soil. BirdLife supporters from around the world responded quickly, and donations soon reached over £14,000. Further erosion was prevented using a soil retention 'blanket' - a technique PNM had adopted successfully to arrest erosion at the Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* colony on the island of Bugio. The team then began to install artificial burrows made of fireproof material, first replacing the existing nests, before adding new ones to attract first-time breeders to the colony.



Generous donations by BirdLife supporters have enabled emergency work to install artificial burrows and prevent further soil

erosion (PNM)

Plants have already begun to regenerate naturally around the burrows and on the cliffs, but in December seeds of native species will be sown around the site to restore the vegetation cover before the birds begin to return to the breeding colony in late March. ?Thanks to the generous response from BirdLife?s supporters around the world, we were able to act quickly enough to ensure that what could have been a catastrophe for Zino?s Petrel is hopefully no more than a temporary setback in its recovery. Thank you so much?, said Richard Grimmett, BirdLife?s Director of Conservation. **You can still help by donating at <http://www.justgiving.com/zinos-petrel-disaster>** Once on the edge of extinction, with numbers down to a few tens of pairs, Zino?s Petrel is living evidence that conservation works. Europe?s rarest seabird, Zino?s Petrel nests only on a few mountain ledges in the rugged central massif of the island of Madeira. Intense action over the past 20 years, led by the Natural Park of Madeira (Parque Natural da Madeira?PNM) with support from SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal), the Freira Conservation Project and Funchal Municipal Museum, helped its population grow to almost 80 pairs.
