

Largest seabird event ever aims high

The world's foremost experts on albatrosses, penguins, and other marine birds are meeting in Victoria on Vancouver Island, Canada, this week for the largest seabird event ever held. With seabirds becoming increasingly threatened and at a faster rate globally than all other species-groups of birds, delegates will be discussing the urgent need for conservation action, and are setting their sights high. "We hope to close the meeting with an announcement that we have formed a new international governing body to address and collaborate on seabird monitoring and conservation", said Professor John Croxall - Chairman of BirdLife's Global Seabird Programme. More than 800 participants from 40 countries, representing most of the world's seabird scientists, will be reviewing the impact of oil spills on marine birds; how pollution, fishing practices and climate change are affecting seabirds; the need for marine protected areas; how to reduce the impact of invasive species on island seabird breeding colonies; and more. The conference was opened today by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales who delivered a pre-recorded welcoming address. "As some of you may know, the plight of seabirds has long been close to my heart", he said. "They are, without doubt, some of the world's most charismatic and iconic species". Delegates were reminded of the urgent need for action in the light of statistics such as 97 (28%) of the world's 346 species of seabird - and over 75% of albatross species - are presently languishing under global threat of extinction. "That they face such challenges to their continued survival is, frankly, terrifying", said The Prince. BirdLife's Global Seabird Programme works around the globe to address the growing threats faced by seabirds, and is a co-sponsor of the conference. "BirdLife is playing a major role in organising the meeting, with staff and Partners making at least 24 presentations, including two major symposia and three workshops", said Dr Ben Sullivan - BirdLife's Global Seabird Programme Coordinator. In his opening address HRH The Prince of Wales highlighted the work of BirdLife's Albatross Task Force which works alongside fishermen to reduce the toll on seabirds killed by fishing gears. For example, in South Africa for every 100 seabirds previously being killed in fisheries, 85 are now being saved just four years later thanks to BirdLife's hands-on efforts with the fleets. "Last year, I remember meeting Meidad Goren, who was working with the Albatross Task Force", said The Prince. "It was inspiring to see the work that he was doing with individual fishermen in South Africa". Delegates at the conference will hear how BirdLife has used its practical experience of working with fishermen to develop factsheets detailing simple and inexpensive mitigation measures to dramatically reduce accidental seabird deaths. "It is of enormous importance to disseminate more widely the knowledge that there are very simple techniques which could make the most profound difference to seabirds", concluded The Prince. These factsheets can be downloaded from BirdLife's website by [clicking here](#). The first-ever World Seabird Conference will be held at the Victoria Conference Centre from September 7 to 11, 2010. Sponsored by 26 professional seabird groups and societies from around the world, the

conference includes groups working on marine science and conservation around the globe. It will also feature a film festival and seabird art exhibition. Image credit: Paul Burns