

BirdLife's History in Objects, #11: The Frontier of Marine Conservation

Title

Remember the launch of the *e-Atlas of Marine Important Bird Areas*, because it is going to be important for the future of our oceans.

BirdLife International has created the first ever global inventory of priority sites for marine conservation, which was unveiled on 16 October 2012. Six years in the making, this scientific breakthrough has been supported by over 1000 contributors from all over the world. Around 3,000 marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are, for the first time, collated onto a simple interactive online map. Data that were transmitted from GPS tags on the backs of wandering albatross from as far as Antarctica have now being presented to policy-makers at an international convention in India, and is facilitating action. Spurring other organisations on to follow with atlases for other marine animals, this pioneering endeavour sets a new precedence for achieving international site conservation in the high seas.

Vast international waters require huge international collaboration

This news gives hope for seabirds- the most threatened bird family -whose huge ranges present a unique conservation challenge. Many species are spectacularly mobile: they travel thousands of kilometres across international waters, and only returning to land to breed. As BirdLife foresaw back in 1994, "Seabird conservation can be attained only through unprecedented levels of global cooperation."¹

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Great-winged Petrel, the entire range of this species is shown on the e-Atlas, as well as important priority

"BirdLife International thanks all the contributors immensely, without whom the geographic extent of sites and the level of detail achieved would not have been possible," says Ben Lascelles, BirdLife's Global Marine IBA Coordinator. "This has been a truly collaborative effort with everyone sharing the common vision."

Following a series of regional and national capacity building workshops, the number of

BirdLife Partners able to engage in the Marine IBA programme has grown from 4 to 40 in the last five years. The BirdLife Partnership has mobilised the input of experts including: government departments of conservation and fisheries, regional fisheries management organisations, university research biologists and the secretariats of international conventions.

On the frontier of conservation scientific progress, sharing is caring

Working like Google Maps, the Marine e-Atlas represents a breakthrough for database interactivity. Data can now be dynamically updated online. With the combining of three databases, new methodologies, refinement of data analysis techniques and challenges in production had to be overcome at international workshops, but the effort will be worth it.

“This is the first example of a global network of sites for any high seas species, and there is nothing similar for important groups such as whales, sharks or turtles,” adds Ben Lascelles. “We hope that the e-Atlas will be a key resource for management of the oceans for years to come, and show the wider marine community the benefits that can be achieved when data are shared for conservation purposes. We are using the IBA data to promote seabirds as indicators of wider biodiversity, and working through the Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative to link our data with wider taxa.”

Future uses: policy action

[Screenshot from the BirdLife e-Atlas of Marine Important Bird Areas, showing Antarctic polar projection](#)

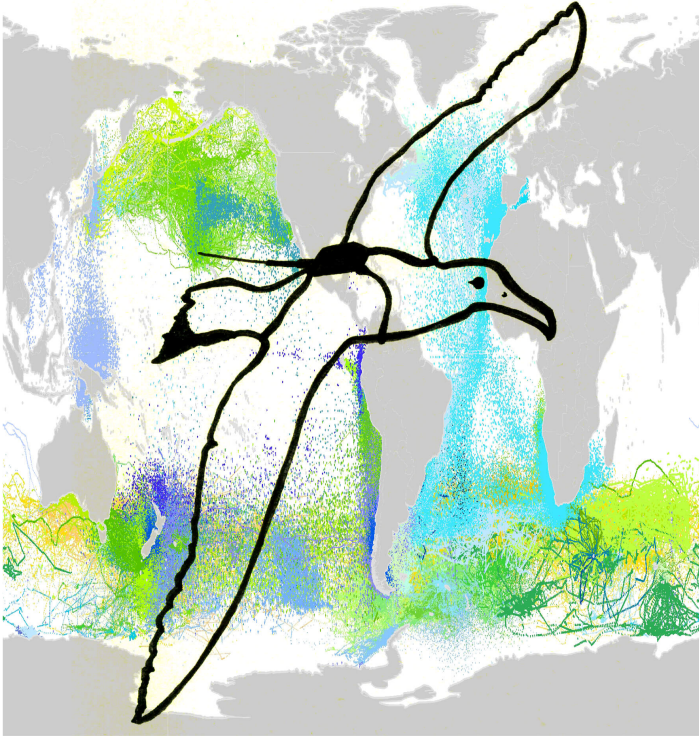
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<http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/BirdLife-Marine-IBA-Inventory2-300x150.png>

With the launch at the eleventh Conference Of Parties for the Convention on Biological Diversity in India, (CBD COP11) a key role of the marine e-Atlas is for influencing marine policy. It will inform Marine Protected Areas; Ecologically and Biologically Significant marine Areas (150 marine IBAs are already recognised as EBSAs by the CBD); the siting of offshore windfarms; oil and gas exploration and extraction; and oil pollution management. It is hoped that decision-makers will recognise the importance of seabirds in part due to the huge international collaborative effort that has gone into this pioneering database.

1. *Seabirds on Islands: Threats, Case Studies and Action Plans*, BirdLife International, 1994.

BirdLife International has been working for seabirds since the early 20th Century. BirdLife established its [Global Seabird Programme](#) in 1997, which amongst other work, uses solid scientific research to inform seabird biology and conservation, implements mitigation measures to prevent seabird fishing bycatch, and protects seabirds from invasive species on islands. This article is part of a series celebrating BirdLife's 90th Anniversary.



Other articles in this series:

1. [Birds of a Feather](#)
2. [Ever fantasised about owning your own private tropical island?](#)
3. [All Hands on Deck](#)
4. [Caribbean Treasures](#)
5. [The Power of a Local Tradition: *Hima*](#)
6. [The Dramatic Relationship between Man and the Northern Bald Ibis](#)
7. [Bringing the Hammer Down on Governments to Save Nature](#)
8. [If a bird calls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it really exist?](#)
9. [Forest Conservation has no Boundaries](#)
10. [A Drink for Nature](#)
11. [The Frontier of Marine Conservation](#)
12. [A Migratory Bird's-Eye View of the World](#)
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