Title

The Albatross Task Force (ATF) are an elite team of international high seas heroes.

The ATF are who you call when 300,000 seabirds are needlessly caught and drowned by longline and trawl fisheries every year.

The ATF are who you call when 17 of the 22 albatross species are under immediate threat of extinction.

The ATF are who you call when simple and cost-effective measures exist that completely prevent seabird bycatch from occurring but local fishermen have no idea of their existence.

Venturing out to sea with local fishermen, the Albatross Task Force work to save seabirds from accidental catching (bycatch).

Here is an insight into their everyday work:

Amidst a snowstorm off the coast of Argentina, all of a sudden, gusts of wind threw a wreck* of Cape Petrel against the side of a fishing boat, where Leo 'Nahuel' Chavez (an instructor from the Argentine ATF) had just changed into his bed clothing for the night. The birds hit the bridge and fell in shock on the greasy deck of the vessel. Out ran the ATF instructor in his slippers, in the snow, to save the 40 dazed Cape Petrels:

> *"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 in Argentina) as a reward."*

Next, in an account by Fabiano Peppes (Brazilian Albatross Task Force), whilst steaming out to sea on board a Brazilian fishing boat, the Captain addressed his crew on his respect for the ATF:

> *"This vessel will also be under the command of Fabiano (ATF), give him all the help he wants and make all the changes that he needs".*

After demonstrating to the fishermen on how to use the new equipment, the next day Fabiano had a pleasant

surprise. Whilst he was preparing his notes, the crew had put a tori line** in the water. And it was working “beautifully”:

> *“There were many albatrosses, shearwaters and petrels around so this was a real bonus. I asked the fishermen who had deployed the tori line and they replied immediately: ‘The captain.’ “I went up to the bridge and he was smiling broadly and said: ‘At first I didn’t think that the tori line would work, but when I deployed it and saw all the albatross moving away from the stern of the boat, I was surprised to see how effective it is’.”*

These personal accounts show that small changes can have a huge impact in our campaign to save the albatross and other seabirds. The Albatross Task Force is a major initiative within BirdLife’s Global Seabird Programme. Lead on behalf of the BirdLife International Partnership by the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), ATF high seas heroes continue to make their way around the world’s pelagic, longline and trawl fisheries. Results so far are very promising: over the last few years there has been an 85% reduction of seabird bycatch rate in three major fisheries where the ATF operated.

The Albatross Task Force demonstrate a suite of cost-effective mitigation measures (like tori lines, weighted lines and night fishing), collect data on bycatch levels and work with fishermen to identify and trial new solutions. The ATF has begun influencing fishery management regulations around the world and this year they started tackling small-scale fisheries in Peru. ATF instructors are now heading out to sea in more and more countries in southern Africa and South America - so watch out for **their blogs**!

* a group of seabirds is called a '**wreck**' of seabirds

BirdLife International has grown into a global Partnership, working with 117 Partners worldwide for nature and people. The Albatross Task Force is a great modern example of the kind of schemes they introduce in order to make a sustainable difference for conservation. This article is part of a series celebrating BirdLife International’s 90 years of experience. Click here to go to the ATF website...

Other articles in this series:

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