

Into the deep unknown ? scientists unveil the secrets of our seas

Title

Safeguarding the world's oceans is a global undertaking, especially considering less than 1% of international waters are currently protected. New insights into marine life have enabled scientists to locate some of the ocean's most ecologically and biologically significant areas (EBSAs), in the planet's most remote places. At the 11th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Hyderabad, India, BirdLife International is supporting the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) in calling on the international community to protect them. BirdLife has provided scientific data, is providing expertise at the EBSA press conference today, and policy support in Hyderabad.

Supporting the seas This is the first time the world's oceans, including international waters, come under scientific scrutiny, combining new facts about the distribution, migration routes and reproductive, nesting and nursing grounds of many threatened species, such as albatross, tuna, sharks, turtles and whales. The Global Ocean Biodiversity Initiative, of which BirdLife International is a partner, has been engaged in compiling and processing the new data. "Many of these important areas lie outside of national jurisdiction, and thus remain neglected or poorly protected," says Kristina Gjerde, IUCN Senior High Seas Advisor. "We need to bring these remote places to the center of government attention." Over 120 marine 'hotspots' located by experts in the Western South Pacific, the Mediterranean, the Wider Caribbean and Western Mid-Atlantic are now waiting to be approved by the CBD. This approval is needed to push world leaders into recognising and protecting these areas. BirdLife calls on Parties at COP11 to endorse those EBSAs described in the expert workshops and approve their inclusion within the repository mechanism.

Solid science Among other features, scientists assessed the biological diversity and the number of rare species in the areas. They also looked at how important these places are for the survival of threatened species and how vulnerable they are to threats such as climate change and human activity, including pollution and illegal and badly managed fishing. "BirdLife has been a key stakeholder in providing sound scientific information to guide the description of EBSAs, having participated in all five regional workshops by CBD so far", said Ben Lascelles- BirdLife's Global Marine IBA Coordinator -who joined the panel of experts for

the EBSA press conference in Hyderabad today. “BirdLife has coordinated the compilation, analysis and submission of bird distribution data to these workshops via a list of marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) for consideration within the EBSA process.” These marine IBAs will be available for the whole world to engage with in an interactive ‘marine e-atlas’, which is to be launched by BirdLife tomorrow at COP11. The oceans are a vital part of the earth's life support system to people around the world, and are home to an estimated 80% of the world's biodiversity, from tiny phytoplankton to blue whales – the largest creatures on the planet. They provide us with oxygen, food and water and regulate the earth’s climate. While unsustainable human use, climate change and ocean acidification continue to threaten their biodiversity, only about 2% of the world’s oceans is protected – including less than 1% of their international waters – and much of them remains unexplored. BirdLife congratulates the CBD Secretariat for leading on a widespread participation in collaborative efforts towards describing EBSAs, which was initiated at the 10th Conference of Parties to the CBD and will hopefully prove successful in the near future.