

On board to save seabirds: Fondation SEGRE and BirdLife Europe create the “Seabird Task Force” to reduce seabird bycatch

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With an estimated 200,000 seabirds accidentally killed every year during fishing activities, seabird bycatch is a critical environmental issue in Europe. In order to tackle this problem detailed knowledge of bycatch hotspots, the numbers of birds killed and a tighter cooperation with fishermen willing to work on solutions are necessary.

Iván Ramírez, Head of Conservation in BirdLife Europe stated: *“Thanks to Fondation Segre, we are now ready to import into Europe the model of the [Albatross Task Force](#), which has been extremely successful in other parts of the world in collaborating with fishermen on seabird bycatch. We will work alongside European fishermen to deliver tangible solutions that work for all.”*

“The European Seabird Task Force, a team of trained experts from BirdLife’s National Partners in Spain (SEO/BirdLife) and Lithuania (LOD), will spend the next two years quantifying the levels of seabird bycatch off the Spanish Mediterranean coast and in the inshore waters of Lithuania in the Baltic Sea and testing mitigation measures that can be adopted by fishermen at minimum costs” said Marguerite Tarzia, BirdLife’s Seabird Task Force coordinator.

In the Mediterranean, the small, artisanal longline fisheries overlap with many of the feeding grounds of the Critically Endangered Balearic Shearwater. The Balearic Shearwater and other seabird species are known to be caught in this fishery. From its work in other longline fisheries around the world, BirdLife has developed mitigation techniques and best practice to effectively reduce seabird bycatch in longlines. The Task Force will be working with the artisanal fishing fleet on board their vessels, to understand the extent of the problem and determine the most appropriate and effective solutions.

In Lithuania, the artisanal gillnet fishery targeting Atlantic cod coincides with hundreds of thousands of sea ducks visiting the country’s waters in spring and autumn. Sea ducks, such as the Long-tailed Duck and the Endangered Velvet Scoter dive for their food at the bottom of the sea, and can easily get caught in these nets as they forage. Unlike in other fishing gear, best practice does not currently exist to reduce seabird bycatch in gillnets. In Lithuania the Task Force will be working with gillnet fishermen to develop innovative solutions to this problem.

As the first step in engaging with the fishing industry, on February 11 the Seabird Task Force will hold its first workshop in Klaipeda, Lithuania, with local fishing associations, fishermen and government officials. The Task Force will also be holding meetings with fishermen in key fishing ports along the Catalan coast in Spain.

All documents, stories, photos and videos regarding the project will be public and distributed thanks to a dedicated website: www.seabirdbycatch.com to be launched on 5 February. For further information contact the Seabird Task Force coordinator, [Marguerite Tarzia](#).