

Newsletter

on Alcyon project activities



Second half of 2016

From the Alcyon project towards an Alcyon Programme...

Alcyon? It is, in fact, a legend borrowed from Greek mythology. Alcyon is a fabulous seabird, with plaintive song (often identified with the kingfisher, gull, petrel or swan), which is considered a good omen by Greeks and poets because according to legend it only builds its nest on a calm sea. We had hoped at the start of the Alcyon project that seabirds and all marine and coastal biodiversity of our sub-region, threatened by various pressures, would nest, just like Alcyon, on the calm marine environment of West Africa. This is what this project, named Alcyon by my former colleague Julien Semelin sets out to achieve.

After four years of the Alcyon project, this is no longer a dream. It is, in fact thanks to the Alcyon project that light has been shed on key sites for the conservation of birds and biodiversity at sea; what we call marine Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas - marine IBAs. Yes, a network of 13 marine IBAs has been identified as part of the Alcyon project, off our sub-region through well-developed methodology based on strict criteria followed by the BirdLife International Marine Programme team. However, the purpose of the Alcyon project was not only to focus on identifying marine IBAs. It is to reach a harmonious West African eco-region, like an Alcyon nest on a calm sea. At this stage, it is more than necessary to put in place appropriate measures to address the threats identified while further knowledge is gathered on other risks that might impede better conservation of seabirds and biodiversity.

For this reason, the project team has begun a process to develop a Regional Strategy and Action Plan (SAP) for seabird and marine biodiversity sustainable conservation off the coast of West Africa. This strategy paper would make it possible to build on the Alcyon project achievements in order to sustain conservation of the resources concerned.

In October 2016, we organized a workshop for wrapping up and future prospects of the Alcyon project to take stock of project achievements, present the strategy paper developed, and to seek contributions from stakeholders, local partners, international experts, and policy makers to better consider the strategic action needed to address the risks and threats identified in the SAP. Undoubtedly, implementing the priority action identified in this SAP will contribute effectively to reducing impact in the long-term and even eliminating the threats identified in marine IBAs.

It is precisely continuing implementation of our Strategic Action Plan through a marine programme, which thanks to the overlap of the different components could achieve our objective. Alcyon will definitely no longer be a project, but rather the Seabird and marine conservation programme in West Africa. You will read news of this marine programme - the Alcyon programme in the next few issues of our Newsletter !

Justine Dossa
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BirdLife International Marine Programme
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New colony of Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*) on Raso Islet, Cape verde. © Biosfera

The goal of the Alcyon project funded by the MAVA Foundation is to contribute to the protection of seabirds in West Africa by identifying marine Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs).

From the next Issues, we will speak instead about the Alcyon Programme



The second half of 2016 was marked by two important events for the Alcyon project: development of the Seabird Conservation Strategic Action Plan (SAP) along the West African East Atlantic Flyway, and the close participation of local partners, Experts, international organizations in the seabird symposium. This was organized by BirdLife International as part of wrapping up the Alcyon project.

At the ending year of the Alcyon project implementation, a practical tool for addressing the issues and challenges ahead is through a Regional Strategy and Action Plan to ensure a long-term sustainable option. BirdLife is developing this Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for the West African sub-region (focusing on the CCLME region) to ensure that threats to seabirds (in the broadest sense) and marine conservation action are well matched, achievable, and carefully considered

The Pan-African Ornithological Congress (PAOC 14) was the setting in which the Alcyon Project Team chose to present this SAP to key stakeholders, international experts and national decision makers; seek their input, and develop and discuss implementation strategies, through a seabird symposium and a Two day workshop. This workshop for the strategic action plan for seabird conservation along the West African East Atlantic Flyway gathered participants from most of the East Atlantic Flyway initiative countries. Participants from BirdLife partners, experts involved in the Alcyon project, supporting partners, local partners (with at least one participant from each CCLME country), potential partners from other initiatives involved in marine conservation in West Africa (including the CCLME project, Mamiwata Project, AWA Project, Marine Spatial Planning Project, oil and gas expert from the Benguela system, the Abidjan Convention, CSR, PRCM), and potential donors (MAVA, CEPF, FAO) attended the two-day workshop, with around 60 participants. The report of this workshop, including the main recommendations can be found [here](#).

The seabird symposium ('Managing impacts on seabirds from forage fisheries, bycatch and the depletion of stocks') attracted participants from many countries working on seabird conservation issues in West Africa. Close to 100 PAOC participants came to



Participants of the SAP workshop during a plenary session (@ Dossa)



Local partners discussing about specific strategic activities to their countries in working group, SAP workshop (@ T. Dodman)

the symposium, reflecting the interest in the relationship between seabird conservation and West African challenges. To sum up: Of the 28 presentations made during the symposium, 21 of them were delivered by Alcyon project partners (students trained by the project; local and external partners) and showed the project results. Also, seven posters were presented on the key results, one of which won the PAOC 14 student poster award (prepared by Ngoné Diop, a Senegalese PhD student).

In Senegal, our partners from the Department of National Parks of Senegal (DPN) launched, in the margins of the PAOC 14, the exhibition which aims to improve the eco-tourism services provided by National Park of Iles de la Madeleine (PNIM) to



Flock of Slender-billed Gulls, National Park of Salioum Delta, Senegal (@ Dossa)

increase the spin-offs of eco-tourism in order to ensure funding of long-term conservation of the park's birds. BirdLife, through its Alcyon project, provided technical support and financed the PNIM for this exhibition which allowed the creation of a logo specific to PNIM and a bank of images presented on outreach activities on which PNIM and its resources have been developed.

Colonel Souleye Ndiaye, Director of the National Parks of Senegal, reiterated his great satisfaction with the collaboration between the DPN and BirdLife International through the Alcyon project for seabird conservation activities in several Protected Areas of Senegal. After rapid assessment of the change observed since the exhibition was set up last October, the park team believes that this exhibition is very appreciated by visitors although it is too early (only 3 months on) to evaluate the change in terms of economic spin-offs. The conservator of PNIM recognizes that «based only on visitor feedback, it can already be confirmed that the exhibition plays a very important role in gaining customer satisfaction at the outset even before arriving in the field. Of the 42 suggestions submitted to the park's suggestion box, 88% of the visitors were very satisfied and expressed the wish to come back as soon as possible».

Training observers and scientists to understand interaction between seabirds and fishing activities

One of Alcyon project activities is to assess interaction between seabirds and artisanal and commercial fisheries. Training fisheries observers in how and why to collect relevant data is an important step to achieving that goal. Specialist training includes seabird identification and scientific approaches to data collection.

Between 30 August-1 September the Alcyon Project Team together with Yann Tremblay (IRD, France) provided training to 20 scientists and fisheries observers, covering West African East Atlantic Flyway seabirds, seabird ecology, seabird identification, at-sea observation of live birds and the collection of important data while out at sea.



Colonel Souleye Ndiaye, Director of DPN, Senegal giving the official speech at the launch of PNIM exhibition (© Dossa)



Captain Mame Abdou Faye, PNIM Deputy Curator presents the exhibition to the guests at the launch ceremony (© Dossa)

Most of the observers are well-trained with respect to fish and fishing operations. They have, collectively, spent decades at sea as observers; monitoring catches on trips that last between two weeks and two months. And now, thanks to BirdLife's initiatives, they are becoming seabird observers.



Practice sessions on the identification of seabirds during the training of observers (© Dossa)

In Cape Verde, all local partners, administrative authorities, PA managers and key external partners involved in seabird conservation in the country (including Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves- SPEA, University of Coimbra, Portugal, University of Barcelona, Spain) are actively preparing with BirdLife International their action plans for better conservation of seabirds in the archipelago. In view of the special importance of this country to conserve seabirds and the insular nature of Cape Verde, BirdLife International will coordinate a single action plan with partners for seabird conservation in Cape Verde, which will be implemented thanks to the support of our biggest ally, the MAVA Foundation. All local NGOs throughout the archipelago, and state institutions, in collaboration with external partners and BirdLife International will join forces to work together for this. This will represent a separate component in our new marine programme. More information in the next issue.



Juvenile of Brown Booby, *Sula leucogaster* on Raso Islet, Cape Verde (© Biosfera)



Chick of Cape Verde Shearwater (*Calonectris edwardsii*) on Raso Islet, Cape Verde (© Biosfera)

Off the coast of West Africa, a network of 13 marine IBAs has been identified after intensive data analysis gathered during the life of the Alcyon project. For a decade, BirdLife partners in over 40 countries have been working to identify marine IBAs as priority sites for seabird conservation. To date, over 3,500 IBAs have been identified for seabirds, including 120 IBAs on the high seas, covering 65% of oceans. Criteria have been discussed and approved to ensure that marine IBAs could be identified in a consistent and comparable way at global scale.

West Africa has not been left out of this marine IBAs process; indeed, this is the ultimate goal of the Alcyon project. Thanks to the project, 13 marine IBAs totalling 7,264,608 ha have been identified during the life of the project from Morocco to Guinea-Bissau including Cape Verde. The BIMP team has prepared an overall report on the detailed description on the identification of marine IBAs at sea in West Africa. This report presents the methodology used to identify the marine IBAs, with a detailed description of each site,

including justification of the boundaries and a list of species. Country reports have also been prepared and shared (translated in each country language as appropriate).

The next step is to work with local partners to integrate these marine IBAs into the various mechanisms that exist by promoting their use as tools to address the different conservation problems in the sub-region. This step has started and a series of feedback workshops on the process is being organised in each Country.

Upcoming events

- BirdLife International World Congress, Singapore, 9-14 October 2017. The Alcyon team is preparing a side event on seabird and marine conservation in West Africa. More soon on our webpage.
- BirdLife will shortly recruit project officers for different components of the Alcyon Programme. The job description will be advertised on our website very soon.

For further information :

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