

Newsletter

on Alcyon project activities



First half of 2016

Alcyon-Wrapping up and looking forward...

The Alcyon Project is drawing to a close. It started with lofty goals and high ambitions. Some of those we've achieved, some are still a work in progress. The key purpose, to identify at-sea areas of importance for seabirds (that is, marine Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, or IBAs) has been done. We were able to conduct new studies, continue longer-term monitoring, and leverage existing datasets to produce some very robust maps of the seabird hotspots. These are the places that our tracking datasets reveal are most important to seabirds. We were deeply disappointed to not secure access to some amazing at-sea survey datasets, but we've incorporated what information exists in the public domain. At-sea survey data complement tracking data, and are important 'ground truthing' what the tracking reveals.

Now starts the next phase of Alcyon, namely to designate the marine IBAs and start the work of providing the maps to national, regional and international marine spatial planning processes. This includes working with national Marine Protected Areas (MPA) authorities to consider proclaiming new off-shore

MPAs. We will continue our work with the MPA authorities to try and build systems for sustainable eco-tourism to key seabird sites, ensuring that there is both income (an incentive for protecting sites) and regular presence (a deterrent to illegal activities).

Looking to the future, our IBAs are, at their most basic level, simply lines on a map. We need to move towards identifying and addressing human activities in those IBAs that threaten seabirds. And IBAs are not just for seabirds - they're just the most visible components of the marine systems. By protecting sites and reducing or, preferably, eliminating threatening processes, IBAs can produce sustained ecosystem benefits for fish, fishers, and many other marine species. We're working closely with our strongest ally, the MAVA Foundation, to move Alcyon forward in the next few years.

Ross M. Wanless,
Africa Coordinator - BirdLife International Marine Programme
Seabird Conservation Programme Manager)



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).



In Senegal, our partners from DPN (National Parks of Senegal Department) have taken over avian fauna ecological monitoring of National Madeleine Islands Park (PNIM); namely, red-billed Tropicbird monitoring thanks to support from the BirdLife International Alcyon project. Indeed, PNIM managers, motivated by the research on red-billed Tropicbird ecology in PNIM as part of the collaboration with Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar (Senegal) to supervise a doctoral thesis, want to have greater understanding of avian fauna population trends in the park and to continue monitoring PNIM seabird colonies in order to sustain data collection by the student preparing her thesis. A number of years ago, PNIM lost almost all the data available on the different park species following an unfortunate event. In addition, the park team considered improving eco-tourism services provided by PNIM by establishing a permanent simple exhibition on its premises to increase the spin-offs of eco-tourism to ensure funding of long-term conservation of the park's birds.

North-South twinning to study Audouin's Gull migration between Europe and West Africa.

One of the strengths of the Alcyon project has been to foster young West African scientist dynamism around seabird conservation. Among the students supervised by Alcyon, Ngoné Diop is preparing her doctoral thesis on animal biology at UCAD (Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar, Senegal) on the ecology of three (3) seabirds. The Audouin's Gull, *Larus audouinii*, a species breeding in the Mediterranean coasts, is one of the species studied by Ngoné. In fact, to complete their vital cycle, Audouin's Gulls rely heavily on West African coastal areas which are a shelter during their winter season when environmental conditions are bad in Spain and in other breeding sites.

BirdLife International, through its Alcyon project, has promoted a North-South twinning between a team of seabird study specialists from the University of Barcelona and UCAD to co-supervise Ngoné's thesis. As part of this twinning Ngoné Diop was attached to the Audouin's Gull banding office in Spain (Doñana Biological Station natural process monitoring team - EBD). During observations made on the Audouin's Gull in winter areas in Palmarin Natural Community Reserve in Senegal, the student has already managed to read the codes of 342 banded individuals coming from Spain.



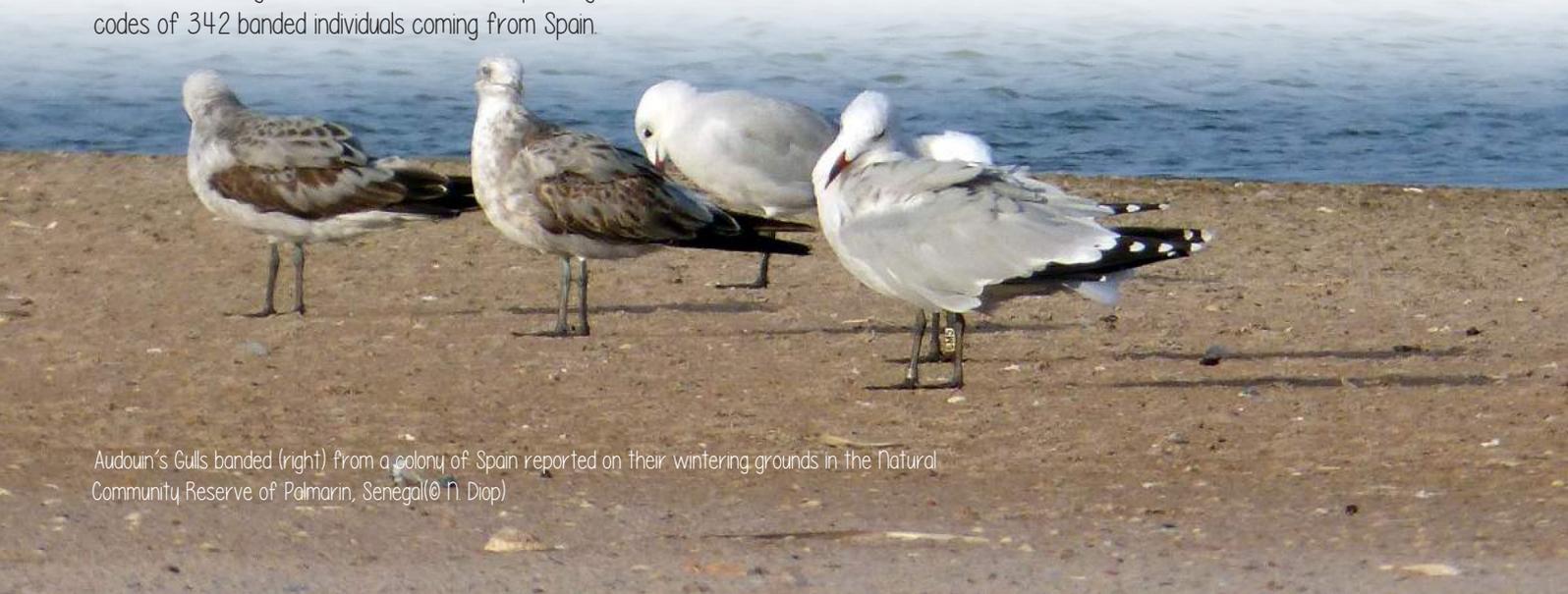
A Technical Officer of PNIM visiting nests of Red-billed Tropicbird during a monthly monitoring (© Dossa)



A Red-billed Tropicbird flying around the National Park of 'Iles de la Madeleine' (PNIM), Senegal (© J. Dossa)



Ngoné Diop, a UCAD PhD student, in the middle of counting and checking rings on Audouin's Gulls at Palmarin (© J. Dossa)



Audouin's Gulls banded (right) from a colony of Spain reported on their wintering grounds in the Natural Community Reserve of Palmarin, Senegal(© N. Diop)

Following those ring readings, Ngoné collected information on the banding date and place of the individual in the breeding colony in Spain from the banding team website she accessed thanks to an individual code obtained as part of the twinning. The site also provides information about other places where each banded individual has already been observed.

Ngoné says «Often, I happen to read a ring code of an individual just banded a few weeks earlier. For instance, two Audouin's Gulls were banded on the 15th and the 19th of June 2015 respectively in the colony in Spain and I observed those birds with the same codes in Senegal; the first on 25th August and the second on 15th September in the same year. This allowed me to discover that certain juveniles migrate to Senegal just after their flight. These readings also give me an indication of the size of the wintering population as well as the annual survival of individuals in Palmarin»

In Cape Verde, our Biosfera I partners continued to implement Cape Verde shearwater conservation action plan activities. Indeed, the Biosfera I team deters the arrival of poachers and fishermen that disturb Cape Verde shearwater breeding on Raso Island thanks to its monitoring camp installed since the beginning of June, which will remain there until the end of November. The team has carried out full monitoring of shearwaters: banding, breeding success, diet, etc. Overall, 170 nests have already been monitored since the beginning of the season and the Biosfera I team has fitted 15 shearwaters with GPS; 14 of these devices have already been retrieved for data extraction and analysis to improve the information provided for the identification of marine IBAs in West Africa as part of the Alcyon project.

Biosfera has also investigated prospecting new colonies of shearwater on other islands; namely in Santo Antao and the assessment of the size of infestation of Raso Island by fire ants with a view to establishing a control/eradication plan. The information collected by Biosfera on fire ants (*Trichomyrmex destructor*) is being analyzed by Biosecurity Queensland Control Centre (Australia), for the development of a pest management plan

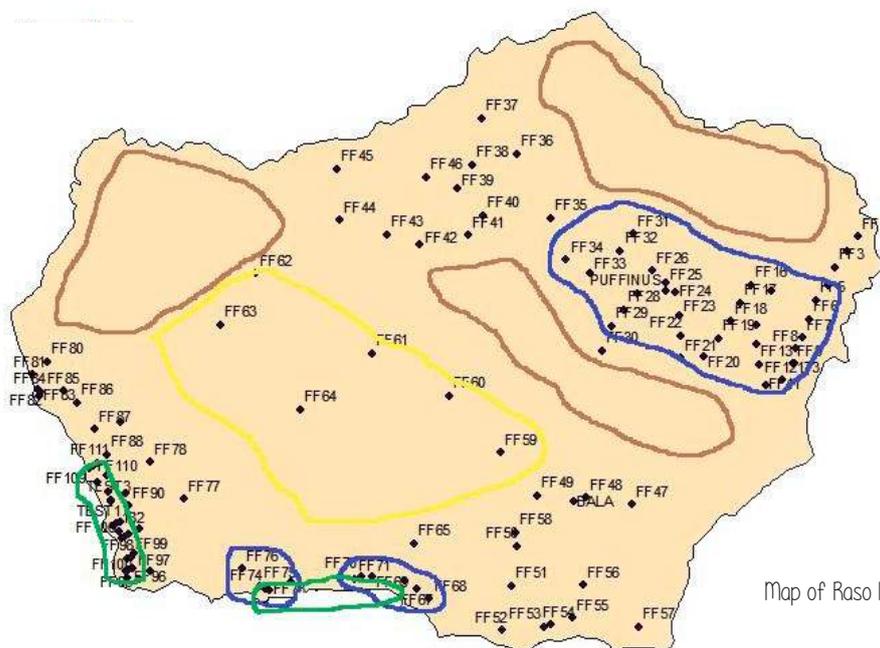


Monitoring of Cape Verde Shearwaters on Raso Island (© Biosfera)



Biosfera staff on the island of Santo Antao, on the way for prospecting new colonies of Cape Verde Shearwaters (© Biosfera)

for Raso Island. Also, the first results from the first prospecting of colonies in Santo Antao suggest that there is probably a colony of Cape Verde shearwaters on that island. The Alcyon project team provides support to the Biosfera team to track shearwaters captured at sea near that island using GPS-PTT devices based on well-developed identification methodology of new colonies to confirm these first investigations.



Map of Raso Island showing investigation points (black dots) on the fire ants by the team of Biosfera (© Biosfera)

Off the coast of West Africa,

Alcyon Project partners will meet with International Experts and the BirdLife International Marine Programme (BIMP) team during the 14th Pan-African Ornithology Congress (PAOC) to assess the achievements of the project and discuss the sustainable outlook for the conservation of the sub-region's seabirds. In fact, what makes the difference with previous PAOCs for the West African sub-region and Alcyon project partners is the diversity and content of presentations planned on seabird conservation in West Africa. Indeed, the Alcyon project funded by MAVA is the first regional project on seabird conservation in West Africa. Alcyon has highlighted a number of issues and challenges to be met in the field. The transfer of the project to BirdLife International has been a decisive turning-point for the sustainability of engaged conservation action. Alcyon has really provided leverage to establish a framework for the sustainable conservation of seabirds and other top predators in West Africa.

Thus, the major conservation challenges now identified in the sub-region namely the issues linked to bad fishing practices; how can marine IBAs be used as effective tools to remedy most of the threats which are uncontrolled so far? How to incorporate seabird conservation in normal fishing practices? How to pool our efforts to implement a regional strategy and action plan for seabird conservation along the African East-Atlantic flyway?

All these questions and others will be discussed during a symposium and a workshop organized as part of the Alcyon project next October.



Cory's Shearwater off Dakar (© R. Wanless)



Sunset on the coast of Dakar, the welcoming city of the PAOC-14 (© R. Wanless)

Upcoming events

- 20 October 2016: A symposium on seabirds: 'Ecosystem approaches to fisheries for managing impacts on seabirds from forage fisheries, bycatch and the depletion of stocks' (30 presentations already accepted and confirmed) during PAOC 14 due to take place in Dakar, Senegal on 17-21 October 2016.
- Also scheduled during the PAOC: Side events on marine IBAs and seabird conservation in West Africa
- 21-22 October 2016: A workshop for the wrapping up and outlook of the Alcyon project and launching the regional strategy & Action Plan for seabird conservation along the African East-Atlantic flyway in view of the sustainability of Alcyon achievements.

News

- Miguel Lecoq (miguellecoq@birdlife.org) has just joined the Alcyon project team as the marine Policy & Advocacy Officer. Miguel is based at the BirdLife International office in Dakar. We are counting on your cooperation to help him make progress in integrating marine IBAs in the different national, regional and international marine spatial planning.
- BirdLife is looking for a consultant for the Alcyon project final evaluation. Further details are available on BirdLife International website.

For further information :

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