

What is the impact of climate change on seabirds?

Human-induced climate change has caused and will continue to cause changes to the world's oceans. This includes disruption of the complex oceanographic cycles that govern marine ecosystems and changing the timing or reliability of food sources for top predators.

In the polar environments, it is physically changing the availability of habitat - the sea ice. Climate change is causing an increase in sea temperature, which impacts marine species such as fish, causing some to shift towards the poles and others to colonise previously unsuitable habitat. It is causing a rise in the acidity of the ocean, with the potential to disrupt the developmental stages of shellfish and other crustaceans.



Pelicans. Photo: Michel Laplace

In the coastal environment, its effects can also be seen through sea-level rise, which accelerates coastal erosion and causes widespread flooding of low-lying coastal habitats, impacting nesting seabirds.

Seabirds are at the top of the food chain as key predators in the marine environment and they are highly mobile, often travelling across and between ocean basins. This makes them an ideal group of species to act as indicators of the magnitude and severity of climate-induced changes in oceans.

Tackling climate change

Urgent, swift and decisive mitigation action, including ambitious policy responses to mitigate and adapt to climate change, are what we need.



Wind farms. Photo: Nial Benvie/RSPB

This includes having a more efficient use of energy and a transition to sustainable development through renewable energy - provided that this is not at the expense of biodiversity and ecosystems.

It is also important to collect and compile all possible information about the effects of climate change on birds and to promote the long-term monitoring of seabird populations. For this, coordination among all organisations, authorities, volunteers and research groups is essential.