

ALBATROSS TASK FORCE

Annual Report

April 2023 - March 2024



*Celebrating 20 years of
the Albatross Task Force*



Partnership for
nature and people

Celebrating 20 years of the Albatross Task Force

This year, 2024, marks the 20th anniversary of the Albatross Task Force (ATF) programme. Back in 2004, international seabird biologists and fishery experts discussed the unsustainable rates of seabird bycatch occurring in the southern oceans, with rapid population declines in the South Atlantic. Conservation scientists had developed effective solutions to reduce seabird mortalities, but a gap remained between scientific knowledge and practical application onboard fishing vessels. To bridge this gap, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and BirdLife International launched the ATF: the world's first international team of bycatch mitigation instructors, with the mission to reduce bycatch of albatrosses and large petrels by working directly with the fishing industry and governments to research, demonstrate and implement mitigation measures at-sea. This work began in Cape Town, South Africa, focusing on increasing compliance with newly introduced mitigation measures through practical demonstrations. The early successes in South Africa set a precedent, with this collaborative effort between fishing companies, governments, and NGOs being key to our success. Over the past two decades, ATF teams have worked collaboratively with over 20 industrial and small-scale fisheries across Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Namibia, Peru, South Africa, and Uruguay. Between the teams, this collectively amounts to nearly 100 years of cumulative work!

The ATF teams have made so many remarkable and vital contributions to seabird conservation over the last 20 years. At-sea trials and implementation of bycatch mitigation measures in trawl and longline fisheries have led to astounding bycatch reductions – such as 98% fewer birds killed in the Namibian longline fishery, and a 99% reduction in albatross bycatch in the South African trawl fleet. In addition, bird scaring lines (BSL) are now compulsory in 9 out of 10 of our original target fisheries, as well as additional fleets, which was largely informed by ATF's research, grassroots engagement, and advocacy work. The ATF has been at the forefront of innovation to mitigate seabird bycatch across the globe, such as inventing in Argentina the "*Tamini Tabla*", a towed device which stabilises BSLs for trawls that received the *Marsh Marine Conservation Leadership Award* in 2018, and co-developing a modified design of the purse seine gear in Chile which reduces seabird mortality by over 80% compared to traditional purse seines used in the Humboldt Current. The ATF has also contributed to the development of the Hookpod – an emerging bycatch mitigation technology, which encases the point and barb of hooks to prevent bycatch on longlines. The findings from ATF trials of this device were published in peer-reviewed journals and reported to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP) to inform international best practice mitigation advice and guide conservation measures in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, contributing to global scale seabird conservation interventions.

Scaling-up these measures requires building awareness and skills amongst the fishing industry, local governments, and coastal communities. In 20 years, our teams have provided training to hundreds of national fishery observers and compliance inspectors, as well as fishing captains and crew onboard – generating knowledge and capacity to support bycatch mitigation compliance. The experience and knowledge developed with domestic fleets is currently supporting the work of the High Seas Programme to reduce seabird bycatch in high seas tuna fisheries. The teams also engage with local communities and schools. For instance, ATF-Argentina's education programme '*Guardianes de las Aves Marinas*' has reached over 14,000 children since 2016. In Namibia, the ATF has championed the local women's group *Meme Itumbapo*, who manufacture BSLs for sale to the local fishing industry. This type of engagement is essential in order to build new generations of marine champions and support local employment and livelihoods within disadvantaged communities.

As we celebrate two decades of the ATF, we reflect on our teams' instrumental contribution to tangible change in seabird bycatch mitigation in some of the world's deadliest fisheries. In 2004, 19 of 21 recognised albatross species were at risk of extinction, and now it is 15 out of 22 – while not solely attributable to the ATF, our efforts have contributed to this improvement. With our steadfast commitment to practical conservation solutions, we look ahead to continued collaborations and impact in safeguarding marine biodiversity.

OUR TEAMS: PAST & PRESENT

The ATF programme is only possible through the dedication and hard work of **its people** – shaping our success over the last 20 years and into the future. The photos below show *some* of our past and present personnel, including instructors and support staff, whose contributions are **integral** to our journey and achievements.



ATF staff past and present (by row, left to right):

Row 1. Argentina: Cristian Marinao, Esteban Frere, Fabián Rabuffetti, Leo Tamini, Mikaela Vouilloz, Nahuel Chavez, Rubén Dellacasa.

Row 2. Brazil: Augusto Silva-Costa, Dimas Gianuca, Fabiano Peppes, Gabriel Sampaio, Leo Sales, Rodrigo Claudino, Rodrigo Santana, Tatiana Neves.

Row 3. Chile: Cristián Suazo, Jorge Ruíz, Juan Carlos González, Luis Cabezas, Patricio Ortiz. **Ecuador:** Jorge Samaniego, Robert Medina.

Row 4. UK/RSPB: Ben Sullivan, Cleo Small, Clare Atkinson, Nina da Rocha, Oli Yates, Rory Crawford, Stephanie Prince, Yann Rouxel, Zoe Jacobs.

Row 5. Peru: Jeff Mangel, Joanna Alfaro. **Uruguay:** Sebastián Jiménez, Andrés Domingo, Martín Abreu, Rodrigo Forselledo. **Namibia:** Clemens Naomab, John Paterson.

Row 6. Namibia: Kaspar Shimooshili, Kondja Amutenya, Melody Rohlf, Ndamonoghenda Mateus, Priskilla Nghaangulwa, Samantha Matjila, Titus Shaanika. **South Africa:** Reason Nyengera, Andrea Angel.

Row 7. South Africa: Barry Watkins, Bokamoso Lebepe, Bronwyn Maree, Chrissie Madden, Lisa Mansfield, Meidad Goren, Ross Wanless, Samantha Peterson, Tshikana Raselhom.

ANNUAL REPORT

Team Highlights April 2023 – March 2024

Overview of 2023/24

As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, in this report we reflect on the recent achievements made by the four active ATF teams (April 2023 – March 2024). Each has made significant strides in their research, grassroots engagement, advocacy and outreach activities, across their respective countries, showcasing commendable achievements and setting important goals for the upcoming year.

In Argentina, the implementation of cameras on vessels marked a pivotal step forward in monitoring the usage of bird-scaring lines (BSLs). Compliance rates with BSLs have shown promising increases across the fleet, supported by capacity building training programmes for inspectors and observers. Their community education programme also reached a further 2,700 children from coastal communities. Moving forward, the team aims to build on recent successes by supporting installation of cameras on more vessels and doubling down on advocacy for improvements in compliance with mitigation measures.

ATF-Chile successfully completed multi-year trials of Modified Purse Seine (MPS) gear, showcasing a substantial reduction in seabird bycatch. As part of this work, MPS packages were implemented by five additional vessels in the sardine and anchovy purse seine fleet – totalling 20 vessels to date. Moreover, their innovative research into alternative measures to traditional BSLs to reduce seabird collisions with trawl warp and netsonde cables found that the combination of two measures, the bird baffler and netsonde curtain (collectively dubbed as the “*bird baffler - netsonde curtain*”), was effective in reducing seabird collisions with trawl warp and netsonde cables – contributing to the diversification of options for mitigation strategies that can be used in trawl fisheries. Looking ahead, the team will concentrate on supporting a transition of all vessels in this fleet to use MPS. In parallel, a new collaborative project is commencing which will identify and prioritise the highest-risk fisheries for seabird bycatch in the Humboldt Current.

Namibia's ATF team focused their efforts on at-sea research to assess bycatch risk in previously un-monitored trawl fleets, and demonstrate how improved weighting regimes can improve seabird bycatch mitigation in the demersal longline fishery to drive industry uptake. In September 2023, the ATF Workshop was hosted in Swakopmund – our first in-person ATF Workshop since 2018. Moving forward, the team will use the latest findings to strengthen seabird bycatch regulations in the National Plan of Action for Seabirds (NPOA-S) and expand advocacy efforts to promote deployment of onboard cameras for compliance assessment.

In South Africa, the team progressed with trials of Hookpods in the pelagic longline fishery where industry indicated a preference for this measure and explored avenues toward the use of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) systems to monitor compliance and bycatch at-sea. Their research to measure sink rates in the demersal longline fishery in the context of seabird bycatch risk will be published later this year. Moving forward, efforts will centre on refining Hookpod setups, securing funding for REM tools, and addressing data gaps in post-release seabird mortality estimates.

None of the advances made by the ATF would be possible without the generous support of The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Fondation Segré, the Chabot Family Foundation, the Friends of South Georgia Island and the South Georgia Heritage Trust, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), LUSH, fishing companies such as Blumar, RSPB members, and many private donors.

ARGENTINA



Team: Leo Tamini, Nahuel Chavez, Rubén Dellacasa, Esteban Frere

Target fisheries: ATF-Argentina works with two trawl fisheries targeting Hake, Kingclip, Hoki and Southern Blue Whiting: the industrial trawl fleet, based in Mar del Plata and Puerto Madryn, and the demersal and midwater trawl fleet, based in Ushuaia.

Trawl fisheries

Building on the achievements of last year, ATF-Argentina has distributed seabird bycatch mitigation devices (bird scaring lines (BSL) and Tamini Tablas) and bespoke mitigation plans to all vessels across both fleets, with new data showing a notable rise in use of BSLs. Indeed, compared to the 2018-2022 period, use of BSLs in 2023-2024 increased by in both the midwater and demersal fleets, reaching 73% and 54% compliance, respectively.

ATF-Argentina has also progressed on expanding the use of cameras to monitor compliance with BSL usage. Currently, five vessels are equipped with onboard cameras including – for the first time – one vessel in the demersal fleet. This year, an agreement was also reached with one prominent fishing company for deploying cameras on more of its vessels.

The team also experimented with a new BSL configuration for the netsonde cable (also known as the third wire). The netsonde is used to electronically monitor several fishing variables during trawling, but can be even more deadly for seabirds that collide with it than with the trawl warp cables as it enters the water further astern where there is greater abundance of seabirds. In collaboration with crew, the team trialled different configurations for the optimum protection of seabirds whilst also limiting risks of entanglements with the gear.

Education and outreach

ATF-Argentina's community education programme '*Guardianes de las Aves Marinas*' reached a new record this year with 2,720 children, aged between 3-16 years old, from 30 schools in coastal Argentinian communities, delivering classroom learning activities based on seabirds. This type of engagement is essential in order to build a new generation of marine champions, particularly in these coastal communities where 30% of the school children reached have relatives within the fishing industry.

The team's collaboration with the *National Institute for Fishery Research and Development* (INIDEP) and the *National Fishing School* has also expanded – to continue to support bycatch mitigation compliance and awareness within these fleets. The team provided seabird identification and bycatch training to 14 aspiring INIDEP observers, and conducted a workshop with 47 future captains from the National School of Fisheries: addressing threats to seabirds, bycatch and its mitigation – including crafting BSLs.

Collaborative fishers, from captain to crew, are critical to our work and to the success of the ATF programme. To celebrate exceptional dedication and support to bycatch mitigation efforts within the fishing industry, ATF-Argentina awards the '*Friend of the Seabirds*' trophy each year. In 2023, this recognition went to the captain of the Tai An trawl vessel, and his crew, for their dedication to and support of bycatch mitigation efforts. Indeed, the ATF have been engaging with this vessel since 2015 – voluntarily deploying BSLs until they became mandatory in 2018.

Next steps

The team will continue their research and advocacy work within the trawl fisheries, notably by installing cameras on more vessels and analysing their data to assess compliance with BSL usage across the fleet, fine-tuning BSL designs for the netsonde cable, and advocating for a ban in the use of the netsonde cable to eliminate this high-risk equipment.

ALBATROSS TASK FORCE ARGENTINA

- First vessel from the demersal trawl fleet equipped with cameras to monitor usage of bird-scaring lines.
- Compliance with bird scaring lines continues to increase in both the midwater and demersal Argentinian trawl fleets, reaching 73% and 54% compliance, respectively.
- 47 future captains and 14 aspiring observers received seabird bycatch training, and classroom learning activities about seabirds delivered to 2,720 children from coastal communities.



Image: ATF Instructor Nahuel Chavez with a fisheries observer from INIDEP during a seabird bycatch training session.



CHILE

Team: *Cristián G. Suazo*

Target fisheries: ATF-Chile works with the austral demersal trawl fleet targeting crustaceans and South Pacific Hake, the demersal trawl fleet targeting Hoki in south-central Chile, the small-scale purse-seine fishery targeting sardine and anchovy and industrial purse-seiners targeting Chilean Jack Mackerel.

Purse seine fisheries

ATF-Chile reached an important milestone this year in completing a four-year long project, supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), to enhance conservation of threatened seabirds by developing a modified version of the traditional purse seine gear used in Chile to catch sardine and anchovy. This innovation – Modified Purse Seine (MPS) – constitutes a package of technical and structural gear modifications that reduce seabird entanglement. At-sea trials in 2023, building on previous work, demonstrated that MPS can reduce mortality among bycaught birds by over 70%, including of the globally vulnerable Pink-footed Shearwater, endemic to Chile, without affecting target fish catch. With support from local fishing industry and net-makers, this year we helped five additional vessels adopt this new technology, totalling 20 vessels to date, which has already helped save hundreds of birds from needless mortality. We will expand on this success by supporting the transition of the >400 vessels of the Chilean sardine and anchovy purse seine fleet to using MPS.

Trawl fisheries

In 2023, the team conducted at-sea trials with the industrial trawl fleet to test two measures to reduce the risk of seabirds colliding with trawl warp and netsonde cables. Where the use of BSLs has proven challenging in this fleet, these alternative measures – the bird-baffle and netsonde curtain – are attached to the back of the vessel during fishing, acting as physical barriers to keep seabirds away from both cables. Key findings from 48 monitored tows in the Humboldt Current revealed that the combined use of these two measures successfully reduced seabird collision rates by 99% and 92% with warp and netsonde cables, respectively. These important findings contribute to the diversification of measures, and have been submitted to government fisheries committees for consideration when updating regulations and Chile's National Plan of Action for Seabirds (NPOA-S).

Advocacy and research

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are crucial for seabird conservation as they can provide safe havens for nesting and feeding. By limiting fishing activities within their boundaries, MPAs can reduce the risk of seabird bycatch, preserving populations. Additionally, MPAs support healthy marine ecosystems, ensuring an abundant food supply for seabirds. To be most effective, data on the distribution and movements of seabirds within marine areas is essential. Recognising this, ATF-Chile has been instrumental in advocating for marine planning to reduce seabird bycatch in Chile's southern waters – notably for the Diego Ramírez-Drake Passage Marine Park, the southernmost MPA in Chile and in South America. Since 2019, they have provided SUBPESCA, the Chilean government's fishing secretariat, with expertise and data on albatross interactions with fisheries in this area, to inform the development of the MPA management plan. The team is also working with the Chilean Antarctic Institute to study how albatrosses use the waters in this MPA during breeding. This information will help strengthen MPA regulations, particularly for around 20% of the global populations of Black-browed and Grey-headed Albatrosses which breed in Chilean southern waters.

Next steps

ATF-Chile aims to continue helping the purse seine fleet fully transition to using MPS, by securing funding with the support of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership's "Bycatch Solution Hub". In 2024, the team will embark on a collaborative project between BirdLife International's Seabird Tracking Database and Global Fishing Watch, supported by NFWF, aiming to reduce seabird bycatch in the Humboldt Current System by identifying high-risk areas where seabirds overlap with intense fishing activities. Using advanced tracking and monitoring tools to analyse seabird and fishing data, the goal is to inform effective grassroots conservation action to substantially reduce seabird bycatch in this global bycatch hotspot.

ALBATROSS TASK FORCE CHILE

- Completed Modified Purse Seine trials, concluding it can reduce mortality among bycaught seabirds by 6.3 times – presenting a 74% reduction in seabird bycatch compared to non-MPS.
- Five additional vessels in the sardine and anchovy purse seine fleet have now implemented Modified Purse Seine gear, totalling 20 vessels to date.
- In trawlers, using the combination measure “bird baffler - netsonde curtain” reduced seabird collision rates by 99% with warp and 92% with net-sonde cables, compared to no mitigation.



Image: Combined measure “bird baffler - netsonde curtain” to reduce seabird collisions and entanglements in the South Pacific Hake demersal trawl fishery. Left: Bird baffler. Right: Netsonde curtain.



NAMIBIA

Team: Priskilla Nghaangulwa, Samantha Matjila and Titus Shaanika

Target fisheries: In Namibia, our team works with the Hake demersal longline and trawl fleet targeting Cape Hake (*Merluccius capensis* and *Merluccius paradoxus*). We have expended our work to engage with the midwater trawl fishery targeting Horse Mackerel and demersal trawlers targeting Monkfish.

Trawl fisheries

In 2023-2024, ATF-Namibia successfully completed bycatch risk assessments on two of their new priority fisheries: the midwater trawl Horse Mackerel and the demersal trawl Monkfish fisheries. The team carried out eight fishing trips in total (88 days at-sea) to monitor seabird interactions with trawl cables, usage of BSLs, and discard management. While low seabird interactions were observed in the Horse Mackerel fleet due to minimal processing – fish are packaged whole for the “fresh-fish” market – the Monkfish vessels seem much more attractive to seabirds due to the high amounts of discards produced in this fleet and thus posing higher risk of bycatch. Those preliminary results demand further scrutiny, in particular to assess the exact level of seabird-cable interactions in the demersal fleet when BSLs are not deployed as we suspect, being a non-mandatory measure in this fleet, the presence of our team onboard influenced their deployment. While the midwater trawl fishery seems less problematic, we have in reality only been able to board the “wet (fresh)-fish” segment of the fleet, and not the refrigerated/freezer vessels, which we suspect could present higher risk to seabirds.

Longline fisheries

Our team in Namibia made significant strides in their work with the demersal longline hake fishery. In order to improve overall compliance with BSL usage, ATF initiated tests of shorter BSL designs (80 m long; adopted from ATF South Africa) which were requested by local fishers to facilitate BSL usage and reduce risks of entanglement compared to the longer design (150 m). We are still in the midst of this experimental phase to assess the practicality and efficacy of these modifications, in order to support the update of current regulations in Namibia, if this new BSL model performance is as effective as the former design at tackling seabird bycatch. We have also started experimenting with time-depth recorders (TDRs) – a small device which records time and pressure – to demonstrate to the fishing industry the benefits of using steel weights, instead of traditionally used concrete weights, in improving how quickly the longline and its hooks can sink to depths out of reach for most seabirds. In total, our tests involved three different boats and gathered data from 36 TDRs. While further tests are required to account for the multiple environmental and operational factors (to allow statistical analysis) our preliminary results confirm that hooks are sinking much slower than the minimum of 0.3 m/s recommended by the *Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels* (ACAP).

Outreach activities

In September, ATF-Namibia hosted our teams in Swakopmund for our first in-person ATF Workshop since 2018. This is a critical component of our global strategy, to exchange knowledge and experience with colleagues across Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, South Africa, Taiwan, the UK and, of course, Namibia. As part of the Workshop, representatives of ACAP delivered bycatch data management training to 12 personnel from the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR). The aim of this training was to enhance institutional capacity for seabird conservation within the Namibian government, specifically in regard to strengthening bycatch data management.

Next steps

ATF-Namibia will provide expert support to the review of the Namibian National Plan of Action for Seabirds (NPOA-S), to ensure that the bycatch issue across all fisheries in Namibia is fully addressed. This includes the inclusion of seabird bycatch regulations for more fisheries (e.g. Monkfish and Horse Mackerel). In the longline fleet, the team will continue their research with TDRs and steel weights, as well as explore funding to deploy cameras onboard two demersal longliners to assess BSL compliance.

ALBATROSS TASK FORCE NAMIBIA

- A total of eight trips, amounting to 88 days at-sea, conducted on new priority trawl fleets (Horse Mackerel and Monkfish) to assess bycatch risk.
- 36 time-depth recorders deployed on longline demersal vessels to determine the sink rates of steel weights compared to concrete weights.
- Hosted the ATF Workshop in September, in Swakopmund, bringing together ATF Teams and partners from across the globe.



Image: Some of the attendees of the ATF Workshop, hosted by NNF in Swakopmund, in September 2023.

SOUTH AFRICA



Team: Andrea Angel and Reason Nyengera

Target fisheries: In South Africa, the ATF team has been working with three key fisheries: pelagic longline vessels targeting Tuna and Swordfish, and the demersal longline and demersal trawl fisheries targeting Cape Hakes *M. paradoxus* and *M. capensis*.

Pelagic & demersal longline fisheries

This year, the ATF-South Africa dedicated much of their efforts on testing Hookpods (HP) – a device that encases the barb of a baited hook and releases it at a predetermined depth out of seabirds’ reach – onboard a pelagic longliner. Nearly 17,000 hooks were deployed with HPs over five fishing trips out of Durban, in eastern South-Africa, and as far as 211 nautical miles offshore into the Indian Ocean. Preliminary findings highlighted operational issues with some HPs becoming entangled or not opening as expected, which influenced the overall performance of HP in terms of target catch. We suspect that the specific model of HP – “Hookpod mini” – tested here could have been too lightweight to operate in the strong currents outside of the Durban area. We recommend the heavier version of the HP to resolve this problem. These trials are a great opportunity to refine the measure to the fishery’s specific context and conclude whether HPs are suitable as a standalone mitigation measure in this fishery.

The ATF-South Africa team has also reached an important milestone in their research with TDRs in the demersal longline fleet. To better understand the seabird bycatch risk posed by the different gear configurations used in this fishery, the team used TDRs to measure sink rates from seven trips aboard demersal longline vessels. Similar to the preliminary findings in Namibia, results show that most hooks sink slower than the minimum rate, recommended by ACAP, to prevent birds from reaching the hooks. A paper on this important research has now been completed and is ready for publication.

Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM)

The sector of electronic monitoring systems for at-sea bycatch monitoring is rapidly growing and holds the potential to transform fisheries management by greatly enhancing at-sea transparency. ATF-South Africa, acknowledging this potential, has taken proactive steps by collaborating with the inshore trawl fishery to develop and install two innovative REM systems. The first is a monitoring device which is attached to the BSL to measure tension produced as it drags in the water – indicating compliance with the use BSLs. This year, the inventor of this device at *Imvelo* has confirmed that upgraded units have been developed and are now ready for testing and final troubleshooting by our teams. The second system involves installing cameras on vessels, from which the video footage captured is used to train and develop an Artificial Intelligence (AI) software that can automatically detect BSL usage and count seabird cable strike incidents, thus minimising the necessity of sifting through hours of video manually. If proven effective, this system could be expanded to other fleets. ATF-South Africa continues to advocate for the importance of these technologies – for example, by giving a talk to over 200 online attendees, during a BirdLife South Africa webinar, on the advances of seabird REM tools and applications for fisheries currently under development in South Africa. These systems present a cost-efficient alternative to human observers, including in fisheries that were previously beyond reach, and the advancement of AI in this context would significantly bolster the capability of fisheries management to monitor compliance.

Next steps

ATF South Africa will continue to trial HPs to troubleshoot issues and refine different setup parameters, including sink-rates, opening depths and entanglements, in order to provide conclusive insights into the suitability of this device for the pelagic longline fleet. For REM & AI, next steps involve securing funding for these two tools, as well as shipping BSL tension devices to other ATF teams for testing. Funding permitting, we are also planning to secure a project to assess post-release mortality of bycaught birds in a South African fishery, to address an important data gap in seabird mortality estimates from bycatch.

ALBATROSS TASK FORCE SOUTH AFRICA

- Hookpod trials conducted over five trips, amounting to approximately 40 days of data collection, with nearly 17,000 hooks deployed with Hookpods.
- Supporting development, testing and troubleshooting of Artificial Intelligence software and bird-scaring line tension device to monitor compliance in the inshore hake trawl fishery.
- Completed paper, ready for publication, on research using TDRs to measure demersal longline gear sink rates – revealing seabird bycatch risk due to slow sinking hooks.



Image: Baited Hookpod ready for deployment, during at-sea trials with the South African pelagic longline fleet.

Conclusions

We hope that the achievements of our ATF teams – past and present – provide some uplifting news in these troublesome times, and that they can inspire new generations of marine champions in the years to come. For the past 20 years, our teams have been working tirelessly with local communities, fishers, and local authorities, to test and implement effective seabird bycatch mitigation measures in some of the deadliest fisheries around the globe. Two decades of cumulative ATF efforts demonstrating that relatively simple measures can drastically reduce unnecessary seabird deaths in fishing gears are now helping saving tens of thousands of seabirds each year. This is an achievement worth celebrating.

Back in 2004 when the ATF was established, 19 of the world's 21 then recognised albatross species were considered globally threatened, and in 2024, this figure sits at 15 species (of 22, following taxonomic change). Whilst the situation remains critical for many species, we are proud that ATF efforts have contributed to helping several albatross populations – such as the Black-browed Albatross – moving from endangered toward a better conservation status. Whilst maintaining the much-needed traditional ATF style engagement, which has been central to our success over the years, we are also conscious that the situation and environment in which we operate has changed, partly thanks to our dedicated efforts. As such we recognise the need to change and evolve if we are to see improvements in the conservation status of more species. This transition is gradual and subject to local needs, but includes several areas of further work.

We note capacity has improved in national institutes and departments, though monitoring and enforcement of regulations remains insufficient in some locations. We will therefore strengthen our national and regional advocacy to ensure bycatch is curtailed. We will inform and channel the rapid development of remote electronic monitoring (REM) technologies to provide a powerful transparency tool to improve best practice adoption at-sea. After all, without effective monitoring, everything else remains so much more complicated. We are already doing more than ever to harness the power of supply chains and the growing consumer preference for sustainable seafood. This is a particularly effective leverage for change, especially where retailer requirements reinforce the need to demonstrate compliance with regulations.

We are well-placed to make this shift, as over two decades our teams have developed a unique set of experience and skills as a trusted stakeholder in the field of marine management. The critical importance of involving local coastal communities is an area we have championed, and it remains key for positive and long-lasting sustainable marine resource use. Our grassroots engagement approach working *in situ* with industry and government remains central to our ethos, as we seek to support local communities play a larger role in the management and protection of their marine environment. Finally, we are excited to share the news that Ecuador will soon re-join the ATF family, thanks to the American Bird Conservancy initiative to minimise the bycatch of the Critically Endangered Waved Albatross in the artisanal hake fishery.

We are extremely grateful to all who have supported the work of the ATF programme over the years – none of these achievements would have been possible without your help. As we open a new chapter of the ATF story, we hope that we can continue counting on your support to helping us ensure our seas are a safer place for albatrosses and all seabirds.

For more information, go to our webpages:

www.birdlife.org/projects/albatross-task-force/

www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/so-many-ways/explore/defend-the-albatross

www.birdlife.org/marine/

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