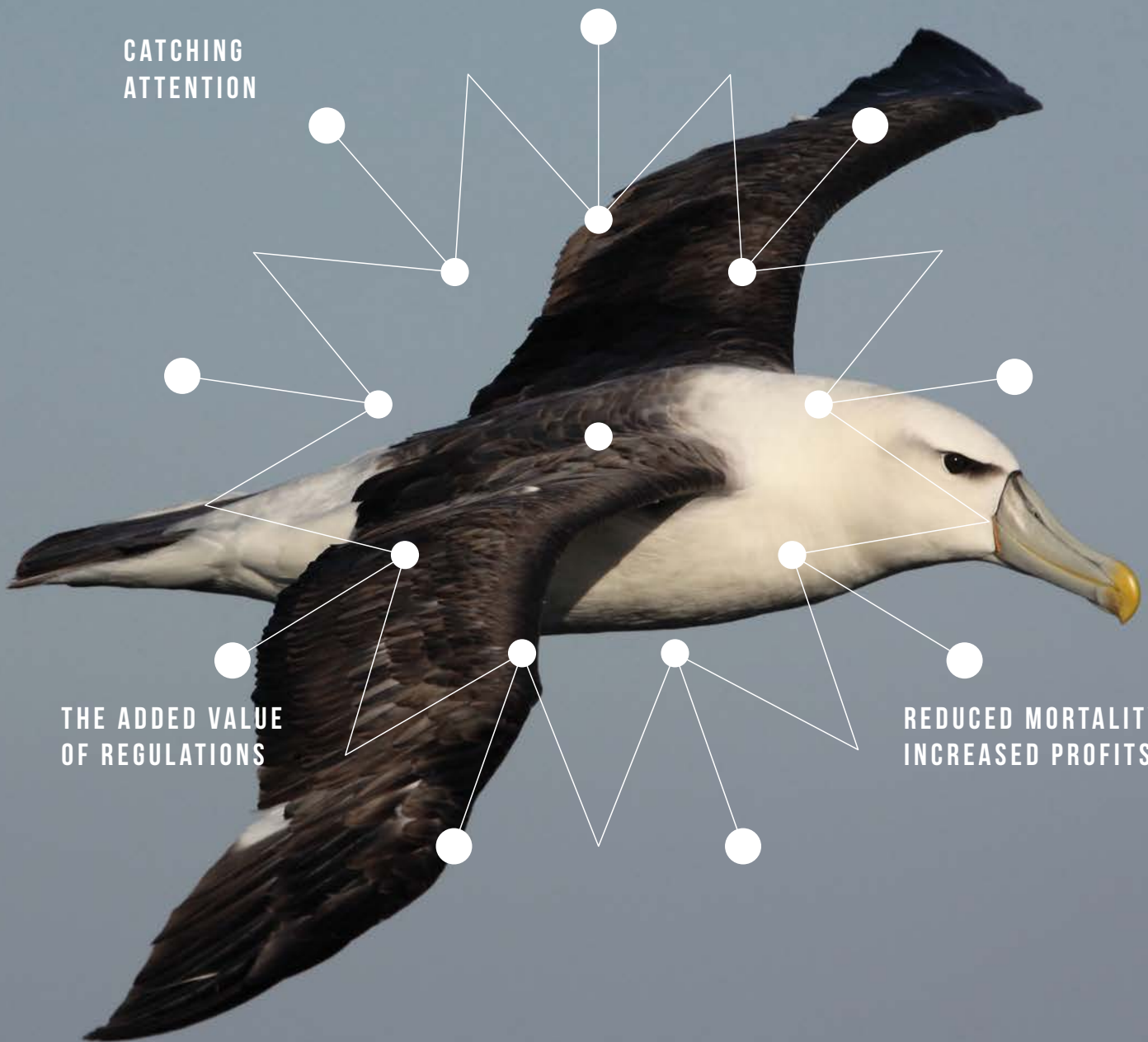


THE ALBATROSS TASK FORCE: FINDING SOLUTIONS TO SAVE OCEAN WANDERERS

THE ECO-LABELLING HOOK

CATCHING ATTENTION



THE ADDED VALUE OF REGULATIONS

REDUCED MORTALITY, INCREASED PROFITS



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FINDING SOLUTIONS TO SAVE OCEAN WANDERERS

A combination of dialogue, capacity building, technical solutions to mitigate impact and economic incentives has led the ATF to the success we see today.

Bycatch of non-target species is a common “side-effect” of commercial marine fisheries. It is, accidentally, killing tens of thousands of seabirds, including globally threatened species like albatrosses.

In long-line fisheries, bait or discarded fish waste is often attached to a hook. This can catch in the throat or beak of albatrosses and other seabirds, pulling them under water, where they drown. In trawl fisheries, birds scavenging on discarded fish behind the vessel are struck and dragged under by the cables towing the net. Albatrosses are particularly vulnerable as they are not able to breed fast enough to keep up with this mortality rate. As a result, 15 out of 22 species of albatross are threatened with extinction.

The Albatross Task Force (ATF), the world’s first international team of expert instructors in seabird bycatch mitigation measures, is led by the RSPB (BirdLife Partner in the UK), BirdLife International and its national Partners in the Southern Ocean. Since 2006, it has been working to reduce the incidental bycatch of albatrosses and other seabirds in targeted fisheries.

The ATF works in bycatch “hotspots” such as South Africa, Namibia, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil and Peru, to achieve its conservation goals, and targets fishing companies and associations, governments and national fisheries observer programmes.

In particular, the ATF uses data on seabird bycatch rates and experimental research on mitigation measures to develop best practices, and is encouraging the use of simple and practical techniques that reduce the impact of fisheries on seabirds at sea and in ports.

CATCHING ATTENTION

Essential to the success of the Task Force in achieving its conservation goals have been locally-employed expertise and early collaboration with the fishing industry. This is especially important because this industry is not usually amenable to measures that may negatively impact on catch rate, with consequent profit implications. A joint process was important to convincing them.

The ATF was able to demonstrate to the fishing industry that catching non-target species such as seabirds means time lost removing dead birds from hooks/nets, and fish catches foregone due to bait loss. These are detrimental to fishing activities and their economic efficiency. Demonstrating the severity of bird mortality was also important in gaining the industry’s support for the initiative.

The ATF develops best practices and bycatch mitigation tools for the fisheries. However, the ATF has also worked intensively on spreading the message about these mitigation measures, to get more industries on-board. Communication and capacity building efforts include:

- regular industry training workshops on sustainable fishing methods
- regular observer training workshops on seabird bycatch issues and data collection
- periodic meetings with relevant government departments to present results of up-to-date mitigation measure research.

THE ECO-LABELLING HOOK

An approach that can offer financial incentives is attractive to businesses. By spreading awareness of the increasing demand from consumers for fish caught in a sustainable way, the ATF encourages industries to adopt best practices for sustainable fishing techniques. It also been helping fisheries prepare for certification (through certification bodies such as the Marine Stewardship Council), a driving factor for bycatch mitigation uptake.

THE ADDED VALUE OF REGULATIONS

In parallel to these market incentives, the ATF has been working closely with relevant government departments, to develop and implement policies which make mitigation measures mandatory for all fishing vessels. In South Africa, for example, fisheries regulations have included various measures to mitigate seabird bycatch through permit conditions. The permit holder is restricted to a seabird mortality limit of 25 birds per year, irrespective of vessel replacements. Once this limit is reached the permit holder must stop fishing for the remainder of the year.



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Here's a major success to be celebrated: in April 2014, BirdLife South Africa reported that for all seabirds the reduction of bycatch was of the order of 90%, including 99% fewer albatross deaths. In other countries, such as Uruguay, the team at sea has also measured significant reductions in bird mortality when vessels adopt mitigation techniques.

There is a long way to go. However, the ATF has already successfully changed fishing processes and obtained significant results in several target fisheries, including changing companies' behaviour and awareness towards seabird mortality.

For more information:

www.rspb.org.uk/joinandhelp/donations/campaigns/albatross/problem/atf.aspx

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