

International

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We're pleased that Tristan da Cunha is now protected for species like the endangered Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross.

Tristan da Cunha is now one of the largest sanctuaries for wildlife

On 13 November 2020, Tristan da Cunha, a UK Overseas Territory in the South Atlantic Ocean, announced one of the world's biggest sanctuaries.

Tristan da Cunha is the most remote inhabited archipelago in the world, 2,400 kilometres (1,491 miles) from the nearest land. It's also a wildlife haven. It's where millions of seabirds come to breed, including the northern rockhopper penguin and the Tristan albatross. It is home to the critically endangered Gough bunting, and the endangered Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross and McGillivray's prion. Beneath the waves, the seas around Tristan da Cunha have the Tristan wrasse, rock shark, blue shark, and beaked whale.

Almost 700,000 square kilometres (270,271 square miles) of its waters are now safe for wildlife as a Marine Protection Zone (MPZ). It has become the largest 'no take' zone in the Atlantic, the fourth largest on Earth. This means that fishing and other associated activities are all banned from the area, which is three times the size of the UK.

The announcement also helps the UK government achieve its ambition to secure protection of 30% of the world's oceans by 2030. The UK has a duty to help the Territories to protect their wildlife and will be responsible for long-term monitoring and enforcement of this vast MPZ.

This announcement is the result of 20 years' work and wouldn't have been possible without the leadership of the Tristan community. Initially, the RSPB worked with the Tristan da Cunha government to lay the conservation groundwork and support Tristan's management of this sustainable lobster fishery, followed by a five-year programme of UK Government Blue Belt support. Then an international coalition of partners supported the final phase.

Tristan da Cunha Chief Islander James Glass said: 'Our life on Tristan da Cunha has always been based around our relationship with the sea, and that continues today. The Tristan community is deeply committed to conservation: on land, we've already declared protected status for more than half our territory. But the sea is our vital resource, for our economy and ultimately for our long-term survival. That's why we're fully protecting 90% of our waters – and we're proud that we can play a key role in preserving the health of the oceans.'

The RSPB and the Government of Tristan da Cunha partnered with National Geographic Pristine Seas, Blue Nature Alliance, Becht Family Charitable Trust, Wyss Foundation, Kaltroco, the UK Government Blue Belt Programme, British Antarctic Survey, and Don Quixote II Foundation.

To discover more about this beautiful marine paradise, visit: www.rspb.org.uk/tristanmarinezone 



RSPB staff with BirdLife Partners across the East Atlantic Flyway.

Giving migratory birds a home from home

A 'flyway' is the flightpath used by birds migrating between their breeding grounds and overwintering areas. Migratory birds face multiple threats, including loss of breeding and wintering habitats, and illegal killing. We focus on the East Atlantic Flyway, which extends from northern Europe to southern Africa.

We launched the East Atlantic Flyway Initiative (EAFI) in late 2015 to coordinate the work of BirdLife Partners in Europe and Africa along this flyway. Now over half the 75 countries have active BirdLife Partners working to protect migratory birds.

At the heart of our collaboration with Nordic partners are winter visitors, including wading birds that breed in the Arctic Circle. In collaboration with neighbouring partners, we are putting together plans for Special Protection Areas for migratory birds in Europe. On the Iberian Peninsula we're supporting SPEA (BirdLife Portugal) to oppose a second commercial airport for Lisbon in the Tagus Estuary.

This internationally-important wetland is a stopover site for migratory species from at least 27 countries, including most of the black-tailed godwits that breed in the UK. In association with our European partners, we're also working to implement the Turtle Dove Action Plan to reverse the fortunes of this iconic bird.

On the southern wintering grounds, we're working with partners in Southern and West Africa to restore and protect natural habitats, to improve prospects for migratory as well as resident birds whilst working with local human communities. For example, in Southern Africa we are working to conserve important landscapes such as the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA), which will benefit birds like the European roller.

We're excited about the future of these collaborations to improve the outlook of birds which migrate annually to and through the UK; securing them a home away from home.

Seabird deaths reduced by 98% in Namibia

The exciting news that seabird deaths in the Namibian demersal (deep sea) longline fishery have been reduced by 98%, or 22,000 birds saved every year, was revealed in a new paper published in Biological Conservation in January 2021.

The Albatross Task Force (ATF) was set up by the RSPB and BirdLife to reduce the numbers of birds accidentally caught in fishing gear, known as 'bycatch'. It demonstrates how simple measures can prevent birds from being killed.

The ATF has been operating in Namibia since 2008. At that time, it was estimated that Namibia's hake trawl and longline fisheries were among the world's deadliest for seabirds.

Fortunately, we know there are simple solutions. In Namibia, the main mitigation measure is to fly 'bird

scaring lines' behind the vessels. These are colourful streamers which act as scarecrows, and are off-putting to birds. ATF instructors started by working aboard fishing boats, demonstrating these simple measures to fishers, but then also worked at a policy level, to get these measures enshrined in law.

In 2015, a new law was introduced, meaning that these measures are now mandatory across the fleet.

Samantha Matjila, Namibia ATF team leader with the Namibia Nature Foundation, our local partner, said: 'It's truly wonderful to see bycatch drop by such a huge amount in Namibia. Our waters are crucial for many globally threatened seabirds – to think that our collaborative efforts with all the vessels and the fishery managers have resulted in more than 22,000 birds being saved every year is something special.'