



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Albatross Task Force's work gets another award**

**Johannesburg, 24 June 2014:**

The *Mail & Guardian* newspaper's prestigious, annual 'Greening the Future' awards ceremony has just been held in Johannesburg. A flagship BirdLife South Africa project – the Albatross Task Force – has taken top honours for their innovative solution that has reduced albatross deaths in a local fishery by more than 90%.

Albatrosses are the greatest flying birds on earth. They are icons of the oceans. They move effortlessly across staggering expanses of trackless ocean and have a near-mystical ability to return with pinpoint accuracy to their islands from anywhere in the wide open seas. They perform no economic services, and the world would continue to revolve should they all go extinct. And all albatross species are threatened with some level of extinction risk. But preventing extinctions of these amazing seabirds serves a higher purpose, it serves to keep species alive for the sheer pleasure and privilege of knowing that they exist.

The overriding threat to albatrosses and their close relatives is the accidental, yet deadly, interaction with longline and trawl fisheries. To address this global threat, in 2005 the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and BirdLife International established the Albatross Task Force (ATF) as the world's first international team of mitigation instructors working directly with fishermen to demonstrate best practice measures to reduce seabird bycatch. The ATF is active in nine countries, filling a critical gap in translating knowledge and regulations to prevent seabird bycatch into direct action onboard vessels.

The ATF's work in South Africa's largest, most economically valuable fishery – the hake trawl fishery – began in 2004. The fishery has an ecolabel certification from the Marine Stewardship Council, which provided a powerful incentive to rectify environmental problems. After the ATF work uncovered seabird mortalities in this fishery at astonishing levels – some 14 000 birds were being killed each year – they took action.

The solution is elegant in its simplicity. A line strung off the back of the boat, with streamers that dangle off the main line, was all that was required to scare the seabirds away from the danger areas behind trawlers. Earlier this year, the ATF team and their collaborators published

a study showing that their lines were responsible for reducing accidental deaths by 90%. For albatrosses alone the benefits were even bigger – a reduction of 99%. BirdLife South Africa has supported a disabled community by training them in how to make the bird-scaring lines, and selling these lines on to fishing companies.

Today their work received well-deserved attention when it took first prize in the ‘Green Technology’ category at the *Mail & Guardian’s* Greening the Future Awards. This comes hot on the heels of an international award for the South African team – in April the ATF team leader, Ms Bronwyn Maree, travelled to the Netherlands to receive her ‘Future for Nature Award’.

Mark Anderson, CEO of BirdLife South Africa, said “The Albatross Task Force has achieved truly remarkable results, effectively eliminating a conservation problem, under very difficult circumstances, with limited budgets, and in a way that benefits the fishing industry rather than creating costs. It’s a very pleasing conservation success for BirdLife South Africa.”

**For further information, please contact:**

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Royalty-free images are available upon request.

**Notes to Editors:**

- The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation and enjoyment of natural birds and their habitats.
- BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organisation in the country, and relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work.
- The Albatross Task Force was established in 2005 by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and BirdLife International.
- Albatross Task Force teams are based in the bycatch 'hotspots' of southern Africa and South America, where albatrosses come into contact with large and diverse longline and trawl fishing fleets.
- For more information, visit on BirdLife South Africa visit [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za) or for the Albatross Task Force visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/albatross/>
- The South Africa hake trawl fishery is certified by the Marine Stewardship Council ([www.msc.org](http://www.msc.org)) which certified sustainable fisheries based on stock status, ecosystem effects and monitoring and compliance. The majority of fishing vessels within the South Africa Deep Sea Trawl Association form part of the Responsible Fisheries Alliance (like-minded organisations working together to ensure that healthy marine ecosystems underpin a robust seafood industry in southern Africa; [www.rfalliance.org.za](http://www.rfalliance.org.za)).
- The most widely used technique to avoid seabird bycatch is the “tori line” or bird scaring line, invented by a Japanese longline captain. Use of bird scaring lines is mandatory in South Africa for the trawl and longline fisheries.
- Ocean View Association for Persons with Disabilities (OVAPD) is a non-profit organisation (NPO 003-115) initiated in 1974. The group started with six members but now comprises more than 60 individuals who are physically and intellectually challenged. The aim of the centre is to generate work opportunities, provide training and occupation for adults with disabilities who are unable to end the open labour market.
- Total South Africa has funded the bird scaring line construction project since 2009.