



These Wandering Albatrosses on the Crozet Islands are at high risk of being caught by longline fisheries.

PETE OXFORD

Tracking albatrosses

Albatrosses are the bird family with perhaps the highest proportion of threatened species: of the 21 species currently recognised, 20 are listed as threatened or near-threatened in the global Red Data List. The accidental capture of albatrosses (and petrels) by longline fisheries is the most significant single threat to albatross populations.

Over the past five years, the Percy FitzPatrick Institute has had a programme to reduce the numbers of albatrosses and petrels killed by longline fisheries. This programme has been very successful for some fisheries: the legal fishery for Patagonian toothfish around the Prince Edward Islands has dramatically reduced the numbers of albatrosses killed, thanks to the implementation of a simple suite of control measures. Unfortunately, other fisheries are proving more difficult to tackle. Tuna

longliners, for example, may kill up to 20 000 albatrosses each year in South African waters alone.

Part of the project has involved tracking the foraging ranges of Wandering and Grey-headed albatrosses breeding at Marion Island to assess the overlap between the seabirds' foraging ranges and the longline fishing effort. To date, this has been restricted to the breeding season, but recent developments have made it possible to track a bird's position for up to five years. In a joint project with the British Antarctic Survey and South Africa's Marine and Coastal Management, the FitzPatrick Institute will deploy 100 miniaturised, leg-mounted devices on Wandering and Grey-headed albatrosses at Marion Island during 2001/02. At the same time, devices will be attached to these species breeding on

South Georgia and the Crozet islands.

The information gathered will give important insights into the movements of these birds during their 'sabbatical' years – both species take a full year off after successfully raising a chick. The latest

findings from South Georgia show that at least some Grey-headed Albatrosses circle the globe twice during this year off, whereas Wandering Albatrosses from Crozet appear to remain in the Indian Ocean, in an area of intense tuna longline fishing activity. □

ADOPT AN ALBATROSS!

To help fund this important and exciting research, we have chartered the *SA Agulhas*, South Africa's Antarctic research and supply vessel, for a two-day pelagic birding trip in August 2001. But this will only raise about half the funds needed; to make up the balance, we are asking members of the public to adopt an albatross.

Once 'your' bird has been fitted with its device, we shall tell you the history of the bird in question (they will be birds from the FitzPatrick Institute's long-term monitoring colonies on Marion Island), and

then let you know where your bird went during its year off, once we recover the device in approximately two years' time. Simply indicate whether you want to adopt a Wandering or a Grey-headed Albatross, then send a cheque for R500 (the cost of one device), made payable to the University of Cape Town, to:

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Tax donation certificates are available on request.

Visit the FitzPatrick website: <http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/fitzpatrick>

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