



Oliver Yates is a marine biologist and worked for BirdLife International's Albatross Task Force for ten years (2007-2017), most recently as coordinator. He currently works for the British Government at the Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science in Tristan da Cunha, a South Atlantic archipelago among Brazil and South Africa.

How did you get interested in the sea? Why birds? Why fisheries?

I was scared of the sea when I was young, and the fear made me want to learn about what lay beneath the dark waves. I learnt to snorkel and then dive and discovered the most incredible world. On one of the dives in my early years, off the coast of Scotland, I surfaced to find puffins flying low across the water very close to me. I was amazed how the birds were such an integral part of the marine system. I was so interested in what I was experiencing I went on to study marine biology.

What is the BirdLife International Albatross Task Force? How did you end up there?

The ATF is an international project to build a bridge between scientists, industry and decision makers in government - the idea behind it is to work with the fishers on board fishing vessels to better understand their reality and generate trust and collaborations to find the best methods to reduce impacts of fisheries on vulnerable marine animals - supporting industry be sustainable into the future.

What jobs did you perform during your stage at the ATF? Do you remember any period with special nostalgia?

It all has special nostalgia, as the team work so hard to find solutions under difficult circumstances. I found the most reward in developing relationships with the people, both the inspirational members of the team and the critical support and understanding from the governments and industry who made such

INTERVIEW

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important decisions that helped drive progress. I will never forget testing early versions of the Hook Pod at sea in Brazil and meeting the Fisheries Minister in Namibia, two moments in time that I think could have huge implications for seabird conservation in the future. I feel very proud of those moments.

What do you think about the interaction between seabirds and fisheries? Do you think that there is a solution for bycatch?

There isn't a solution for seabird mortality in fisheries, there are many! We have reached the point where fisheries really have no excuse to permit large numbers of seabirds to die accidentally. The solutions are available and they are incredibly effective when adopted. Anyone who is interested should consult the agreement on the conservation of albatross and petrels website where the latest best practice measures are listed www.acap.aq

Do you think that the experience gained during your time onboard fishing vessels has been beneficial to minimize seabird bycatch?

I think that anyone who wishes to make sensible suggestions about fisheries management should spend as much time at sea as possible to understand the practical challenges that fishers deal with everyday. For me it was essential.

What do you think are the key elements to success in solving bycatch? Can you give us some examples of success?

The critical factor is collaboration. It is essential to work together to find the solution that suits each fishery, as every area and season has different seabird assemblages with varying behaviour and each fleet has a variety of technical and operational factors to consider. It is very rare that one person can be knowledgeable about all those aspects, so working as a team with openness and trust is of immense importance. Examples of this include the development of measures and regulations in South Africa, Namibia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, New Zealand, Australia.... the list goes on! In fact I can't think of an example where it has worked without collaboration.

In your opinion, what is the balance between regulation and promotion of good practices to minimize bycatch?

For me it is a stepwise process. Some operators will adopt measures with a little encouragement and the right guidance. Others will delay as long as is possible, so I think you need to find the right balance of giving all operators the chance to trial new measures and provide support while they test things out. Including a feedback mechanism to ensure they are listened to adequately and their concerns dealt with effectively is not simple. So sometimes that time needs to be a long process. However, for all vessels across a fleet to have the incentive to adopt best practice, regulations should be adopted with appropriate incentives.

From your experience in Catalonia, how do you see this problem? How do you think it would be the best way to deal with it?

I have very limited experience in Catalonia, but from what I have seen the fishery is operating in a situation where the normal practice has a low impact on birds but when conditions are right, there can be heavy and unexpected mortality, which at a population level could be catastrophic for the birds. So time is not a great luxury and I hope industry can be proactive and help find the right combination of measures to prevent the issue. I have great trust in the people working with the fishery and am confident the tests underway will provide good options that could be used widely across the fleet.

Based on your experience, what should be the role of fishers in minimizing the accidental capture of seabirds? And that of the administrations?

I have probably answered this already - the industry have to partners and collaborators in the entire process. The best situation is when industry has ownership of the solution because they have tested it and used it and seen the results. They can then help the administrators understand they are willing to adopt measures and the incorporation of the solution into legislation is much easier. Administrators are very respectful of industry, so it is hugely positive to work together to promote measures that really work and have some level of acceptance before seeking regulatory change. Not an easy path to follow, but one that has been demonstrated to work.